

Religious Aspects of Japanese Neo-Confucianism: The Thought of Nakae Tōju and Kaibara Ekken

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Japanese Neo-Confucianism has been the subject of significantly polarized interpretations, namely, of fascination with its humanistic aspects and rejection of its apparently rigid hierarchical structure for political control. R. C. Armstrong's *Light From the East* (1914), for example, although written over sixty years ago, contains an appreciation for the wisdom and rational humanism of Japanese Confucian thought. More predominant, however, has been the interpretation of Japanese Neo-Confucianism as a controlling ideology of the Tokugawa government (1603–1868). In this respect it was seen as a hierarchical system which kept individuals in their proper places and encouraged loyalty and obedience to the Tokugawa Bakufu (Maruyama 1975; Reischauer 1974, pp. 89–91). In light of more recent scholarship this is an over-simplified and, indeed, a somewhat distorted view of the role of Neo-Confucianism in early Tokugawa Japan (see Ooms 1985 and Najita 1987).

The Tokugawa period has also frequently been interpreted within the framework of modernization theories which perceive the growth of Neo-Confucianism during this time as a movement towards rational, secular thought in contrast to the predominantly spiritual and religious concerns of medieval Buddhism. Such a dichotomy is inappropriate to describe the complex reality of Tokugawa intellectual history. Indeed, it is precisely the juxtaposition of religious and secular concerns which make for a dynamic interweaving of systems of thought and ritual practices. Wm. Theodore de Bary has observed that such a shift from medieval to modern thought “cannot be taken simply as one from the sacred to the secular or from the metaphysical to the material, but rather must be seen as a complex ramification and interaction of individual and social needs; moral, intellectual, and religious concerns; rational and intuitive methods” (1979, p. 5).

Japanese scholars have recognized this complex interaction for some

time, and more recently Herman Ooms has articulated such a position in his important work on *Tokugawa Ideology*. Ooms, relying on the work of Japanese historians and on his own extensive scholarship, has given us a highly sophisticated interpretation of the interacting forces of Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism in creating ideology and social values in the early Tokugawa period. Tokugawa Confucian thought can no longer be seen simply as a monolithic force for social control at the hands of Bakufu administrators. This is not to suggest that, like every religious or political system, there have not been abuses in translating ideas into practice. Only distortion of historical realities could allow us to conclude otherwise.

These introductory remarks, then, are intended to set the context for more extended comments on aspects of Japanese Neo-Confucianism which may be considered religious. The aim is two-fold: first, to expand on research mentioned above suggesting that Neo-Confucianism was not simply a political arm of the so-called "Bakufu orthodoxy" and, secondly, to point toward ways in which Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, being more than rational, secular systems of thought, had a significant appeal to individuals for their religious, educational, and moral concerns. As Kim has written, "On the surface, Neo-Confucianism appears to be a philosophy that deals with the origin of the universe (cosmology) and the essence of the human nature (philosophy of human nature), but underneath all these discussions, one cannot help but detect a religious dimension of Neo-Confucianism, which is as profound and significant as any religion of the world" (1977, p. 337).

This brings us to the problem of defining the religious aspects of the Confucian tradition. Religion in its broadest sense is a means whereby humans, recognizing the limitations of phenomenal reality, undertake specific practices which aim at self-transformation and self-transcendence. This is not simply a passing or superficial enterprise but one which is all encompassing. As Paul Tillich has so aptly stated (1955), for an individual, religion is a matter of ultimate concern. In these general terms Confucianism can certainly be regarded as religious in the sense that the primary activity of Confucians is moral and spiritual cultivation leading to self-transcendence. Followers of the Confucian path are well aware of the imperfections of human beings and the limitations of reality. Yet in their religious quest they insist on affirming the essential goodness of human nature and the importance of working within the social and political sphere for the transformation of both self and society. In this context, then, self-transcendence means moral and spiritual cultivation to recover the deepest well-springs of the human spirit. It is not an escape from the self but a penetration into one's nature so as to activate one's humaneness. Such activity results in the realization of one's authentic being in relationship to the larger universe. This is expressed in the idea of the human as forming a triad with heaven and earth. This process is in a profound

sense religious.

DeBary has maintained that Confucianism is, strictly speaking, not a religion by Western standards. He observes, however, that “the religious dimensions of human experience have always held great importance for Confucians. Moreover, because religious attitudes and practices have tended to find expression in this as in other established teachings or ideologies, there is much to be learned about religion from the study of the historical development of Confucianism” (see Eber 1986, p. 116). DeBary refers to Confucianism as a “religious humanism” as in a similar vein Thomas Berry has called it a “mystical humanism” (*Riverdale Papers*, n.d.). Both of these terms point toward the distinguishing feature of Confucianism as a special concern for the development of human nature and human relationships in a context of profound connection to heaven, earth, and all things. Human action is sustained by a reverence for the creative sources of life. This places less emphasis on union with a transcendent other, or on withdrawal from worldly affairs, than on a reverent intellectual and moral cultivation aimed at more effective participation in the social and political order.

Let us turn, then, to the writings of Nakae Tōju (中江藤樹, 1608–1648) and Kaibara Ekken (貝原益軒, 1630–1714) to examine the religious dimensions of their thought.

Nakae Tōju

Nakae Tōju, often called the “Sage of Ōmi,” was born in Ogawa in Ōmi province on Lake Biwa in central Japan. With the exception of some years in Ozu on Shikoku, he spent his life in Ōmi engaged in studying, teaching and writing. His grandfather, who had adopted him at the age of nine, first brought him to Shikoku where he encouraged his early education. After his grandfather’s death when Tōju was fifteen, he attended lectures on the *Analects* by a visiting Zen priest. From this time he became earnestly engaged in studying the Four Books and Chu Hsi’s commentaries on these. In 1634, citing ill health and his desire to be with his widowed mother, he returned to Ōmi. While some sources indicate his motive may also have been to escape political entanglements, the eulogizing accounts of Tōju mark this as the beginning of his concern for the virtue of filial piety (Minamoto 1979, p. 389).

In 1636 Tōju set up a school (Tōju Shoin 藤樹書院) and accepted pupils of all classes and backgrounds. The Four Books and Chu Hsi’s commentaries were the core of the curriculum, but Tōju wished to avoid the behavioral formalism sometimes associated with the transmission of Chu’s thought. Instead, he stressed the need to adapt Neo-Confucianism to time, place, and rank. It was during this period that he studied the Five Classics and, being inspired by them, he wrote two works on moral cultivation. These are *Jikei*

zusetsu 持敬図説 (The diagram of holding fast to reverence, explained) and *Genjin* 原人 (Inquiry into human beings), both written in 1638. In the following year he wrote *Rongo kyōtō keimō yokuden* 論語郷黨啓蒙翼伝 (Resolving obscurities concerning the Hsiang-tang chapter of the *Analects*). In this work he discusses the reverential attitude displayed by Confucius in daily activities and in religious rituals. Tōju had been moved by this description of Confucius and wished to return to that religious spirit he saw in Confucius and in the Classics (Yamashita 1979, pp. 309, 310, 313). Consequently, he also began to recite each morning the *Hsiao-ching* 孝經 (Classic of filial piety) and he became increasingly convinced of its profound implications. It was in 1641 that he wrote *Kōkyō keimō* 孝經啓蒙 (The true meaning of the *Classic of filial piety*). His other major work, written a year earlier and continually revised until his death was *Okina mondō* 翁問答 (Dialogue with an old man).

While Tōju has been considered the founder of the Wang Yang-ming 王陽明 school in Japan, it was not until three years before his death that he acquired Wang's complete works. Although deeply affected by them, he had already been exposed to the writings of late Ming thinkers such as Wang Chi 王畿, who some scholars feel may have had an even stronger influence on him (Yamashita 1979, pp. 311–323). It is clear that his doubts about Chu Hsi's thought arose from his aversion to its formalistic interpreters. Thus the appeal of the Ming Neo-Confucians was their emphasis on interiority, innate knowledge, universal sagehood, and a religious sense of reverence.

Tōju's principal religious ideas can be summarized as a profound reverence for the Supreme Lord 上帝 (Chin. *Shang ti*, Jpn. *jōtei*) which was manifested in an optimistic doctrine of moral self-cultivation based on the innate knowledge of the human. Tōju taught that the heart of self-cultivation was filiality, for it was the "root of the human" and an integral part of the transformative processes of nature itself (Tsunoda 1958, pp. 374–375). As the dynamic reciprocity between all created things, he saw filiality as the basis of social relations and as a nurturing principle in the natural order. Thus Tōju's distinctive religiosity drew on various strains of Neo-Confucian thought, combining a reverent theism, interior cultivation, and filial devotion.

It should be noted, however, that Tōju's movement towards such a religiosity was gradual and deliberate. In his early studies he had been strongly influenced by Chu Hsi and his commentaries on the Four Books. It was in his early thirties that he began to read the Five Classics and gradually became more attracted to Wang Yang-ming's thought. Yamashita describes this shift as reflecting a movement from a rationalist position to an increasingly mystical and theistic path (1979, pp. 309–311). Indeed, Yamashita feels that Tōju was recovering the earlier Confucian religiosity present in the Five Classics (1979, p. 309). His movement in a more overtly religious direction was

brought to completion with his reading of Wang Yang-ming. In 1645, at the age of thirty-seven, Tōju acquired Wang's complete works. These he read with great enthusiasm, and for the last three years of his life he became an ardent exponent of Wang's thought.

A Theistic Sense of Devotion

Tōju's sense of religiosity is distinct from both Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming, who were major influences on his thinking. Julia Ching has succinctly summarized these differences as follows: ". . . where Chu Hsi speaks of the Great Ultimate (*T'ai-chi* 太極) as the source and principle of all goodness and being, and where Wang Yang-ming speaks of *hsin* 心 or *liang-chih* 良知 in near absolute terms, Tōju prefers reverence for a supreme and personal being, a God to whom he gives many names, but whom he honors especially as Lord-on-high" (Ching 1984, p. 297).

Ching suggests that Tōju's personal theism draws on a variety of sources, including the personal god of early Confucianism (*Shang-ti*) and the "Lord on High of the Great Void" 太虛上帝 (Chin. *T'ai-hsu shang-ti*, Jpn. *taikyō jōtei*) of Neo-Confucianism. This blending of a personal and a cosmic sense of the divine was, no doubt, enhanced by an appeal to other sources, including Shinto, Buddhism, and even Taoism (Ching 1984). Indeed, Tōju's affinity with a personal idea of deity may well be due to his acceptance of the Shinto belief in particular divine presences or *kami* and his willingness to pay respects to the sun goddess Amaterasu at Ise (Ching 1984, p. 303).

One of the distinguishing features of Tōju's thought is clearly his reverence for a Supreme Lord. This Divinity is the principle of absolute truth, the primary agent of creation and an active sustaining presence. These aspects of the divine, namely the unmanifested, enduring Supreme Ultimate, and the manifold creator and sustainer of the world, are combined in Tōju's thought. There emerges a unique sense of reverence for this numinous force which is simultaneously behind and within the universe. This ground of being and cause of life is seen as the source of the unity and continuation of life.

Tōju describes this unified role of the Supreme Lord as the self-sustaining absolute principle and benevolent creator presence in the following passage:

The Supreme Lord Above is infinite and yet He is the final end of all. He is absolute truth and absolute spirit. All forms of ether are His form; infinite principle is His mind. He is greater than all else and yet there is nothing smaller. That principle and that ether are self-sustaining and unceasing. Through their union He produces lives throughout all time, without beginning or end. He is the father and mother of all things (Tsunoda 1958, pp. 373–374).

Tōju's sense of reverence for the Supreme Lord is revealed in a passage which is a litany of praise to the marvelous qualities of the divine as a cosmic

presence pervading the universe:

His body fills all space. Without noise, without scent, His mysterious activity pervades all space. Most miraculous, most spiritual, reaching to where there is no circumference, penetrating to where there is no center, He alone is worthy of devotion and without peer. His virtues are exquisite and unfathomable. Nameless Himself, He has been called by the sages "The Supreme Heavenly God of Life," in order to let men know that He is the source of all creation so that they may pay homage to Him (Tsunoda 1958, p. 374).

In Tōju's thought the way humans pay homage to the Supreme Lord is by awakening the Divine Light within them.

Doctrine of the Mind

Tōju felt that in all humans there is a divine light like a clear mirror. This he identified as the source of good knowing or conscience. Similarly, it is the root of enlightenment and is united to the divinity of heaven (Tsunoda 1958, pp. 372–373).

Tōju indicated that this inner light of conscience was divine reasoning in contrast to worldly desires. When the mind is ruled by conscience and not swayed by desires, then one can abide in a state of sincerity and authenticity. From this balanced harmony, the mind is filled with joy and delights. Tōju distinguishes between the mind of the sensible world and the inner mind of conscience. He equates conscience with a formless, transcendent reason. By acting in harmony with conscience, he feels we become the incarnation of this timeless principle.

The fact that all humans have this innate knowledge is one of the primary reasons that he espoused the doctrine of human equality and brotherhood. He writes:

There is no distinction among men, be they sages or ordinary persons, so far as their Heaven-bestowed nature is concerned. They are all gifted with the divine light that tells good from bad. . . . It is only from the self-watchfulness of the one and the self-deceit of the other that the vast distinction arises between the superior man and the inferior man (Tsunoda 1958, p. 373).

Filiality as Cosmic Principle and Human Virtue

While the innate knowledge of the mind is that which links the human to the universe, central to this process is the virtue of filial piety. Tōju's teachings may be seen as a further elaboration of filiality as discussed by earlier Confucians and ultimately as an extension of Chang Tsai's "Western Inscription." Tōju writes of the vital significance of filiality to human life that "Filial piety is the root of human beings. When it is lost from one's heart, then one's life

becomes like a rootless plant . . ." (Tsunoda 1958, p. 374). Thus the practice of filiality distinguishes the human, while at the same time filiality is part of the very life-giving power of the universe.

Tōju discusses the all-pervasive presence of filial bonds of older and younger in the natural world, which he sees as part of the underlying structure of reality. Indeed, filiality for Tōju is comparable to the principle of gravity which binds the elements to one another:

If we consider the Supreme Vacuity as the elder, then heaven, earth, humans, and all things are the children. If we take heaven as the elder, then the earth is the child. . . . If the universe is the elder, then sun and moon, the five elements, and people and things are the children. If the sun is the elder, then the moon is the child receiving the light of the sun (Yamanoi 1974, p. 181).

Thus just as filiality has a cosmic dimension in the natural order, it is the root of social relations in the human sphere. Indeed, Tōju recognizes that the "seasons of filiality" in the human order are the five relations which mirror the reciprocity already evident in the natural world.

The activation of filiality in accordance with the underlying filial bonds of the universe was the overarching goal of Tōju's thought. Tōju identified filiality with the "illustrious virtue" of the Great Learning and saw both virtues as at the heart of innate knowledge. The practice of the illustrious virtue of filial piety was a means of preserving the life force in the individual which was inherited from the ancestors. Tōju further recognized that this life force was essentially linked with the life force of the universe, namely the Supreme Vacuity. Thus to practice filial piety meant to nourish the very life force of the universe. For Tōju, then, filiality was both a personal and a cosmic virtue, sustaining human relations and supporting the cosmic order itself. He describes this process as follows:

Our bodies come from our parents, theirs issue from heaven and earth, and heaven and earth derive from the Supreme Vacuity. Thus our original bodies are offshoots of the Supreme Vacuity and the Divine Light. To clarify the original form of the Supreme Vacuity and the Divine Light itself and not lose it is what is meant by respecting one's body. To clarify the original form of the Supreme Vacuity and the Divine Light, to preserve oneself, to associate with others, and to deal with affairs is essentially the meaning of practicing the Way (Yamanoi 1974, p. 28).

From this religious connection to the creative force in the universe comes the impetus for the practice of filial piety. He outlines in great detail the five levels of filial piety, namely, for the emperor, lord, vassal, warrior, and commoner (Yamanoi 1974, p. 28-31). Filiality as the supreme virtue and fundamental morality is described as follows:

Filiality is based on centrality and harmony and is essentially love and respect. It was called supreme virtue and fundamental morality because it exists in the heart, fills the universe, embraces all the directions; above it reaches into the past without beginning, below it signifies a future without end, it brings together life and death, the present world and the other world, existence and non-existence, and is an all-encompassing divine Way (Yamanoi 1974, p. 48).

Tōju goes on to say that filial piety is the complete method of self-cultivation and the one unequalled miraculous path as described in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Analects*. Thus genuine learning involves the effort to activate one's innate virtue:

First one should aspire to clarify one's illustrious virtue. Then, being guided by the Four Books and the Five Classics, one should polish the treasure of illustrious virtue by trying it out on the grindstone of involvement with actual life commitments, earnestly practicing the highest good of filiality amidst the five classes and of the way of the five relations, being in harmony with all reality and acting in an appropriate manner (Yamanoi 1974, p. 51).

As part of learning to develop one's innate virtue he urges his students to transcend formalism and strive toward true learning (*jitsugaku* 実学). He taught the way of adaptation (*ken no michi* 権の道) to time, place, and rank as essential to self-cultivation and to the way of government (Yamanoi 1974, pp. 68–72). Rigid formalism he felt may be very damaging. He cites the importance of distinguishing between the truth and the law, the former being eternal while the latter is human made and subject to historical conditions. He warns against confusing form with content, urging flexibility in adapting the Way.

Tōju, thus, had a deep concern for activating the religious sources of the Confucian tradition. He wished to avoid a rigid or overly academic approach to Confucianism. For him Confucianism was clearly a practice, not simply a study. As such it involved theistic reverence along with a cosmic filiality that translates into ethical practice in a variety of circumstances.

Kaibara Ekken has a similar sensitivity toward a cosmic filiality which becomes a touchstone for his ethical thought. Ekken is, however, less overtly theistic in his expression than is Tōju. For Ekken, metaphysics, especially as expressed in a monism of material force 氣 (Chin. *ch'i*, Jpn. *ki*), becomes primary. Let us now turn to Ekken's life and thought to see where religious concerns are also central.

Kaibara Ekken

Kaibara Ekken was born in Fukuoka in Kyushu into a lower class samurai family. His mother died when he was five and he was largely educated by his father and brothers. He was employed by the Kuroda *han* lord when he was

eighteen but this only lasted two years. He spent the next seven years as a *rōnin* 浪人, a masterless samurai. He was eventually reemployed by the *han* lord who, recognizing his talents, sent him to Kyoto for study. There he remained for seven years studying with some of the leading Confucian thinkers of the day. He came in contact, for example, with Matsunaga Sekigo 松永尺五, Kinoshita Jun'an 木下順庵 and Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋.

While in Kyoto he began to lecture on the Confucian classics and these remained the primary focus of his teaching and research when he returned to Kyushu. He became involved in a rigorous program of lecturing, tutoring, research, and travel that was to last for the next fifty years. During this time he was married to a very capable woman, Tōken 東軒, who seems to have helped in compiling his travelogues and may have co-authored *Onna daigaku* 女大学 (Great learning for women).

While his primary duty as a *han* scholar included tutoring the *han* lord and his heir, as well as younger *han* samurai, he also frequently accompanied the lord to Edo and visited Kyoto en route. He was thus able to maintain or broaden his contacts with leading Confucian scholars of his day. In terms of his research he had a broad interest in “practical learning” (*jitsugaku*) which ranged from “the experience and practice of ethics to manners, institutions, linguistics, medicine, botany, zoology, agriculture, production, taxonomy, food sanitation, law, mathematics (computation), music, and military tactics” (Okada 1979, p. 268). One might also add to the list astronomy, geography, history, archaeology, and genealogy. In practical learning, however, he hoped to avoid over-specializing or technical learning devoid of human values. He felt practical learning should foster self-cultivation while also assisting others. His extensive writings reflect this breadth of concern and can be described as dealing with:

1. Confucian thought and ethical practice;
2. *Han* commissions of the Kuroda lineage and local topography;
3. Studies in botany;
4. Agricultural and travelogue observations.

In order to promote Confucian learning, Ekken punctuated the Chinese classics and Neo-Confucian texts for easy reading by the Japanese. He also compiled his lectures on individual classics and wrote commentaries on the major works of Chu Hsi. His *Kinshiroku bikō* 近思錄備考, one of the first Japanese commentaries on *Reflections on Things at Hand*, was published in 1668 and was admired by both Japanese and Chinese Confucian scholars. In his efforts to popularize Confucian ethical practices, he wrote essays of instruction (*kunmono* 訓もの) designed for a wide audience. The majority of these were written after he retired from active *han* service at the age of seventy. They included essays addressed to the samurai, the lord, the family, children and women. He also wrote on health care, learning, calligraphy and

literature. His treatises on *Yōjōkun* 養生訓 (Precepts for health care) and the *Onna daigaku* (Great learning for women) have remained to this day two of his best known works (*Ekken zenshū* 3; see Kaibara Ekken, 1910–1911).

Ekken's essay on *Yamato zokkun* 大和俗訓 (Precepts for daily life in Japan) was included among these moral treatises designed for a wide audience (*Ekken zenshū* 3). In it he discussed the method of intellectual and spiritual discipline necessary for the practice of the learning of the mind-and-heart (*shingaku* 心学). It was this *shingaku* which had been so significant in the development of Neo-Confucianism in both China and Korea and, through the writings of Ekken and other Japanese scholars, became an important force in Japanese Neo-Confucianism as well. His other significant work written at the end of his life was *Taigiroku* 大疑録 (Record of grave doubts) where he set out his disagreements with Chu Hsi, especially regarding the apparent dualism of principle and material force (Chin. *li* 理 and *ch'i* 氣; Jpn. *ri* and *ki*) (*Ekken zenshū* 2).

Cosmology and Ethics

Ekken followed Chu Hsi's basic interests in a world-affirming spirituality that combined a profound inner authenticity with a participation in practical affairs. Yet he also developed growing doubts about Chu's metaphysical system. While Ekken affirmed Chu's dialectic of the interaction of substance and function, he came to disagree with Chu's articulation of the dialectic as a dualism of *li* and *ch'i*. Ekken's concern to articulate the dynamic relationship between the cosmological and human orders led him towards a naturalism expressed as a monism of *ch'i*. Like Chu and the Sung Neo-Confucians before him, he was concerned with the problem of change in the universe and its implications for human action. Central to this concern was his articulation of fecundity and generation in the natural order as having its counterpart in the virtue of humaneness in the human order. This naturalistic morality was at the heart of all his ethical treatises. Thus, Ekken identified the basic inspiration for moral behavior as lying in an active response to nature's great generative processes which provide blessings for the human.

While Chu Hsi no doubt intended a mutual interaction of *li* and *ch'i* to be the pivot of his cosmological and ethical system, he nonetheless acknowledged a certain priority, permanence, and superiority to *li*. He maintained that *li* is above form and therefore perfect, while *ch'i* is within form and therefore coarse. The Ming Neo-Confucian Lo Ch'in-shun 羅欽順 disagreed with this dualistic characterization of *li* and *ch'i*, arguing against the notion of *li* as an autonomous, regulating power which somehow becomes linked to material force. As Irene Bloom has indicated, for Lo principle was neither causative nor determinative but "the pattern itself, the actual reality, rather than the origin or cause of what is true of the natural process" (1979, p. 84).

For Lo, and for Ekken who followed him, a monism of *ch'i* was an articulation of a naturalism which expressed the dynamics of change and so became a basis for a unified doctrine of human nature and an affirmation of human emotions. The central phrases that Ekken used to support his arguments against dualism were derived from Lo Ch'in-shun. These are "Principle is one, its particularizations diverse" and "Principle is the principle of material force."¹ Ekken used these phrases to assert the essentially unified, dynamic, and creative nature of reality. Principle is not something separate from, or prior to, material force, nor is it eternal and unchanging. In this he disagreed with Chu Hsi, who maintained that while *ch'i* was subject to the transformations of life and death, *li* was not.

Filiality as Cosmic Principle and Human Virtue

Ekken continually spoke of the special relationship of human beings toward heaven and earth as similar to that of children toward their parents. Since human beings are born from heaven and earth and they receive the mind and heart of heaven and earth, they are endowed with intelligence and with moral virtues which distinguish them from other living things. This capacity for both rational and spiritual activity marks human beings as uniquely connected to the cosmos and therefore obligated to repay the great debt of having received the gift of life. It is for this reason that Ekken called upon people to serve heaven and earth with a heart of filiality and humaneness.

Ekken maintained that as a result of this unique connection to the natural order human beings ought to extend the doctrine of filial piety to embrace the whole natural world. Throughout his works he recognized the importance of loyalty and reverence to one's parents as the source of life, and he carried this feeling of filial respect to the cosmic order. He maintained that since nature is the source and sustainer of life, one should respond to it as to one's parents, with care, reverence, and consideration.

For Ekken there are both privileges and responsibilities involved with realizing one's special connection to the cosmic order. He notes that because of this people must try to know the "Way of the human" and adopt it. Guidelines exist for following this path, and they should be sought out. There arises, then, an overriding need to know the Way so as to discover and discern the most authentic mode of human behavior. This can be called the wisdom imperative of Confucian spirituality. It is the source of the constant emphasis on learning and on education in the Confucian tradition.

The wisdom imperative is never an end in itself, however, for it finds its

¹ Kaibara Ekken, *Taigiroku* (Record of grave doubts) in *Nihon shisō taikai* Vol. 34, pp. 17, 18, and 54 (Inoue and Araki 1970). The phrase "Principle is one, its particularizations are diverse" is thought to have originated with Ch'eng I, *I-chuan wen-chi* (Collection of literary works by Ch'eng I) 5:126. See Bloom 1987, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired*, p. 65. For the phrase, "Principle is the principle of material force" see *Knowledge Painfully Acquired* p. 173.

natural outlet in personal integration. Here the pursuit of wisdom becomes the transformation of the self through spiritual and moral cultivation. This transformation is the core of Ekken's *shingaku* teachings.

The Learning of the Mind-and-Heart: Ekken's Shingaku Teachings

Ekken's *shingaku* teachings expand upon the essential point of the *Great Learning* that through disciplining oneself, one's family can be regulated and other people can be governed. If this self-discipline is not thorough, one's social or political participation will be ineffective. To rectify the mind-and-heart one must first make one's will sincere in loving good and disliking evil. Then one will be able to maintain and express the seven emotions, (happiness, anger, sadness, enjoyment, love, hate, desire) in correct proportions. With a balancing of emotions an effective social-political activity can be undertaken and a deep spiritual harmony can be maintained. To achieve such a goal, a rigorous program of moral practice is outlined by Ekken. This includes initial discernment and resolution, moral purification and emotional control, the practice of virtue, and achieving spiritual harmony.

In *Yamato zokkun* Ekken begins his discussion, as did Chu Hsi, by advocating a method which combines intellectual discernment, volitional effort, and emotional and sensual balance. Drawing on a central passage in the *Book of History* 書經 (Chin. *Shu ching*), he notes the importance of distinguishing between the human mind 人心 and the Way mind 道心. The human mind is seen as the seat of emotions and desires while the Way mind is the root of moral principles and virtues. Recognizing the differences between the two is the beginning of moral cultivation. In discerning between the two, one can begin to learn how to control the human mind and preserve the Way mind. This is the fundamental basis of moral and spiritual discipline.

Ekken then cites three major obstacles to the practice of the learning of the mind-and-heart. These are: first, selfish desires and evil thoughts; second, a biased disposition; and third, faults. All of these obstacles must be carefully eliminated in order to progress in virtue.

In connection with moral purification Ekken also engages in specific discussions of the problem of the emotions. He is concerned with the question of how and when to control the emotions or to express them so as to live morally but also humanely. He is aiming at an authentic integration of the person so that the emotions are not suppressed or eliminated but are restrained or expressed when appropriate.

After purification and emotional balancing one can then effectively practice virtue, beginning with love and respect toward others. This implies having humaneness and decorum so as to show compassion and sympathy rather than disdain toward people and things. Ekken identifies the virtue of humaneness with the life principle in the universe. He writes that compassion

“is the great virtue of heaven and earth and it is the principle of life” (*Ekken zenshū* 3, p. 82). He also says, “humaneness is a heart which loves and sympathizes with others; in other words, it is the heart which gives life to the things of heaven and earth” (*Ekken zenshū* 3, p. 82).

Ekken describes the culmination of this path of virtue as the practice of hidden virtue. This is an all-embracing humaneness which does not seek recognition or repayment from others. It is, rather, concerned with the public good not with any private gain. If people choose such a generous and public-spirited path they will be “in accord with reason, with the will of heaven and with the human heart” (*Ekken zenshū* 3, p. 100).

When people come to this stage of integration, according to Ekken, their mind-and-heart will be illuminated and not vacillating in discerning right from wrong. The result will be an inner calm which reflects the peaceful harmony of the workings of heaven. The microcosm and the macrocosm will mirror each other through the inner harmony of the individual. It is this type of spiritual integration that is the ultimate aim of Ekken’s learning of the mind-and-heart. It is an integration which is in harmony with change, and constantly reverent before the myriad life processes. Through an arduous effort at discernment, purification, and practice the individual can experience himself as a vital part of larger cosmic processes. It was toward this end that Ekken advocated the “discipline of the mind-and-heart” (*shinjutsu* 心術) which would result in a person forming one body with heaven and earth and all things.

Conclusion

It would appear, then, that Ekken and Tōju share a special concern for activating in people a sense of a cosmic filiality, namely a connection of the human to heaven and earth as the great parents of all living things. This awareness, of course, is intended to evoke a response in humans of reciprocity and responsibility towards the various orders of life, both in the natural and the human worlds. For each of these Neo-Confucian thinkers, then, the five relations and the virtues they represent are primary, for they signify the paradigmatic structure of an ideal society. These are not intended as rigid, inflexible hierarchies but as a patterning for a harmonious social order.

For Tōju, clearly the bass note of this dynamic society is a reverence for the Supreme Lord which he sees as a vital force permeating the universe. For Ekken the dynamic quality of the cosmos lies in its material force which is the energizing principle of both nature and human beings. Tōju had a more overtly expressed theistic sensibility while Ekken was more engaged in articulating a metaphysics of a naturalistic vitalism. A further difference may be the detailed spiritual practice articulated by Ekken in his *shingaku* teachings which seems to have remained on a more general level for Tōju. Both,

however, can be considered Neo-Confucians whose religious concerns are essential to their thought as a whole.

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