
Mary Evelyn TUCKER, *Moral and Spiritual Cultivation in Japanese Neo-Confucianism: The Life and Thought of Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. xv+451 pp. Hardcover \$49.50, Paper \$16.95. ISBN 0-88706-889-8.

This book consists of two main parts: an analysis of certain aspects of Kaibara Ekken's life and thought, and a translation of the first half of *Yamato zokkun*, or *Precepts for Daily Life in Japan*, accompanied by a photocopy of the Japanese text. This, the first book-length study of Ekken in English, is a significant contribution to the literature on Japanese thought and religion. Chapter three serves as a good, concise biography, and the bibliography of works in Japanese and English is extensive. The translation is generally accurate and readable.

In part one, the author develops two main points about Ekken, the first being that he was important in adapting Neo-Confucianism to "the Japanese context"; he did this mainly by writing ethico-religious treatises in Japanese (what the author somewhat misleadingly calls "a simplified Japanese") to promote wide-scale education in basic Confucian concepts. Second, Tucker argues that Ekken's life and thought represent an integration of two poles in Chu Hsi's teachings, namely the investigation of things (manifested in Ekken's interest in empirical research) and self-cultivation (manifested in Ekken's religious and ethical thought and practice); this bipolar integration was reflected

cosmologically as a “vitalistic naturalism” expressed as a monism of *ch'i*, and religiously as a reverence for life and a desire to repay heaven and earth out of gratitude for the gift of human life. In the process of making these points, the author takes issue with scholars such as Maruyama Masao and Minamoto Ryōen, who have viewed Ekken’s empirical investigation and moral idealism as separate and unrelated, or even contradictory.

The book is not without problems, some substantial. Reference notes to document the specific textual sources for many points regarding Ekken’s thought are provided only erratically. Key statements about Ekken’s thought tend to be supported more by repetition of the point itself than by in-depth analysis. Indeed, the author seems to have identified so closely with Ekken as to have prevented a sufficiently critical reading of his texts. Contradictions or tensions in Ekken’s thought, as well as the polemic nature of certain passages in his texts, are not addressed. For example, we are told that Ekken “particularly disagreed . . . that there was a distinction between the original or heavenly nature as perfect and the physical nature as imperfect” (p. 82), an important point. But how, then, should we interpret Ekken’s distinction between the “human mind” and the “way mind”? As Tucker says:

[For Ekken,] the human mind is seen as the seat of emotions and desires while the mind of the Way is the root of moral principles and virtues. Recognizing the difference between the two is the beginning of moral and spiritual cultivation. This process of discernment is difficult because of the unstable nature of the human mind which is connected to physical forms. . . (p. 98).

By his insistence on an absolute unity of principle and *ch'i*, and a unitary view of human nature, explaining evil actions became problematic for Ekken—the above distinction between the two minds being but one manifestation of this. Some discussion of this and other problems in Ekken’s thought would have been valuable.

Most problematic is a lack of systematic text-context analysis. Although chapter two contains a brief overview of early Tokugawa-period conditions, key points, such as the transformation of the samurai class from warriors to civilian bureaucrats, are neither sufficiently developed nor explicitly related to Ekken’s texts. Citing the complexity of the seventeenth-century Japanese intellectual milieu, Tucker declines to engage in any substantial discussion of this important context (p. 23). I am not suggesting that a summary of all facets of the intellectual, social, and political contexts is needed, but an analysis of those directly relevant to Ekken’s texts would have helped.

In *Taigiroku*, for example, Ekken stresses that sincerity (*makoto*) is the ontological foundation of the mind (*kokoro*), and seriousness (reverence, mindfulness, *kei*) is but a method, albeit an important one, for nurturing this function. To regard this mode of praxis as the ontological foundation of the mind, as Ekken says Chu Hsi did, leads to rigidity, artificiality, and a host of other problems. Tucker mentions this in connection with Ekken’s downplaying of the importance of seriousness (pp. 65, 83), but does not mention that such ambivalence vis-à-vis perceived formalism in Chu Hsi’s thought is also what Nakae

Tōju (1608–1648) struggled with. A more detailed discussion of the basis for Ekken's views, along with appropriate comparison with Tōju (to give but one example), would have served not only to shed more light on the particulars of Ekken's thought, but also to help root it in the intellectual context of its time and place. Furthermore, Ekken's repeated statements decrying those who blindly follow Chu Hsi, along with his specific thoughts on seriousness, point directly to a textual engagement with Yamazaki Ansai (1618–1682) and his Kimon school. Here, too, contextual discussion and comparison would have been tremendously valuable.

The same problem is evident regarding Ekken's religiosity, the focus of the study. Yamazaki Ansai, Nakae Tōju, and numerous other Japanese Neo-Confucians addressed religious issues in one way or another. Tucker mentions this in passing, but provides no comparison. The discussion of possible connections between Ekken's religious attitude and Shinto is slightly more substantial (pp. 59, 81, 124–25). Even here, however, greater depth, including some discussion of the specific contents of Ekken's essay on Shinto, *Jingikun*, would have enhanced the analysis.

Consideration of the social context of the time is essential for determining the intended and actual audience of Ekken's texts. We are told Ekken wrote his ethicoreligious treatises for the education of all social strata, but the only evidence adduced to support this claim is that he wrote them in Japanese (a practice not uncommon at the time). A closer reading of *Taigiroku* and *Yamato zokkun* in light of changes in the samurai class, however, suggests that Ekken (who rarely taught commoners) had a different message for each of two different groups within that class. The anti-philosophical complexity, back-to-basics tone of *Taigiroku* seems to be saying to scholars (most of whom would have been samurai at this time), "Abandon useless discussions of doctrinal subtleties and minutiae, and start putting basic Confucian values into practice." On the other hand, the exhortations to formal study (of difficult texts) in *Yamato zokkun* seem to be aimed at poorly educated samurai (certainly not most commoners), hostile to what they perceived to be effete, bookish pursuits. In any case, the portrayal of Ekken as an educator of the common person lacks sufficient support.

In the translation, there are some passages in which Tucker strays farther from the original diction and syntax than seems necessary, but this does not prevent her translation from conveying the basic meaning of the original. Indeed, in some places Tucker's translation seems more precise than MATSUDA Michio's modern Japanese translation (1969). For example, regarding educated people unwittingly reinforcing others' view that education is detrimental:

Tucker: People who read . . . frequently argue angrily . . . and their fighting *becomes an example of this type of criticism* [that education is harmful] (p. 176, brackets mine).

Original: Sho o yomu hito . . . ikariarasoi, kōron to nari, tatakai ni oyobu koto sono *tameshi ari* (p. 255).

Matsuda: Sho o yomu hito ga . . . ikariarasoi, kōron to natte, tatakai ni naru koto ga *yoku aru* (p. 88).

The key word here is *tameshi*, which has a range of possible meanings, including “case,” “example,” and “evidence.” While Matsuda’s interpretation is awkward, Tucker’s fits the passage’s context quite nicely.

There are a host of minor problems with the book, including awkward writing in places, a surprising number of glossary errors, and occasional errors in macron use and bibliography entries. Its strengths and weaknesses all taken into consideration, the book is stronger as a well-annotated translation than as a thorough analysis of Ekken’s thought.

REFERENCE

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