

OGYŪ SORAI, HUMAN NATURE, AND EDO SOCIETY:  
THE CHINESE CONTEXT

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## Abstract

This thesis deals with the prevailing image of Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728) as a pioneer who proposed to read Chinese classics not in the Japanese way of *kundoku* 訓讀 but in its original way, i.e. in the Chinese word order and pronunciation. I challenge the historical accuracy of this image and regard it as a product created mainly by the prominent Japanese Sinologist, Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎 (1904-1980). It is well known that Sorai stressed the importance of rites, music, punishments and administration 禮樂刑政 as external forces which transform the internal mind from the outside. I believe that Sorai stressed mastery of literary style rather than mastery of colloquial Chinese as an external thing 物. His belief in practicality which was cultivated by the art of war led Sorai to attempt to realize a world based on a rigid meritocratic hierarchy. Therefore, Sorai proposed to return to the literary styles of the Qin, Han and Tang dynasties whose political situations were highly centralized. This, he believed, would serve to transform the feudalistic hereditary Neo-Confucian Edo state composed of Shogun and Daimyo into a more centralized and meritocratic one through educational policy. In pre-modern China, literature and politics were thought to be connected closely. Previous research, however, had been centered around literary studies focusing on the influence of the *Guwenci pai* 古文辭派 (Old Phraseology School) upon Sorai's *Kobunji* 古文辭 (Ancient Words and Phrases) school. In short, there was no bifurcation in Sorai's thought between literature and politics in the modern sense. I propose that Yoshikawa separated literature from politics in Sorai's thought to prove the legitimacy of his own methodology of the evidential school. I will demonstrate their closeness by questioning why Sorai proposed to read poems from the High Tang dynasty instead of the Zhou-dynasty *The Book of Songs* 詩經. Finally in my conclusion, I suggest that Sorai's design was ultimately realized in the Meiji era.

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Dedicated to my grandmother, Suzuki Tomi 鈴木登美 (1924-2014)

## **INTRODUCTION: Sinology in Japan**

There are mutually contradictory viewpoints in Japanese academia toward Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728). Some regarded him as an unpatriotic Sinophile — a view that prevailed especially during the Second World War — while others saw him as an ethnic nationalist. Some nationalists under the influence of the thought of the national polity 国体 criticized Sorai as a traitor for proclaiming himself a barbarian in the East and for his excessive praise of Chinese culture.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the prominent post-World War II Sinologist, Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎 (1904-1980), considered Sorai to be an ethnic nationalist. He claimed that Sorai in fact regarded himself to be a sage by despising contemporary China.<sup>2</sup> Why did Yoshikawa so radically change the political image of Sorai?

First of all, we should consider the state of studies of Japanese Confucianism including Sorai in Japan, which can be divided broadly into two scholarly factions: Japanese Japanologists who specialize in the study of Japanese Confucianism, and Japanese Sinologists who minor in the field. The fact that there are almost no Japanologists with powerful clout among the Sinologists reveals that it is invariably Japanese Sinologists who exert influence on Japanese Confucianism.

The best example of this one-way influence is the two editions of the complete works of Sorai: one published by Kawade Shobō between 1973 to 1978 under the editorship of the Japanologists, Imanaka Kanshi 今中寛司 (1913-2007) and Naramoto Tatsuya 奈良本辰也 (1913-2001); and the other from Misuzu Shobō which has been in progress since 1973 and is still being worked on under the supervision of mainly Sinologist scholars such as Ogawa Tamaki 小川環樹 (1910-1993), Shimada

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<sup>1</sup> Ishizaki, pp. 405-409. Yoshikawa, 1975, pp. 201-225. Tucker, 2006, pp. 108-109.

<sup>2</sup> Yoshikawa, 1975, pp. 201-286.

Kenji 島田虔次 (1917-2000), Togawa Yoshio 戸川芳郎 (1931-) and Yoshikawa Kōjirō. Yoshikawa criticized the various errors in the interpretation of Sorai's *kanbun* 漢文 writing found in the Kawade edition and felt it was his duty as a specialist in Sinology to correct those mistakes.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to such asymmetrical influence, there exists another division among Japanese Sinologists which further confounds the situation. The division is between two different attitudes toward the *kundoku* 訓読 system, i.e., the Japanese rendering of Chinese language. One side relies on the traditional style of *kanbun* to interpret the Chinese classics, with some dismissing the need for Mandarin altogether. The other side proposes that one must learn Mandarin to study classical Chinese. The reason for this division derives from the fact that Classical Chinese is not a colloquial language but a written language. Some scholars from the former camp say that it is not useful to learn modern Mandarin because the pronunciation and grammar are very different from ancient and classical Chinese. What is the point, then, of studying Mandarin with so much effort for the purpose of interpretation of classical Chinese? Studying classical Chinese in Mandarin is inferior even to studying it in Japanese *kanbun*, as Japanese might ironically preserve more accurate pronunciations of ancient Chinese. Against this viewpoint, other scholars believe it vital to learn Mandarin to understand classical Chinese, since this would facilitate a fuller appreciation in such areas as poetic rhyming, and would enable texts to be read without guiding marks for rendering Chinese into Japanese 訓点. There are of course theories that combine both points, making use of *kundoku* in conjunction with the study of Mandarin, — an approach that is now becoming a major trend. Let us examine the history of the new Sinology in Japan to understand why this division is of such great concern.

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<sup>3</sup> Yoshikawa, 1975, XV.

It had been a dominant trend among Japanese sinologists to rely just on the *kundoku* system to interpret classical Chinese until the emergence of some scholars who harbored doubts as to the axiom of employing *kundoku* only for the appreciation of classical Chinese texts. Scholars who studied at Kyoto University such as Kuraishi Takeshirō 倉石武四郎 (1897-1975) and Yoshikawa Kōjirō were opposed to the Japanese traditional way of learning Chinese classics, and fought with contempt against them especially during the time when the idea of national polity had power.<sup>4</sup> They endured many troubles with traditional *kanbun* scholars who despised their attempts, sometimes based on a sense of superiority over the weaker China. Against this backdrop, Kuraishi declared the famous phrase: “I threw away the *kundoku* system in the Sea of Genkai 玄界灘”, the sea located between Japan and the Chinese continent, when he went to China to study abroad. He went so far as to wear Chinese clothing to understand Chinese culture *directly* while he was in Beijing along with Yoshikawa.

Sorai was idealized in this course as a pioneer who advocated the interpretation of the Chinese language as it is, i.e. without applying the *kundoku* system. One can imagine how supportive it would have been for them to have such a great scholar like Sorai as a precursor. One further point of importance is that Yoshikawa belonged to the evidential school of Confucianism 考證學 (J. *kōshōgaku*), as he himself proclaimed. The evidential school is a Confucian movement that was widespread during the Qing dynasty, and which could be defined in terms of the modern understanding of philology. The movement influenced modern Japanese sinologists as well as Confucians in Edo. Benjamin Elman has analyzed the characteristics of the evidential school in post-Meiji Japan and states that, “distinguished post-Meiji Japanese historians such as Shigeno Yasutsugu in Tokyo and Naitō Konan in Kyoto learned to apply the methodology of German Rankean history by integrating Western

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<sup>4</sup> About the history of learning Mandarin in Japan, see Kuraishi.

learning with their earlier training in *kōshōgaku*.<sup>5</sup> Yoshikawa was a student of the Kyoto school, which explains the great attention that he gave to the philological aspects of Sorai's work. Emanuel Pastreich mentions that “we must be wary of the attempts of Yoshikawa Kōjirō to make Sorai out to be a careful philologist.”<sup>6</sup>

The tendency after the Second World War to associate *kundoku* with militarism propelled some Japanese Sinologists to live with the guilt of having ignored the study of the Chinese language, and at the same time with a sense of burden over the convenience of the *kundoku* system. The considerable influence of Yoshikawa in the field of Japanese Confucianism derives from the fact that he was one of the key figures during the War who advocated the direct method of reading classical Chinese in its own way, i.e. by using the Chinese pronunciation and word order, without applying the *kundoku* style. This might have something to do with the situation that Japanese intellectuals found themselves in after the Second World War, to the extent that those who had been antimilitarists during the War were after its conclusion, hailed as protectors of democracy.

Even though it sounds like a matter of course to read a foreign language in its original language, this was not commonly the case with classical Chinese works in Japan. The feature of Chinese characters as ideograms made it possible for neighboring cultures to read them without relying on or knowing the pronunciation of the Chinese language. This characteristic enabled the Japanese to create a method of *kanbun* reading which applied Japanese pronunciations to Chinese characters, and put guiding marks 訓点 beside the characters to arrange the word order to suit Japanese grammar. Moreover, there were

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<sup>5</sup> Elman, 2002, p. 179. Elman continues, “In the process, the Tokyo and Kyoto University traditions of historical research achieved maturity. As in Qing China, classical scholars in Tokugawa Japan were in part providing the nativist foundations for a tradition of precise, empirically based research and impartial analysis. In the eighteenth century, Tokugawa classical scholars still emulated research from Qing China. In the late nineteenth century, however, Qing classical scholars increasingly learned from intellectual developments in Meiji Japan.” pp. 179-180.

<sup>6</sup> Pastreich, p. 142.



also political motives that underlay the complicated relationship between Japanese and Chinese. Pre-modern Japan was located in the periphery of East Asia, a region over which Chinese culture dominated as a central power. This structure of cultural power has continued in modern Japan, in which Japan as a periphery always subjugates to a central power, although it is the case that China eventually gave way to the West as a center.<sup>7</sup> With the emergence of the West, the position of *kanbun*, or what should rather be referred to as the *Chinese language*, fell into decline in favor of the study of the Western languages and civilization.<sup>8</sup> Sinologists were no longer able to maintain their once esteemed position.<sup>9</sup>

It is then understandable how difficult it was in Japan to promote reading Chinese classics using the Chinese language in Japan between the end of Edo and the conclusion of the Second World War, taking into account the ultranationalistic situation during that period.<sup>10</sup> At the time, Kuraishi and Yoshikawa had to fight with the conservative tradition maintained by *kanbun* scholars who usually held disdain towards a weak China, and regarded Japan as a new supreme ruler and rising central power in East Asia.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is understandable that they found similarities with the great scholar Sorai in the past, and it can be said that they esteemed Sorai as their mentor. However, we should be aware that the image of Sorai proposing the method of the direct reading of the Chinese language was one that

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<sup>7</sup> This process did not occur all of a sudden in the transition from Edo to Meiji. Cf. Watanabe, 1997, pp. 192-268 and Watanabe, 2010, pp. 363-381.

<sup>8</sup> There is a view that *kanbun* education helped Japanese to master Western knowledge. For example, Benjamin Elman writes that “the Japanese viewed the Chinese from afar in the eighteenth century with combined admiration, jealousy, and fear. China’s language, values, and institutions were still worthy of emulation and adaptation in a Japan moving from a decentralized warrior society to an increasingly centralized civil order. In the eighteenth century, Japan changed faster and more dramatically than China. Such efforts to emulate and master China provided the first steps toward later efforts by the Japanese to emulate and master Europe.” Elman, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> It is said that *kanbun* and the Chinese classics still possessed great influence during Meiji, Taisho and early Showa. Cf. Mehl. However, in comparison with the position of *kanbun* in Edo and the role of Western languages in Japan since Meiji, the decline of *kanbun* after Edo is an undeniable fact.

<sup>10</sup> Actually, it is still doubtful that the idea of treating Chinese classics in Chinese has now spread in Japanese academia. The way of reading of *kanbun* in *kundoku* is still substantially pervasive for better or worse.

<sup>11</sup> About Japan’s orient, see Tanaka.

was created by Japanese Sinologists in the late 19th and 20th centuries who revered Sorai as their pioneer.<sup>12</sup> It is historically inaccurate to apply this image to the study of Sorai's thought. First of all, we should distinguish between the idealized image of Sorai as a pioneer of Chinese language learning from the actual historical figure.

The importance of Yoshikawa derives from the fact that there were only a few people who could handle Mandarin in Japanese academia. It seems that it is for this reason that his statements as an authority on Sinology in Japan did not experience the hardship of criticism. Had he been studying such Western languages as French or English, he could have not gained his position. The situation that Maruyama Masao's 丸山眞男 (1914-1996) studies of Sorai were critiqued more harshly than Yoshikawa demonstrates the unbalance. In this thesis, I critique Yoshikawa's statement regarding Sorai by providing possible alternatives to the image of Sorai's learning of the Chinese language.

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<sup>12</sup> About Japanese Sinologists who revered Sorai in the 19th century after Meiji, see Tao, pp. 69-81.

## **IMAGE: Sorai as a Pioneer of Chinese Language Learning**

In the influential book, *Jinsai Sorai Norinaga* 仁齋・徂徠・宣長, Yoshikawa divided Sorai's life into three stages: the first period from the year of his birth in 1666 寛文六年 to 1709 宝永六年 as a language expert;<sup>13</sup> the second period from 1709 to 1716 正徳六年 as a man of letters; and the third period as a philosopher from 1716 享保一年 until his death in 1728 享保一三年.<sup>14</sup> The second period represents a stagnant time for Sorai when his rival, Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657-1725),<sup>15</sup> had clout under the sixth Shogun Ienobu 家宣 (1662-1712, reign 1709-1712) and the seventh Shogun Ietsugu 家継 (1709-1716, reign 1713-1716). The third period starts from the year 1716 when Yoshimune 吉宗 (1684-1751, reign 1716-1745) became the eighth Shogun and Sorai was reinstated into the political center. The reason why Yoshikawa demarcated these three stages stems from his emphasis on the first stage of Sorai as a language expert. Yoshikawa supposed that the solid linguistic and philological foundations of the young Sorai contributed to the formation of his later philosophy. By setting the first stage of Sorai as a linguist and philologist, he could prove the legitimacy of his own methodology for reading classical Chinese using the Chinese language in the philological way of the evidential school. Yoshikawa mentioned that "he (Sorai) made philology the starting point for elucidating the early philosophical texts he used for such advocacy."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The English version of Yoshikawa's book translates 語学者 into philologist. p. 92. I think the term philologist does not convey the intention of Yoshikawa to emphasize the aspect of the early stage of Sorai as a linguist, so have instead changed it into a language expert.

<sup>14</sup> Yoshikawa, 1975, pp. 86-87.

<sup>15</sup> About the rivalry between Sorai and Hakuseki, I referred to Katō and Nakai, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Yoshikawa, 1989, pp. 175-176. J., pp. 529-530.

Again, one can imagine, but cannot ultimately prove, that Yoshikawa emphasized the importance of learning the Chinese language and the philological aspect of Sorai's work in order to prove the validity of Yoshikawa's own scholarship. In support of this, one would note that Yoshikawa set out Sorai's first stage as an expert of language in order to stress the point that learning language and the philological method functioned as the fundamentals which allowed Sorai to become a man of letters and philosopher in his later stages. In this context, Yoshikawa also stressed the importance of learning the Chinese language as an essential factor for mastering classical Chinese. It is true that mastery of classical Chinese played a significant role in shaping Sorai's philosophy. However, the role of learning the Chinese language in the formation of Sorai's thought was probably overemphasized by Yoshikawa.

Sorai wrote many reference books for learning classical Chinese such as *Yakubun sentei* 訳文筌蹄, that prove Sorai's highly advanced ability as an expert in classical Chinese. However, he was expert in classical Chinese *only*. In fact, there are almost no writings by Sorai himself which demonstrate Sorai's actual ability in the colloquial Chinese language. Yoshikawa stated in *Jinsai Sorai Norinaga* that "according to Sorai, to read books is to read them as they are, in other words to read them in their original form, without adding unnecessary comments as is the case with the *kōshaku* 講釈 (the conventional method of lecturing on Confucian classics) method. To read Chinese classics in their original form of course means to read them in Chinese."<sup>17</sup> I suspect that the last sentence reveals not Sorai's but Yoshikawa's own proposal.

*Kinsei nihon ni okeru shinazokugo bungakushi* 近世日本に於ける支那俗語文學史 (The History of Literature in Vernacular Chinese during the Pre-Modern Japan), a major work published in 1940 by Ishizaki Matazō 石崎又造 (1905-1959), depicts the state of vernacular Chinese studies during

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<sup>17</sup> Yoshikawa, 1975, p. 110.

the Edo period, which definitely influenced Yoshikawa's work.<sup>18</sup> However, some points can be found which Yoshikawa seemed to exaggerate.

First of all, according to Ishizaki, it was 1697 when Sorai first felt the need to learn spoken Chinese.<sup>19</sup> Sorai started learning Chinese only after he began serving Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu 柳沢吉保 (1658-1714) because his master, a devotee of the Ōbaku Zen school 黄檗宗, was fond of studying colloquial Chinese.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, Yoshikawa supposed that Sorai was well aware of the necessity to learn colloquial Chinese even from his youth in Kazusa 上総 as a result of his encounter with a work titled *Daxue yanjie* 大學諺解 (J. *Daigaku genkai*). Contrary to the view held by scholars that the book was a commentary in Japanese by Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583-1657), Yoshikawa suggested that “in my view it was more likely one of those commentaries on Confucian works in colloquial Chinese often referred to as “*yanjie* 諺解”. Presumably, Sorai used it to study the rudiments of colloquial Chinese.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, there has been no evidence found to support his assumption.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, if one follows the years Sorai was involved in learning colloquial Chinese, it turns out that they do not match with the first stage of Sorai as a language expert from 1666 to 1709. Sorai founded the Translation Society 訳社 in which people gathered together to learn colloquial Chinese in 1711. The first six volumes of Sorai's *Yakubun sentei* were published in 1714 and the later three

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<sup>18</sup> Yoshikawa mentioned the book of Ishizaki many times in his *Jinsai Sorai Norinaga*. e.g. Yoshikawa, 1975, p. 106, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Ishizaki, p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> About the relationship among Yanagisawa, Ōbaku Zen and colloquial Chinese, see Ishizaki, pp. 44-53.

<sup>21</sup> Yoshikawa, 1983, pp. 103-104. Yoshikawa, 1975, pp. 94-95.

<sup>22</sup> Murakami Masataka denies the possibility of Yoshikawa's argument and judges that the book was annoyed by Hayashi family. See Murakami, p. 60. Then, Abe Yoshio mentions Hayashi Razan was greatly influenced by Korean explanation of colloquial Chinese. He says it is reasonable to read an explanation of Chinese as a foreign language written by a foreigner rather than by a Chinese. See Abe, pp. 295-296. Prof. Donald Baker also doubts Yoshikawa's argument. I owe this point to his comment.

volumes in 1796 after the death of Sorai. Again, these significant years for Sorai's learning Chinese language do not correspond well with the first category of Sorai set forth by Yoshiakwa.

Sorai came back to Edo from Kazusa in 1690 and opened a private school which Yoshikawa believed "must have caused a stir among the townspeople [because] his method of teaching was fresh and unique, not found in any other school."<sup>23</sup> The fresh and unique method here means learning classical Chinese as it is, i.e. not in *wakun* but in vernacular Japanese as Sorai himself wrote in *Yakubun sentei*.<sup>24</sup> Truly, Sorai did not propose to employ colloquial Chinese only in his writings, rather it was Yoshikawa who proposed this method.

In addition, the actual level of Sorai's Chinese ability was not as advanced as expected. It is contradictory that Yoshikawa himself mentioned this point, as he quoted in his *Jinsai, Sorai, Norinaga* from Ishizaki's book, "in one passage Sorai says, 'Though I have studied some colloquial Chinese in the past, it is still like the chirping of birds to me. I can write all right, but when I try to open my mouth, I can't utter a single word. 小的前年學學唐話幾話，却像鳥言一般。寫是寫，待開口的時節，實是講不得。'"<sup>25</sup> Even if it might be only a courtesy, it is surprising that Sorai, a person of grandiloquence, admitted his clumsiness. This would testify to the notion that Sorai was not very good at speaking Chinese.

To sum up, Yoshikawa exaggerated Sorai's concern with mastery of colloquial Chinese. If we look at what Ishizaki thought about Sorai's Chinese based on Sorai's translation of *Liuyu yanyi* 六諭衍

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<sup>23</sup> Yoshikawa, 1975, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> "Although it is superior, the Nagasaki Method is not yet well known. For those without connections who live in the most isolated parts of Japan, there is a second technique. ... using Japanese pronunciation. ... to explain ... in the vernacular. 崎陽之學。世未甚流布。故又為寒鄉無緣者。定為第二等法。... 教以此方讀法。... 俚言解說。" Pastreich, p. 157. *OSZ* vol.2, p. 9. 訳文筌蹄五

<sup>25</sup> Yoshikawa, pp. 126-127 and Ishizaki, p. 58. The original text is an interview by writing in original Chinese at the Kanrodō 甘露堂 Hall of Zuishōji 瑞聖寺 with Eppō Dōshō 悦峰道章, the newly appointed Chinese chief priest of the Ōbaku-san temple at Uji, September in 1707. Cf. Ishizaki, pp. 55-61.

義, a colloquial exposition of the edict on moral education issued by Emperor Taizu 太祖 (Hong Wu di 洪武帝 1328-1398, the founder of Ming dynasty), Ishizaki mentioned ironically enough that “it was fortuitous for the Sorai school to pride itself in the world simply by translating such easy vernacular Chinese 是れ式のことを以て鼻うごめかすことの出来た徂徠門下は世にも亦僥倖であつたといはればなるまい。”<sup>26</sup> It was apparently Yoshikawa who created the image of Sorai as a pioneer of fluent Chinese language learning and a genius at mastering a foreign language.

Then, why did Sorai propose to employ Chinese pronunciation to read classical Chinese at all? Even though, as we have seen, the actual level of Sorai’s Chinese speaking abilities and the realistic possibility of his solely colloquial pronunciation of the classical Chinese texts are doubtful, it cannot be denied that Sorai was enthusiastic to learn colloquial Chinese from Ōbaku monks, Nagasaki interpreters, and literati such as Okajima Kanzan 岡島冠山 (1674-1728).<sup>27</sup> There are three main explanations for this.

First, we should notice that Sorai was more enthusiastic about abolishing *wakun* than adopting the colloquial Chinese method, as we will analyze later. In other words, Sorai utilized colloquial Chinese so as to escape from the trap of *wakun*. Therefore, what concerned him the most was not colloquial Chinese itself, but how to avoid the use of *wakun*. Sorai was well aware of the fundamental difference between Japanese and Chinese while other *kanbun* scholars were so accustomed to *wakun* that they did not even realize it. It is obvious that spoken Chinese is essentially different from Japanese. When it comes to classical Chinese, however, Japanese tend to interpret the texts based on the *wakun*

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<sup>26</sup> Ishizaki, p. 136.

<sup>27</sup> Okajima Kanzan should not be classified as an interpreter as Ishizaki pointed out. p. 87.

system designed to interpret classical Chinese through knowledge of the Japanese language, relying on the Japanese pronunciation and word order. It is then sometimes misleading to read classical Chinese in *wakun*, as this would result in an inaccurate, characteristically Japanese rendering of the texts. Some Chinese characters, for example, have totally different meanings in each language, although the shapes of characters are exactly the same. One can interpret and appreciate classical Chinese to its fullest extent only if one reads texts with the specific intent to grasp this difference. Therefore, Sorai proposed to adopt the Nagasaki Method 崎陽之學 to let students realize the difference between the two systems by pointing out the problem of *wakun* and the merits of reading classical Chinese as it is. However, this proposal does not necessarily mean that students should read classical Chinese *only* in the Chinese way. It is, practically speaking, almost impossible for an everyday Japanese speaker to put this into practice, as Sorai himself mentioned below. Sorai was really practical in this point. As long as students can realize the difference between the two languages and the reason why the *wakun* method is a bad habit, the Nagasaki Method can also be thrown away like a *sentei* (the bamboo fish trap which should be discarded after one catch of a fish) as expressed in the book title, *Yakubun sentei*. Sorai himself proposed listening to classical Chinese texts using the *eyes* to be the ultimate methodology for interpreting classical Chinese. In *Gakusoku* 學則 (Instructions for students), he mentioned that

“... it is the languages which are different. With the aid of Kibi’s achievement (note. Kibi here means Kibi no Makibi 吉備真備 (693/695-775) who Sorai regarded as the creator of the *wakun* system), we can parse Chinese texts and get their meaning, but we cannot recite them and thus cannot hand them down reliably. We can get by for the present, but over the long run the teachings will become murky. Kibi’s method is like the bamboo fish trap. Once you have caught the fish, you discard the trap. Do not use mouth or ear, but consider the texts with heart and eye;



ponder them and ponder again, and as if by divine inspiration you will perceive their meaning. The ancient literature, records, proprieties, and music are Chinese words, and we must try to listen to them with our eyes. That is, treat China as China, and Japan as Japan; grant those things which do not exist; ‘pursue the straight Way,’ and we can transmit the Way to all men; then we can ‘unite the wills of all under Heaven.’ Why stop merely with Japan? 亦唯言語異宜。其於黃備氏之業。可訓以故。不可誦以傳。暫則假。久則泥。荃乎荃乎。獲魚舍荃。口耳不用。心與目謀。思之又思。神其通之。則詩書禮樂。中國之言。吾將聽之以目。則彼彼吾吾。有有無無。直道以行之。可以咸諸橫目之民。則可以通天下之志。何唯東方。’’<sup>28</sup>

To read it with the Chinese pronunciation did not play such a significant role for Sorai as Yoshikawa emphasized, as long as one can grasp the accurate meaning of the texts in classical Chinese.

Second, the popularity of Chinese culture at the time of Sorai should be taken into consideration, especially that of Ōbaku Zen 黃檗禪.<sup>29</sup> After the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), some Chinese scholars such as Zhu Zhiyu 朱之瑜 (J. Shu Shiyu. Also known as Zhu Shunshui 朱瞬水. J. Shu Shunsui 1600-1682) fled from China to Japan. Zhu came to Mito 水戸 and taught Tokugawa Mitsukuni 德川光圀 (1628-1700) Chinese cultures, including Neo-Confucian ideas. In addition to those refugees from the Ming dynasty, there were monks coming to Japan such as Yi Ran 逸然 (J. Itsu Nen 1601-1668) and Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (J. Ingen Ryūki 1592-1673).<sup>30</sup> Yi Ran, as an Ōbaku monk, escaped to Nagasaki in 1644 to avoid the disturbance of war in China at the time of

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<sup>28</sup> Minear, pp. 14-15. *OSZ* vol. 1, pp. 5-6. 學則一

<sup>29</sup> About Ōbaku Zen, I use Baroni greatly.

<sup>30</sup> For the list of Chinese monks who came to Japan, see Ishizaki, pp. 34-35.

transition from the Ming to Qing dynasty. Yinyuan responded to Yi Ran's appeals and came to Japan in 1654. He found the Manpuku temple 万福寺 at Uji 宇治 in 1661 by the donation of the fourth Shogun Tokugawa Ietsuna 徳川家綱 (1641-1680, reign 1651-80) where Chinese monks served as the chief priest from generation to generation until 1740. The influence of Ōbaku Zen Buddhism during the Tokugawa was tremendous and extended to cultures including a painting school called Ōbaku school 黄檗派. It can be said that there was a *China boom* in the second half of the 17th century in Japan.<sup>31</sup>

Helen Baroni defines the most prominent characteristic of Ōbaku Zen Buddhism in Japan as its Chineseness: "in the context of Japanese religion, it has been assumed that new movements introduced from outside Japan succeed only when they effectively integrate themselves into the Japanese milieu by becoming Japanese in style. In the case of Obaku Zen, I have argued that the success it enjoyed in establishing itself as a third sect of Zen Buddhism rested largely on its identity as a distinctly Chinese form of Zen Buddhism."<sup>32</sup>

According to Ōba Osamu 大庭脩 (1927-2002), the number of Chinese vessels that entered the port of Nagasaki increased dramatically after the *qianjie* (restrict the area) order 遷界令 was rescinded and the *zhanhai* (expand to the sea) order 展海令 was promulgated in the Qing dynasty in 1684. In 1683 and 1684, the number of those vessels was 24. "In 1685 the number rose sharply to 85; to 102 in 1686, 115 in 1687, and 193 in 1688. The year 1688 marked the high point in the entire Sino-Japanese

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<sup>31</sup> About the China boom in Edo, there is no such specific term. However, considering the importance of Chinese culture in the late 17th century in Edo culture, there should be such a term. About the influence of Chinese culture in Edo, as for books, see Ōba, 1984. About Ōbaku Zen, see Baroni. About poems, see Matsushita. About vernacular literature, see Ishizaki and Pastreich.

<sup>32</sup> Baroni, p. 203. She states, "Throughout the first century of Obaku's history, the distinctive monastic code and style of practice established by the Chinese founders, as well as the regular contact with their home monasteries in China, fostered an ongoing maintenance of the Chinese flavor of the Obaku movement. During this century, Obaku enjoyed a period of steady institutional growth. After the first century of its history, Obaku was not successful in maintaining the early level of excitement and growth. It is not coincidental that just at the juncture when meaningful contact with the Chinese resources stagnated that Obaku's institutional growth peaked and then began to recede. ... Ironically, in the case of Obaku, the process of Japanization marked the end rather than the beginning of its success."

trade of the Edo period for the number of Chinese ships.”<sup>33</sup> Along with the increase of vessels, many Chinese cultural products such as books were imported.<sup>34</sup>

Sorai opened his first private school around this time in 1690 at Shiba 芝 near Zōjyō-ji 増上寺 and Ōbaku school temple Zuishōji 瑞聖寺 after coming back from Kazusa, the middle part of the current Chiba 千葉 prefecture, where he spent his youth because of the ejection of his father from Edo. Yoshikawa stated that his school became popular soon after the opening since his methodology for employing the Chinese pronunciation attracted many students as an innovative method of teaching.<sup>35</sup> However, it can be also said that Sorai emphasized the utilization of colloquial Chinese in order to seize the opportunity of the China boom to promote the popularity of his school.

Third, the oral effect of reading the Chinese classics not in the way of *kundoku* but using Chinese pronunciation should be considered. It is well known that Sorai stressed the importance of rites, music, punishments and administration 礼楽刑政 as external forces which transform the internal mind from the outside. In *Bendō* 辨道 (Distinguishing the Way), Sorai clearly defined Dao as the Way of the Early Kings 先王之道 i.e., concrete things such as rituals. I speculate, then, that the reason why Sorai advocated the reading of classical Chinese using the Chinese pronunciation was that he emphasized the power of the sound of a language also as an external thing 物. It is similar to the phenomena in Japanese Buddhism in which Buddhist priests chant Sutras in Mantras which are believed to be based on the pronunciation of the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit. In addition to

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<sup>33</sup> Ōba, 2012, p. 24. (J. p. 31.)

<sup>34</sup> About the situation of importing Chinese books in Edo Japan, see Ōba, 1984.

<sup>35</sup> Yoshikawa, 1975, p. 107.

sound, Sorai stressed mastery of literary style. I believe that Sorai regarded literary style also as an external force which visually affects one's mind. He mentioned that

“When it comes to reading aloud, the Japanese fall back on *wakun* annotation and its inversions and transformations. If one reads Chinese straight from top to bottom like a Sanskrit text, the process of reading takes considerable effort as the original sounds of Chinese are different from those of Japanese. If one makes just a mental effort, how will one manage to feel in one's heart the content of the text? 若或從頭直下。如浮屠念經。亦非此方生來語音。必煩思惟。思惟纔生。緣何自然感發於中心乎。”<sup>36</sup>

As we have seen already, the very reason why Sorai proposed to read Chinese texts according to the Chinese pronunciation was not based on his esteem of original texts in the original language as Yoshikawa insisted. The real ultimate purpose was to avoid *wakun* annotation.

“I have set forth the Nagasaki Method of Chinese language study: to employ vernacular Japanese in the classroom, to read Chinese texts according to Chinese pronunciation, to translate Chinese texts into vernacular Japanese and, at all costs, to avoid *wakun* annotation. 故予嘗為蒙定學問之法。先為崎陽之學。教以俗語。誦以華音。譯以此方俚語。絕不作和迴環之讀。”<sup>37</sup>

The Nagasaki Method of Chinese language studies was employed in order to abolish the vicious practice of *wakun*. *Wakun* annotation, according to Sorai, does no good and a great deal of harm to students. The worst example is explication 講 which hinders students' autonomy by letting them just listen to lectures passively. In addition, *wakun* gives students an impression of the difficulty of

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<sup>36</sup> Pastreich, p. 160. *OSZ*, vol. 2, p. 11. 訳文筌蹄六

<sup>37</sup> Pastreich. p. 156. *OSZ*, vol. 2, p. 9. 訳文筌蹄五

approaching the classics because of the loftiness caused by the antique grammar and pronunciation of traditional *wakun* reading. Again, it should be noted that Sorai did not regard learning the Chinese language as the fundamental starting point of his learning. What actually concerned Sorai the most was the destruction of *wakun*. Sorai himself wrote that

“Chinese speak frequently of reading books aloud. I would say that what we Japanese do is better thought of as ‘looking at books’ than ‘reading aloud books.’ The sounds of Chinese and Japanese are so completely different. Therefore the aural and oral aspects of reading do not develop for Japanese. Only eyes take part in the act of reading. There is not one exception in three thousand Japanese. ... only when one considers words both in the eyes and in the mind does one obtain a glimpse of the world they denote. 中華人多言。讀書讀書。予便謂讀書不如看書。此緣中華此方語音不同。此方耳口二者。皆不得力。唯一雙眼。合三千世界人。總莫有殊。 ... 唯心目雙照。始得窮其境界。”<sup>38</sup>

Here, he did not mention the need to pronounce Chinese characters at all. It was Yoshikawa who exaggerated the aspect of learning Chinese language in Sorai’s thought.

In this thesis, I attempt to present another possibility of the reason why Sorai proposed the employment of the literary style of *kobunji* 古文辭 (Old Phraseology): to transform Edo society through language and literary style as external things. I divide the later part of this thesis into three main parts: Condition, Ideal and Means. In Condition, I analyze how Sorai perceived the political situation of Edo Japan at his time. Then, I move on to read the Ideal Sorai held against the condition. In the last part of Means, I examine how Sorai attempted to achieve his ideal in the condition.

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<sup>38</sup> Pastreich, p. 160. *OSZ*, vol. 2, p. 11. 訳文筌蹄六

## **CONDITION: Neo-Confucianism and *Kobunji***

In this section, I analyze how Sorai perceived the socio-political condition of Edo Japan during his time. First of all, I propose that the role of Neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan was to promote regionalism rather than to support the ideology for centralization by the Bakufu. That is, it is more reasonable to understand Sorai's political thought according to the scheme of Neo-Confucianism as an idea used to support the status quo of the Bakuhan 幕藩 system and to perceive the *Kobunjigaku* 古文辞学 as an idea of promoting the centralization by the Bakufu.

It has been thought that Neo-Confucianism in China functioned as an ideology of a central state based on a powerful emperor. This traditionally settled viewpoint was shaped under the influence of the concept of a *static China* held by figures such as Hegel, Weber and Marx: to regard China as consistently unchangeable under the control of the despotic monarchies of a repeating circle of dynasties. In addition, the political stance of the Chinese Communist Party against feudalism would stretch the image of powerful and savage dictators who tortured the populace.<sup>39</sup> However, recent studies of historical realities in the late imperial China provide different images of emperors, gentries and the populace. Gentries and the populace were not so much under the control of the emperor as had been previously expected. Being influenced by this flow, some studies of Neo-Confucianism also show a new perspective on the role of Neo-Confucianism in the state. For example, Peter Bol says in his *Neo-Confucianism in History*, “when Neo-Confucians did serve in government, they supported the spread of Neo-Confucian learning and local voluntarism rather than trying to expand the state's role at the expense of local elites.”<sup>40</sup> Supposing that the role of Neo-Confucianism in China was to support

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<sup>39</sup> About the *static image of China*, refer to Brook and Blue. *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge*, Chpt. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Bol, 2008, pp. 274-275.

regionalism by local magnates, and to help powerful merchants protect their interests against the centralization promoted by the emperor, its role in Tokugawa Japan may have been of a similar nature. Surely, Edo Japan had various powerful Daimyo and a newly awakened merchant class.

There was also a paradigm shift of viewpoints toward Neo-Confucianism at the time of Edo related to the change in perspective toward the role of the Bakufu. Similar to the case of China studies, the role of Neo-Confucianism in Edo Japan was believed to be an official ideology of the central Bakufu government to legitimate its political power.<sup>41</sup> However, along with the emergence of a new perspective to regard the Bakufu as one of the Daimyo in reality, some scholars have discredited the image of the Bakufu as a powerful central power. John Hall says, “the powers exercised by the daimyo within their domains had expanded tremendously since the time of the Muromachi military governors, the *shugo* daimyo. In fact it was probably in the *han* that the machinery of centralized bureaucratic administration proceeded the farthest. In many instances the Edo shogunate based its governing practices on techniques adopted from times when the head of the Tokugawa line was simply one of many daimyo competing for local supremacy in central Japan.”<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Bitō Masahide 尾藤正英 (1923-2013) published *Nihon hōken shisōshi kenkyū: bakuhan taisei no genri to Shushigaku teki shii* 日本封建思想史研究：幕藩体制の原理と朱子学的思惟 (The Study of the Intellectual History of Japanese Feudalism: The Principle of the Shogunate and Domain System and the Neo-Confucian Way of Thought) in 1961, which shed doubt on the image of the Bakufu as a central power with the ideology of Neo-Confucianism. The finding that the Bakufu

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<sup>41</sup> About the relationship between *Bakufu* and ideology, I rely on Ooms.

<sup>42</sup> Hall, pp. 129-130.

might have actually been not as powerful as previously believed led to a new viewpoint toward Neo-Confucianism: Neo-Confucianism did not work as the Bakufu's official ideology.

There are still, however, not many studies further proposing that Neo-Confucianism supported the shogunate and domain system called *Bakuhan taisei* 幕藩体制.<sup>43</sup> In this thesis, I base my discourse on this relatively new proposal and conclude that Sorai criticized Neo-Confucianism so vehemently because he noticed its role in the strengthening of the status quo of the decentralized Edo to which Sorai objected. From this new perspective, I think we can much more clearly understand what Sorai wanted to achieve. The rivalries with Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627-1705)<sup>44</sup> as a representative of a burgeoning merchant class and Arai Hakusaki as a Neo-Confucian supporter of the shogunate and domain system could also be understood within this scheme. But the question still remains: Why was Sorai against the decentralized situation of Edo?

Before moving to the question, let us first look at Sorai's viewpoint toward the political situation in Edo, mainly by looking through his *Seidan* 政談 (Discourse on Government), presented to the eighth Shogun Yoshimune. First of all, Sorai was a person who supported a strong central government. Sorai clearly stated that "if the whole of Japan were one day no longer under the shogun's full control, there could come a time of difficulty for his government 日本国中ハ上ノ儘成様ニナサレ置レザルトキハ、時ニ取テハ政道ノ指支ユル所アル."<sup>45</sup> Ishii Shirō 石井紫郎 (1935-) interpreted this statement as Sorai's proposal to establish a centralized government.<sup>46</sup> Sorai also advised

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<sup>43</sup> There are some scholars such as Asao Naohiro 朝尾直弘 (1931-) and Watanabe Hiroshi who propose that the notion of *han* 藩 did not exist before the late 18th century, therefore, it is misleading to use the terminology of *Bakuhan taisei* before that time. Cf. Watanabe, 1999, pp. 8-9. However, Watanabe himself says Sorai liked using the new word, so I keep my argument based on the idea of *Bakuhan taisei*. See Watanabe, 1999, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> About the rivalry between Sorai and Jinsai, see Spae and Tucker, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Lidin, 1999, pp. 275-276. *NST*, p. 411. 政談卷之四

<sup>46</sup> Ishii, p. 274.



that “it is desirable that a damiyo estate should not exceed 300,000 *koku* [because] the daimyo of more than 400,000 to 500,000 or 1,000,000 *koku* are excessively large for so small a country as Japan. 総ジテ四五十万石・百万石ニ余ル大名ハ、日本小国ニハ過タル者也。... 大名ノ家、三十万石ヲ限ニ支度事ナリ。”<sup>47</sup> Sorai advocated dividing the lands of the Daimyo whenever there was an opportunity.<sup>48</sup>

Sorai was also dissatisfied with the hereditary system in Edo society because of its irrationality. Again in *Seidan*, he mentioned that “it is unavoidable that high officials with hereditary stipends, who live all the time in Edo, pay no attention at all and drift along with the changing habits, having no ideas of their own and so are unable to express themselves about anything.”<sup>49</sup>

Sorai dreamt of constructing a meritocratic society in which a powerful emperor would unite a country and select his subjects based not on their pedigrees but on their abilities. The pros and cons of centralization and regionalism were always discussed in Confucianism. While centralization makes it possible to treat personnel in a meritocratic way, regionalism tends to favor heredity.<sup>50</sup> However, regionalism makes the local administration function well in accordance with the real situation of local areas rather than by official personnel dispatched from a central government who are not familiar with the local situation well. Localism also can contribute to the stability of a society because of the very nature of the hereditary system. A meritocratic society functions efficiently but possesses a possibility

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<sup>47</sup> Lidin, 1999, p. 276. *NST*, pp. 411-412. 政談卷之四

<sup>48</sup> *NST*, pp. 410-411. 政談卷之四

<sup>49</sup> Lidin, 1999, p. 116. *NST*, p. 290. 政談卷之一

<sup>50</sup> I am influenced by the argument of Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) cited by Mizoguchi Yūzō 溝口雄三. (1932-2010). Li Zhi proposed a powerful central government in his historical account, *Cangshu* 藏書. Mizoguchi regards the reason derived from Li's aspiration to achieve a more meritocratic and anti-hereditary society. I think Sorai's ideas of politics have many common points with Li Zhi. See Mizoguchi, pp. 51-216.

of social upheaval owing to its flexible mobility of people. Regionalism also has a danger of social chaos if some local areas achieve too much freedom out of a central government.

What was Sorai's view of the political situation in Edo? The actual situation in history is of little consequence here. Rather, how Sorai perceived the world is much more significant. Sorai mentioned that "in ancient times Japan, too, had commanderies and counties, but the county is now divided into feudal domains. This is why much in the writings of T'ang and Sung Confucians would be hard to adopt. 日本も古は郡縣にて候へども。今程封建に罷成候故。唐宋諸儒之説には取用がたき事共御座候。"<sup>51</sup>

Whether Neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan functioned as the Bakufu's ideology for centralization or as the Daimyo's ideologies against infringement on their vested rights by the Bakufu, the divergence derives from the viewpoint toward the degree of power held by the Bakufu as the central government. It used to be believed that the Bakufu wielded enormous power over other Daimyo. However, as recent research shows, there has appeared another viewpoint which regards the Bakufu's power as less than previously thought,<sup>52</sup> and which pays much greater attention to the authority of the Daimyo and vassals.<sup>53</sup> The Bakufu was truly just one of the Daimyo, but the one that possessed the most extensive lands.

It is my view that the new debate over the historical location of Neo-Confucianism in China can also be applied to the case of Edo Japan. In this thesis, therefore, I take the stance that Neo-Confucianism was not the Bakufu's ideology, but it rather functioned as the ideology of the shogunate and domain system. As a supporter of the centralization by the Shogun to achieve a meritocratic

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<sup>51</sup> Yamashita, 1994, pp.47-48. *OSZ* vol. 1, p. 434. 答問書上

<sup>52</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that the Bakufu's power varied during the Tokugawa period. Probably, the strongest time was in the beginning.

<sup>53</sup> See Ishii and Kasaya.

society, Neo-Confucianism stood in the way of Sorai as a serious obstacle to be removed. Therefore, he was deeply opposed to Neo-Confucian concepts and established his own school of *Kobunji*. It can be said that Sorai properly fathomed the effect of Neo-Confucianism as *an ideology to support regionalism* rather than centralization.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> There are various opinions on Sorai's political viewpoint toward polity, whether he supported centralization or decentralization. I owe a lot to the argument by Ishii. See Ishii, pp. 259-281.

## **IDEAL: Meritocratic Society Based on Rigid Hierarchy with Practicality and Stability**

In general, a feudalistic state supports a hereditary system while a centralized state inclines toward a meritocratic system. From this perspective, the Edo state composed of the Shogun and Daimyo was nothing more than a feudalistic hereditary society supported by Neo-Confucian ideology. The third volume of *Seidan* vividly shows that Sorai aimed to change the current condition of polity into a much more centralized one so that he could bring a meritocratic society into being. Why did he cherish this ideal? I will begin by analyzing the origin of this ideal in Sorai's thought.

The essence of Sorai's thought is its practicality. As a versatile person, Sorai also mastered the art of war, which influenced him to develop his main characteristic of being strategic in his political thought.<sup>55</sup> Sorai abhorred Buddhism and Daoism because of their ideas of nature 自然.<sup>56</sup> Daoism, in particular, maintains that the best way to keep order in society is to abandon artifice and to take things as they come 無為自然. While Daoism taught that abandoning artifice or effortless action 無為 was the best way to bring order to this world, Sorai maintained that it was imperative to fully utilize artifice 作為. According to him, the natural condition actually means a condition which seems to be achieved without artifice. It is something *created* by a ruler to be natural for the simple-minded populace. There is no other way to maintain order without the employment of artifice. To fully utilize artifice requires the separation of those who possess power and those who are controlled. Sorai's technique was to deceive the populace to believe in the artificial condition as the natural state. This is the best way to sustain order in a society.

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<sup>55</sup> About the situation of the art of war in Tokugawa Japan and the influence on Sorai, see Maeda and Noguchi. Bitō Nishū 尾藤二洲 (1745-1813) commented that “the book of Sunzi 孫子 (J. Sonshi) was introduced to Japan by Sorai. The essence of his learning stemmed from the same book. 孫子の書は、徂徠先入の主なり。終身の論学、その意皆此に本づく。” NST37, p. 287. *Sosanroku* 素餐錄 二四一.

<sup>56</sup> About Sorai's viewpoint of the ideas of nature and artifice, see Yamashita, 1984.

As is well known, Neo-Confucianism was formed under the influence of Chan 禪 (J. Zen) Buddhism which was quite popular among Shidafu 士大夫 (Scholar-officials/gentry) at the time of the Song dynasty. Sorai strongly criticized Neo-Confucianism by judging that it was influenced by the idea of nature in Buddhism and Daoism. Sorai believed in artifice, while despising the idea of using nature for the governance of a country as being too optimistic and impracticable.

The pragmatic Sorai supported the polity of ancient China because of its ability to stand the test of time.<sup>57</sup> The Zhou dynasty lasted for almost eight hundreds years, while later dynasties such as Han and Tang remained in place for three hundred years. Contrary to other Confucians, he did not believe in the ancient time of China as an idealized Utopia. As a realistic man, Sorai also did not believe that it was possible for a dynasty to exist forever, without collapse. He thought it was inevitable for each dynasty to relinquish the reigns of power to another dynasty. Based on these practical and realistic viewpoints toward the cycles of dynasties, Sorai attached the most importance to the duration of a single dynasty; the longer a dynasty lasts, the better it is. His great emphasis on tactics in his political thought is no less than a technique to achieve this purpose in order to sustain the Tokugawa shogunate as long as possible. His idealization of three dynasties in ancient China must be taken in this context. To remain in power over a long duration of time, what is needed most is efficiency and practicality. The key factor is personnel. In *Seidan*, Sorai mentioned that “truly, the line of policy that holds firm to family lineage and the line of policy that fosters talent are opposites. Here, then, we have the divide between peace and disorder in the realm. 兎角ニ家筋ヲ立ル方ト、賢妻ヲ挙ル方トハ裏腹ナルコトニテ、国家治乱ノ別ルゝ事ハ茲ニ有事也。”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. *NST*, pp. 304-305. 政談卷之二 Also, Watanabe, 2010, J. pp. 187-189.

<sup>58</sup> Lidin, 1999, p, 226. *NST*, p. 371.

As stated before, Sorai sought a society with fairness and impartiality regarding personnel matters. However, this does not mean that he advocated the equal treatment of people. Rather, he stuck to a rigid hierarchy which grouped people into different classes *according to their abilities*. Sorai writes that “If merely an able peasant or townsman was employed and made a gokenin retainer, and if the shogun showed him favor, what threat could there be in that to the rule of the realm? 仮令百姓・町人ナリトモ、才智アラン者ヲバ新ニ被召出テ御家人ニナシ玉ハンモ、上ノ御威光ニテ、国家ヲ治ル道ニハ何ノ憚カ可有。”<sup>59</sup> Here in this section, we see Sorai’s idea of human nature which clearly shows his view of an idealized society.

As is well known, Sorai wrote in *Sorai sensei tōmon sho* 徂徠先生答問書 (Master Sorai’s Responsals) that:

“One’s inborn nature is endowed by Heaven and produced by one’s own father and mother. The idea of transforming one’s innate nature is an empty Sung Confucian theory, and forcing people to be what they are not is most unreasonable. The inborn nature, no matter what one does to it, resists transformation: a grain of rice is forever a grain of rice; a bean is forever a bean. ... a grain of rice is useful for the world as a grain of rice, and a bean is useful as a bean. But a grain of rice will never become a bean; nor will a bean ever become a gain of rice. 氣質は天より稟得。父母よりうみ付候事に候。氣質を變化すると申候事は。宋儒の妄説にてならぬ事を人に責候無理之至に候。氣質は何としても變化はならぬ物にて候。米はいつまでも米。豆はいつまでも豆にて候。...されば世界の為にも。米は米にて用にたち。豆は豆にて用に立申候。豆は米にはならぬ物に候。米は豆にならぬ物に候。”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lidin, 1999, pp, 225-226. *NST*, p. 371.

<sup>60</sup> Yamashita, 1994, p. 76. *OSZ*, pp. 456-457. 答問書中

Yet, this does not indicate that he believed in egalitarianism. Sorai criticized Neo-Confucianism because of its emphasis on the equality of people. The egalitarian idea of Neo-Confucianism comes down to this statement: “ ‘Master I-Ch’huan said: It was to learn the way of becoming a sage.’ ‘Can one become a sage through learning?’ ‘Yes.’ 伊川先生曰、學以至聖人之道也。聖人可學而至歟。曰、然。”<sup>61</sup> Watanabe Hiroshi 渡辺浩 (1946-) explains this Neo-Confucian notion in comparison with Jean-Jeaques Rousseau (1712-1778). “ Jean-Jeaques Rousseau begins his *Confessions* with the assertion, ‘I am not made like any that I have seen; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist.’ A Neo-Confucian scholar would regard this as the confession of a small and evil man. It is not ‘individuality’ that is important, but the realization of the humanity shared by all mankind.”<sup>62</sup> Sorai opposed this idea of egalitarianism and denied the possibility for people to be able to become sages. “The Sages were endowed by Heaven with intelligence and wisdom, and their brilliance matched that of the gods. How can one speak of achieving this by human effort? 聖人は聰明睿智を天よりうけ得て神明にひとしき人にて候を。何として人力を以てなり可申候哉。”<sup>63</sup> For Sorai, Sages equaled the object of worship, as in the following: “I myself do not believe in Buddhism; I believe in the Sages. 愚者は釈迦をば信仰不仕候。聖人を信仰仕候。”<sup>64</sup>

Confucians speculated on how to attain order so as to establish permanent peace. They created concepts such as heaven, earth and ether, and applied them to their own constructs for keeping order. Neo-Confucians aimed to establish order through the unification of human nature among all people in the world. If all people behaved in the same way, there would be no disorder. Natural phenomena such

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<sup>61</sup> Chan, p. 36. 近思錄 為學三.

<sup>62</sup> Watanabe, 2012, Chapter Six n. 14, p. 454 and Watanaben, 2010, p. 134, Capter Six, n. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Yamashita, 1994, p. 76. OSZ, p. 457. 答問書中

<sup>64</sup> Yamashita, 1994, p. 71. OSZ, p. 452. 答問書中

as seasonal change are ordered well because the principle of heaven governs it. Spring comes after winter. When summer arrives, spring ends. People, on the other hand, behave so individually that they cause disorder. As with nature, man must also obey the principle of heaven to maintain order. For Neo-Confucians, individuality is no more than an obstacle to be overcome.

On the other hand, difference is not something unusual for Sorai and is an unalterable phenomena. He found fault in any attempt to alter such an intrinsically human phenomena, and since it is impossible to change individual human nature, he rejected the Neo-Confucian idea of self-improvement to become a sage. The attempt is vain in the way it does not acknowledge the unalterable phenomena of difference. As such, Sorai sought to utilize the difference. The most significant point is, however, that Sorai did not aim for individualism. Some scholars try to find modernity in this idea of Sorai. Imanaka Kanshi, for example, regarded his theory of the fundamentally unchangeable human nature to be something modern which cannot be found in other Confucians' ideas, even within China.<sup>65</sup> Sorai admitted the existence of individuality, but not individualism.<sup>66</sup>

Bitō Msahide thought that what Sorai was referring to was assigned roles 分/役 in society.<sup>67</sup> Sorai did not agree with Neo-Confucian notions of egalitarianism, and at the same time, disagreed with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's individualism types. Rather, Sorai sought an organic and hierarchal structure which assigned roles to people. He did not begin at the level of individuals, but started from society as a whole. Maruyama Masao quoted two incidents to indicate the importance of the whole over persons in Sorai's thought.<sup>68</sup> One involves the abandonment of a mother by her son. While so many other Confucian scholars criticized the son for his disloyalty, Sorai attacked the person in charge of the

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<sup>65</sup> Imanaka, pp. 416-439.

<sup>66</sup> Individuality accepts human difference. Individualism promotes it.

<sup>67</sup> Bitō, 2013, pp. 311-314. Also Watanabe, 1997, pp. 234-235.

<sup>68</sup> Maruyama, pp. 69-76. J. pp. 71-78.



domain in which the mother and the son lived. According to Sorai, it was not the son's guilt but that of the lord for leading the son to act in such a manner. The second incident is the famous account of the forty-seven *rōnin* of the Akō clan 赤穂浪士四十七士. They broke into the Edo residence of Daimyo, Kira Yoshinaka 吉良義央 (1641-1702) on December 14, 1702, in order to avenge the death of their Lord, Daimyo Asano Naganori 浅野長矩 (1667-1701). While the great majority of Confucians praised their act of revenge, Sorai was opposed to their conduct. Maruyama's reasoning behind this was that, "although on the one hand he (Sorai) fully recognized the 'righteousness' of the samurai's conduct - and therefore opposed extreme penalties such as decapitation - he saw this as a matter strictly limited to the private realm, and based on personal considerations. He opposed any tendency to allow personal considerations to undermine public ones, that is, he would not permit private morality to influence matters that demanded political decisions."<sup>69</sup> What we can tell from Sorai's reactions to these two incidents is that he placed priority on the whole rather than individuals.

Bitō quoted the passage from *Bendō* to show, "what Sorai thinks about 'human nature,' that is the essential nature of the mind of the individual."

"Being mutually familiar and mutually affectionate, being born together and raised together helping one another and correcting one another, such is human nature. 相親相愛相生相成相輔相養相匡相求者。人之性為然。"<sup>70</sup>

Then, Bitō concludes that "the identifying feature of Sorai's view is his insistence that man is a social animal, whose nature requires that he be part of a group. Where this conception differs from those of Mencius and Hsün Tzu is in its dimension: they are concerned with the individual, Sorai with the larger

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<sup>69</sup> Maruyama, p. 74. J. p. 76.

<sup>70</sup> *NST*, p. 202.

collective. If the nub of Sorai's political thought is the problem of how best to manage the masses and to manipulate them psychologically, using religious ritual, then it is framed within his larger view of man."<sup>71</sup>

Sorai writes in *Seidan* that

“... when a *seido* makes a distinction between high and low, it is not with the intention that those above shall be arrogant and despise those below. Generally, there is a limit to what is produced between Heaven and Earth. There is a limit to the things produced in Japan, to the amount of rice, coarse grains and timber that can be produced over decades. Among these, the fine things are few and the bad things are many. When the *seido* is set up for clothing, food and housing, so that nobles are to use the superior and the lower classes the inferior articles this would be in accordance with reason and there would be no difficulties. Since the nobles are truly few in number and the lower many, the situation would be that the few superior articles would be used by the few, and the many inferior articles used by the many. The things produced throughout Japan would suffice for everyone. 上下ノ差別ヲ立ル事ハ、上タル人ノ身ヲ高ブリテ下ヲ賤シムル意ヨリ制度ヲ立ルニハ非ズ。総ジテ天地ノ間ニ生ルコト各其限リアリ。日本国中ニハ米ガ如何程生ル、雜穀如何程生ル、材木如何程生ジテ何十年ヲ経テ是程ノ材木ニ成ト言ヨリ、一切ノ物各其限り有事也。其中ニ善モノハ少ク、悪モノハ多シ。依之衣服・食物・家居ニ至ル迄、貴人ニハ良物ヲ用ヒサセ、賤人ニハ悪モノヲ用ヒサスル様ニ制度ヲ立ルトキハ、元来貴人ハ少ク賤人ハ多キ故、少キモノヲバ少キ人用ヒ、多キモノヲバオトキ人ガ用レバ、道理相応シ、無行支、日本国中ニ生ル物ヲ日本国中ノ人が用ヒテ事足コト也。”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Bitō, 1978, p. 159.

<sup>72</sup> Lidin, 1999, pp. 147-148. *NST*, p. 313. 政談卷之二

Sorai continues

“... when there are no distinctions between high and low, high and low are thrown into disorder, and this becomes the beginning of strife, leading to many evils. When a *seido* is established beforehand and implemented, people know their limits and their places. As a result, they do not enjoy their luxury above their social station, and there is no squandering in society. 上下ノ差別ナキ故、上下混乱シ、争ノ端ト成テ、諸ノ悪事是ヨリ生ル也。兼テ制度ヲ立テ是ヲ守ラスルトキハ、人々其節限・分量ヲシル故、分ニ過タル奢ハ自然ト無シテ、世上ニ費ナシ。”<sup>73</sup>

Each status should not exceed its assigned role and boundary, and one should behave appropriately to one’s social status and capacity 分相應: however, one’s status should be decided not by heredity but by ability. This was Sorai's ideal.

Again, the very reason why Sorai abhorred Neo-Confucianism derives from the egalitarian idea of human nature. Sorai regarded it as too insecure for the maintenance of order in society. Returning to “a grain of rice is forever a grain of rice; a bean is forever a bean,” Edo society seemed to Sorai a world in which a bean becomes a grain of rice if the bean is born in a rice grain’s house. Even if one has no ability, one can hold high position and rank as long as he is from a prestigious family. At the same time, the current China seemed to him to be a world where a bean tries to be a grain of rice even if it is not appropriate. The examination system in China was too open. The system itself was fair, but created instability in society, as it allowed room for even peasants to become emperors. There should still be a hierarchical class system which defines each person’s position in society, and we cannot ultimately call his thought egalitarian because of his emphasis on hierarchy. It is also different from the idea of human

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<sup>73</sup> Lidin, 1999, p. 148. *NST*, p. 313. 政談卷之二

rights today in the way that Sorai did not attempt to hide the existence of class. For Sorai, people cannot live without a social stratum. His great emphasis on rituals was to make the difference of classes distinct.

Everybody is to behave within their own ability and not exceed their assigned roles. Such a society functions in the most efficient way. Sorai did not seek an aristocratic society, but at the same time, he did not pursue an egalitarian society either. It is not rational to decide social positions based on pedigree, since a hereditary system generally does not operate efficiently, even though social order tends to be well maintained. On the other hand, it is difficult to keep order in an egalitarian society because of its mobility, even though personnel are ruled with relative fairness. The idealized society that Sorai searched for was a society with a rigid hierarchy in which social status and ranks would be determined according to the abilities of people. Hierarchy is impossible to destroy. Some people have to work for others who govern them. The problem is how to keep the shape of hierarchy within a system of social mobility. The ultimate purpose was to achieve an ordered society with efficiency. Edo society was kept in stable order as a result of the hereditary system, but that also caused inefficiency among personnel. China achieved an egalitarian society but lacked stability because of the mobility of people. How could one solve this contradiction?

Sorai integrated the advantages of both systems dialectically and constructed an ideal image of a stable society with efficiency. One's social place should be determined by abilities which will secure his position in society forever, as long as he maintains them. Sorai then took ancient China as a model which he thought assigned personnel according to people's abilities in order to achieve advanced efficiency but which still maintained rigid hierarchy, being different from both Edo and current China. What Sorai hated the most was the irrationality in politics caused by emotions. He also disliked the

disturbance to meritocracy caused by the hereditary system. The reason in both cases derives from his belief in practicality and efficiency.

Although Sorai mentioned that the political situation of Edo Japan was similar to that of the ideal political situation in ancient China, the true feudalism which Sorai sought was the very original one at the time of Zhou. For Sorai, Japanese feudalism in Edo seemed to be too localized. Similarly, the current situation in China after the Song was also too localized because of Neo-Confucianism. On the other hand, the political situation starting from Qin until Tang was too centralized. The Zhou feudalism was an ideal mixture of centralization and regionalism: Not too centralized, not too localized. Sorai aimed to achieve an ideal in Edo Japan, where the situation was similar to that of China. How could the situation be made more centralized until a well balanced condition of centralization and regionalism appeared? The answer would be to add some stimuli toward centralization.

A centralized meritocratic society functions well for both personnel and stability at the first stage of an empire, because there are not yet aristocracies established and the ruler is powerful enough to prevent local figures from being dominant. It gradually transforms itself, however, into an aristocratic and hereditary society as time passes. If social mobility is too meritocratic, then the stability of the society cannot be guaranteed, since there would be a possibility that people would come to believe that they were equal. Sorai was altogether familiar with these issues.

To sum up, there were two undesirable points for Sorai to keep social order and stability: A) egalitarian ideas such as Neo-Confucian notions of good human nature and human rights in modern nationalism, B) hereditary social system like Edo society. A dialectical solution that Sorai proposed was to maintain a rigid hierarchy based not on pedigree but on ability with social mobility.

Truly, Sorai did not mean to abolish a hierarchical system at all, but tried to strengthen it. He vehemently attacked Neo-Confucianism because he was aiming to build up a highly centralized Bakufu

in order to solve the problem of inefficiency and inequity caused by blood relationships in Edo. Sorai had an insight into Neo-Confucianism's characteristic of conducting toward regionalism. In the case of Japan, the shogunate and domain system equated to decentralization, with decentralization and inequity by blood relationship highly connected. In short, Sorai promoted centralization to solve the problem of inequity of personnel in Edo society in order to achieve a much more efficient and practical society for the long sustenance of the Bakufu regime. We could see here Sorai's self-confidence as a figure who possessed highly advanced abilities in contrast to a vast majority of incompetent high officials whose positions were decided and assigned according to lineage.

According to Confucianism, history can be divided into two stages based on change of polity. The most ideal political system 封建主義 designed by ancient kings became obsolete once China adopted centralization 郡縣主義 by the Qin dynasty. The actual situation of Chinese politics in history is not of great importance here. What matters most is how Sorai perceived Chinese history.

“The era of the Three Dynasties was an age of feudalism. The period after the Ch'in and Han dynasties and up through the T'ang, Sung and Ming dynasties was an age of commanderies and prefectures. 三代之時分は封建之世にて御座候。秦・漢以降は。唐・宋・明までも皆郡縣之代にて候。”<sup>74</sup>

Sorai repeatedly emphasized that the world changed after the emergence of Neo-Confucianism. As such, it is more reasonable to divide the period following the Three Dynasties into pre- and post-Neo-Confucianism. Sorai, therefore, thought that: A) Neo-Confucianism supported commoners to promote regionalism after the Song dynasty; B) Confucianism after the Qin dynasty helped the aristocracy to promote centralization by the emperor; and C) before Confucianism was established, i.e. at the time of

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<sup>74</sup> Yamashita, 1994, pp. 46-47. *OSZ* vol.1, p. 434. 答問書上

Yao Shun 堯舜 and the early kings 先王, the ideal political society functioned in a manner that combined both centralization and regionalism. He inferred that the political situation of Edo at his time belonged to A), and as such, was too localized. The ultimate ideal would be to achieve condition C). Therefore, the Bakufu needed to change itself so that it was closer to B), until it could reach the ultimate ideal of C). In the next section of Means, we will see how Sorai thought to achieve this ideal.

## MEANS: Literature as an External Force

How could Sorai achieve a society modeled after ancient China which he thought maintained both social order and efficiency? The expected answer by Sorai would be through rites, music, punishments and administration 礼樂刑政 as external forces which transform the internal mind from the outside.

Sorai explained that:

“the mind has no form. It is impossible to grasp it and control it. Therefore the way of the early kings used rites to control the mind. ... Trying to use our minds to control our minds is like a crazed person personally trying to control his own craziness thereby. How could he possibly control it? 心無形也。不可得而制之矣。故先王之道。以禮制心。... 以我心治我心。譬如狂者自治其狂焉。安能治之。”<sup>75</sup>

Some scholars at his time criticized his emphasis on rituals as being too extreme since they were afraid of Sorai’s belittlement of the ability of the mind to maintain morality and ethics.<sup>76</sup> So it can be easily thought that Sorai hardly cared about mind at all. However, that Sorai put so much emphasis on rituals does not mean that he was slighting the function of mind; rather, he was so well aware of the significance of mind that he then proposed governing of mind by external means.

According to *Bendō* 辨道 (Distinguishing the Way), which was written to explain what Dao 道 means, Dao in Sorai’s thought was equal to rites, music, punishments and administration. He believed that the rituals were created by the early kings, so he called them “the Way of the Early Kings”.

“The way is a comprehensive name. It refers to everything that the early kings established, especially the rites, music, penal laws, and administrative institutions. The way embraces and designates them all. There is not something called ‘the way’ apart from their rites, music, penal

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<sup>75</sup> Tucker, 2006, p. 157. *NST*, p. 205. 辨道十九

<sup>76</sup> About anti-Sorai scholars at the time of Edo, see Kojima, pp. 111-157.



laws, and administrative systems of government. 道者統名也。舉禮樂刑政凡先王所建者。

合而命之也。非離禮樂刑政別有所謂道者也。”<sup>77</sup>

Truly, the way is a comprehensive term, which includes anything external which the early kings established. Language, characters, and literature are also included in the way, but little research has demonstrated that Sorai also utilized literary things as external forces.

I believe that Sorai stressed mastery of literary style, because he regarded it as a means to transform the feudalistic, hereditary Neo-Confucian Edo state composed of Shogun and Daimyo into a more centralized and meritocratic one. His strategy was to adopt the reactionary classism theory of *Guwenci pai* 古文辭派 (Old Phraseology School) and to return to the literary styles of Qin, Han and Tang dynasties whose political situations he believed to be highly centralized. In pre-modern China, literature and politics were thought to be closely connected. Previous research, however, mainly focused on the influence of *Guwenci pai* on Sorai's *Kobunji* 古文辭 school only on the side of literature. What we have to treat is the political placement of Old Phraseology within the Chinese literary history. The Ming dynasty saw many associations such as the *Donglin* party 東林黨 and the Restoration School 復社 which involved literary movements as well. The movement of Old Phraseology is almost exclusively researched from the side of literary works. A study which demonstrates the political location of Old Phraseology is awaited.<sup>78</sup> Here in this section, I demonstrate the possibility of closeness between literature and politics within Sorai's thought.

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<sup>77</sup> Tucker, 2006, p. 140. *NST*, p. 201. 辨道三

<sup>78</sup> William Atwell mentions in the afterword to John Wixted's *Five Hundred Years of Chinese poems, 1150-1650*, a translation of Yoshikawa's *Gen Min shi gaisetsu* 元明史概説, that, "Old Phraseology proponents did have enormous influence in the late Ming cultural world. Moreover, although Yoshikawa characteristically does not emphasize the point, that influence extended to the realm of political thought." Atwell mentions supporters of Old Phraseology "not because they were devoted to deciphering obscure ancient texts for their own sake, but because they believed that many of those texts (but not necessarily the commentaries) contained practical information that could be used to solve contemporary problems." Yoshikawa, 1989, p. 195. Their approach sounds like that of Sorai.

It may sound odd that Sorai did not want to rely on texts and language to learn about the same ancient times that he wanted to restore into his own time. It is true that one of the main characteristics of the Sorai school is its emphasis on philological activities. However, we should note that philology was not his purpose, but simply a tool. He aimed to restore the ideal world of ancient China into his time and relied on texts to learn about it. In short, there was no way to gain knowledge of the early kings other than to rely on texts and language from ancient times. This point also enables us to gain insight into his practical way of thinking.

“Generally speaking, the way of learning involves nothing more than literary style. The way of the ancients is found in texts, and what are texts but literary style? If one has mastered literary style and reads texts on their own terms without adding one’s own ideas, the ancients’ intentions will be clear. One cannot grasp the Way of the Sages except by following their pedagogy, which survives in texts, and thus everything comes down to literary style. 惣而學問の道は文章の他無之候。古人の道は書籍に有之候。書籍は文章に候。能文章を會得して。書籍の儘濟し候而我意を少も雜え不申候得ば古人の意は明に候。聖人の道は聖人の教法に順はずして可得様會而無之候。其教法は書籍に有之候故つまる所是又文章に歸し申候。”<sup>79</sup>

Sorai was trying to utilize the efficacy of literature itself as an external force in order to transform the hereditary decentralized Edo society into a more meritocratic centralized one. But, how?

Sorai said, “the times change, bearing the words along; the words change, bearing the Way along. 世載言以遷。言載道以遷。”<sup>80</sup> This passage is usually interpreted as one which states the main principle of Sorai’s way of philology,<sup>81</sup> but my interpretation is that Sorai emphasized the close

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<sup>79</sup> Yamashita, 1994, p. 95. *OSZ*, vol.1, p. 471. 答問書下

<sup>80</sup> Mnear, p. 16. *OSZ*, vol. 1, p. 7. 學則二

<sup>81</sup> Yoshikawa, pp. 127-128.

connection between the times, the words and the Way. If one of these factors changes, so, too, will the others.

Maruyama Masao pointed out that one can notice a clear separation of politics from morals in Sorai's thought. "*The disintegration of the continuity between moral standards and nature...culminated in the Sorai school in the liberation of the private or inner life from all rigorism as a result of the sublimation of standards (the Way) in the political.*"<sup>82</sup> Maruyama directed his great attention to the separation, because it played a significant role as a starting point in Western modern society, which Maruyama idealized. He regarded the division in Sorai's method of thought as a departure toward a modern society in Japan.

Even though this methodology for tracing the sprouts of Western modern society in premodern Japan has become outdated, it was true that Sorai separated morals from politics in order to achieve efficiency. This is because some Neo-Confucians such as Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇齋 (1619-1682) adhered to morals so scrupulously that they could not analyze reality properly. In a similar way, Maruyama also saw the separation of literature from morals in Sorai.<sup>83</sup> He wrote that "the natural human sentiments that Sorai released from the fetters of moral rigorism moved, as one might expect, in the direction of 'refined tastes and literary talent.' ... Just as Sorai rejected moralistic restrictions in politics and history, he insisted that literature should be independent of ethics."<sup>84</sup> Politics were distinguished from morals, and so was literature. Then, can we also conclude that a distinction was also made between politics and literature?

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<sup>82</sup> Maruyama, p. 106. (J. p. 110) The italics in the original.

<sup>83</sup> Hino Tatsuo 日野龍夫 (1940-2003) also pointed out the separation. See Hino, pp. 178-195.

<sup>84</sup> Maruyama, p. 107. (J. p. 111)

I believe that the relationship between politics and literature remained indistinct in Sorai's mind.<sup>85</sup> The separation emerged only after his death, with the division of the Sorai school into the statecraft coterie 經世派 led by Dazai Shundai 太宰春台 (1680-1747) and the literary coterie 詩文派 represented by Hattori Nankaku 服部南郭 (1683-1759). I suspect that the approach of finding a separation of literature from politics in Sorai's thought was shaped from the perspective of this later division. At the time that Sorai was still active, literature was perceived to be closely connected with politics. In a similar way, language was also highly connected to politics. "If one does not understand words, everything one speaks is foolishness. Words are the tools that connect us with the Way."<sup>86</sup> Without them what can a teacher use to find the Way? 不知文字。所講皆妄。文字貫道之器。何取乎道。<sup>87</sup>

Sorai's Kobunji school was formed under the influence of its Chinese counterpart *Guwenci pai*, which was a literary movement of classicism in 16th century Ming China that used as its model the prose of the Qin and Han dynasties and the poems of the Tang and Wei dynasties. One of the Later Seven Masters 後七子, Li Panrong 李攀龍 (1514-1570) and another leading figure, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590),<sup>88</sup> proposed that "prose should be from the Qin and Han and poetry from the High Tang. There is no so-called literature after the Qin and Han dynasties. 文必秦漢、詩必盛唐。秦漢以後無文矣。<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> About the controversy of the relationship between politics and literature in the field of *Kokugaku* 国学 (National Learning) in the 18th century, cf. Nosco, 1981.

<sup>86</sup> Pastreich identifies this as a "quote from Li Han's 李漢's preface to a collection of Han Yu's prose. Pastreich, p.156, n. 75.

<sup>87</sup> Pastreich, p.156. *OSZ* vol. 1, p. 9. 詞文筌蹄五

<sup>88</sup> About Wang Shizhen, cf. Hammond.

<sup>89</sup> *Mingshi* vol. 278. 明史卷二七八 文苑列傳三

As for the leader of the Former Seven Masters 前七子, Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1472-1529.), Adam Wilder Schorr mentioned that “for Li Mengyang politics and poetry, moral behavior and the word, could never be separated.”<sup>90</sup> He proceeds, concluding that “the very reason why the Former Seven Masters emerged ... derived from ... the dissatisfaction of lower officials against Li Dongyang’s hesitation to deal with a powerful courtier, Liu Jin. ... the activities of Li Mengyang and his circle did not merely represent a new turn in the literary fashions of the day. The rise in popularity of the poetics of the Seven Masters signaled the end of the grand secretaries’ control over the literary world, and thus a transference of power.”<sup>91</sup>

Truly, *Guwenci pai* was a literary movement. It is understandable that previous research usually focused on the side of literature when it came to the influence of the Old Phraseology movement on Sorai. One reason is because Sorai himself stated that he was influenced by the methodological approach of *Guwenci pai* just in the field of literature. Sorai thought that he was the very first person to apply this methodology to the field of the Six Classics of Confucianism 六經 and regarded this point as his great achievement.<sup>92</sup> One can thus say that Sorai applied the methodology for literature to the Six Classics because he idealized the political model at the time of the Six Classics.

Literature had been traditionally thought to assume a close relationship with politics in Chinese discourse. Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226 Wendi文帝 reign 220-226), the son of Cao Cao 曹操 and the first emperor of Wei 魏 (220-265), stated in his *Dianlun* 典論, the oldest literary criticism in China, that “literary works are the supreme achievement in the business of state, a splendor that does not decay. 文

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<sup>90</sup> Schorr, p. 185.

<sup>91</sup> Schorr pp. 185-186.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. 徂徠集二十二 与富春山人 Also, *NST*, p. 537. 徂徠集二十八 復安澹泊

章經國大業，不朽之盛事。”<sup>93</sup> This idea of literary works as the business of the state 文章經國 is also typical in Sorai’s thought. Ever since Cao Pi’s thought on literary works as the business of state, literary theory has played an important role in the formation of political ideologies. Again, literature was closely connected to politics in pre-modern Asia.<sup>94</sup>

As is mentioned in the introduction, some Japanese Sinologists such as Yoshikawa Kōjirō and Maeno Naoaki 前野直彬 (1920-1998) idealized Sorai as a progressive pioneer in reading Chinese texts without the use of *kanbun*.<sup>95</sup> They recognized the great influence of the *Guwenci-pai* on Sorai’s school of Kobunji. However, they did not meaningfully consider its historical and political aspects. For example, Yoshikawa was not favorable toward *Guwenci-pai* because of his belief in individualism and creative expressionism in opposition to its formalism.<sup>96</sup> The political aspects of *Guwenci-pai* should be further examined, as well as its literary theory. Did their attempt to return to the aristocratic Han and Tang literature styles stay only within the realm of literature? Richard John Lynn defined the characteristics of both Chinese and Western archaic movements, explaining that “the mind was seen as essentially a *passive* entity, something to be shaped by models and conditioned by tradition rather than as something that creates works *ex nihilo*.”<sup>97</sup> The belief that literary style reflects the polity in Chinese thought should be considered further without the constraint of the modern tendency of separating literature from politics and the praising of originality rather than formalism.

The best example to consider regarding the above point is Sorai’s attitude toward *The Book of Songs* 詩經. Previous research has analyzed in detail the methodology of the Sorai school to restore the

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<sup>93</sup> Owen, p. 68.

<sup>94</sup> For the tight connection in the Tang and Song dynasty, see Bol, 1992.

<sup>95</sup> See Maeno.

<sup>96</sup> About the criticism of Yoshikawa on this point, see Lan, pp. 48-49.

<sup>97</sup> Lynn, p. 338.

ideal world that was thought to exist in ancient China through the imitation of ancient things.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, great importance was attached to the composition of poems and prose in the Sorai school because one can understand the feeling and thought of ancient people through imitating their literary works.

“The language of the *Odes* is highly refined and has the power to make people understand things that are left unsaid. ... because the Sages were Chinese and the classical texts are written in Chinese, the Way of Sages is difficult to grasp without a knowledge of Chinese characters. As for acquiring this knowledge, if one is unable to duplicate the consciousness of the ancients when they wrote those texts, one’s knowledge will never be complete. Thus if one does not actually compose poetry and prose in Chinese, there will be much that remains beyond one’s understanding. 詞の巧なる物なるゆへ。其事をいふとなしに自然と其心を人に會得さする益ありて。人を教へ諭し諷諫するに益多く候。... 聖人と申候も唐人經書と申候も唐人言葉にて候故。文字をよく會得不仕候ては聖人之道は難得候。文字を會得仕候事は。古之人の書を作り候ときの心持に成不申候得ば濟不申儀故。詩文章を作り不申候得ば會得難成事多御座候。”<sup>99</sup>

Here, a simple question naturally arises: why, then, did they choose prose texts from the Qin and Han and poems from the high Tang? In other words, why not select directly from the period they idealized, i.e. those from the Zhou such as *The Book of Songs*?

*The Book of Songs* is one of the Six Classics of Confucianism. If Sorai aimed to restore the time of the Zhou dynasty, *the Book of Songs* should be selected instead of poems from the Tang dynasty

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<sup>98</sup> His disciple, Dazai Shundai, even said that “The teaching of Sages is a technique which transforms the mind from outside. If one follows ancient kings’ rituals and treat things with righteousness, one can be called a man of virtue. What he thinks in his mind does not matter at all. 聖人ノ教ハ、外ヨリ入ル術ナリ。身ヲ行フニ先王ノ義ヲ用ヒ、外面ニ君子ノ容儀ヲ具タル者ヲ、君子トス。其人ノ内心ハ如何ニト問ハズ。”*Seigaku mondō* in *NST* 37, p. 95. 聖学問答 卷之上

<sup>99</sup> Yamashita, 1994, pp. 80-81. *OSZ*, vol. 1, pp. 460-461. 答問書中

which the Old Phraseology School modeled. Yoshikawa also asked, “why did Sorai regard only the poetry of the Han, Wei, and the High T’ang as models in Chinese poetry and not the earlier verse in the *Shih ching*? This is a question which Sorai, together with Li P’an-lung and Wang Shih-chên, must answer.” The answer according to Yoshikawa is “because to copy the four-character verses in the *Shih ching* was difficult and unrealistic even for those who avowed to be enthusiastic classicists.” Yoshikawa explained that, “Sorai readily accounts for this question. Poetry is an expression of emotion, and emotion is aloof from the changes of time. Therefore, insofar as poetry is concerned, the verses of later ages, particularly those of the Han, Wei, and High T’ang, are essentially the same as those in the *Shih ching*.”<sup>100</sup>

However, I think the answer goes back to the political viewpoint of Sorai mentioned before.<sup>101</sup> Sorai thought the political status of China transformed itself into a more decentralized situation after the emergence of Neo-Confucianism. After the Qin and before the Song, China had been centralized. What the Bakufu should do to achieve a meritocratic society is to direct itself towards centralization. I think the reason why Sorai adopted the Old Phraseology perspective derives from this point. It can also be said that the establishment of the Meiji government began in this direction, and in the end failed to stop at the well-balanced condition of ancient China, and ultimately proceeded toward extreme centralization.

Here, we have finally reached what Sorai intended by proposing to read classical Chinese texts. It was not a linguistic endeavor nor a philological attempt to decipher the meanings in the modern sense. For him, literature was nothing more than a tool for his plan to achieve a regimented society. As

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<sup>100</sup> Yoshikawa, 1983, pp. 187-188. (J. p. 150.)

<sup>101</sup> Wakamizu Suguru mentions that the viewpoints of Sorai on the *Shi Jing* are connected to politics. He says that Sorai could not escape from the constraint of the past which binds literature and Confucianism together. I do not judge whether the view to see the connection as a constrain is appropriate or not, but in Sorai’s mind, there was no such obvious separation between “literature” and politics. See Wakamizu, pp. 73-94.



a mere scholar who did not possess political power in reality, he counted on the power of literature. Through literature, people are inspired. And the literature he chose was the Chinese classics from the Qin, Han and Tang, dynasties which he regarded as having achieved a highly centralized political condition.

“Principle is so difficult that those who are stupid cannot fathom it. This is why the Sages’ Way and teachings are presented as specific forms of practice. If these are performed, even if their underlying principle is not understood, popular customs will be modified naturally, people’s views will be corrected, and order will prevail in the provinces and realm. ... If one understands literary style and has a mastery of language, the Way and the teachings of the ancient Sages, because they assume the form of specific acts of practice, will be all the more accessible on a linguistic level. But because it entails understanding the archaic language of a foreign people, understanding literary style is a formidable task. 理の六借事は愚なる人は會得成不申事故。古聖人の道も教も皆わざにもたせ置候事にて。其わざさへ行候得ば。理は不知候でも。自然と風俗移候所より。人の心も直り候て。國天下も治り。... 是故に今日の學問はひきくひらたく只文章を會得する事に止り候。文章を會得して古の詞濟得ば。古聖人の道も教もわざにて候故。詞の上にて直に見え分れ申事に候。只ゞ異国人の古の詞を會得する事故。文章を會得する事六借候。”<sup>102</sup>

Yoshikawa’s answer to the question is limited, and let us now conclude by attempting to locate the origin at which his problem arose.

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<sup>102</sup> Yamashita, 1994, p. 96. *OSZ*, vol. 1, p. 472. 答問書下

## **CONCLUSION: The Realization of Sorai's World in Meiji Japan**

As people living in the 21st century, we can easily find fault with the teleological connection between early modern and modern times in the writings of scholars of the 20th century. However, it is also apparent that we cannot escape the constraints of modernity altogether, because of the very fact we are now living in this age. How we perceive the early modern also depends on how we observe the time we are now living in. Therefore, I believe it is all the more worth pondering the meaning of and the connection between early modern and modern times. In this conclusion, I offer an opinion on the meaning of modernity in Sorai's thought by comparing Yoshikawa Kōjirō with Maruyama Masao.

We must begin by dealing with the misunderstanding of Maruyama Masao's view of Sorai. As mentioned earlier, there have been many criticisms of Maruyama. Most of them attack Maruyama for his attempt to find Western modernity in Sorai. They mainly argue that it is a vain attempt to trace modernity in someone whose environment is/was completely different from that of Europe. The crucial point is, however, that Maruyama himself did not say that Sorai was a modernist, as many scholars seem to overlook.

“Why is it that I have studied the emergence of a modern consciousness that resulted from the internal disintegration of Confucianism from the point of view of changes in method of thought? ... Why have I looked for a modern consciousness deep in these methods of thought themselves rather than in antagonistic tendencies in political thought? Insofar as conscious resistance to feudal authority is concerned, the thought of Sorai, who advocated bakufu absolutism, and of Norinaga, who believed that the bakufu's policies were divinely obtained, was more feudal than that of Ōshio Heihachirō, or even that of Takenouchi Shikibu or Yamaga Sokō. This latter approach might be the valid method of examination for modern European

thought, where changes in the fundamental mode of thought have occurred more or less in parallel with changes in the political thought based on them. But it cannot be applied in the same way to Japan. During the Tokugawa period, the steady development of bourgeois social power in the womb of feudal society was impossible, so only arbitrary results could be obtained by looking for evidence of a modern consciousness in political theory that was governed largely by accidental conditions and lacked any connection with the basic mode of thought. I am not interested in the fragmentary modernity of this or that school of thought; my aim is to uncover a consistent growth of modern consciousness in the systematic framework of the thought itself. ... an analysis of its rather unexpected disintegration from within, rather than of its destruction from without”<sup>103</sup>

This statement by Maruyama is nothing more than the establishment of modern studies of Japanese intellectual history. What matters the most for Maruyama is not individual ways of thinking or actions in reality, but rather the mode of thinking called *Shisō* 思想 in Japanese which affects people living within the framework.

Watanabe Hiroshi, a disciple of Maruyama, wrote in his *A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600-1901* that “the core of Ogyū Sorai’s thought is almost a complete reversal, a precise negative of the ‘modern.’ His view of history was opposed to progress, development, growth. He was against urbanization and the market economy. He was opposed to freedom and equality in the lives of individuals, and against any attempts at ‘enlightenment’ for the ruled. Politically, he was completely

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<sup>103</sup> Maruyama, pp. 177-179. J., pp. 183-184.

opposed to any sort of democracy. In all respects he was remarkably consistent.”<sup>104</sup> Truly, Sorai was an anti-modernist. However, his *method of thought* was tacitly and *unexpectedly* progressing toward the modern.

To conclude, I think that it was Yoshikawa who led the image of Sorai into a modernistic figure rather than Maruyama. People easily misread and misinterpret what Maruyama actually meant, partially because of the image of Sorai as a pioneer of learning Chinese language and also as a modern type of scholar based on the method of his philology. It is true that the difference between the disciplines of Maruyama and Yoshikawa also contributed to critiques of modernity. Maruyama studied politics and Yoshikawa specialized in literature, yet, we need to recognize that the literary side can also affect the political sphere. Besides, the field of literary studies can also function as sacred precincts which claim to protect modern ideas, and tend to lead to misunderstanding of pre-modern ideas. To regard the idea of human nature in Sorai as individualism in the modern sense is a typical example of such a case.

To treat the ideas of Sorai from a more objective perspective, we have “a somewhat ambiguous position between literary studies and intellectual history,” as Peter Flueckiger says. He continues, saying that “these disciplinary divisions of the modern academy are a barrier to grasping the full import of Tokugawa discourse on poetry. ... we need to take seriously the ways in which writers of this time combined poetry with cultural and intellectual pursuits that to the modern reader lie outside the rubric of ‘literature,’ rather than dismissing such efforts as evidence of these figures’ failure to grasp some

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<sup>104</sup> Watanabe, 2012, p. 179 and Watanabe, 2010, p. 197. Watanabe, then, says “the modern reader is unlikely to feel any great sympathy for such a position. We might note, however, that Sorai did not have any naive belief in the possibility of unlimited “development” of the market economy in a limited world. Nor did he believe that humans were such wonderful creatures that they could maintain social order and avoid doing evil once their relations with others had been rendered superficial through freedom of mobility. Are we really in any position to say he was completely wrong?” Watanabe, 2012, pp. 179-180 and Watanabe, 2010, pp. 197-198. Here, we can clearly see the time gap of half a century between Maruyama and Watanabe. Watanabe cannot believe in “development” any more as Maruyama hoped. Here, Sorai became another possibility to consider the meaning of modernity.

purported essence of what poetry or literature should be. These writers saw poetry as embodying qualities that contributed to the ideal society, and it was only natural to them to integrate poetry with other means for achieving such a society, such as historical study, the exegesis of the Confucian classics, music, or devotion to the Shinto gods, and to use discourse on poetry to engage in philosophical explorations of the basis of good governance and social harmony.”<sup>105</sup> We do not have to throw away the “disciplinary divisions of modern academies,” as it is simply impossible. However, we need to at least attempt to understand sincerely how pre-modern people were living, and what they were really feeling and thinking.

In 1877, the 10th year of Meiji, Mishima Chūshū 三島中洲 (1830-1919) established *Keikoku bunsha* 経国文社.<sup>106</sup> The name was derived from Cao Pi’s phrase as mentioned before, “literary works are the supreme achievement in the business of state, a splendor that does not decay.” Mishima’s master, Saitō Setsudō 斎藤拙堂 (1797-1865) sent Mishima his own calligraphy of the characters, “literary works are the supreme achievement 経国之大業.” *Keikoku bunsha* later changed itself into *Nishō gakusha* University 二松学舎大学 which has been affecting the teaching of *kanbun* in Japan .

The actual influence of Sorai on the formation of the Meiji central government to unite Japan should be researched further. However, the powerful Imperial Emperor, the emphasis on education through recitation such as the installment of Imperial Rescript on Education 教育勅語, and so on, remind us of the closeness of political policy in Meiji with Sorai’s political and literary ideas which we have seen so far. Let us take a look at what Robert Bellah concluded:

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<sup>105</sup> Flueckiger, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> About Mishima Chūshū, see Togawa.

“There is an inner affinity between Sorai’s thought and the Meiji Restoration. Sorai’s prescription for the ‘new prince,’ that he create a whole new institutional order, was followed out by the Meiji oligarchs. Sorai’s appreciation of the usefulness of the ‘civil religion’ instituted by the early kings in obtaining the reverential obedience of the masses was put into practice by the creation of the Meiji emperor system where the ‘imperial will’ could play the role of heaven. The social utilitarianism in an elite political perspective that was so characteristic of Sorai was certainly very much of the essence of the Meiji achievement.”<sup>107</sup>

Some scholars think that the political ideal of Neo-Confucianism was brought into realization after Edo.<sup>108</sup> I believe that the thought of Sorai’s Kobunji school was finally realized in Meiji. Neo-Confucianism inclines toward decentralization rather than promoting centralization. The difficulty that both China and Korea suffered in modern times over centralization may originate from this point. Both countries were strictly governed by *official* Neo-Confucians from local areas. By contrast, the place where Neo-Confucianism was relatively in a weak position was much more easily united through the application of Sorai’s kobunji school at the time of Meiji.

If the thought of Sorai helped form the centralized Meiji government and early Showa concert of national polity as Maruyama Masao depicted, the reason derives precisely from this point as to why Yoshikawa Kōjirō changed the image of Sorai from that of an unpatriotic Sinophile to one of an ethnic nationalist. Yoshikawa had to divide Sorai’s thought into the two aspects of politics and literature so that he could confine Sorai’s political aspect to the past, and extract only his literary method to support Yoshikawa’s own position as an innovatory Japanese Sinologist. Ironically, in this way, Yoshikawa begins to take on the image of Sorai as an innovatory Japanese Sinologist with a Sinophilic taste. In

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<sup>107</sup> Bellah, p. 148.

<sup>108</sup> See Nakai, 2002 and 1980.

other words, Yoshikawa actually reversed the images of Sorai completely, representing him as progressive in literature, but reactionary in politics.

By separating literature from politics in Sorai's thought, Yoshikawa managed to change the image of Sorai from that of a literary Sinophile into the pioneer of a new methodology for reading Chinese in the Chinese language, and from a political Sinophile into an ethnic nationalist. Yoshikawa protected his own position on the basis of this newly created image of Sorai as an innovative scholar of literature with conservative views in politics, in contrast to Yoshikawa's own self-image of being a progressive literary scholar who is also enlightened in international politics, i.e. neither a Sinophile nor a Nationalist. Yoshikawa implies that the imperfection of Sorai's understanding of classical Chinese was because of his lack of respect for China. By this account, though Sorai's methodology was revolutionary, he was not as perfect a *Sinophile* as Yoshikawa in his own understanding of Chinese culture.

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