Ninjō and the Affective Value of Literature

at the Kogidō Academy

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Recent scholarship in both Japanese and Western languages has, among other things, successfully debunked the notion that, in the first century of Tokugawa rule, an "orthodox" school of Ch'eng-Chu 程朱 Confucian thought enjoyed monopolistic patronage to the exclusion of other "heterodox" schools. We are now well aware that in the seventeenth century, a plethora of schools, roughly divided along Confucian, Buddhist, and Shintō lines, competed for patronage (and usually coexisted) at the bakufu, domain, and even the urbanite (chōnin 町人) levels. Even within the so-called "orthodox" school of Sung Studies that thrived in Edo, Kyoto, and at many castle towns, the founder, Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窺, left behind a legacy, not only in the person of Hayashi Razan 林羅山 and his heirs in Edo, but of other Ch'eng-Chu schools, including those founded by Hori Kyōan 堀杏庵 in Owari and Kinoshita Jun'an 木下順庵 in Edo. Kyōan's grandson, Hori Keizan 堀景山, corresponded at length in his youth with Ogyū Sorai 萩生徂徠, and in later life served as mentor to none other than Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長. Jun'an attracted and trained many talented individuals, including Arai Hakuseki 新井白石, Muro Kyūsō 室鳴巢, Amenomori Hōshū 雨森芳洲, and Gion Nankai 祐園南海.

Among other Confucian academies, Yamazaki Ansei's 山崎安斎 Kimon 崎門 school in Kyoto was highly successful, Nakae Chōju 中江藤樹 and his successor Kumazawa Banzan’s 熊沢蕃山 school of Wang Yang-ming 王陽明 studies (J. Yōmeigaku 陽明学) thrived from its base in Ōmi province, and Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 and his school provided yet another Confucian perspective from his base in Chikuzen province on Kyūshū, near sources of new texts and other ideas imported from China and Korea. Finally, Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 taught and wrote in Edo, until his eventual exile.

Despite the major disparities in the content of their teachings, pedagogically these schools shared much in common, stressing intensive study and rote memorization of the

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1 Samuel Yamashita has recently published a highly insightful review of English-language scholarship in early modern Japanese intellectual history that covers the major books published in the field since the early 1970s. The one regret I have with Yamashita's review is that he failed to identify the connections between many North American intellectual historians and a limited number of Japanese who have, for one reason or another, provided a surprising degree of influence over English-language scholarship, irregardless of the degree to which that scholarship may claim inspiration from European criticism. See Journal of Japanese Studies (Spring 1996), pp. 1-28.
Confucian classics, particularly the Four Books. Literary works, especially narrative fiction, were denounced as unfit for inclusion into a curriculum designed to help men order their houses and, by extension, the state, and were generally ignored in these academies.

Chinese poetry, especially that of the Southern Sung, was generally considered worthy of appreciation, but then only after mastery of such “canonical” texts as the Four Books. Poetic composition, if attempted at all, tended to be stilted, and “poetically inspired” intellectuals (usually samurai) took separate lessons in waka and even haikai, under names appropriate for these avocations. Practitioners took part in these activities because they presumably could express themselves better using poetic Japanese, rather than Chinese, forms.

For seventeenth-century samurai, avoiding the literary (J. bun 文, Ch. wen) was an ideal, something to be sacrificed in favor of martial (J. bu 武, Ch. wu) values. Furthermore, a general fear existed that overindulgence in literary matters would stunt one’s moral growth as a potential leader over others.

Civil and martial (bunbu 文武) were viewed, not as opposites, however, but as two sides of the same coin. Conservative thinkers, such as Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), nevertheless posited bun in terms that sublimated it to the Tao, or the Confucian (and for Razan, samurai) Way.

When there is a Way, there is culture (bun); when there is no Way, there is no culture. Culture and the Way share the same principle (ri 理) and only differ in manifestation (koto/ji 事). The Way is the root (hon 本) of culture; culture is the periphery (matsu 末) of the Way. The extension is minor while the root is major. Therefore it is good and firm.

--Razan Hayashi sensei bunshū 林羅山先生文集 66 (publ. 1662)²

This is an example of what the contemporary scholar Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦 terms saidōsetsu 截道説, or the position that literature must serve as a vehicle for the Tao, or a life of moral rectitude.³

Writers and scholars throughout the early modern period and into the modern have cast literature as best serving a second aim: kanzen chōaku 勤善懲惡, or “promoting the good and chastising evil,” a venerated tradition that is found in literary criticism worldwide, and even to recent American political attacks on the moral content of mass-market films, such as Pulp Fiction and Natural Born Killers. In many works, the figure of an “evil” character was portrayed as showing readers (and audiences in plays and oral tellings) how not to act in a particular situation.


³ For Nakamura’s authoritative analysis of literary positions held by seventeenth-century Confucian scholars in Japan, see his “Bakusho Sōgakushatachi no bungakukan” 幕初宋学者達の文学観, in Nakamura Yukihiko chojutsu shū 中村幸彦著述集 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1982), 1: 7-30.
In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ch’eng-Chu Confucian discourse, however, some works of Japanese literature were condemned to the point that they fell even below any possibility of serving as an example of promoting good and chastising evil. These works existed in the minds of their critics in a realm beyond any edifying value that readers or audiences could gain as they learned of the evils wrought by villains as they met with ultimate destruction. Throughout most of the early modern period, especially after these texts appeared in woodblock form, the *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 and *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 were considered by many readers to be the ideal vehicles for vicariously reliving the elegance of the Heian court. For others, including Yamazaki Ansai, they were akin to the daytime confessional talk shows ubiquitous in today’s popular culture.

The fact that people today will, in their frivolity (*tawabure* たわぶれ), traverse down a road for which there is no return, is due to the existence of the *Genji* and the *Ise monogatari*. It is said that the *Genji* was written as an admonishment for men and women. It is extremely dubious, however, that such frivolity could serve to admonish anyone. Kiyohara no Nobukata 清原宣賢 asserted that, while the *Ise monogatari* dealt with matters of lust (*kōshoku* 好色), it also includes depictions of rites and of benevolence, and that Confucius or Mencius would have acted as Narihira had if they had been in his position. With regard to such falsehoods (*higagoto* ひがごと), it is not even worth one’s breath to discuss their merits or failings!

—Yamato shōgaku 大和小学*(Japanese Lesser Learning, 1660), “Preface”*

Such denigration of literary expression was not the only perspective available to students of Confucian learning. Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 began his career in Kyoto reading the Ch’eng and Chu Hsi 朱熹 commentaries to the classics, but by 1665 (at almost the same time, coincidentally, as that other founder of the “School of Ancient Learning [Kogaku 古学]”, Yamaga Sokō), he came to the conclusion that Confucian truths were accessible only through direct philological analysis of the classics themselves, thereby avoiding the strong influence of the Sung interpretations.

Much of his doubt in the accuracy of Ch’eng-Chu teachings had to do with his view of the relationship between loftiness of tone and the general human condition. He states the following:

After all, poetry takes the common as good. The reason why the Three Hundred Verses (*Book of Songs*) is a Classic is because they are of the common. Poetry takes the singing out of one’s inborn emotions (*hsing-ch’ing* 性情) as its origin. When it is common, thus does it well exhaust the emotions. When it is overly polished and excessive, it grinds down the inborn emotions and completely strips away one’s true energies.

—”Afterword” to the *Hakushi monjū* 白氏文集*(Collected Works of Po Chu-i)*

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4 Quoted in Nakamura, “Bakusho Sōzoku shatachi no bungakukan,” p. 22.
5 Included in Jinsai’s posthumous anthology, *Kogaku sensei bunshū* 古学先生文集, compiled by Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯. The “Afterword” is dated “Winter, Hōei 宝永 1 (1704),” or only a few
Jinsai relates the universality of such emotions to none other than the first compilation of song in the Chinese Confucian tradition, the *Book of Odes*. In other words, for Jinsai, the low or common (zoku) is in tune with basic human emotions. The contrast between such sentiments and those proclaimed by Razan above, which attempt to delineate between the moral Way and literary subservience to it, could not be more striking.

In response to a question regarding the *Odes*, Jinsai makes the following important statement:

*Question:* Please provide a summary of the Five Classics.

(Response:) ...The *Shih* serve as guide to emotions and character/nature (jōsei 態性). Even though the number of people in the world is vast, and the ages of time have been endless, when you wish to inquire into the workings of the emotions, there is nothing that surpasses the three hundred songs (of the *Shih ching* 詩經). When you follow them things are ordered; when you reject them things are chaotic. This is why the Former Kings preserved them without damage, and cherished them without loss. It is due to the *Shih* that the Imperial Tombs and Sacred Shrines were well preserved for several centuries, and the descendents of defunct reigns continued to be counted among the guests of the ruler. Ignorance of the *Shih* means loss of the ability to order the realm and the state...

Furthermore, in ancient texts, people would quote *shih*, cutting them away from their original context, and then use them to apply an interpretation. This was the common manner by which the ancients made use of the *shih*. Those who would study the *Shih* should always keep this in mind.

--*Dōjimon* 童子問 ("Questions from Children," vol. 3:5, 1693, pub. 1707) 6

Here the *Book of Odes* is revered as a classic, necessary for grasping the workings of the human psyche, in order better to govern both a household and a realm. We should further note here that Jinsai espouses a reader-response critical approach, in which reinterpretation of the content of the poems in the *Odes* is a natural outcome of changing needs over time. Such an expansive critical perspective allows him to avoid the pitfalls found in the rigid, moralistic views of literature prevalent during his time.

Jinsai thus elevates the study, interpretation, and recitation of the *Odes* to a level of centrality usually devoted to such works as the *Analects* (Lunyǔ 論語), the *Great Learning* (Ta-hsiieh 大學), or the *Doctrine of the Mean* (Chung-yung 中庸). What is his position, though, on poetic composition as an act, as a form of human expression?

*Question:* For scholars to be fond of *shih* composition—is there or is there not any harm to the Way in this?

(Response:) *Shih* are the chanted expression of character/nature and the emotions. It is also truly beneficial to compose *shih*. There is no harm in not composing them...

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either. The ancients taught people by means of the Six Accomplishments. This is extremely fascinating. When you do not partake in a diversion, then you will be unable to apply your talents fully. Neither will you be unable to understand people. In a medical text it says, "Take the five fruits as your supplement." However, if you eat too much, then it will harm you. Shih is the most elegant of the polite accomplishments, but if you become overly fond of it, then it will bring you harm. It is fine for recluses in the wooded mountains, who in their leisure have no pressing business, to vent their emotions, singing of their nostalgia. They can thus express their feelings of despondency and ennui. But for aristocrats, generals and ministers, scholars, officials, and others of position and office; if they once overindulge in shih composition, then their intent will grow wild and they will cause the downfall of their enterprise. Beware!

—Dōjimōn, Vol. 3:397

The upshot for Jinsai is that poetic composition is healthy, even necessary, to properly foster a leader’s sensibilities. Problems occur for Jinsai, however, when an individual goes beyond prudent limits in focusing on poetic accomplishments to the exclusion of other equally important activities.

Jinsai’s Kogidō, or “Hall of Ancient Meanings,” academy was located just down the street and across from Yamazaki’s Kimon (“Saki Gate”) academy on Horikawa 堀川 Avenue in Kyoto. Nakamura Yukihiko quotes sources stating that the Kimon school atmosphere was strict and patriarchal, in which the master would lecture sternly on abstract issues of Confucian metaphysics, and in which there was little if any opportunity for students to question the bases of the metaphysical theories being explained. In contrast, at the Kogidō, students and professors alike were engaged in joint philological examinations of the texts themselves, and discussions of points of fact and their ramifications were common among students and instructors. (Such an atmosphere is, in fact, not unlike that existing for students of Chinese and Japanese literature at Kyoto University today!)

For a specific example of the range of topics discussed by students at the Kogidō, let us examine some comments found in Jinsai’s second son, Itō Baiu’s 伊藤栄宇, Kenmon Dansō 柿陰談叢 (“A Thicket of Discussions about Things Heard and Seen,” preface, 1737, autograph manuscript in the Kogidō Bunko 古義堂文庫 archive, Tenri Central Library). In this passage, Baiu refers to the haikai poet and founder of the narrative ukiyo zōshi 浮世草子 genre, Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴, and incidentally providing the sole identification of Saikaku as the Osaka urbanite, Hirayama Tōgo 平山藤五.

He possessed a deep appreciation (yoku ajiwai よくあじわひ) of social affairs: good and ill fortune, regret, hardship, and give and take. He was endowed from birth with a piercing insight into human emotions. Furthermore, it seems he followed a life course based not on Lao-Chuang 老莊 [teachings], but on some other approach.8

8 See Kamei Nobuaki 亀井伸明, comp., Kenmon dansō (Iwanami bunko series, 2370-72, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1940): 243. Nakamura Yukihiko begins his important study of the
The most astounding element of this passage is that any member of an academy of Confucian studies would even mention the patently “vulgar” genre of popular fiction ukiyo zōshi in his writings. When we note that in Jinsai’s academy, Saikaku’s stories and novels are praised for their insight into the workings of the human emotions, then we know that we have discovered an atmosphere of study that is much more receptive to various influences than anything found in Hayashi Razan’s Rinke 林家 or Yamazaki Ansai’s Kimon (or Nangaku 南学) Confucian academies.

The following items are quotations from an extremely important but little-cited text, Doku Shi yōryō 読詩要領, or Essentials for Reading the Shih ching. This work was originally intended to serve at the first of a series of “Essentials” for each of the Five Classics (the Songs, Changes, Spring & Autumn Annals, Documents of Shang, and Rites), but the other four apparently were never completed. Itō Tōgai (1670-1736), Jinsai’s eldest son and second director of the Kogidō, left a manuscript of the text, which Tōgai’s third son and heir, Itō Tōsho 伊藤東所 (1730-1804), later copied and augmented with fuller references to Chinese referents. A separate copy of Tōgai’s text, located in the National Diet Library, was published in the Nihon Jurin sōho 日本儒林叢書 series (Kaisetsubu 解說部, vol. 1) in 1929. Both the Tōgai manuscript and the Tōsho augmented copy are well-worn, providing evidence that both texts were used in the course of lectures and studies of the Chinese classics, especially the Shih ching. In 1991 Shimizu Shigeru included the Tōsho text in volume 65 of the Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 新日本古典文学体系(SNKBT) series (volume entitled, Nihon shi shi, Gozan-dō shiwa 日本詩史五山堂詩話, translated, edited, and annotated by Shimizu, Ibi Takashi 捺斐高, and Ôtani Masao 大谷雅夫, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten).

The first quotation explicitly relates the poems found in the Shih ching with Confucian ethics. By claiming that the poems exist as candid, unadulterated examples of human emotion, the text promises that such honesty will prove to continue to be in accord with Confucius’s (as well as Mencius’s) teachings.

The Master said, “The Shih are three hundred in number. They can be covered in one phrase, ‘Thoughts devoid of corruption.”9 This section was the clearest for Confucius to explain the nature of the Shih. The word shih refers to the candid (ariyō ni あ り ゃ う に) expression of what people feel in their hearts. When we peruse the language of the three hundred verses, we find in praise of the wise the sentiment to “offer... a fine black robe,”10 or in hatred of scoundrels the sentiment to “throw them to the jackals and tigers.”11 There are celebrations of the virtues of the Sages, laments

9 Lun yü, Bk. 1 Ch. 2 (D. C. Lau Penguin translation, p. 63). The quoted passage from the Shih ching is Mao version #297, Waley translation #252.
10 Shih ching, “Cheng feng” (Mao #75, Waley #11). The two parts of the phrase are disconnected in the original.
11 Shih ching, “Lesser Ya” 小雅(Mao #200, Waley #282). The reading of these two verses as examples of praise and scorn goes as far back as the Li chi, and was fully conventionalized in the
about the practices in ages of chaos, and sentiments of indebtedness from son to father, from brother to brother. There is variation in the circumstances of each verse, but in every case we find the candid expression in words of what people feel in their hearts. This is why Confucius declared, "They can be covered (pi 蓋) in one phrase, 'Thoughts devoid of corruption.'" The word "pi" means "lid," as in when you cover a container. This single phrase serves to envelop all three hundred of the shih. Those who are human innocent and candidly speak of matters as they really are. Confucius often said, "Make self-respect and honesty your mainstays." He also said, "These common people are the touchstone by which the Three Dynasties were kept to the straight path." In the Mencius it is also written, "Those who reflect upon sincerity are on Heaven's Way." These all refer to the same notion.

The next passage identifies the famous touchstone upon which Kogidô poetics have been based. As Nakamura Yukihiko has analyzed at length, Jinsai's, Tôgai's, and later Tôsho's views allow the Shih ching to represent poetry in general, and, as we noted above regarding Saikaku's reception within the Kogidô, such views may extend to literary activity in general.

In a chapter of the Chuang-tzu it says in a discussion of the Five Classics, "The Shih serve as guide to human emotions." In the Yang-tzu fu-yen 楊子法言, "Kua-chien p'ien 寫見篇" it further says, "There is nothing more explicit for expressing intent than shih." Both of these statements carry the same argument, that the Shih gives voice to each and every intent and provides the full spectrum of human emotions (ninjô o tsukushitaru sho). The Chuang-tzu is a heterodox [i.e., non-

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12 Lun yü, Bk. 1, Ch. 1 (Lau, p. 60); Bk. 5, Ch. 9 (Lau, p. 99), Bk. 6, Ch. 12 (Lau, p. 114). "Chu chung hsin 主忠信." Lau translates this terse phrase as: "Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say."

13 Lun yü, Bk. 8, Ch. 15 (Lau, p. 135).

14 Meng tsu, Bk. 7 (D. C. Lau Penguin translation, p. 123). Tôgai's citation is actually a combination of two adjacent phrases. Lau translates, "Being true is the Way of Heaven; to reflect upon this is the Way of man."

15 Shimizu Shigeru, ed. and annot., Doku Shi yôryô, in SNKBT 65: 10-11.

16 "Bungaku wa 'Ninjô wo iu' no setsu;" see note 8 above.


18 (Master Yang's Legalist Sayings), by Yang Hsiung 揚雄 (53 bce-18 ce).
Confucian] text, but the above statement aptly describes the Way of shih (shi no michi 詩の道), and has been quoted regularly since the former Confucian scholars. Many words have been written on shih, but the phrase "serves as guide to human emotions" summarizes it succinctly.

There are cases in public matters by which, if you apply the situation at hand to surface measures of laws and propriety, there is no denying your actions. However, when you examine the situation from within, you find that circumstances can conspire to force you to break the law, commit a transgression, and thereby suffer the censure of those around you. If you fail to grasp this, then in your association with people in society and in your execution of administrative matters, you will be too rigid and you will be unable to gain entry to people's spirits.

In other words, nothing serves as well as the composition and appreciation of poetry, starting with the Shih ching, to provide the individual with insight into the human condition. The fact that "intent" in the original Chuang-tzu quote has been replaced with "human emotions" tells us two things about Jinsai and Kogidō poetics. First, Jinsai was not averse to quoting a Taoist text like the Chuang-tzu, which would have been ignored, or even scorned by more conservative Confucians. Second, whether consciously or not, Jinsai preferred to believe that the Chuang-tzu also supported the notion that poetry not only took human emotions as its source, but, conversely, provide a guide to understanding human emotions in their myriad diversity. The interest in both philosophical Taoism and in literary activity among Confucian scholars, particularly in Ogyū Sorai's school in Edo in the Kyōhō 享保 era (1720s) and beyond, clearly bears a debt to such positions within the Kogidō in the Genroku 元禄 era (1690s).

Our final quote from Essentials tackles the issue of licentiousness, which also brings us back to our starting point and the Confucian denunciations of the Genji and the ise in the seventeenth century. The Kogidō scholars of course reject the didactic critique, and instead promote an attitude of acceptance on the part of the reader for the poems as honest expressions of human feelings.

Among the shih of Cheng and Wei, many are licentious. It is exclusively these that former Confucian scholars singled out as examples of "chastising vice." However, these would serve as a admonishment for later ages if, as in the Ch'un ch'iu 春秋, the names of the period, the people, and the place of the transgression were explicitly noted. There is no way for the casual statement of a transgression, in the absence of any specification of what age or who was involved, to serve as an

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19 It is tempting to speculate that Tōgai might have had in mind here the 1684 incident in which the bakufu wakadoshiyori 幕府若年寄 Inaba Iwami no kami Masayasu 稲葉石見守正休 assassinated the tairō 大老 Hotta Chikuken no kami Masatoshi 堀田筑前守正俊. Masayasu, who was himself killed in this incident, had the previous year requested and received a copy of Jinsai's Go Mō jigi 語孟字義. The more recent Akō rōshi 赤穂浪士 vendetta of 1702 also prompted widespread comment on the relationship between feudal loyalty and adherence to written law, and may indeed have contributed to Tōgai's concern.

20 Shimizu, Doku Shi: 16-17.

21 Such suggestive courtship shih also include those of Pei and Yung. (Shimizu, p. 17, note 3).
admonishment for people of later ages. The shih of Cheng and Wei are invitations to courtship between men and women. Such courtship occurs all the time among people in the villages and the fields. Such transgressions are not even serious enough to warrant a stern admonishment. In these shih there is no trace of heinous acts against benevolence or righteousness, such as regicide, killing one's own father, or murdering a man to abscond with his wife. We do find shih compositions on treacherous or lustful acts, such as those about Yu and Li of Chou, Duke Hsiang of Ch'i, and Duke Hsüan of Wei, but these are shih censuring well-known people of the time; they are not confessions by the culprits themselves. In considering all the evidence, it is clear that the notion of "chastising vice" is not in accord with the character of the Shih.

We may safely conclude from the above collection of statements that the Kogidō in its Confucian teachings fostered a profound appreciation of the human condition. Furthermore, such an empathetic appreciation could only be possible through reading the most distilled examples of human emotion, poetry, beginning with the Shih ching, believed to have been compiled by Confucius himself. When the reader recognizes that the poem or song originates in the heart or mind, he or she can then both acknowledge the particular emotional state found in the poem, as well as similar states that might occur in his or her own life experience. Such understanding is essential to wise administration among those in positions of responsibility, regardless of whether such responsibility is over a household, or over a domain.

From these quotations, we can identify those elements that drew the young Oguyō Sorai to write to Jinsai, and it is not too much of a stretch to identify sources of Hori Keizan's teachings to the young Motoori Norinaga as he studied in Kyoto in the 1750s. Norinaga's insistent defense, even of illicit love affairs that could potentially affect the course of a country's history as they are found in the Genji monogatari, clearly did not arise from an intellectual vacuum.

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22 The Lesser Prefaces to various songs in the Shih ching identify them as examples of censure of the kings and dukes cited. For King Yu of Chou: Mao #191, 264, and 265 (Waley #291, 304, and 305); King Li of Chou: Mao #253 (Waley #300); Duke Hsiang of Ch'i: Mao #101, 102, 103, 105 (Waley #71, 47, 258, and 70); and Duke Hsüan of Wei: Mao #32, 34, 43, 44, and 58 (Waley #78, 54, 77, 33, and 104). Waley omits the first four songs listed above, well known over the history of Shih ching exegesis for their strong political tone, from his translation, which stressed the pastoral nature of the original songs.