

# **Mencius and the Meiji Restoration: A Study of Yoshida's Shōin's *Kō-Mō yowa* (Additional notes in explanation of the *Mencius*)**

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Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰 (1830-1859) was a famous Confucian thinker and leading *shishi* 志士 (literally, men of high aspiration, usually referring to late Tokugawa royalists) in the last decades of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868).<sup>1</sup> He trained many brilliant young samurai, some of whom later became leaders of the Meiji Restoration and the Meiji government. Among his writings, the *Kō-Mō yowa* 講孟余話 (Additional notes in explanation of the *Mencius*, 1856, 6 *kan* or scrolls) was particularly influential.<sup>2</sup> It was more important as a treatise detailing Yoshida's political ideas than as a commentary of the *Mencius*. As a *Mencius* commentary, it does not deepen our understanding of the teachings of Mencius a great deal. As a political treatise, the *Kō-Mō yowa* was one of the most popular texts among late Tokugawa royalists, providing them with ideas for the Meiji Restoration through its advocacy of *sonnō jōi* 尊王攘夷 (revere

<sup>1</sup> A large number of books have been written on Yoshida Shōin. In the Meiji era (1868-1912), Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰 (1863-1957) wrote a brief biography on him, entitled *Yoshida Shōin* (Tokyo: Minyūsha, 1893). The study of Yoshida became a boom in the 1930s and early 1940s, when about forty books about him were published. Most works of this period served as propaganda for the militarist government. Post-war studies on Yoshida have been more diversified and scholarly. About ten books have been published. For example, Naramoto Tatsuya 奈良本辰也 provides a fine biography in his *Yoshida Shōin* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1951). Shimohodo Yūkichi 下程勇吉 examines Yoshida's morality in his *Yoshida Shōin no ningengaku teki kenkyū* 吉田松陰の人間学的研究 (A study of Yoshida Shōin's views on human nature) (Kashiwa: Kōchi gakuen shuppanbu, 1988), and Umehara Tōru 梅原徹 introduces Yoshida's academy in his *Yoshida Shōin to Shōka sonjuku* 吉田松陰と松下村塾 (Yoshida Shōin and his private academy) (Tokyo: Mineruva shobō, 1990). For discussions of Yoshida in English, see: H. Van Straelen, *Yoshida Shōin: Forerunner of the Meiji Restoration* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952); and Thomas Huber, *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> This work is also called *Kō-Mō satsuki* 講孟筭記 (Notes on the *Mencius*). For this paper, three different editions of the text have been used. Hirose Yutaka 廣瀬豊, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1942) is the most important. It covers the entire text in its original language without annotations. Naramoto Tatsuya, ed., *Nihon no shisō* 日本の思想 (Japanese thought), Vol. 19, *Yoshida Shōin shū* 吉田松陰集 (Works of Yoshida Shōin) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969) includes selected parts of the text in both the original language and modern translation. It also includes valuable correspondences between Yoshida and Yamagata Taika 山縣太華 (1781-1866), a Chōshū Confucian. Matsumoto Sannosuke 松本三之介, ed., *Nihon no meicho* 日本の名著 (Famous writings of Japan), vol. 31, *Yoshida Shōin* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1973) contains a modern translation of selected parts of the text.

the emperor; repel the barbarians), emperor-state ideology, *kokutai* 國體 (national polity or nationality), and *bushidō* 武士道 (way of the samurai).<sup>3</sup> It continued to be used to propagate political conservatism in prewar Japan. Yoshida interpreted the *Mencius* loosely, applying it to discuss contemporary issues and to advocate his own political beliefs. Thus, the text reflects the political thought of Yoshida, not that of Mencius.

The *Mencius* is a book of political philosophy and ethics. Compared with other Confucian classics, its political ideas are relatively liberal and humanistic. In late-Ch'ing and early-Republican China, the text was used to promote Western ideas, such as democracy, liberty, equality, free will, constitutional monarchy, Social Darwinism, mercantilism, and judicial independence.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, in late Tokugawa Japan, the *Mencius* was used by Yoshida to construct a conservative political ethics and ideology, the opposite of the political values that the *Mencius* stands for. This was an extremely interesting and unique development in Mencian studies in Japan. We cannot find a parallel in either China or Korea.

Through a historical review of Mencian scholarship and a textual analysis of the *Kō-Mō yowa*, this essay will examine the roles of the *Mencius* in Tokugawa politics and thought and in the making of Yoshida's *shishi* ideology. We want to know whether Mencian political thought was faithfully reflected in Yoshida's commentary and whether the *Mencius* and Yoshida's commentary had a strong impact on the Meiji Restoration and prewar conservatism. This essay consists of three main sections. The first situates the *Kō-Mō yowa* within Tokugawa studies of the *Mencius*. Section two outlines the main ideas in the *Kō-Mō yowa*, absolute loyalty and *bushidō*, discussing issues such as the naturalization of Confucianism, differences between Japanese and Chinese political ethics, and the formation of nationalist and royalist ideology. The concluding section compares the differences between the *Mencius* and the *Kō-Mō yowa* and attempts to gauge their impact on political and intellectual developments in prewar Japan.

### The *Kō-Mō yowa* in Tokugawa Scholarship on the *Mencius*

The *Mencius* arrived Japan no later than the eighth century. It was not popular in

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<sup>3</sup> The terms, "sonnō jōi," "kokutai," and "bushidō" are commonly used by modern Japanese scholars to discuss the Tokugawa and prewar Japanese discourses and were not actually used by Yoshida Shōin.

The most influential texts among late Tokugawa royalists were Aizawa Seishisai's 會澤正志齋 (1781-1863) *Shinron* 新論 (New theses, 1825), Yoshida Shōin's *Kō-Mō yowa*, and *Dai Nihon shi* 大日本史 (Chronicle of great Japan, compiled by Mito domain). For a study of the *Shinron*, see Bob T. Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early Modern Japan: The New Theses of 1825* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986). For a discussion of the *Dai Nihon shi* from a comparative perspective, see Kate W. Nakai, "Tokugawa Confucian Historiography: The Hayashi, Early Mito School, and Arai Hakuseki," in *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, ed. Peter Nosco (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 62-91.

<sup>4</sup> See Huang Chün-chieh 黃俊傑, *Meng-tzu ssu-hsiang shih-lun* 孟子思想史論 (Historical discourse on Mencian thought) (Taipei: Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan, 1997), pp. 13-53, 394.

the Nara (712-93) and Heian (794-1186) periods but later drew some attention among Buddhist monks and courtiers in the medieval period (1186-1603).<sup>5</sup> The *Mencius* was a popular but controversial text in Tokugawa Confucianism. Following the rise of the Sung school or neo-Confucianism, the Four Books (*Ta-hsüeh* 大學 or Great Learning, *Chung-yung* 中庸 or Doctrine of the Mean, *Lun-yü* 論語 or *Analects* of Confucius and *Meng-tzu* 孟子 or the Sayings of Mencius) were widely read among Tokugawa intellectuals. According to the *Nihon keikai sōmoku-roku* 日本經解總目錄 (Complete index of Confucian writings), there were 169 books written on the *Mencius* by 126 Tokugawa scholars. In terms of the number of Confucian writings published in the Tokugawa period, the *Mencius* came in only seventh place.<sup>6</sup>

### Confucian Writings in the Tokugawa Period

Confucian Classics	Number of Books	Number of Authors
<i>I-ching</i>	395	212
<i>Lun-yü</i>	363	261
<i>Ta-hsüeh</i>	246	183
<i>Ch'un-ch'iu</i>	224	164
<i>Hsiao-ching</i>	199	144
<i>Shih-ching</i>	173	131
<i>Meng-tzu</i>	169	126
<i>Chung-yung</i>	168	131
<i>Shu-ching</i>	147	111
<i>Li-chi</i>	144	91

The *Kokusho sōmoku-roku* 国書総目録 (Complete index of Japanese books, compiled by Iwanami shoten, 1963) and some book and library indexes indicate that the number of Tokugawa commentaries on the *Mencius* was near 500.<sup>7</sup> Compared with other Confucian classics, the *Mencius* was not particularly popular.<sup>8</sup> This was mainly because the book

<sup>5</sup> For a historical overview of Mencian studies before the Tokugawa era, see Inoue Junri 井上順理, *Honpō chūsei made ni okeru Mōshi juyō shi no kenkyū* 本邦中世までにおける孟子受容史の研究 (A study of the adoption of the *Mencius* through medieval Japan) (Tokyo: Kasama shobō, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> The *Nihon keikai sōmoku-roku* was compiled by Hayashi Taisuke 林泰輔 (1854-1922) during the Taishō period (1912-1926). See Fukushima Kinezō 福島甲子三, ed., in *Kindai Nihon no Jugaku* 近代日本の儒学 (Confucianism in modern Japan) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1939), pp. 1141-43.

<sup>7</sup> See Seo Kunio 瀬尾邦雄, ed., *Kōshi Mōshi ni kansuru bunken mokuroku* 孔子孟子に関する文献目録 (List of documents concerning Confucius and Mencius) (Tokyo: Hakuteisha, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> The most popular Confucian classics in the Tokugawa period were the *I Ching* and the *Lun Yü*. For example, there were at least 1085 Tokugawa commentaries on the *I Ching* written by 416 authors. See Wai-ming Ng, "Study and Use of the *I Ching* in Tokugawa Japan," *Sino-Japanese*

contains many controversial and sensitive political ideas, such as regicide, the distinction between the kingly way (*ōdō* 王道) and the hegemonic way (*hadō* 霸道), politics for the sake of the people, and support for the imperial court, that were considered incompatible with the Tokugawa ideology. Following the medieval practice, when scholars lectured on the *Mencius* to the Tokugawa emperor and shōgun, all problematic passages were cut.<sup>9</sup> The sale of its commentaries was not particularly good. Tokugawa book merchants bought very few commentaries on it from China.<sup>10</sup>

According to the approaches and areas of concern, Mencian studies in the Tokugawa period can be divided into four major schools: the school of commentary, the school of textual criticism, the school of moral thought, and the school of political thought. The school of commentary and the school of textual criticism concerned the text, whereas the school of moral thought and the school of political thought studied the ideas behind the text. The approach of the school of commentary was explanatory, the school of textual criticism was philological, the school of moral thought was philosophical, and the school of political thought was historical.

The school of commentary was the largest school. Scholars of this school annotated and sometimes even translated the *Mencius* passage by passage to help their students and readers understand the meaning of the text. They came from different Confucian traditions, including the Chu Hsi 朱熹 school (e.g., Hayashi Gahō 林鷺峰, 1618-1680, Kaibara Ekken 貝原益軒, 1630-1714, Nakamura Tekisai 中村惕齋, 1629-1702, and Okada Hakku 岡田白駒, 1691-1767), the Wang Yang-ming school (e.g., Kumazawa Banzan 熊澤蕃山, 1619-1691 and Satō Issai 佐藤一齋, 1772-1859), and the eclectic school (e.g., Minakawa Kien 皆川淇園, 1735-1807 and Ōta Kinjō 大田錦城, 1765-1825). They produced many commentaries of excellent and careful scholarship, such as Minakawa Kien's *Mōshi shakukai* 孟子釋解 (An explication of the *Mencius*, 1797, 14 kan), Ōta Kinjō's *Mōshi seion* 孟子精蘊 (The essence of the *Mencius*, 1828, 7 kan), and Satō Issai's *Mōshi rangai* 孟子欄外書 (Notes on the *Mencius*, 1830, 2 kan).

The school of textual criticism produced some very scholarly works. Influenced by Ch'ing *k'ao-cheng* 考證 (evidential research) scholarship, scholars of this school were critical of the Sung commentaries for being too speculative. They attempted to reconstruct the original text and meanings of the *Mencius* through various research methods, such as philology, phonetics, and textual comparison. They were more interested in restoring Han commentaries than discussing issues of authorship or authenticity. Their representatives include Yamanoi Kanae's 山井鼎 *Shichikei Mōshi kōbun* 七經孟子考文 (Textual study of the Seven Classics and *Mencius*, with supplement, 1726), Kaiho Gyoson's 海保漁村 (1798-1866) *Mōshi Chōshi gi* 孟子趙氏

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<sup>9</sup> See *Honpō chūsei made ni okeru Mōshi juyōshi no kenkyū*, p. 513.

<sup>10</sup> There was one superstitious belief among Tokugawa book dealers that any ship bringing the *Mencius* to Japan would sink. The origin of this belief can be traced to a Chinese book written in the Ming period. See Warren Smith, *Confucianism in Modern Japan* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1973), p. 141.

義 (Chao Ch'i's 趙岐 [A.D. 201] interpretations of the *Mencius*, 20 *kan*) and Ikai Keisho's 猪飼敬所 (1761-1846) *Mōshi kōbun* 孟子考文 (Textual study of the *Mencius*, 1827, 1 *kan*). They improved the accuracy of the text, which had become corrupted over the ages, and restored some pre-Sung commentaries. Yamanoi's work was particularly significant in Mencian scholarship and Sino-Japanese cultural interchange. Based on some Sung editions of Chinese books held in the *Ashikaga gakkō* 足利學校, Yamanoi restored some fragmentary pre-Sung texts, in particular the commentary of Chao Ch'i. Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (1684-1751), the eighth Tokugawa shōgun, had the text edited by Ogyū Hokkei 荻生北溪, the younger brother of Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728), and published by the *bakufu*. This text was then sent to Ch'ing China and was reprinted by the famous official-scholar Juan Yüan 阮元 (1764-1849).<sup>11</sup>

The school of moral thought produced the best and most original scholarship. Regarding the *Mencius* as one of the most important Confucian classics, scholars of this school used the text to explain their understanding of Confucian morality and philosophy. They mainly came from the ancient learning school (*kogaku* 古學) (e.g., Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋, 1627-1707 and Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯, 1670-1736), the eclectic school (e.g., Miyake Sekian 三宅石庵, 1665-1730 and Nakai Riken 中井履軒, 1735-1807), and the school of mind (*shingaku* 心學) (for example, Ishida Baigan 石田梅岩, 1685-1744).

Representative works of this school were Itō Jinsai's *Mōshi kōgi* 孟子古義 (Ancient meanings of the *Mencius*, 1720, 7 *kan*) and Nakai Riken's *Mōshi hōgen* 孟子逢原 (Investigation of the origins of the *Mencius*, 7 *kan*).<sup>12</sup> These two works were among the best commentaries on the *Mencius* of the entire period. Itō and Nakai developed the philosophy of the unity of principle (*li* 理) and force (*ch'i* 氣) in their explanations of the *Mencius*.<sup>13</sup> They criticized the metaphysics and epistemology of the Chu Hsi school in their discussion of key concepts in the *Mencius*, such as *chih-yen* 知言 (understanding the meaning of words), *yang-ch'i* 養氣 (nurturance of the vital force), *ts'un-hsin* 存心 (retaining of the mind), *yang-hsing* 養性 (nurturance of the nature), and *chi-i* 集義 (accumulation of righteousness). Many scholars of this school came from merchant backgrounds, and they emphasized the universality of Mencian ethics. For instance, Miyake Sekian, Itō Jinsai, and Ishida Baigan found a universal value for merchants and commoners in the *Mencius*.<sup>14</sup>

The school of political thought was a strange company of critics of Mencius, who attacked Mencian political thought in their writings. In Ming and Ch'ing China, although

<sup>11</sup> See Ōba Osamu 大庭脩, *Edo jidai no Nit-Chū hiwa* 江戸時代の日中秘話 (History of Sino-Japanese relations in the Edo period) (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 1980), pp. 157-58.

<sup>12</sup> Itō's and Nakai's commentaries are included in Seki Giichirō 関儀一郎, ed., *Nihon meika shisho chūshaku zensho* 日本名家四書注釈全書 (Commentaries on the Four Books by prominent scholars) (Tokyo: Otori shuppan, 1973).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Itō's and Nakai's interpretations of the *Mencius*, see Huang, *Meng-tzu ssu-hsiang shih-lun*, pp. 241-63.

<sup>14</sup> See Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 25-36, 88. See also Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion* (New York: Free Press, 1957), p. 160.

some Mencian political ideas were regarded as controversial, most intellectuals recognized the text's political value and relied on it to develop their political ideas. However, in Tokugawa Japan, the anti-Mencian tradition was much stronger due to Tokugawa cultural policy and censorship. Since many of Mencius's political ideas were considered dangerous, unorthodox, and alien, until the last decades of the Tokugawa period, Tokugawa intellectuals did not endorse the text's sensitive political ideas openly lest they get into trouble with the officials.<sup>15</sup> This explained why most people discussed Mencius's political thought in a negative light.

Many scholars of this school came from the Sorai school, the Ansai 庵齋 school, national learning (*kokugaku* 國學), and the early Mito school.<sup>16</sup> They criticized certain Mencian ideas, which they believed did not fit with Japan's political tradition or Tokugawa ideology. Their ideas represented a strong nationalist current in Tokugawa intellectual development and had a strong impact on late-Tokugawa royalists including Yoshida Shōin. Dazai Shundai 太宰春台 (1680-1747), an ardent supporter of the *bakufu*, was the spokesman for this school. He attacked several aspects of the *Mencius* to uphold the Tokugawa ideology in his *Mōshi ron* 孟子論 (Discourses on the *Mencius*). This work created a heated debate over Mencian concepts.<sup>17</sup> Yoshida shared many ideas with Dazai and scholars of the Ansai school and may have been influenced by them in his reading of the *Mencius*.<sup>18</sup> There were two areas in which their views were almost identical.

First, they pointed out that the imperial family in Japan enjoyed an unbroken lineage and thus regicide, perhaps the most controversial concept in the *Mencius*, was not compatible with Japan's national polity. They condemned Kings T'ang 湯 and Wu 武 for setting the precedents for traitors in China, stressing that revolution was the vilest political principle which should never be applied in Japan.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> However, some individuals did endorse Mencian political ideas in the Tokugawa period. Satō Naokata 佐藤直方 (1639-1719) was one such example.

<sup>16</sup> Scholars of the Ansai school did not completely deny the political value of the *Mencius*. They only attacked those ideas that they deemed went against Japan's political traditions and Suika Shintō 垂加神道. Their extensive writings on the text include Yamazaki Ansai's 山崎闇齋 (1618-1682) *Mōshi shūchū josetsu* 孟子集注序說 (Introduction to the *Meng-tzu chi-chu*, 1667, 1 *kan*), Asami Keisai's 淺見綱齋 (1652-1711) *Mōshi kōgi* 孟子講義 (Lectures on the *Mencius*, 3 *kan*), and Miyake Shōsai's 三宅尚齋 (1662-1741) *Mōshi hikki* 孟子筆記 (Notes on the *Mencius*, 4 *kan*).

<sup>17</sup> Certain Chu Hsi scholars defended the *Mencius* in a roundabout manner. They argued that Dazai misread the *Mencius* and accused Mencius wrongly for the ideas that he did not advocate. Yabu Kōsan 藪孤山 criticized Dazai's *Mōshiron* in his *Sū Mō* 崇孟 (Revering Mencius, 1775). Nakayama Jōsan 中山城山 and Hattori Rissai 服部栗齋 wrote commentaries on the *Sū Mō*. They are included in Rai Tsutomu 頼惟勤, ed., *Nihon shisō taikēi* 日本思想体系, Vol. 37, *Sorai gakuha* 徂徠学派 (The Sorai school) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972), pp. 356-80.

<sup>18</sup> Yoshida, in the *Kō-Mō yowa*, quoted the writings of some Ansai scholars but did not mention Dazai's *Mōshiron*. Nevertheless, the *Mōshiron* was a popular text and it was likely that Yoshida had read it.

<sup>19</sup> Scholars of the Ansai school discussed this topic at length. They disapproved of the Mencian

Second, they advocated absolute loyalty and criticized the Mencian notion of reciprocity in the ruler-subject relationship. According to the *Mencius*, the relationship between the ruler and the subject is reciprocal and conditional, and therefore if the ruler is irrevocably bad, the subject may abandon him. Scholars of this school attacked this idea as disloyal, emphasizing that in Japan the subject should always be loyal to the ruler regardless of the personal qualities and ethics of the ruler.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these two topics, scholars of this school and Yoshida also rejected some other Mencian political ideas they considered either inappropriate or unrealistic, such as politics for the people, concession of the throne to the capable, and the use of rites and music to rule.<sup>21</sup>

How shall we situate Yoshida's *Kō-Mō yowa* in Tokugawa scholarship on the *Mencius*? The significance of the *Kō-Mō yowa* does not rest with its scholarship or originality, but more with its political implications. Fairly speaking, Yoshida broke no new ground in the study of the text and ideas of the *Mencius*. As a Confucian commentary, it was not a work of high scholarship. Although Yoshida claimed that he had studied the *Mencius* for twenty years, he did not specialize in it and did not study it seriously until his last years. His interest in the *Mencius* seems to have been inspired by his teacher Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山 (1811-64), who also studied the text in prison. Sakuma influenced Yoshida's understanding of the *Mencius* in two ways. First, the *Mencius* had important political and practical values. Second, Chu Hsi's commentary contained many mistakes.<sup>22</sup> Yoshida's reading of the *Mencius* was also influenced by the Mito school, the ancient learning school, and the Ansai school. In the *Kō-Mō yowa*, Yoshida's political ideas were close to those of the Mito and Ansai schools, and his textual interpretation followed Itō Jinsai's commentary closely.

Obviously, Yoshida had little to do with the school of commentary or the school of textual criticism. To him, the only things that were worth studying were those related to the well-being of the nation and the people. He regarded politics and economics as true learning, and he looked down upon philology, phonetics, and textual criticism as heretical learning.<sup>23</sup> He was not interested in textual study and did not read many commentaries on the *Mencius* before he wrote his lectures. In his lectures, Yoshida only cited three commentaries: Itō Jinsai's *Mōshi kogi*, Chu Hsi's (1130-1200) *Meng-tzu chichu* 孟子集注 (Collective commentary on the *Mencius*), and Okada Hakku's *Mōshi kai* 孟子解 (Explanation of the *Mencius*, 1762, 7 kan). He liked Itō's commentary very much and cited it frequently. Like Itō, he was critical of Chu Hsi's commentary, pointing out its numerous mistakes in interpretation.<sup>24</sup> He did not belong to the school of moral philosophy either. Although Yoshida addressed moral issues in his lectures, unlike

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concept of revolution, insisting that the subject had to obey the emperor even when the latter was a tyrant. See *Nihon shisō taikēi*, Vol. 31, *Yamazaki Ansai gakuha* 山崎闇齋学派 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1980). The only exception was Satō Naokata who defended Kings T'ang and Wu.

<sup>20</sup> *Mōshiron*, in *Nihon shisō taikēi*, Vol. 37, *Sorai gakuha*, p. 153

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>22</sup> See Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, pp. 251, 322-23, 326.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 322-23.

scholars of the school of moral thought, he was only concerned about political ethics and cared less about personal ethics.

Among the four schools of Mencian studies, Yoshida belonged to the school of political thought. He represented a new direction in this school. The writing of Yoshida's commentary demonstrated the emergence of a more vibrant intellectual climate in late Tokugawa Japan. With the decline of *bakufu* authority, many heretofore illegitimate teachings found space to grow. Mencius's political thought was one such teaching. Unlike early scholars of this school, Yoshida basically upheld Mencian political ideas, although he did not hesitate to disapprove of some of Mencius's ideas that he deemed incompatible with Japan's political traditions. He disagreed with Dazai and other early scholars of this school over certain issues. For instance, Dazai attacked Mencius's distinction between the kingly way and the hegemonic way to legitimize the Tokugawa *bakufu*, whereas Yoshida upheld the distinction to challenge the *bakufu*. According to Mencius's definition, a hegemon controls the nation by means of his military strength, whereas a true king manages the nation by implementing benevolent rule. Mencius did not give high credit to the former even though he may bring peace to the nation. On the contrary, Dazai argued that a military man who could bring peace to the nation was no longer a hegemon but a true king. Hence, the Tokugawa shōguns were the legitimate rulers.<sup>25</sup> Yoshida accepted Mencius's distinction but added that true kings were not only determined by benevolent rule, but also by birth. As a result, only the imperial family could be true kings.

Yoshida used the *Mencius* to advocate his own political ideas more than he used his writing to promote Mencius's political ideas. His work is important because it provides clues for us to understand the ideological underpinnings behind the Meiji Restoration and some of the nationalist ideas that shaped the history of modern Japan. An examination of Yoshida's commentary also deepens our understanding of the accommodation and naturalization of Chinese political thought in Tokugawa Japan.

### **The *Kō-Mō yowa* and Late Tokugawa Political Thought**

The *Kō-Mō yowa* was Yoshida's most representative, comprehensive, and influential work. In it Yoshida expressed his opinions on current issues in Tokugawa politics, economy and diplomacy.

The work was a collection of Yoshida's lectures on the *Mencius* given while he was in prison. He realized that he might not be able to leave the prison alive and decided to do something that would help the nation.

Last year, I offended the law and was imprisoned. I could do nothing in prison. I am indebted to the virtues of the emperors of all ages and to the care of the daimyō. I am nobody but I feel that my responsibility is by no means light. I see reviving the imperial court and the nation as my responsibility. Hence, I wrote the *Kō-Mō yowa*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See *Nihon shisō taikēi*, Vol. 37, *Sorai gakuha*, pp. 154-56.

<sup>26</sup> Naramorto Tatsuya, ed., *Yoshida Shōin shū*, pp. 271-72.



He started reading and lecturing on the *Mencius* from April 12, 1855. Two months later, from June 13, he began a regular lecture series on the text for his cell mates, relatives, and jailers, which he finished a year later on June 13, 1856. During that year, he gave lectures on the *Mencius* 55 times, about four to five times each month on average. Having edited his lectures, he named it *Kō-Mō satsuki* 講孟筭記 (Notes on the *Mencius*) and sent a copy to Yamagata Taika 山縣太華 (1781-1866), the head of the Confucian academy in Chōshū domain, for comments. To Yoshida's surprise, Yamagata, a Chu Hsi scholar and a supporter of the *bakufu*, made extremely harsh criticisms of the text, attacking Yoshida's work almost passage by passage on the basis of the teachings of Chu Hsi and Tokugawa ideology. Yoshida engaged in a heated exchange of ideas with Yamagata. Due to this unpleasant and unnerving experience, his anti-*bakufu* ideas became even stronger and more explicit in his correspondences with Yamagata.

Although the *Kō-Mō yowa* was not published until 1871, handwritten copies were circulated widely among late-Tokugawa scholars and activists. Many ideas in the text represent a strong late-Tokugawa nationalist current, shared by *shishi* activists, Mito scholars, and *kokugaku* scholars.

Yoshida was already in prison because of his problematic political attitude, but he continued to comment on current affairs. Why did he take such a risk? To answer this question, we should know the mind set of the *shishi*. Yoshida was a model *shishi* who always followed his own principles without making compromises or worrying about the consequences. If only he believed it was the right thing to do, he would do it even though his action might go against some established teachings or laws. It is simplistic to trace the intellectual orientation of *shishi* like Yoshida to a single origin, such as the Wang Yang Ming school, the Mito school, national learning, ancient learning, or the Ansai school.<sup>27</sup> Yoshida was certainly influenced by all of these schools of thought, but he never limited himself to one particular school. Basically he was only faithful to his own beliefs. In writing the *Kō-Mō yowa*, he actually disobeyed Chinese teachings and the orders of Tokugawa *bakufu*. Although the Chinese believed that people without official positions should refrain from discussing politics and the Tokugawa *bakufu* censored political speeches and writings, Yoshida stressed that it would be a crime for anyone to ignore the crisis of the nation, and therefore he had to write these lectures to remind the people.<sup>28</sup> He laid out four directions for political reforms in Japan in his work: revering the emperor, repelling the Western intruders, promoting political ethics, and cultivating the talented people. He explained the motives of the book as follows: "The points that I am suggesting here mean upholding the national polity by revering the emperor and repelling the barbarians, encouraging the proper political conduct of the retainers, and

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Noguchi Takehiko 野口武彦 classifies Yoshida into the Wang Yang-ming school and regards Satō Issai's *Mōshi rangai shō* and Yoshida's *Kō-Mō yowa* as the two representative commentaries on the *Mencius* of this school. See Noguchi, "Edo Yōmeigaku to Mōshi" 江戸陽明学と孟子 (Wang Yang-ming studies in the Edo period and the *Mencius*), *Bungaku* 文学 49.2 (1981): 97.

<sup>28</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, pp. 217-18.

cultivating talented people.”<sup>29</sup>

In constructing his anti-*bakufu* and conservative ideology, Yoshida interpreted the *Mencius* loosely. Yoshida was neither pro-Mencius nor anti-Mencius. He simply used his own political standards to judge the *Mencius*. In general, he respected Mencius as a great Confucian master and had a positive view of Mencian political thought. However, when any Mencian idea was in disagreement with his beliefs, he did not hesitate to reject it. For instance, he upheld the Mencian ideas of distinction between the kingly way and the hegemonic way, the way of the *chih-shih* 志士 (*shishi*), and the politics of benevolence, but criticized Mencius's personal political ethics and his ideas of revolution, the reciprocity in the emperor-subject relationship, and politics for the people.

The basic assumption of the *Kō-Mō yowa* was the oft-repeated Shinto and *kokugaku* belief that Japan had a different *kokutai* (national polity) which was superior to that of China or any other nation. *Kokutai* refers to the political culture, ethics, and institutions of a nation. Yoshida's definition of Japan's *kokutai* was similar to that of the Mito school, but his presentation of the idea was more powerful and sensational. He held that Confucian values had their universality, but each nation had its peculiarity due to its unique historical and geographical backgrounds. The *kokutai* of Europe, America, and India were completely different from that of Japan and should not be adopted. In particular he rejected Christian and Buddhist ethics. He looked down upon Westerners as barbarians and reminded his readers that they could study Western medicine, weaponry, and logic, but should not admire the Westerners. To him, Western learning was only a means to strengthen Japan so that it could repel the Westerners.<sup>30</sup> Like his teacher Sakuma, Yoshida believed in the need to combine Western science and Eastern morality.<sup>31</sup>

Yoshida put a lot of effort in his lectures into comparing the *kokutai* of Japan and China. While acknowledging that there were similarities in *kokutai* between the two nations, he emphasized that Japan's *kokutai* was fundamentally different from and superior to that of China.<sup>32</sup> He showed little respect for China, calling it *Shina* 支那, and the Chinese, *mō-Tōjin* 毛唐人 ('hairy Chinamen'; namely, uncivilized aliens) with disdain, pointing out that Ch'ing China was poor and corrupt and the way of the sages no longer existed there: "Although China has preserved the writings of the sages, the kingly way is no longer respected. Even the barbarians criticize it. How sad!"<sup>33</sup>

Yoshida argued that Japan's *kokutai* was superior because the Japanese treasured the virtue of absolute loyalty. Influenced by Shinto myth prevalent among Tokugawa intellectuals, he maintained that Japan had adopted a feudal system under which the Japanese imperial family enjoyed an unbroken lineage and ministers were hereditary and unfailingly faithful to the emperor. China, on the other hand, had abandoned feudalism and the true principle of loyalty.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 360-62.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 44.

In our country, from the imperial court down to the daimyō, the succession is uninterrupted. This is something that China cannot match. In China the subjects engage themselves only for half a season like servants. If their lords are good, they stay with them. If they are bad, they leave them. The subjects of our country, however, being hereditary, share life and death and joy and sorrow with their lords. These subjects will never leave their lords, even when they must die.<sup>34</sup>

The thing that Yoshida disliked most about China was that loyalty was conditional and relative, so that the Chinese switched their loyalty easily for personal interest. In the strict sense of absolute loyalty, Yoshida pointed out that most Chinese sages were far from perfect. For example, King T'ang and King Wu, the founders of the Shang and Chou dynasties, respectively, were condemned as traitors, because they betrayed their emperors and took the throne. Chi Tzu 箕子, a Shang prince, was criticized for giving political advice to his enemy King Wu.<sup>35</sup> Wei Tzu 微子, also a Shang prince, was considered wrong to have left the Shang emperor when his advice was not taken seriously.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, many famous ministers in Chinese history, from Yoshida's point of view, "were nothing but human beings who did not know benevolence and righteousness."<sup>37</sup> Even Confucius and Mencius were not spared. Yoshida criticized them for leaving the state of their birth to look for posts and opportunities in other states.<sup>38</sup>

According to Yoshida, the Chinese way of leaving one's lord to serve another, even with the aim of doing good to the whole world, was unacceptable in Japan. He added that if the lord was bad, the subject should remain loyal to him and even prepare to commit suicide to force his lord to repent.<sup>39</sup> In Japan, the subjects were always faithful to the ruler, but "in China, the situation is different. Although the relationship between the ruler and the subject is said to be based on righteousness, the subject only obeys when the ruler is right, and disobeys when the ruler is wrong. After reminding the ruler of his mistakes three times in vain, they leave for other domains."<sup>40</sup>

In China, the relationship between the ruler and the subject, as Mencius pointed out, was not always harmonious. Sometimes, the ruler treated his subjects as dogs and horses, and the subjects saw their rulers as enemies. Yoshida warned that this must not happen in Japan, and that those subjects who regarded their ruler as an enemy should receive capital punishment.<sup>41</sup> He reiterated that in Japan the subject must show absolute

<sup>34</sup> Translation is modified from *Yoshida Shōin: Forerunner of the Meiji Restoration*, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 134.

<sup>36</sup> Naramoto Tatsuya, ed., *Yoshida Shōin shū*, pp. 289-90.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>38</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> Yoshida repeated the same idea in the *Yūshitsu bunkō* 幽室文稿 (Dark room manuscript, 1857): "Suppose that in our country our emperor oppresses us as Kings Chieh and Chou have done, we can do nothing but offer our heads to them." Translation is modified from *Yoshida Shōin: Forerunner of the Meiji Restoration*, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 196.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

respect to the emperor. Unlike their Chinese counterparts, the teachers of the Japanese emperor were not allowed to sit while giving their lectures, because the primary status of the teachers remained their position as subjects of the emperor.<sup>42</sup>

Yoshida was an early advocate of the family-state ideology, an integral part of prewar conservatism, in his definition of loyalty. He regarded this concept as a special feature of Japan's *kokutai*. Between the two fundamental Confucian virtues, filial piety was considered more important than loyalty in China. In the case of conflict between the two, one would choose to be a faithful son rather than a loyal subject. In Japan, loyalty was considered more important than filial piety. The family-state ideology meant the inclusion of filial piety within loyalty. Yoshida stressed that the people should treat their ruler as their father and the ruler should treat his people as children, and the people should never abandon the emperor no matter how he behaved.

After all, the lord is for us also like a father. To look for a lord in another province, leaving one's country of birth, because the lord is foolish and stupid, is the same as to take as father an old man from a neighboring house, leaving one's own house, just because the father is stupid.<sup>43</sup>

He added that since the Japanese emperor had divine origins, he was more important than the people: "In China, the people are considered more important than the emperor. In my country, the holy emperor comes before the people."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the imperial family and not the people should be the center of national politics. Hence, Yoshida rejected Mencius's idea that the emperor existed for the sake of the people. Obviously, the main purpose of the family-state ideology was to promote the emperor's authority more than the emperor's paternal love for his subjects.

Naturally, Yoshida saw the Mencian notion of regicide as a kind of treachery. He argued that even in China, regicide could only be considered under extreme circumstances. Kings T'ang and Wu only used it as the last resort, but it was misused by later generations as a convenient ideological justification for revolt.<sup>45</sup> Yoshida denied the application of the entire set of Mencian ideas about regicide, such as heavenly mandate, politics for the people, and revolution. According to Mencius, the nation does not belong to a single family, and heaven appoints a man to rule on its behalf. The ruler should carry out the politics of benevolence. If a ruler does not care about the well being of the people, he will lose the mandate of heaven and heaven will appoint another man to replace him by means of revolution. Yoshida did not accept this concept. To him, the idea of heavenly mandate did not apply to the Japanese imperial family. He explained that the tenure of the Japanese emperor did not depend on his ethics and quality, but on his blood. The imperial family and heaven were inseparable, and its tenure was for good

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 157-58.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> Naramorto Tatsuya, ed., *Yoshida Shōin shū*, p. 277.

<sup>45</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 105.

without any conditions.<sup>46</sup> Yoshida, however, did not completely deny Mencian notions of heavenly mandate, politics for the people and revolution, suggesting that they could be applied to the shōgun and regent.

More significantly, Yoshida expressed his anti-*bakufu* ideas in his explanation of absolute loyalty. He defined the position of the *bakufu* in his explanation of the Mencian notion of the distinction between the kingly way and the hegemonic way. Yoshida, like Mencius, did not give high credit to hegemons even though some brought peace to the state. He condemned the Taira 平, the Minamoto 源, the Hōjō 北條, and the Ashikaga 足利 as “rebels (*gyakuzoku* 逆賊),” and praised Emperor Godaigo 後醍醐 (1288-1339) for carrying out the Kemmu Restoration.<sup>47</sup> Yoshida pointed out that like China, Japan also had had five authoritarian regimes in its history: the Minamoto, the Ashikaga, the Oda, the Toyotomi, and the Tokugawa. In general, he was critical of them although he gave special credit to Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534-82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536-98), and Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542-1616). In particular, he praised Hideyoshi for respecting the imperial court and expanding Japan’s territory.<sup>48</sup> In Japanese history, as Yoshida put it, the throne always belonged to the imperial family, whereas the running of the administration sometimes was entrusted to powerful families.

In Japan, the nation belongs to one man [the emperor] and no one should take over the throne. The Fujiwara 藤原, Taira, Minamoto, Hōjō, Nitta 新田, Ashikaga, Oda, and Toyotomi were in control of the administration for a certain period of time. They committed many mistakes, but also did some good things. The tenure of their administration was unquestionably based on whether they could do good things.<sup>49</sup>

He added that even the most ambitious people in Japanese history did not dare to take over the throne. Not a single shōgun or regent failed to show some respect to the imperial court.

The object of loyalty, in Yoshida’s mind, was always the emperor and not the shōgun. The shōgun, to him, was merely a subject of the emperor. Accordingly, the people’s support for the shōgun was conditional. If the shōgun performed his duties of revering the emperor and repelling the barbarians, the entire nation should support him. If he ignored his duties, then he should be overthrown. Thus, the idea of revolution *may be* applied to the shōgun. He gave the Tokugawa *bakufu* a clear warning: “Posts like that of shōgun are appointed by the imperial court only for those who can carry out the duties of the posts. If the shōgun shirks his duties like the Ashikaga house did, he should be

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 331-33. For discussions of the Mencian concept of revolution in the Tokugawa period, see Noguchi Takehiko, *Ōdō to kakumei no aida: Nihon shisō to Mōshi mondai* 王道と革命の間：日本思想と孟子問題 (Between the kingly way and revolution: Japanese thought and issues in the Mencius) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1986); and John Allen Tucker, “Two Mencian Political Notions in Tokugawa Japan,” *Philosophy East and West* 47.2 (April 1997): 233-53.

<sup>47</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 118, 140.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 234-35, 238, 301-02.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 330-31.

sacked immediately.”<sup>50</sup> At first, Yoshida asked the people to support and respect the shōgun who was officially appointed by the emperor. When the *bakufu* went wrong, people should try to warn it. He said: “From the daimyō to officials and commoners, we must unite to remonstrate and argue with the *bakufu*, to respect the imperial court, and to repel the barbarians.”<sup>51</sup> Anyone who failed to do this was disloyal. Obviously, the emperor instead of the shōgun was the true source of political authority. As he explained: “Up to now, we have only respected the *bakufu*. From now on, we respect the *bakufu* only because we [respect and want to] repay the imperial court.”<sup>52</sup>

As time went on, Yoshida became more radical in prison and turned to suggesting that the *bakufu* be overthrown for disobeying the imperial order to repel the Westerners. He claimed that all lands in Japan belonged to the emperor and the *bakufu* was disloyal for giving land to the Westerners without the consent of the emperor.<sup>53</sup> He even dared to question the integrity of the Tokugawa shōguns: “Although the feat of Tokugawa Ieyasu was unprecedented, he was far from perfect. His offspring became the shōguns. It goes without saying that they were not loyal. We must say that they were not even filial.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, in Yoshida’s hand, the Mencian notion of revolution killed two birds with one stone, denying it to strengthen the imperial authority and upholding it to question the legitimacy of the *bakufu*. This was a case of innovative naturalization of a Chinese political concept.

To Yoshida, *bushidō* was also evidence of the superiority of Japan’s *kokutai*. *Bushidō* teachings emphasized the absolute and unconditional loyalty of the samurai to their lords. Like other *shishi* activists, Yoshida was also imbued with the samurai spirit. His *bushidō* ideas seem to have been influenced by Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622-85), an early ideologue of *bushidō*, and his reading of the *Mencius*. Yoshida used the *Mencius* extensively to explain the way of the samurai. His pen name was *mōshi* 猛士 (fierce warrior), a homonym for *Mencius* (*Mōshi*) in Japanese. Even the characters are similar. Like Mencius, Yoshida felt that he had a sense of mission to save the nation.<sup>55</sup> The samurai spirit, he suggested, was not only for samurai, but for every Japanese. In other words, he attempted to turn samurai ethics into national ethics.

Yoshida identified death as the most important element in *bushidō*. This was perhaps the most distinctive feature of his political thought. To him, a real samurai must prepare to die for his lord at any time. Like Yamamoto Tsunetomo 山本常朝 (1659-1719), the author of the *bushidō* classic *Hagakure* 葉隠 (1716, 11 *kan*), Yoshida was obsessed with death and developed the philosophy of death to the utmost: “I studied the

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>52</sup> Naramoto Tatsuya, ed., *Yoshida Shōin shū*, p. 320.

<sup>53</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, pp. 77-78. Yoshida also attacked the *bakufu* for being arrogant and wasteful, for not using talented people, and for not reducing taxation and punishments. He quoted the *Mencius* to ask the *bakufu* and the daimyōs to carry out political, economic, and military reforms based on the politics of benevolence. Ibid., pp. 178, 242, 148-49.

<sup>54</sup> Naramoto Tatsuya, ed., *Yoshida Shōin shū*, p. 345.

<sup>55</sup> See Huber, *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan*, pp. 57-58.

martial arts of the Yamaga school when I was young, and therefore I am imbued with *bushidō*. Death is something always on my mind.”<sup>56</sup> He encouraged his cell mates and himself: “Although we are in prison and our lives may end soon, we should never forget the quality of the *shishi*.”<sup>57</sup> The term *shishi* came from the *Mencius*. Yoshida quoted the following sentence from the *Mencius* to emphasize that a *shishi* should prepare to die for the principles he believes in: “A man whose mind is set on high ideals (*shishi*) never forgets that he may end in a ditch; a man of valor never forgets that he may forfeit his head.”<sup>58</sup> Yoshida’s position is different from Mencius’s. Mencius only regarded martyrdom as the *last* recourse for fulfilling ethical ideals, but Yoshida saw it as the *necessary* recourse.

He regarded death as the fundamental principle in his teaching and stressed its importance throughout his lectures: “Undoubtedly the people of Chōshū should die for the defense of Chōshū, and the people of Japan should die for the defense of Japan. This is the number one principle in my lectures on the *Mencius*.”<sup>59</sup> He glorified death as a fulfillment of loyalty which could give the nation the spiritual strength to repel the barbarians: “If retainers are willing to die for the emperor, and sons are willing to die for their father, we do not have to be afraid of the barbarians.”<sup>60</sup> “If everyone from the shōgun and daimyōs to the senior ministers in the *bakufu* and the retainers in the domains is willing to sacrifice his life for the nation, there is no reason why we cannot repel the barbarians.”<sup>61</sup> He blamed the retainers of the *bakufu* and domains for inviting foreign invasion, because they did not want to die for the nation. In Yoshida’s explanation of the Mencian notion of “correcting one’s mind (*cheng-hsin* 正心),” he noted: “In recent years, we have done a lot of things in front of the foreign barbarians to harm our national polity. The reason is that the retainers and samurai of the *bakufu* and domains do not correct their minds and do not die for the nation.”<sup>62</sup>

Yoshida planned for his own martyrdom in order to fulfill *bushidō* and to awaken the nation.<sup>63</sup> In his last imprisonment in 1859, shortly before his execution, he quoted the *Mencius* to tell his students of his determination to die for the nation.

[The *Mencius* states:] “Never has there been one possessed of complete sincerity who did not move others.” I studied [the *Mencius*] for twenty years from childhood until now, and yet I did not understand the meaning of this passage. Now, I am going to Edo to receive punishment and will experience this passage with my own body. I do not worry if I will

<sup>56</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 339.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101. The translation is modified from D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 106.

<sup>59</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 336.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>63</sup> The *bakufu* at first had no plan to execute him, but Yoshida revealed his plot to assassinate *bakufu* officials. See Albert Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 162.

lose my life.<sup>64</sup>

This statement was Yoshida's lifetime motto, and he quoted it many times on different occasions.<sup>65</sup> Sincerity (*makoto* 誠), a key concept in both Shinto and Confucianism, had special place in his thought and action. This contributed to a kind of romanticism and moralism which only concerned one's internal principle and will.

Besides the philosophy of death, Yoshida used the *Mencius* to explain other elements in *bushidō*. First, a samurai must have a constant heart for righteousness. The *Mencius* reads: "Only the gentleman [official] can have a constant heart in spite of a lack of constant means of support."<sup>66</sup> It also suggests that the gentleman will not get addicted to pleasure in good times, will not change his goal in poverty, and will not bend under military pressure. Yoshida believed that these ideals were also applicable to the Japanese samurai. He said if a samurai could suffer from hunger or even face death without losing his constant heart for righteousness, Japan would fill with spiritual and moral force and could be saved from foreign invasion.<sup>67</sup> Second, a samurai acts according to the principles of loyalty and filial piety, whereas an ordinary person acts according to profit. A samurai seeks the interest of the nation and his lord, but an ordinary person only cares about his own interest. Third, a samurai has a sense of shame: "Samurai in my country talk about shame frequently. Nothing is more shameful than not knowing shame. More than ever before, many present-day samurai do not have the sense of shame. In order to revive the way of the warrior (*budō* 武道), we must first revive the concept of shame."<sup>68</sup>

In brief, Yoshida's political thought, as seen from his *Kō-Mō yowa*, was radical, sensational, eclectic, loosely-organized, and sometimes inconsistent. Among popular readings for *shishi*, the *Kō-Mō yowa* was not as well-written and systematic as the *Shinron* and not as scholarly and ambitious as the *Dai Nihon shi*. Its ideas were not original and most were very close to those of the Mito school and *kokugaku*, representing attitudes and ideas that were prevalent among late Tokugawa activists.

In the late-Tokugawa period, different Confucian elements were incorporated into a developing conservative ideology. The *Mencius* was only one such element. It was, however, not the original teaching of the *Mencius*, but its Japanese interpretation which had an impact on late-Tokugawa politics. As the *Mencius* itself is fairly liberal and open, in the making of a late-Tokugawa royalist and conservative ideology, a large part of its

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<sup>64</sup> Modified from Harry Harootunian, *Toward Restoration* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 232. Yoshida repeated this view in his *Ryūkon roku* 留魂録 (Record of an everlasting spirit, 1859). See *Yoshida Shōin: Forerunner of the Meiji Restoration*, p. 120.

<sup>65</sup> See Matsumoto Sannosuke, "Shisōka to shite no Yoshida Shōin" 思想家としての吉田松陰 (Yoshida Shōin as a thinker), in his *Nihon no meicho*, Vol. 31, *Yoshida Shōin*, p. 8; and Chō Subai 暢素梅, "Yoshida Shōin no ningenron" 吉田松陰の人間論 (Yoshida Shōin's view of humanity), in *Kikan Nihon shisō shi* 季刊日本思想史 44 (1992): 104-26.

<sup>66</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, p. 36. Modified from D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius*, p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> Hirose Yutaka, ed., *Kō-Mō yowa*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.



teaching was reinterpreted and distorted. In this process, Chinese political thought was naturalized and became distinctly Japanese. Yoshida's *Kō-Mō yowa* should be understood in this political and intellectual context.

### The *Kō-Mō yowa* in the Meiji Restoration and Prewar Conservatism

Yoshida was perhaps the most influential of *shishi* thinkers.<sup>69</sup> His images had undergone several changes before the war. Yoshida was regarded as a leading Restorationist ideologue and a great revolutionary thinker in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods. From the late Meiji to the end of the Second World War, he was used to advocate the emperor-state ideology and other nationalist ideas.

From the *Kō-Mō yowa*, we can conclude that Yoshida was neither a creative nor a systematic thinker. He only repeated ideas of the Mito school, ancient learning, national learning, and the Ansai school. His ideas were extreme, confrontational, and eclectic. Nevertheless, his nationalist ideas, such as absolute loyalty, *bushidō*, emperor-state ideology, *kokutai*, and imperialism, had a strong impact on late Meiji conservatism and pre-war Japanese militarism. Unlike other *shishi* leaders, such as Sakamoto Ryōma 坂本龍馬 (1835-67), Saigō Takamori 西郷隆盛 (1827-77), and Yokoi Shōnan 横井小楠 (1809-69), Yoshida did not have a blueprint for the new Japan. Hence, he should be given credit only for contributing to the Meiji Restoration and not to Meiji reforms. He had little to do with Westernization, although he wanted to go to the United States and approved of people studying Western science and technology.

Yoshida's interpretation of the *Mencius* exerted a considerable impact on late Tokugawa and pre-war political thought. His work was influential in the late-Tokugawa period not because of its scholarship but because its provocative ideas fit the intellectual needs of the times. People wanted to know what went wrong and what they should do to save the nation. The *Kō-Mō yowa* provided a clear answer and solution: the *bakufu* should be held responsible for not carrying out the imperial order to repel the Westerners. His words are forceful, sensational, critical, and penetrating, and they touched the hearts of many late-Tokugawa Japanese. His death made him a legend and drew more attention to his writings.

The *Kō-Mō yowa* was not only a popular book in the last years of the Tokugawa period, it was also the main textbook used at his private academy, *Shōka sonjuku* 松下村塾 (village school under the pine tree). After his release in 1856, Yoshida founded this private academy to continue his lectures on the *Mencius*. During this time, he organized the lectures he gave during his imprisonment and compiled them as the *Kō-Mō yowa*. His students, including royalists and forerunners of the Meiji Restoration (Kusaka Genzui 久坂玄瑞, 1840-64, Takasugi Shinsaku 高杉晉作, 1839-67, and Maebara Issei 前原一誠, 1834-76) and Meiji leaders (Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文, 1841-1909, Shinagawa Yajirō 品川彌而郎, 1843-1900, Kido Takayoshi 木戸孝允, 1833-77, and Yamagata Aritomo 山縣有朋, 1838-1922), were all familiar with this work. Undoubtedly, it might have exerted a considerable impact on the thought and action of

<sup>69</sup> Albert Craig believes that, more than any other figure, Yoshida was responsible for the formation of *sonnō* ideology. See his *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*, p. 162.

these late-Tokugawa royalists and Meiji leaders. However, the intellectual gap between Yoshida and his students was wide. For Meiji leaders like Itō and Yamagata, they were influenced more by Yoshida's nationalist and royalist spirit than by his radical and extremist ideas and actions.

The *Kō-Mō yowa* was not a faithful commentary on the *Mencius*. Yoshida only used the *Mencius* to promote his own ideas. This was perhaps an unwise decision, because in so many ways the *Mencius* stands for opposite political values. The *Mencius*, by traditional standards, contains many liberal and humanistic ideas and has had a liberalizing effect on East Asian political thought. Using it to advocate conservative ideas was not easy. That was why Yoshida was inconsistent in his critique of the text. While supporting some of its ideas, Yoshida attacked those liberal and humanistic aspects of the *Mencius*. In his explanation of the *Mencius*, Yoshida made major modifications to pursue his own political agenda. He upheld the distinction between the kingly way and the hegemonic way, but added that true kings were determined by blood. Yoshida developed the way of gentleman in the *Mencius* into *bushidō*, stressing that death was a necessary and not last recourse. He condemned the Mencian ideas of reciprocity in the emperor-subject relationship and revolution to construct his nationalist ideology.

There was a Chinese Mencius versus Japanese Mencius scenario in modern Japan. Relatively speaking, the Chinese Mencius is liberal, open, and humanistic, whereas the Japanese Mencius is conservative, radical, and feudalistic. Due to the basic differences between the *Mencius* and the *Kō-Mō yowa*, they were used by different people in modern Japan to advocate opposite values. Westernizers used the *Mencius* to justify Western ideas. For instance, Nakae Chōmin 中江兆民 (1847-1901), a champion of Western philosophy in the Meiji period, found the Western political ideas of liberty, equality, and democracy in the *Mencius*. Mencian political ideas also gave people the strength to demand their rights and to confront the government during the People's Rights Movement in the mid-Meiji period. Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1878-1933), the spokesman for "Taishō democracy," cited the *Mencius* to uphold the ideal that politics should be for the sake of the people. Uno Tetsuto 宇野哲人 (1875-1974), a specialist in Chinese philosophy, in his writings in the Taishō period mentioned that the *Mencius* contains the elements of freedom and equality.

By contrast, the *Kō-Mō yowa* was used by conservatives and militarists to promote emperor-state ideology. Passages and ideas from the *Kō-Mō yowa* were included in the official textbooks for ethics and national history for elementary schools in the early Shōwa period.<sup>70</sup> Ōba Osamu 大庭脩, a scholar of Sino-Japanese relations, remembers that during the wartime, he was drawn by an interest in history into a study group to read the *Kō-Mō yowa*.<sup>71</sup> However, prewar cultural conservatives and the government only promoted the *Kō-Mō yowa* and not the *Mencius*. They even took a critical stance toward the *Mencius*. For instance, in the early Shōwa period (1926-45), conservative scholars, such as Shionoya On 鹽谷溫 (1878-1962) and Nakamura

<sup>70</sup> Tanaka Akira 田中彰, "Yoshida Shōin zō no henshen" 吉田松陰像の変遷 (Changes in the image of Yoshida Shōin), in *Nihon no meicho*, Vol. 31, *Yoshida Shōin*, pp. 39-43.

<sup>71</sup> *Edo jindai no Nit-Chū hiwa*, p. 14.

Kyūshirō 中村九四郎, attacked the Mencian theory of revolution.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the *Mencius* was remade in Japan. From the late Meiji to the early Shōwa period, the official ideology embraced only the Japanese or Yoshida's interpretation of the *Mencius*, but rejected that of the original Chinese. The Japanese *Mencius* was much more influential than the Chinese *Mencius*. Hence, when we discuss the role of the *Mencius* in the Meiji Restoration, we should know that they were two *Menciuses* in modern Japan. It was the Japanese *Mencius*, not the Chinese *Mencius*, which had a strong impact on the Meiji Restoration and prewar political ideology.

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<sup>72</sup> See Smith, *Confucianism in Modern Japan*, pp. 141-56.