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Chun-chieh Huang

East Asian Confucianisms

Texts in Contexts

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Contents

Preface	7
Prologue	9
Part I New Perspectives on East Asian Confucianisms	
Introduction	23
Chapter One: On the Relationship between Interpretations of the Confucian Classics and Political Power in East Asia: An Inquiry into the <i>Analects</i> and <i>Mencius</i>	25
Chapter Two: On the “Contextual Turn” in the Tokugawa Japanese Interpretation of the Confucian Classics: Types and Problems	41
Chapter Three: East Asian Conceptions of the Public and Private Realms	57
Chapter Four: The Role of <i>Dasan</i> Learning in the Making of East Asian Confucianisms: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective	81
Part II Confucian Texts in East Asian Contexts	
Introduction	93
Chapter Five: Zhu Xi’s Comments on <i>Analects</i> 4.15 and 15.3, and His Critics: A Historical Perspective	97
Chapter Six: The Reception and Reinterpretation of Zhu Xi’s <i>Treatise on Humanity</i> in Tokugawa Japan	113

Chapter Seven: The Confucian World of Thought in Eighteenth-Century East Asia: A Comparative Perspective	131
Chapter Eight: Itō Jinsai on the <i>Analects</i>	149
Chapter Nine: Shibusawa Ēichi on the <i>Analects</i>	175
Chapter Ten: What is Ignored in Itō Jinsai's Interpretation of Mencius?	187
Chapter Eleven: Yamada Hōkoku on Mencius' Theory of Nurturing Qi: A Historical Perspective	199
Chapter Twelve: The Idea of <i>Zhongguo</i> and Its Transformation in the Contexts of Early Modern Japan and Contemporary Taiwan	215
Epilogue	225
Appendix: Some Observations on the Study of the History of Cultural Interactions in East Asia	237
Indexes	
Bibliography	263
Index of Names	285
Index of Terms	291
Endorsement	297

Preface

Over the long span of history, Confucian texts travelled across every country and region in East Asia. The vitality and openness of Confucian texts inspired the curiosity of readers in each country and invited those readers to engage in creative dialogue with the texts. Through the continuing intellectual and spiritual conversation among Confucian scholars, a Confucian community was created. This volume tells the story of the importance of the Confucian traditions and why and how Confucian texts were reinterpreted within the different ambiances and contexts of East Asia. Therefore, we will discover that “East Asian Confucianisms” is an intellectual community that is transnational and multi-lingual. It evolved in interaction between Confucian “universal values” and the local conditions present in each East Asian country.

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Prologue

The purpose of this book is not to repeat the cliché that Confucianism is the *sine qua non* of East Asian civilization, but rather to suggest that the paradigm of “East Asian Confucianisms” can open up a brand new vista for the study of Confucian traditions in East Asia. In this prologue, I will argue that we must finally leave the ghetto of “national learning,” with its practice of holding state-centrism as the basis of Confucianism. Instead, we must reconsider the development of Confucianism in a broader East Asian perspective. By contextualizing Confucianism in East Asian cultures and societies we find ourselves in a better position to appreciate the diversity and variety of East Asian Confucian traditions.

In this prologue I will discuss the legitimacy of studying “East Asian Confucianisms,” and the promise that this new field of study holds. I will engage with the twentieth-century Japanese scholar Tsuda Sōkichi (津田左右吉, 1873–1961), particularly his doubts on the validity of the concept of “East Asian Civilization.” I shall also confirm “East Asian Confucianisms” as a valid new field of study with a rich and distinct “unity in diversity.” Moreover, I shall suggest that seeing Confucianism in the wide, East Asian perspective opens up a novel vista for future investigations and leads us to new and as yet undiscovered questions.

1 The possibility

If we are to discuss the legitimacy of “East Asian Confucianisms” as a field of study, then we must begin with Tsuda Sōkichi’s objection to the idea of “East Asian civilization.” A guiding thread in Tsuda’s enormous scholarship is the idea of the absolute difference between Japanese and Chinese culture. If this were true, the concepts of “East Asian Civilization” and “East Asian Spirit” would exist only within our cultural imagination.

Tsuda insisted that the Japanese lifestyle differs completely from that of the Chinese, especially in clan and social organization, political style and customs.

He saw nothing in common between Japan and China, claiming that the two differ in ethnicity, language, and even species. Differences in regional conditions, and in geographic, climatic, and other causes also led to differences between the clothing, food, shelter and social psychology of these two peoples. Quoting Sakuma Shōzan (佐久間象山, 1811–1864), a nineteenth-century Japanese thinker and a scholar of military learning, he argues that the expression “East Asia” only gained general cultural currency during the nineteenth century. In fact, there was nothing substantial to the concept of “East Asia.”¹

Were we to survey all these points, we would find that certain features of Tsuda’s intellectual background inclined him to deny the idea of an encompassing East Asian Civilization. He was a strong supporter of the Meiji regime’s new culture, and openly disdained Chinese culture. His writings clearly conveyed this stance and repeatedly stressed the gap between these two cultures. However, as his contemporary Sinologist Masubuchi Tatsuo (増淵龍夫, 1916–1983) has pointed out, Tsuda’s critique of Chinese culture reflected an outsider’s perspective, without any sympathetic understanding of China.² Tsuda lived in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, a period when Japan was undergoing radical modernization and a progression toward militarism. It is hardly surprising that Tsuda was deeply influenced by the views of his time.

The renowned Sinologist Naitō Konan (内藤湖南, 1866–1934) affirmed that East Asian history had been formed and conditioned by Chinese culture. Yet he stressed only what he thought to be the advanced features of that culture.³ When he traveled to China, he often felt uncomfortable with its people and customs, even distressed by their apparent barbarism.⁴ Having embraced this sense of Japanese superiority, he felt very out of place when visiting the new Japanese colony of Taiwan and argued that the Taiwanese did not deserve equal rights under the Japanese Empire.⁵

Slightly earlier, Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉, 1834–1901), a pivotal architect of modern Japan, stated in one of his influential works that the Western powers represented the epitome of progress. He believed the European powers and America were the most civilized, followed by the half-developed Asian Turkey,

1 Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉, *Tsuda Sōkichi zenshū* 津田左右吉全集 [Complete Works of Tsuda Sōkichi] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1965), vol. 20, p. 195, pp. 302–3.

2 Masubuchi Tatsuo 増淵龍夫, “Nihon no kindai shigakushi niokeru Chūgoku to Nihon: Tsuda Sōkichi no ba’ai 日本近代史学史における中国と日本：津田左右吉の場合 [China and Japan in the History of Historiography of Modern Japan],” in his *Rekishika no Dōjidaishi teki Kōsatsu ni tsuite* 歴史家の同時代史的考察について [A Historian’s Observation of Contemporary History] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1983), pp. 3–48.

3 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, *Naitō Konan zenshū* 内藤湖南全集 [Complete Works of Naitō Konan] (Tokyo: Chikuma shoten, 1944), vol. 1, p. 9.

4 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 75.

5 Ibid., pp. 394–6.

China, and Japan, with the barbaric African and Australian nations last. In addition to this classification, he thought that China had regressed in the evolutionary stages of civilization.⁶

This predilection for worshipping the West and looking down on Asian cultures (especially Chinese) was characteristic of thought in a Japan that had just completed the Meiji modernization. By drawing a firm line between Japan and China, Tsuda not only exposed his scorn for China, but also reflected the zeitgeist of his age.

Nevertheless, Tsuda's critique of the concept of East Asian Civilization offers some methodological suggestions for the possibility of "East Asian Confucianisms" and hints at a kind of methodological individualism. For Tsuda, general "East Asian Confucianisms" do not exist. What does exist are particular entities with unique features, such as Chinese Confucianism, Japanese Confucianism, and Korean Confucianism. Thus, comprehensive "East Asian Confucianisms" exist only when we can see and examine Confucianism in each of these cultures.

2 The rationale

2.1 East Asian Confucianisms as a reality of history

The rationale for proposing East Asian Confucianisms as a field of study is twofold. On the one hand, "East Asian Confucianisms" embraces the Confucian traditions of China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. On the other hand, the varied Confucian traditions in these cultures did not form a mechanical assemblage, but rather a comprehensive, developing, and systematic whole.

"East Asian Confucianisms" displays a genetic developmental interconnectedness. It is well known that Confucianism originated in Shandong, China, two thousand years ago. By the sixteenth century it had spread to Japan across the vital bridge of Korea and taken up a major place in Japan's philosophical mainstream. During the Tokugawa period, the Japanese Zhu Xi (朱熹, Huian, 晦庵, 1130–1200) school of Confucianism began to take shape. This was largely due to the great influence of Zhu Xi studies in Joseon (1391–1910) Korea, especially in the writings of the Korean scholar Yi Toegye (李退溪, 1501–1570), most of whose works were also published in Japan. Later, a Ming (1368–1644) scholar Luo Qinshun (羅欽順, 1466–1547) revised Zhu Xi's philosophy in his *Kunzhiji* (困知記, *Knowledge Acquired through Adversity*). This book had a profound impact on

6 Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉, *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* 文明論の概略 [Introduction to the Theory of Civilizations] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1997), pp. 25–55.

the Tokugawa world of thought. Luo's book was printed in Japan on the basis of the Korean version.⁷

Apart from journeying across the Korean peninsula, Chinese Confucian classics also reached Japan directly by sea. Chinese classics began to appear in Japan from the ninth century, and by the nineteenth century seventy to eighty percent of the Chinese classics could be found there. In addition to the classics, Japanese thought and culture were also greatly influenced by other Chinese publications such as histories and biographies, local gazettes and law books.⁸

In the historical development of East Asian Confucianisms, many classics and the ideas therein were transmitted from China to Korea and then Japan, like expanding ripples on a pond, creating developmental inter-connectedness.

By the same token, Confucianism throughout East Asia exhibits a similar structural pattern. Despite the fact that Confucianism in China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan displays regional features, Confucians in these different places read the same Confucian classics, such as the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. They all came to ponder the core ideas of the Confucian tradition, reflecting on what Confucius meant when he said "A single thread connects my Way" (*Analects* 4.15, 15.3) or "At fifty, I comprehended the mandate of Heaven" (*Analects* 2.4) etc. Yet Confucian scholars of different regions promoted their own site-specific interpretations of the Confucian traditions.

All such problems constitute a series of questions commonly shared by East Asian Confucians. Consequently, a Confucian system of thought with East Asian characteristics came to emerge and exhibit a set of "family resemblances," which can aptly be termed "East Asian Confucianisms." Such a Confucian family of ideas and problems conveys the sense that East Asian Confucianisms form a *system* of thought.

7 Abe Yoshio 阿部吉雄, *Nihon Shushigaku to Chōsen* 日本朱子学と朝鮮 [Japanese Zhu Xi School of Neo-Confucianism and Korea] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku shuppankai, 1965, 1975), p. 19.

8 Yian Shaodang 嚴紹璁, ed., *Riben cang Songren wenji shanben gouchen* 日本藏宋人文集善本鈎沉 [Selections of the Rare Editions of the Literary Works of Song Literati Preserved in Japan] (Hangzhou: Hangzhou University Press, 1996), pp. 1–2; Ōba Ōsamu 大庭脩, Qi Yinping 戚印平, trans., *Jianghu shidai Zhongguo dianji liubo Riben zhi yanjiu* 江戸時代中國典籍流播日本之研究 [A Study of the Dissemination of Chinese Texts in Tokugawa Japan] (Hangzhou: Hangzhou University Press, 1998).

2.2 East Asian Confucianisms as the method of the humanities

To characterize the genetic progression of East Asian Confucianisms as the outward spread of ripples which led to a simultaneous developmental and systematic comprehensiveness would leave us under the impression that Chinese Confucianism is the core or center, and Confucian ideas in other places merely peripheral.

Koyasu Nobukuni (子安宣邦, 1933–) recently called into question this impression. He noted that such a view would propagate a political center–periphery dichotomy and cultural origin–reception tension. Such a view would amount to an intellectual version of pre-modern Chinese imperialism.⁹ The ripple effect is one that sends forth Chinese cultural chauvinism. And indeed Koyasu’s doubts are absolutely correct. The monistic approach which would take China’s Confucian tradition as the central culture would mean adopting as the basis of our developmental explanation the civilized–barbaric distinction embraced by the Chinese hegemony. It is little wonder that Tsuda despised China with his Japan-centrism and Japanese chauvinism in return.

China’s cultural egocentrism has been deep-rooted. Its imperial rulers thought they were the center of the world and they looked down on the peoples of the surrounding “barbarian” lands. According to Wang Ermin (王爾敏, 1927–), the term *Zhongguo* (中國, central state or middle kingdom) was used in several senses in the pre-Qin classics, usually involving a center–border outlook, thus suggesting that the Chinese monistic cultural outlook was formed very early indeed.¹⁰ However, as I shall argue in chapter 10, some Japanese intellectuals of the seventeenth century took *Zhongguo* to refer to their own homeland, Japan, since they felt Japan had been imbued with the Way of Confucius and the authentic spirit of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* more adequately than had China. Moreover, the concept of *Zhongguo* in the contemporary Taiwanese worldview can be divided into a cultural China and political China. While these two elements are not completely cut off from one another, there is a degree of tension and struggle between them.

9 Koyasu Nobukuni 子安宣邦, *Ajia wa dō katararete kita ka – Kindai Nihon no orientarizumu* 「アジア」はどう語られてきたか – 近代日本のオリエンタリズム [How can Asia be discussed? Orientalism in Modern Japan] (Tokyo: Fujiwara shoten, 2003), pp. 171–98.

10 Wang Ermin 王爾敏, “‘Zhongguo’ mingcheng suoyuan jiqi jindai quanshi 「中國」名稱溯源及其近代詮釋 [The Origin of ‘China’ and its Interpretation in Modern Times],” in *Zhongguo jindai sixiang shilun* 中國近代思想史論 [Essays on Modern Chinese Intellectual History] (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1977), pp. 441–80. Cf. Michael Loewe, “The Heritage Left to the Empires,” in Michael Loewe, Edward I. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 992–5.

This monistic, Sino-centric, political-cultural solipsism¹¹ should have collapsed together with the downfall of the Qing Empire (1644–1911). After all, the new cultural-political orders of the twenty-first century were formed with the strong affirmation of cultural pluralism, on which “East Asian Confucianisms” is espoused in Taiwan today. Acknowledging the varied Confucian traditions in East Asia – as manifested in China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan – we see that Confucianism in each place expresses its own particular strengths, weaknesses, and its rich multi-faceted contents.

Nevertheless, while each regional version of Confucianism responds to the specific features and requirements of that locale, there is a clear commonality within their visible diversities. That is, Confucians of different places still pay the same respect to Confucius (551–479 BCE) and Mencius (371–289 BCE) as did their spiritual forebears. Their specific needs and requirements respond to the classics, thereby opening up a new vista of Confucian interpretation, constructing localized Confucianism reflective of their region’s specific ethos. In short, the significant commonality of East Asian Confucianisms is this “plurality.” Thus the common framework of the Confucian traditions need not foster cultural monism but can provide a prism that highlights the rich diversity of East Asian cultures.

Viewing “East Asian Confucianisms” in this way makes the study of this field an example of the “method”¹² used in studying the humanities. When studying “East Asian Confucianisms” as a historical reality, we must avoid the trap of taking China to be the center. Rather we should see the concept of “East Asian Confucianisms” as a “method” that illuminates concrete processes whereby the so-called peripheries form their own respective versions of Confucianism.

Interpreted in this sense, Confucianism becomes a parameter for the formation of the *subjectivities* of each and every East Asian region. What is important to observe here is the *process* by which such specific subjectivity is constructed, be it in Japan or Korea, *not* the “authenticity” or “orthodoxy” of a specific regional Confucianism. “East Asian Confucianisms” are not something ready-cast, nor a frame of thought that exists above the concrete process of the development of Confucianisms in Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Rather it exists only in the interactive formations among East Asian regions, including China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

11 John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1; Lien-sheng Yang, “Historical Notes on the Chinese World Order,” in Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order*, p. 20.

12 For reflections on Asia as “method,” see Takeuchi Yoshimi 竹内好, “Hōhō toshite no Ajia 方法としてのアジア [Asia as Method],” in *Takeuchi Yoshimi zenshū* 竹内好全集 [Complete Works of Takeuchi Yoshimi] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1981), vol. 5, esp. 114–15.

3 The aspects and configurations of the problem

The view that East Asian Confucianisms reflect the diversity of regional characteristics, and that its comprehensive integrity is not a mechanical assemblage of regional Confucian traditions but rather some overall family resemblances in thinking, leads us to face certain challenges. Let us look here at the legitimized field of “East Asian Confucianisms,” and the new inquiries and points of significance that it raises.

One repercussion of the novel view mentioned above regards Chinese Confucianism itself. If we were to consider the study of Confucianism only in the context of Chinese history (even going to the effort of detailing all the changes and differences among the various dynasties and movements, such as Han Confucianism, Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, Qing Confucianism, etc.), then our view would still be filtered through the official system of examination and its related educational channels. “Chinese Confucianism” would have remained closely tied to the Chinese imperial order, which functioned as the principal platform for its dissemination.

Under Chinese imperial order, such Confucian values could not have produced any tensions between political and cultural identity. And in fact traditionally China strongly promulgated sociopolitical monism, to the extent that the orientations of that value themselves exhibited a high degree of uniformity.¹³ The influence of an overall imperial monism ensured that political and cultural identity remained tightly fused across two thousand years of Chinese imperial dynasties.

Even exiled Chinese Confucians have displayed such a unity of political and cultural identity. Zhu Shunshui (朱舜水, 1600 – 1682), an exiled Confucian of the late-Ming and early-Qing, is a prime example. In 1659, just after the fall of the Ming (1368 – 1644) and rise of the Qing (1644 – 1912) empires, Zhu left for Japan, where he sought military support to restore the Ming dynasty. Recognizing the Ming reign as the political identity, Zhu supposed that political authority was rooted in culture. He wrote to a Japanese friend, lamenting that “recently the Chinese empire fell because it had abandoned the teachings of the sages and rushed to open the competitive road of profit.”¹⁴ Staying in Japan for twenty-two

13 Cf. Donald W. Treagold, *The West in Russia and China: Religious and Secular Thought in Modern Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), vol. 1, xxii.

14 Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水, *Zhu Shunshui ji* 朱舜水集 [Collected Essays of Zhu Shunshui] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), vol. 7, p. 182. Cf. my “Lun dongya yimin ruzhe de liangge liangnanshi 論東亞遺民儒者的兩個兩難式 [On the Two Predicaments in Confucianism as Formulated by the Leftover Subjects in East Asia],” *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 3/1 (June, 2006): pp. 61–80, and my *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010), pp. 62–3.