

Japanese Reinterpretations of Confucianism: Itō Jinsai and His Project¹

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Abstract

This article aims to introduce the study of Itō Jinsai from the point of view of the value of his Confucian interpretations within the context of the project of Confucian ethics—in other words, trying to ascertain in what ways Jinsai's project can help facilitate the study of Confucian ethics beyond the realm of intellectual history in the global context of the 21st century. It is imperative to allow Jinsai's notions, as much as possible, to speak for themselves; but it is also of great importance to first place Jinsai within his own time and inside the intellectual space in which he formulated his ideas. A number of scholarly sources will be considered, with the intention of illuminating Jinsai's work from a few different angles.

Keywords: Itō Jinsai, Japanese Confucianism, traditional Japanese philosophy, ethics

Japonske reinterpretacije konfucijanstva: Itō Jinsai in njegov projekt

Izvleček

Članek je uvod v študij Itōja Jinsajja z vidika vrednosti njegovih konfucijanskih interpretacij v kontekstu projekta konfucijanske etike – z drugimi besedami, ugotoviti poskuša, kako lahko Jinsajev projekt pripomore k študiju konfucijanske etike onkraj intelektualne zgodovine, v globalnem kontekstu 21. stoletja. Jinsajevim pojmom moramo nujno dovoliti, da spregovorijo sami zase; vendar pa je zelo pomembno, da Jinsajija najprej umeštimo v njegov čas in intelektualni prostor, v katerem je osnoval svoje ideje. Upoštevani so različni akademski viri, s katerimi avtor Jinsajevega delo osvetli z več različnih zornih kotov.

Ključne besede: Itō Jinsai, japonski konfucianizem, tradicionalna japonska filozofija, etika

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Introduction

As will be developed in the present article, a study of Jinsai's life and works shows that Jinsai's views on the *Analects* and the Confucian Way, though sometimes presented in a radical fashion, did not come about abruptly and were not based solely in doctrinal objections. Jinsai in fact worked his way diligently as a student—from studying the Neo-Confucian thought of the Cheng-Zhu School, to trying to find solutions to his personal crisis in both Buddhism and Daoism; through a slow disillusionment with Neo-Confucian concepts of both the Cheng-Zhu as well as the Yang Wangming School, and in the end settling on thoroughly analyzing the Four Books themselves, especially the *Analects* and *Mencius*.

The present article therefore aims to argue that while Jinsai's position may have first been based on certain textual concerns, his attitudes towards the “heterodoxies” of Buddhism and Daoism were developed both concurrently with his philosophical ideas as well as his ideas on proper ethical practice; and that while the latter was perhaps his more enduring motivation for the critique of Neo-Confucian thought, it may actually have been necessitated by his search for a universally valid Confucian ethics, based on the secular and every-day experience of the people.

As different scholars of Jinsai also stress different features of his work, a study of different scholarly sources should help illuminate as many aspects of Jinsai's thought as possible.

Itō Jinsai as Kogakuha 古学派 (The School of Ancient Learning)

It is usual in Japanese historiography to categorize the scholars of the Edo period, who identified themselves as Confucians, into three factions: *Shushigaku* 朱子学 (Zhu Xi Learning), *Yōmeigaku* 陽明学 (Wang Yangming Learning) and *Kogaku* 古学 (Ancient Learning). In this triad Jinsai is seen as belonging to the Ancient Learning faction of Japanese Confucian scholars—a group, whose best-known members also include Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685) and Ogyū Sorai 萩生徂徠 (1666–1728).

Kiri Paramore notes that these categories were seldom applied strictly in the historical reality of the Tokugawa period, but that they became reified by historians of the 20th century, notably Inoue Tetsujirō and Maruyama Masao (Paramore 2016, 194, note 2)—by focusing mostly on the ideas of different Confucian-identified figures of the time. He also notes that while there is some utility to such an approach as a means of linking different trends in Japanese Confucianism to continental trends, analyzing the relationships between different interpretations

of Tokugawa Confucianism only through these kinds of categorizations occludes many of the most socially and culturally significant aspects of Confucianism's legacy in Japan (*ibid.*, 43).

Maruyama Masao 丸山真男, who as mentioned above helped popularize such categorizations, admits in his "Author's Introduction" to Mikiso Hane's translation of *Studies in Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (1974) that his original essays were flawed in many ways, especially in not taking into account important distinctions between the Japanese and the Chinese schools, as well as ignoring important influences like Korean Neo-Confucianism² (Maruyama 1974, xxxiv–xxxv). Another problem of categorization for this thesis comes from the criteria used. While Sokō, Jinsai and Sorai might all have been critical of what they perceived as the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy through the lens of returning to the classical Chinese texts, their ideas were hardly identical in their intentions and consequences; nor where the texts to which they ascribed authority the same. Jinsai, for example, never wrote of Sokō's work and while Sorai did write of Jinsai's, it was mostly to criticize him harshly.

Another approach, taken by Paramore himself, is also possible: that instead of focusing on the *differences of thought* of the different factions, he tries to identify *similarities in practice*. He argues that "despite coming from a range of different intellectual schools of Confucianism, and disagreeing with each other on many theoretical issues, in terms of practice, context, and sociality, the Way of Heaven teachings, and the Confucianism of all these figures shared (...) similarities" (Paramore 2016, 44)³. But among the figures Paramore goes on to discuss in more detail, Itō Jinsai is notably absent.

As Jinsai was not a samurai and did not write directly of or to the samurai class, his ethics are presented in universal terms, with indirect political messages. John Allen Tucker sees this as being representative of a worldview belonging to the Edo period townspeople (*chōnin* 町人) class, which was by necessity more inclusive and more diverse (Tucker 1998). Jinsai also does not overtly connect Confucian

2 This is also remarked upon by Tucker in Tucker (1997b, 529).

3 "1. A clear focus on Neo-Confucian practice as outlined in key texts edited by Zhu Xi in the Song, and developed through practice in Ming dynasty China: notably the "Method of the Heart" (*xin-fa*). 2. A syncretist tendency to present Neo-Confucian practice in relation to, or even as, Shintoism, Military Thought, or other indigenous-Japanese non-Buddhist traditions. 3. A vision of post-Han contemporary imperial Chinese society as a completely separate and ruptured society from the ideal historic Confucian age of Yao and Shun. 4. A related capacity to create a space for Japanese nationalist sensibilities and to criticize contemporary imperial China from a Confucian perspective. 5. Use of Neo-Confucianism to give meaning to the life of samurai in the new peaceful Tokugawa order. 6. Criticized by others as potentially or actually politically subversive." (*ibid.*)

practice to Shintoism or other indigenous-Japanese traditions—as Huang Chun-chieh notes, Jinsai's descriptions of the Confucian *dao* are turned to the everyday and the secular (Huang 2008). As Maruyama notes, Jinsai sees *Dao* as universally human, but also sees the world as historically evolved—he does not see it in a post-Golden Age time of the decline of the Way (Maruyama 1974); and it is true that Jinsai did himself keep a fairly low profile, possibly in fear of being criticized by others as potentially or actually politically subversive (Tucker 1998).

I would therefore argue that Jinsai does not fit as easily into Paramore's analysis of the commonalities of Confucian-identified thinkers in Japan. The value of both of these kinds of categorizations is thus limited in this context, and the approach I propose to take is more in line with analyzing internal similarities and differences of Jinsai's thought with the thought of those predecessors whose works he himself had engaged with, without prejudging the outcome. I also do not intend to discount different interpretations of Jinsai's own work out of hand, as they might each present important aspects of his project. I therefore merely propose to re-examine and try to synthesize these different views on Jinsai as they pertain to his philosophical work, while holding an open-minded stance on the different generalizations and categorizations already offered.

The views presented above need to be examined one by one, not to judge which of them may have had a greater influence on Jinsai, but to show that in fact Jinsai's project does in certain ways evade strict delineation. Certain aspects of Jinsai's work could thus even be called contradictory, but his project as a whole exhibits a high level of integrity.

Jinsai's Project as Facilitating the Dissolution of the Zhu Xi Mode of Thought

Maruyama Masao is widely considered as one of the most influential post-World War II Japanese scholars associated with the history of Japanese Confucianism. He was a University of Tokyo professor of political science and of history of political thought who idealized Western liberalism (Paramore 2016, 168). One of his two most famous works, *Nihon seiji shisō kennkyū* 日本政治思想研究, published in the form of short essays in the years before the war, then as a book in Japanese in 1952, later again translated as the *Studies in Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* by Mikiso Hane in 1974, describes the history of the political and philosophical role of Confucianism in early modern Japan.

Paramore notes:

Although presented (...) as a history of Confucian thought, the book's points were deeply political and present (ibid.). As Maruyama himself wrote in an introduction to a later printing, the book was his answer and resistance to the 'overcoming modernity' and 'national morality' ideologies of the wartime fascist state (Maruyama 1974, ix, xxx, xxxi). He thus used the history of Confucianism in Japan as the central plank in his argument against the fascist nationalism. (ibid.)

Maruyama's book, understood within this context, may have lost much of its original interpretative power, but even if its main premise has been shown to be based on flawed assumptions (and as already pointed out, Maruyama himself has admitted to this to a certain extent), the book can still offer insight into the specific nature of the work of different scholars presented in it. The infamous schema in which a pure version of the Zhu Xi mode of thought is transplanted to Japan, where the eventual changes in political reality bring about its dissolution—as completed by the formation of the Sorai School, its antithesis—remains always in the background of any study of Maruyama's views on the *kogaku* scholars, but I would still follow Maruyama's own line of thinking, when he writes:

From the perspective of the present day, there is room for a good deal of doubt how far the evolutionary schema implicit in the first two essays—of universal Zhu Xi type Neo-Confucian mode of thought followed by its gradual disintegration, or of a transition in emphasis from "nature" to "invention"—will actually stand up to the historical evidence. However, I like immodestly to think even if one totally discards the whole schema, several individual pieces of analysis (...) still have value as providing a basis for further research. (Maruyama 1974, xxxv)

Bearing the above in mind, I would like to set out Maruyama's specific observations of Jinsai's work.⁴ I do not argue here either for or against Maruyama's observations.

- a) Jinsai sought to purify Confucian ethical philosophy by emphasizing the normative aspects of the system (ibid., 51). His stated aim was to rescue Confucianism from its decline into a merely contemplative philosophy by reinforcing its practico-ethical character (ibid., 52).

⁴ Mikiso Hane's translation is lightly edited to better reflect my own use of the different philosophical terms in the text.

b) Jinsai made clear distinctions between categories such as the Way of Heaven (*tendō* 天道), the Way of Humanity (*rendao/jindō* 人道), the Decree of Heaven (*tainming/tenmei* 天命), structural coherence (*li/ri* 理), humaneness (*ren/jin* 仁), appropriateness (*yi/gi* 義), ritual propriety (*li/rei* 礼), wisdom (*zhi/chi* 智) and the “suchness” of things (*xing/sei* 性). He confined *yin* 隱 and *yang* 陽, as categories of the natural world, exclusively to the Way of Heaven, and humaneness and appropriateness, as moral categories, exclusively to the Way of Humanity (ibid., ed.).

c) Compared with the quiescent, rational view of nature held by the Song scholars, Jinsai’s cosmology is strongly vitalistic. Such a view inevitably led Jinsai to the denial of the supremacy of *li* 理 over *qi* 氣. For Jinsai, *li* no longer provides the link between Heaven and man; it is no more than a “physical principle” (ibid.). However, Jinsai’s criticisms of Song philosophers’ theory of *li* and *qi* did not, as is often argued, confuse the logical priority they claimed for *li* over *qi* with a temporal priority. Rather, he feared that the supremacy accorded *li* by the Zhu Xi School might go beyond a logical supremacy and become a supremacy of value (ibid., 53).

d) Only a small part of Jinsai’s overall philosophical system is concerned with his theory of the Decree of Heaven, but its importance in the intellectual structure of his philosophy cannot be ignored, as the logical origin of Jinsai’s agnostic tendencies can be traced to it (ibid., 54).

e) By insisting that “there is no way outside of the people, and no people outside of the way” (“人の外に道無く、道の外に人無し”) (Itō in Shimizu 2017, 26), Jinsai hoped to strengthen the ethical side of the Song School’s Way, which had been weakened by its extension to cover the natural world (Maruyama 1974, 55). Having broken the continuity between the Way in general and the Way of Heaven, he now made it transcend suchness (*xing/sei* 性) as well. In Jinsai’s opinion, humaneness, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom are not principles endowed upon man by birth, constituting his Original Humanness; they are ideal characteristics that men must strive to realize (ibid.).

f) However, because he respected Mencius just as much as Confucius and could not but support the former’s belief in the goodness of humanness, Jinsai, while insisting on regarding humaneness, appropriateness, ritual propriety, and wisdom as transcendental ideas, placed the “four sprouts” (*si duan* 四端) i.e., the senses of commiseration (惻隱之心), shame (羞惡之心), compliance (辭讓之心), and moral judgement (是非之心), in the realm of humanness. The four sprouts are endowed in humanness as predispositions toward the realization of the way, which has an objective and autonomous existence (ibid., 55,56; see also Hu 2021).

g) Although Jinsai emphasized the imperative character of Confucian ethics, he was not intolerant of man's natural desires. For instance, he said, "if we were to judge things in terms of ritual propriety and appropriateness, we would find that feelings (*jō* 情) conform to the way and desires (*yoku* 欲) to appropriateness. There is nothing wrong with them." (trans. Hane in Maruyama 1974, 57, ed.) ("苟しくも禮義以て之を裁することあるときは、則ち情則ちは道、欲則ちは義、何んの悪むことか之れ有らん。" (Itō in Shimizu 2017, 98)) And, though happy to remain in abject poverty all his life, also remarked:

Confucians pride themselves on showing little interest in monetary compensations and holding wealth and rank to be worth no more than dust and dirt. Society in general also respects those who hold mundane affairs in disdain and maintain an attitude of transcendence and aloofness. Both show that they are extremely ignorant of the Way. (trans. Hane in Maruyama 1974, 57)

儒者或は軒冕を錙銖にし、富實を塵芥にするを以て高しと爲、世間も亦超然遐舉、人事を蔑視するを以て至れりと爲す。皆道を知らざるの甚だしきなり。(Itō in Shimizu 2017, 45–46)

h) Jinsai said: "If the sages were born in the present age, they would rely on the common ways of today and employ methods of today" (trans. Hane in Maruyama 1974, 59) ("若し成人をして今の世に生まれしめば、亦必ず今の俗に因り、今の法を用いる" (Itō in Shimizu 2017, 109)). The emphasis on the importance of the historical development of the rites and music shows that the quiescent immobile rationalism of the Zhu Xi School had lost its hold on Jinsai's mind. Just as Jinsai the "moralist" was not moralistic, so Jinsai of the School of Ancient Learning did not believe that civilization had steadily declined since the days of the sages and that it was approaching its demise (Maruyama 1974, 59–60).

i) There are clear signs in Jinsai's thought of the disintegration of individual morality and government. For example, Jinsai said:

A scholar must of course regulate his life in terms of these ideals, but the ruler must have as his basic principle a willingness to share the good and the bad with his subjects. Of what advantage would it be for the art of government if he aimlessly studied the principle of the upright mind and sincere intentions but was unable to share the good and the bad with his subjects? (trans. Hane in Maruyama 1974, 60)

學者の如きは、固に此を以て自ら修めんばあるべからず。人君に在っては、則ち當に民と好惡を同じゅうするを以て本と爲

べし。其れ徒らに誠心誠意を知って、民と好惡を同じゅうすること能わづんば、治道に於て何んの益かあらん。(Itō in Shimizu 2017, 106)

As has been remarked, and can now be seen, Maruyama traces Jinsai's thought from the point of view of opposition to what Maruyama himself calls "the Zhu Xi mode of thought". In all these different instances he tries to show ways in which to present Jinsai as a stepping stone between the Zhu Xi School and Sorai School—between the consciousness of the "natural" and the consciousness of the "artificial", the consciousness of the "public" and the consciousness of the "personal". While these interpretations do not seem to represent wrong readings of Jinsai *per se*, the underlying thread does seem to finally overreach; and at the same time, to limit the interpretative range (as has been established).

I would also argue that reading Jinsai too strongly in relation to Sorai, while useful in certain ways, may conceal important distinctions of Jinsai's own thought in many others. As Jinsai could never answer Sorai's aggressive critique (having passed away before he could respond to the famous letter), it is hard to say how the dialogue between the two scholars would go and how the main points of disagreement would be hashed out in person. I do contend that perhaps some of the most important parts of Jinsai's work—his own brand of humanism, agnosticism, and even liberalism—cannot be given adequate attention and value by trying to show him strictly in the same intellectual movement as Sorai.

In this sense, I follow John Allen Tucker's more grounded and nuanced study.

Jinsai's Project as a Philosophical Lexicography

John Allen Tucker points out that even if it is still useful to see Jinsai as one of the *Kogaku* scholars, Maruyama's formulations of the school are in many ways overburdened and there are many links missing between different *Kogaku* scholars as presented by traditional *Kogaku* scholarship. The most persuasive link between the different *Kogaku* scholars, Tucker argues, might therefore be found in a different place: the genre of philosophical lexicography.

Tucker points out the two important figures of Chinese Neo-Confucianism, who might have had the greatest influence upon the genre as well as *Kogaku* scholars in general:

The impact of two Song Neo-Confucians, Chen Beixi 陳北溪 (1159–1223) and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1192), seems to account for the

more salient characteristics of the Japanese School of Ancient Learning.
(Tucker 1993, 701)

Rather than simply following the ideas of the Ancient Learning schools as a sort of a true anti-thesis to the Cheng-Zhu mode of thought in Japan, Tucker points to an often overlooked relationship between the works and ideas of the *Kogaku* scholars and tries to show that the *Kogaku* schools, instead of representing a real critical break with the Neo-Confucian tradition, in fact represent a sort of radical Neo-Confucian revisionism—a critical development of certain Neo-Confucian methods and ideas, which, though widely used and fitting to the circumstances of Tokugawa Japan, were not originally conceived there, but can be traced all the way back to China and to Zhu Xi's own contemporaries.

Tucker argues that philosophical lexicography, connecting the likes of Yamaga Sokō, Kaibara Ekken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714), Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai, originated with an important disciple of Zhu Xi, Chen Beixi 陳北溪 (1159–1223) and his most important work, the *Xingli ziyi* 性理字義 (*The Meaning of Neo-Confucian Terms*). Tucker argues that:

(While) Neo-Confucian texts, such as Zhu Xi's *Sishu jizhu* 四書集注 (*Commentaries on the Four Books*), had appeared in Japan several centuries before the Tokugawa period, Beixi's *Ziyi*, a brief, conceptually organized primer explaining some-twenty-five philosophical terms and/or groups of terms crucial to an elementary understanding of Neo-Confucianism, only reached Japan in the 1590s, presumably following Toyotomi Hideyoshi's (1536–1598) first Korean invasion (1592–1593). (Tucker 1993, 683–84)

By then, the *Ziyi* had been through eight different Chinese editions (ibid., 684), but the relevant version of the work, which had the most influence in Edo Japan, is the 1553 Korean edition of the text⁵. This gained widespread popularity through the work of Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657), one of the most influential Confucian teachers in the early Edo period, who also worked on providing a vernacular translation, titled *Seiri jigi genkai* 性理字義諺解 (*Vernacular Explanation of the Meaning of Neo-Confucian Terms*). By the time the latter was published, Beixi's *Ziyi* had become one of the most influential Neo-Confucian texts in early Tokugawa Japan (ibid.).

Tucker argues that without the *Ziyi* it would be impossible to imagine works such as Yamaga Sokō's *Seikyō yōroku* 聖教要錄 (*Essential Lexicography of Sagely*

5 This was itself apparently a reprint of one of the earliest (if not the earliest) editions, the so-called Yuan period 元 (1279–1368) edition (ibid.).

Confucian Teachings), Itō Jinsai's *Gomō jigi* or Ogyū Sorai's *Benmei* 辨名 (*Distinguishing Names*) (ibid., 686) and shows how the structure, methodology and certain ideas are developed within these works. Tucker also points out that even certain factual mistakes which crop up in Razan's *Genkai* can be seen reproduced in both Jinsai's as well as in Sorai's work (Tucker 1994, 76).

These similarities are not coincidental. Nor can they be explained by any other Neo-Confucian text, not to mention one with a publication record comparable to that of Beixi's *Ziyi* in seventeenth-century Tokugawa Japan. Zhu Xi's *Commentaries on the Four Books* are not arranged around the orderly, systematic discussion of the semantics of exclusively philosophical terms. Rather, Zhu's *Commentaries* follow the order of the texts—the *Great Learning*, the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*—which they explicate. Of course, the terms that Beixi discusses do crop up, here and there, in Zhu's *Commentaries*, but their various appearances provide no systematic model for the kind of ordered, lexicographical discussions found in the terminologically arranged works of Sokō, Jinsai, and Sorai. (Tucker 1993, 689)

The second thing Tucker points out about the genre of philosophical lexicography in Tokugawa Japan is that while Hayashi Razan popularized the *Xingli ziyi*, he also did it in a critical manner. His *Seiri jigi genkai* thus also contains Lu Xiangshan's critique of the notion of *wuji er taiji / mukyoku ji taikyoku* 無極而太極 ("the ultimate of non-being and the great ultimate") as a Daoist (and not a Confucian) concept. Razan presents Zhu Xi's answer to Lu Xiangshan's critique, but does not give an indication as to which of these two interpretations he thinks is the correct one, leaving it up to the reader. As neither Lu Xiangshan's critique, nor Zhu Xi's answer to it are found in Beixi's *Ziyi*, Tucker argues that:

(F)rom the start, then, Razan's brand of Neo-Confucianism (in large part expressed for the first time systematically and conceptually in the *Genkai*) projected an ambivalence wavering toward criticism of notions like the ultimate of nonbeing, notions which even in the Song had sparked debate, being deemed by thinkers like Lu as dubitable due to their heterodox origins. (ibid., 629)

Tucker demonstrates how Jinsai's own critique of Neo-Confucian terms in the *Gomō jigi* systematically appropriates both Beixi's ordering of meaning within a philosophical lexicon as well as Lu Xiangshan's critical analysis of certain Neo-Confucian notions. I therefore follow his assertion that both Chen Beixi and

Lu Xiangshan can be taken as proper influences for Jinsai and his work and so place Jinsai within a line of scholars, who—though they may not all be connected in a simple linear fashion—still share in common the methodology as well as the influence of certain ideas found in the genre of philosophical lexicography that Hayashi Razan helped to popularize.

Because of the specific juxtaposition of these influences, Tucker also does not believe that the genre was itself something limiting to the scholars working with it. He rather points out:

Conventional wisdom of course holds that lexicons limit meaning by legislating a rigid version of semantics. Yet in the first flush of unrestrained lexicography, Tokugawa philosophers revealed that through lexicography, meaning could be endlessly legislated and relegislated, established and fractured, defined and then differentiated in an asymptotic quest for final, definitive meaning. They showed that lexicography could be easily utilized by opponents of a given semantics to establish their own, opposing estimates of the meanings of words. (Tucker 1994, 77)

Tucker sees the genre itself as an inherently political Confucian project, and as the reason why in the Tokugawa period it ended up becoming a sort of an underground movement (ibid., 78). After writing his *Seikyō yoroku*, Yamaga Sokō, “who had never evinced, except in the realm of ideas, the slightest disloyalty to the Tokugawa shogunate” (ibid., 71), was exiled from the capital of Edo to the Akō domain on the orders of Hoshina Masayuki 保科正之 (1611–1673), the guardian of the shogun Ietsuna 德川家綱 (1641–1680). Hoshina subscribed to the fundamentalist school of Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闡齋 (1619–1682), whose views were antithetic to those of the *Kogaku* scholars. Ansai was considered the guardian of Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, and had by this time managed to supplant even the famous Hayashi School itself (ibid.).

It is probably for this reason that Jinsai, while he himself never did fall afoul of Tokugawa shogunate’s censors like Sokō did, did in fact refrain from publishing his most critical works while he was still alive.⁶ Jinsai’s relationship with the politics of the day for all intents and purposes remains intellectual, but it is also very clear from his writings that he had strong political views, especially supporting the politically more liberal ideas of Mencius.⁷ Jinsai’s ideas might have gotten him in trouble, if he was not such a non-openly polemic scholar and if his project had

⁶ Though a pirated version of the *Gomō jigi* did make the rounds and was the version studied by Ogyū Sorai.

⁷ See for example, Tucker (1997, 244–45).

been happening anywhere nearer to the capital city. As it was, Jinsai never ventured far outside the City of Kyōto in his life, and his political views remained in the realm of his philosophical ideas.

But Tucker argues Jinsai could not have been ignorant of the political realities of his time, and that his project also expresses his political views, which are those of a Kyōto *chōnin*.

Jinsai as a Kyōto *chōnin* Scholar

Setting out Jinsai's project as less a polemical rejection of Neo-Confucian ideas and more a critical revision of them, Tucker explores the possible socio-political and biographical elements, which may have influenced Jinsai's work. He writes:

More than any other teacher or book, Jinsai's path as a scholar-philosopher was influenced by the socio-political environment into which he was born, that of Kyoto *chōnin* in early-Tokugawa Japan. (Tucker 1998, 39)

Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 was born as Itō Genshichi 伊藤源七 on the 20th day of the seventh lunar month of Kannei 寛永 4 (August 30, 1627) in Kyōto, Japan, as the eldest son of Itō Ryōshitsu 伊藤了室 (1599–1674) and Satomura Nabe 里村那倍 in his family's residence, on the east side of the Horikawa Street. The family residence stood not far from the imperial palace grounds in north central Kyōto and would later become the place of Jinsai's own school, the Kogidō 古義堂 (Tucker 1998, 29). As John Allen Tucker notes:

(T)he proximity to the palace and the aristocratic community surrounding it facilitated for Jinsai's Kogidō (...) a following among Kyōto's social elite that few if any other Tokugawa schools, before or after, enjoyed. The Itō family was not, however, part of the old stock of Kyōto; rather they were newcomers as of the late sixteenth century. (ibid., 29)

Jinsai's grandfather, Itō Ryōkei 伊藤了慶 (1561–1615), brought scholarship into the family home, but could not interest his own children in it (Ishida 1960, 11). Ryōkei was interested in both the arts and religion, he associated with Zen Buddhists, practiced linked verse (*renga* 連歌) and pursued studies in Confucian thought. The texts that he supposedly owned included copies of important Cheng-Zhu texts, such as Zhu Xi's *Sishu* 四書 (*Commentaries to the Four Books*), Zhu Xi and Lü Zuqian's 呂祖謙 (1137–1181) *Jinsilu* 近思錄 (*Reflections of Things at Hand*) and the imperially-sponsored Ming dynasty compilation, the *Xingli*

daquan 性理大全 (*The Great Compendium on Humanness and Principle*). These were allegedly among the first works Jinsai perused in his own studies of Confucian thought (Tucker 1998, 12).

When Jinsai was born the family fortune was already declining, and Jinsai's father wanted his son to pursue medicine, which at the time was a more lucrative profession, but Jinsai's own interests lay in other areas. Tucker writes:

As a child and adolescent, Jinsai apparently circulated among Kyōto's cultural elite. Despite the low status of *chōnin* within a social system dominated by samurai, Kyōto *chōnin* were exceptions, enjoying relatively higher prestige and social standing as preservers of traditional arts, crafts, and cultural enterprises in the ancient imperial capital. Their standing was realized, however, provided that they remained in Kyōto, a world somewhat apart from the one that samurai otherwise were prone to rule more arrogantly and ruthlessly. (ibid., 32)

When he was ten years old, Jinsai began his formal education under his maternal uncle, Ōsuka Kaian 大須賀快庵, a noted physician, and was said to be impressed when introduced to the *Daxue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*) (Yamashita 1983, 456). At eighteen years old he obtained a copy of *Yanping Dawen* 延平答問 (*Dialogues with Yanping*) and is reported to have read and reread it until its pages disintegrated (ibid.). This brief work, edited by Zhu Xi, advocates the meditative practice of “quiet sitting” (*seiza* 静座), taught to Zhu Xi by Li Yanping.⁸ It is quite clear that Jinsai was at this time a student of the Cheng-Zhu School Neo-Confucianism.

Tucker also delves into other possible early textual influences. He offers speculation on Jinsai's own descriptions in the *Dōshikai hikki* 同志會筆記 (*Records of the Society of the Like-Minded Scholars*), where Jinsai describes having read the *Great Compendium on Humanness and Structural Coherence* and the *Zhuzi Yulei* 朱子語類 (*Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*) at the age of 27. Tucker also wonders whether some of those books were not in fact too hard for a beginner and whether some of the titles Jinsai describes might not be copies of other titles, including Beixi's *Xingli Ziyi* (Tucker 1998, 37). Unfortunately, Tucker has to in the end admit that the question of when Jinsai first read the *Ziyi* remains unresolved (ibid.).

⁸ John Jorgensen discusses Li Yanping as having “taught a method for the realization of the singular pattern or coherence inherent in all divergent particulars, thus underscoring the value and worth of phenomenal reality. (...) Li advocated that students could gradually come to empathize with other things (and perceive coherence thereby) in the daily functions of life *via* quiet sitting and cleansing the mind” (Jorgensen 2018, 44).

Some biographers speculate that Jinsai attended lectures by Matsunaga Sekigo 松永尺五 (1592–1657), the Kyoto-based Neo-Confucian successor of Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窓 (1561–1619) and at one time the teacher of Jinsai's cousin, Itō Masatomo 伊藤正知, but there is no actual historical proof of this (Tucker 1998, 38). Other possibilities include Jinsai studying with a fairly obscure and unknown teacher or being largely self-taught (ibid.). Yamashita, on the other hand, writes that Jinsai did indeed briefly study with Matsunaga, but stopped going to his school after only one or two lectures for some unknown reason (Yamashita 1983, 457). In any case, Jinsai in all probability did not have a very influential figure in his early life to study with, and this kind of independence might have also had a not insignificant influence on his thought and work.

Jinsai's pursuit of scholarship was not supported by his family, and in 1655, at the age of 29, this drove him into seclusion at the Kyōto Matsushita Ward. It also brought upon him a certain illness called, using modern terminology, "a neurosis", one which perhaps worsened by a heart condition or tuberculosis (Tucker 1998, 41). It is known that at this time, when he was by himself, Jinsai would communicate with people very rarely and barely leave his residence. His illness did not however stop him from further study, and in those years Jinsai would explore Daoist and Buddhist texts, as well as the Neo-Confucian teachings of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1559) (ibid., 42). He also established his first study group there, the *Dōshikai* 同志會 (*Society of the Like-Minded Scholars*).

In 1662, and after a devastating earthquake, Jinsai—now 35 years of age and with a firmly renewed faith in the ethical teachings of classical Confucianism—returned to his family residence, where the *Dōshikai* then began to meet. Out of this Jinsai's School, the *Kogidō*, would be born, as well as his *kogaku* philosophy (ibid., 46). The inspiration for establishing the school might actually have been the Yamazaki Ansai School (*Kimonha* 崎門派), which stood across the street from the Itō family home (ibid.). As Jinsai's philosophy is often considered as the answer to Ansai's strict Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, it is interesting to note the differences in the two scholar's teaching methods.

Tucker writes:

Unlike Ansai, a demanding teacher who supposedly criticized his students for not memorizing Zhu Xi's writing precisely, Jinsai was more deferential, tolerant, and gentle in teaching, emulating Confucius' more liberal and humanistic pedagogical demeanor. The *Dōshikai* did not emphasize, within the classroom at least, differences between students and their teacher. Distinctions in relative social status were not stressed either. (ibid., 47)

He also notes:

To some extent, the differences between Jinsai and Ansai reflected their social backgrounds and those of their students. Ansai was the son of a *rōnin*, and his students were mostly *bushi*, while Jinsai's school included representatives from wealthy *chōnin* families, prominent lines of Kyōto physicians, the cultural elite of the ancient capital, and members of the imperial aristocracy from distinguished lines such as the Fujiwara. Perhaps naturally, a strict and demanding atmosphere more prevailed within Ansai's school than in Jinsai's. (Tucker 1998, 47–48)

Even though the Kyōto *chōnin* were afforded some measure of independence, and Jinsai himself maintained scholarly independence from samurai patronage (ibid., 50), the *bakufu* power was quite evident even in Kyōto. Jinsai, living for a long time in the shadow of the imperial castle, could not be unaware of it, nor the wider political situation in the country. It is therefore interesting to note again that while Jinsai never directly engaged with the politics of the day, but his project, Tucker argues, as a proper Confucian one, must be seen as political and as championing the specific *chōnin* worldview. Jinsai also never wrote any political treatise, but his thinking is evident from some of his writings—most especially in his focusing on the people and his adoption, as has already been mentioned, of the more politically liberal ideas of Mencius.

Jinsai is thus a *Kogaku* scholar, influenced by his life as a *chōnin* in the ancient imperial capital of Kyōto. But it seems that to describe his project primarily in those terms might again be an overreach in itself, with the mistake being not taking into account Jinsai's own avowed positions. Jinsai himself never described his project in those terms, and it is doubtful that he would have seen it as such, as his ethical philosophy is in his works repeatedly presented in inclusive and universalistic terms, while maintaining a quite radical apologia of Confucius and Mencius's thought.

Jinsai as a Confucian Radical

Koyasu Nobukuni notes Itō Jinsai's Confucian radicalism in his belief that the *Analects* is the most perfect book in the universe (see Koyasu 2015), and this does have a bearing on Jinsai's project as a whole. In the *Gomō jigi* Jinsai describes his project thusly:

I teach students to scrutinize the *Analects* and the *Mencius* thoroughly so that they can rightly discern, with their mind's eye, the semantic

lineage of the teachings of the sage Confucius. When so trained, students will readily recognize the semantic lineage of Confucian-Mencian philosophical notions, and thereby fathom their meanings without error. (trans. Tucker in Tucker 1998, 69)

予かつて学者に教うるに語孟二書を熟読精思して、聖人の意思語脈をして能く心目の間に瞭然たらしむるときは、すなわちただ能く孔孟の意味血脉を識るのみにあらず、又能くその字義理会して、大いに謬まるに至らざることをもってす。(Itō in Yoshi-kawa and Shimizu 1971, 14)

But Jinsai's project also had wider implications. Huang Chun-chieh describes it in the following fashion:

The book⁹ (...) represents a type of Confucian hermeneutics in East-Asia, a forceful apologia for Confucius against “heresies” of Daoism, Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. Jinsai re-interprets Confucius by offering meticulous textual exegesis with fresh intratextual annotations of the *Analects* and faithful definitions of such key notions as *dao* 道 and *ren* 仁 as Confucius himself meant them, on the one hand, and intertextual collations of the *Analects* and the other Classical writings to show their mutual coherence, on the other. (Huang 2008, 248)

Jinsai shows himself in many ways to be a radical Confucian, and as an aggressive opponent of the notions which he believed were developed in the Buddhist and Daoist traditions and which he held to have corrupted the proper Confucian Way. But his view of what might be considered properly Confucian is also grounded in his own project and methodology. Jinsai found in the *Analects* and *Mencius* the textual authority to counter the teaching of the Cheng-Zhu School¹⁰, but it is not that his objections stem from his Confucian radicalism; it is rather that his Confucian radicalism might have stemmed from his objections and search for universally applicable ethical teaching.

Jinsai went so far as to attack one of the four books—the *Great Learning*—as a non-Confucian text, writing a supplementary essay in the *Gomō jigi*, titled “Dai-gaku wa Kōshi no isho ni arazaru” 大學非孔子之遺書辨 (The Great Learning is

9 The book mentioned here is the *Rongo kogi* 論語古義 (*Ancient Meanings in the Analects*) (see Itō in Koyasu 2017; Itō in Koyasu 2018), which together with the *Gomō jigi* represents Jinsai's most valuable work.

10 As has been discussed, this might follow Lu Xiangshan's method.

Not a Confucian Text)¹¹. In the introduction to the essay Jinsai writes the words most closely associated with his radical Confucian stance:

The words of the *Analects* are plain and honest (*heisei* 平正), but its principles are deep and profound (*shinon* 深穩). Adding even one word would be excessive. Taking away one would leave it imperfect. The *Analects* is the most perfect work in literature in the entire world (*tenka no gen koko ni oite ka kiwamaru* 天下之言於是乎極矣). It exhaustively explains the principles of the world (*tenka no ri koko ni oite ka tsuku* 天下之理於是乎盡矣). It truly is the greatest book in the universe (*jitsu ni uchū daiichi no sho nari* 實宇宙第一書也). (trans. Tucker in Tucker 1998, 234)

誠にもって論語の一書、その詞平正、その理深穩、一字を増すときはすなわち剰ること有り、一字を減ずるときはすなわち足らず、天下の言、ここにおいてか極まる。天下の理、ここにおいてか尽く。實に宇宙第一の書なり。(Itō in Yoshikawa and Shimizu 1971, 99 & 160–61)

But Koyasu Nobukuni explains Jinsai's radicalism in different terms, as Jinsai discovering in the *Analects* a confirmation of his own views on everyday ethics and a tool to challenge the Neo-Confucian doctrine (Koyasu 2015, 21–22). Jinsai saying that “to speak of filial piety, brotherly deference, loyalty and trustworthiness suffices”¹², that “where there are not people, the Way will not be seen”¹³ shows that in exhaustively reading the *Analects* (and the *Mencius*), Jinsai not only came to possess the language and textual authority to criticize the accounts of Cheng-Zhu School thought and practice (especially as put forth by the already discussed Kimon School of Yamazaki Ansai), but also that his preoccupation, rather than doctrinal, remained always with proper everyday ethical life of the people.

Jinsai's “ten proofs” why the *Great Learning* is not a Confucian text thus begins with his criticism of it as a book that aims at being too lofty and setting out too hard a road for the practice of the Confucian Way. Jinsai writes:

But the *Great Learning* suggests that progress along the moral way is as difficult as climbing a nine-story pagoda.¹⁴ We mount story after story, until finally reaching its pinnacle. Yet the Confucian way is nothing other

11 This essay was not in the Edo edition of the text, showing how Jinsai's radicalism might have subsequently been downplayed by his son, Itō Tōgai.

12 惟孝弟忠信を言ふて足れり。

13 人無きときは則ち以て道を見ること無し。(See Itō in Shimizu 2017, 27)

14 See *Daodejing*, ch. 64.

than the Way of Humanity (*hito no michi* 人之道)! Because it was meant to be cultivated, how could it be so remote? Confucius himself remarked, “Is humaneness far away? As soon as I want it, there it is.”¹⁵ Mencius added, “The way is close, but can be sought even in distant places.”¹⁶ These passages imply that the way is very close by! Why must we climb a tall pagoda to reach it? (trans. Tucker in Tucker 1998, 236)

大学もって人の道に進む、九層の台に登るがごとく、一階を歴て、又一階を歴て、後進んで台上に至るとするか。それ道は他にあらず、即ち人の道なり。人をもって人の道を修む、何の遠きことかこれ有らん。孔子の曰く、「仁遠からんや。われ仁を欲すれば、ここに仁至る」。孟子の曰く、「道は遡きに在り。しこうしてこれを遠きに求む」。みな道の甚だ近きを言うなり。あに九層の台に登るがごときこと有らんや。(Itō in Yoshikawa and Shimizu 1971, 101, 161)

Jinsai's semantic project then connects to his radicalism concerning the ancient meaning of terms found in the *Analects* and *Mencius*. But this project comes from Jinsai's own striving for an ethical position which was not exclusive, lofty or hard to either understand or achieve; which was not turned to quietism and was not built in a way that demanded gradualism or some sort of ultimate attainment: it simply demanded the effort of sincerity. It demanded sincere practice. To Jinsai, the proper Way is the Way of the human condition itself. It is so fundamentally bound to the basic relations of life that going against it would be impossible to do and remain recognizably human.

If Jinsai's stated project is then first and foremost to discover the ancient meanings of terms—as opposed to the meanings that have become misunderstood through philosophically original interpretations of the Cheng-Zhu School—on the other hand, his work (as has been discussed previously) shows that he never lost sight of philosophical integrity and also conducted his teachings in a philosophically liberal way. In his striving to formulate coherent philosophical positions, supported by the textual authority of the *Analects* and *Mencius*, he also seems to be in line with his ethical project, much more than it being simply a semantic one.

Huang Chun-chieh also affirms this:

Itō Jinsai thought that the *Analects* is “the loftiest, the greatest Primal Book in the whole universe” precisely because what it conveys are the

15 仁遠乎哉？我欲仁，斯仁至矣 *Lunyu*, 7/30.

16 道在爾而求諸遠 *Mengzi*, 4A/11.

principles of ordinary daily living. Such a *bears its inevitable universality and universal effectiveness. (Huang 2008, 260)*

Jinsai's project should therefore not be seen as strictly doctrinal and based solely on textual objections, aimed at purifying Confucian orthodoxy of the influences of Buddhism and Daoism (as he himself sees them), but more as a project which combines textual, philosophical and practical objections to the kind of ethical ideals that each of these traditions might have developed—a project, then, that is multi-faceted and complex. Jinsai here is a moralist and an ethicist, trying to fathom the teachings he believed to be true to life but also formulate philosophical answers against developments which he believed damaged the true *of humanity.*

Jinsai's Project as Centered on the Practice of Virtue

Samuel Hideo Yamashita argues that to understand Jinsai, one has to firmly grasp Jinsai's views on the practice of virtue. He writes:

Although it is commonly believed that Jinsai's philological studies inspired his criticisms of contemporary Neo-Confucian scholars, most of whom subscribed to one variety or another of the philosophy of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, what has not been recognized is the part played by his new method of ethical practice, which he called, following Mencius, "nourishment" (*yang* / *yashinaiu* 養). Herein lies the value of studying Jinsai's early life and his preoccupation with the practice of virtue. (Yamashita 1983, 454)

It would be safe to say that Jinsai, as Yamashita points out, was convinced that performing acts of virtue was superior to explicating virtue through the study of the Confucian classics (ibid., 453), but Yamashita also shows that while Jinsai's enduring motivation for studying Confucian thought and engaging in his philological work was his attempt to pursue ancient meaning and achieve the proper practice of virtue, it was his inner need first to object to improper practice on ethical grounds, defend his objections on textual grounds, and then to finally formulate proper philosophical solutions to the problems that were facing him, that formed the core of his project.

The first expressions of Jinsai's thought are his early essays. Jinsai wrote four short essays between 1653 and 1655. They are the "Keisaiki 敬齋記 (Keisai's Testament)", the "Taikyokuron 太極論 (The Doctrine of the Great Ultimate)", the

“Shingakuron 心學論 (The Doctrine of the Learning of the Heart-Mind)”, and the “Seizenron 性善論 (The Doctrine of a Felicitous Humanness)”. The essays show Jinsai’s knowledge and his interest—in this time still strong—in the Cheng-Zhu School; but they also show Jinsai’s own preoccupations at the time were mainly with finding answers to the problems he was facing in his own life: alienation from his family and not being ready to follow their wishes for him as a son.¹⁷

Jinsai’s anguish enhanced the appeal of Cheng-Zhu philosophy, and Cheng-Zhu philosophy, as he interpreted it, salved his loneliness by sanctioning his interest in himself. Jinsai’s separation from family and friends and his enormous self-absorption are the keys to his earliest writings. (Yamashita 1983, 458)

It would be during this time that Jinsai would slowly become more and more disillusioned with the Cheng-Zhu School, and he now tried to find answers further afield—in both Daoist and Buddhist texts and practices as well as in the teachings of Wang Yangming. Furthermore, Jinsai also sought personal healing in different kinds of meditation, as he seemed to recognize its power to bring peace to his troubled mind; but he also slowly recognized in meditative practices a deep antisocial streak, which he finally grew to reject. Jinsai’s own description of meditation is quite striking, as it shows how he thought about it later in his life. Jinsai would describe his memories of the so-called “skeleton meditation” in the following fashion:

The Zen Buddhists have a practice of meditating on skeletons. In this method, the devotee first sits quietly, reflecting on himself. When his concentration is complete, he sees himself as a skeleton, stripped of all flesh, and for that moment he is above lamenting his unenlightened state. In my youth, I tried this technique. Sure enough, when I had achieved complete concentration, I saw the skeleton in myself. I also imagined that when I spoke to anyone, I was conversing with another skeleton, and passersby appeared to be walking puppets, and everything seemed to be a dream: there was neither Heaven nor Earth, neither life nor death; and everything, even mountains, rivers and palatial mansions, appeared phantasmal. This is what the Buddhists call clarifying the mind and glimpsing one’s humanness. I recall too that filial piety and loyalty seemed shallow and barely worth discussing. After I had practiced quiet sitting for some time, I regained my lucidity, and my views came naturally. (I know now

17 This might be said to represent a true Confucian crisis of identity.

that) these were not the ‘real principles of Heaven and Earth’ and that it is because of practices such as this that Buddhists sever all ties with society and withdraw from daily affairs. (trans. Yamashita in Yamashita 1983, 460–61, ed.)

禪家に白骨を観ずる法といふことあり。白骨を観ずる法とは静座して自己の一身をおもふに、工夫熟する時、皮肉悉く脱露して只白骨ばかりあるやうにみゆるとなり。かくのごとき時、悟道せざる事を憂ずとへり。僕曾てわかゝりし時、此法を脩し侍り候。工夫熟して後は、自己の身白骨にみゆるのみならず、他人と語るにも白骨と対談するやうにおもはれ、道行人も木偶人のあるくやうにみゆ。万物皆空相あらはれて、天地もなく生死もなく、山川宮殿までも皆まぼろしのやうに思は侍り候。かれがいはゆる明心見性の理に自然に符合せり。孝悌忠信などは皆其浅くしていふにたらぬやうに見て侍り。これ僕が静座する事久しくして心地靈明なるの至り、自然に見付たる見解にて天地の実理にあらず。仏者の人倫を掃、日用にはなるゝ皆此理より来れり。 (Itō in Ishida 1960, 37–38).

From such experiences Jinsai's distrust of both the practice of meditation and of the Buddhist interpretations of notions that formed its theoretical background—as well as a distrust of what Jinsai called Zen-Confucian practices, such as the aforementioned “quiet sitting”—would emerge. Jinsai would go on to spend his life fighting quietism in Confucian practice as well as what he perceived as quietist principles in Neo-Confucian thought. This is without doubt another major part of his project: a possible starting point. That the experiences were so visceral to Jinsai shows that his shift in thinking was not born from simple doctrinal dislike of Cheng-Zhu school's thought, but from his experiences and his own attempts to come to terms with them. Jinsai struggled with being human and sought solutions both philosophical and practical.

In 1658 Jinsai wrote another short essay, the “Jinsetsu 仁説 (Theory of Humaneness)”; and in 1661 he wrote the “Shosai shishū 書齋私祝 (A Student's Pledge)”. In both of them, Jinsai would completely renounce his former self-obsession as well as his Cheng-Zhu influenced views on individualism and sociability. He would become a staunch defender of the Confucian values of filial piety and brotherly love and would also radically shift the focus of his studies from the Neo-Confucian notion of seriousness (*jīng/kei* 敬) to the study of the Confucian notion of humaneness (*ren/jin* 仁).¹⁸

18 This even shows in his choice of a name. Before this time, Jinsai 仁斎 took for himself the name of Keisai 敬斎.

It would seem that this was also a deep personal shift for Jinsai, the once rebel son, and it formed the backbone of the further development of his thought. Soon after, Jinsai's family home was struck by disaster and Jinsai returned there, where he, in time, established his famous school, the *Kogidō*. And of course, Yamashita demonstrates by looking at both Jinsai's writings as well as those of his son Tōgai that the shift in his thinking did not happen all at once, but was developed over many years, most of it between 1662–1677, when returning home he held the many meetings of the *Dōshikai* (ibid.).

This interim period is important because it was then that Jinsai questioned the adequacy of his earlier textual solution to the problem posed by his affirmation of the emotions and began to search for another, more satisfying solution. His writings from this period, which include his lectures, the topics he raised for discussion in the meetings of the [Society of Like-minded Scholars], and the notes of these meetings, chronicle this search. From them we learn that Jinsai first sought philosophical solutions, then practical ones, and also that the former led to and perhaps even necessitated the latter. (Yamashita 1983, 466)

In this shift, Jinsai also encountered a problem of Zhu Xi's formulation of humanness as "the *li* of love"¹⁹ as described through Zhu Xi's duality of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣. Jinsai, with his newfound respect for sociality, was afraid that humanness and human feelings had become too divided by Zhu Xi's formulation. It was to this concrete question, Yamashita argues, that Jinsai sought his answers and it was this question that in the end led him to abandon important aspects of the established duality (ibid., 462). But Jinsai's answers, at first, were based more or less on the simple textual authority of the *Analects* and *Mencius*.

Yamashita argues that Jinsai, having in a strictly ethical sense found himself at odds with elements of Neo-Confucian practice, which to his mind belonged instead to Buddhist and Daoist traditions, found in the *Analects* and *Mencius* the textual authority needed to support his own philosophical views, and through this tried to resolve his problems with Zhu Xi's formulation of the notion of humanness. At first, however, he did this while still trying to preserve the duality found in the teachings of the Cheng-Zhu School. Later he began to question such textual solutions, which he found unsatisfying, and started searching for more complete philosophical ones (ibid., 468–69).

I will not be discussing here in what ways Jinsai finally managed to resolve the duality between *li* and *qi*. For the purposes of the present article, it is more important

¹⁹ See, for example, *Zhuzi yulei*, 6.

to note that Jinsai did in fact go on to formulate philosophical solutions which brought together human feelings and the inner disposition of goodness, and therefore in a certain sense achieved a re-valuation of the given duality, by asserting that “people having the same sense of right and wrong is what was earlier referred to as the feeling of commiseration” (trans. Yamashita in Yamashita 1983, 472; Itō 1717, vol. 4). Thus Jinsai, having combined the original humanness and human feeling, came to a more satisfying philosophical solution, which would have both ontological and ethical consequences.

But he was still not satisfied with this, as Yamashita writes:

Jinsai recognized that although he had found an easy textual solution and then a more satisfying philosophical solution to the problem of reconciling virtue and the emotions, he had not found a practical solution, that is, an appropriate method of actually embodying virtue. What may have drawn him to Wang Yang-ming, then, was the latter’s advocacy of both a monistic ontology²⁰ and an active form of praxis. (ibid., 473)

In 1662, Jinsai was busy trying to synthesize the views of Mencius and Wang Yangming and primarily interested in the proper practice of virtue. He would later go on to reject Yangming’s solutions through embarking on his own philological project, and finally accepting Mencius’ notion of *nourishment* as the one proper practice to settle upon.²¹ However, while even his rejection of the *Great Learning* as a Confucian text is based on the exact argument that it stresses introspection above nourishment (Yamashita 1983, 478), Jinsai does not deny the value of introspection, but simply argues against any kind of order in which it comes before “nourishment”. Still, it is safe to say that Jinsai’s philological project, while surely driven by his search for classical textual authority and proper practice of virtue, was just as much driven by Jinsai’s need to formulate a proper philosophical response to the prevailing doctrines of his time.

Conclusion

Jinsai’s project can thus be traced from his ethical objections, in certain ways influenced by his *chōnin* life, to his search for textual authority through which to counter

20 Whether Wang Yangming had indeed formulated a monistic ontology can be disputed.

21 Yamashita writes: “Although it is possible that his decision to emphasize nourishment, albeit aimed at Yang-ming, was influenced by the latter’s glorification of action, Jinsai did not acknowledge this influence but instead cited the Mencius as his *locus classicus*, as if this were sufficient authority.” (Yamashita 1983, 475)

the quietist elements of the Cheng-Zhu School's interpretations, his attempts to formulate a philosophical solution to the problems posed, and on to practical solutions: a search for the proper practice of virtue. His radical views of the *Analects* and its ethical universality can be seen as no less important than his status as a townsman of the City of Kyōto and his philosophical work of establishing ancient meaning within the genre of philosophical lexicography can be seen as no less important than his textual objections to overreaching interpretational and commentarial work. But his final goal is clearly not simply contemplative, it is also decidedly practical.

Still, even though the philosophical work of Jinsai might perhaps be seen as neither the starting point, nor the actual goal, it can also be said to be the central activity that holds his project together. In this sense, philosophy to Jinsai might be seen as the means to an end, but that is also very much in line with the Confucian tradition. As John Allen Tucker has pointed out, Jinsai can certainly be regarded as one of the early-modern Tokugawa philosophers, and his work on Confucian ethics can be seen as important to that project. As his work had thus been shown to represent a specific mix of methods and influences, his own project can be considered as multi-faceted but also as philosophically relevant.

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