

The China of Trade and the China of the Mind

—The role of China in the first two centuries of Tokugawa Japan—

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In studies of Japan's Tokugawa period (1600-1868), much has been made of the edicts of national seclusion decreed in the 1630s¹. However, the prevalent western image of an isolated Japan whose inhabitants were cut off from the outside world does not match up with what is known of Tokugawa society and culture which were, to a considerable degree, orientated towards the language and classical culture of continental China. In fact, despite the edicts, seclusion did not really become a pillar of Tokugawa ideology until the nineteenth century when the *bakufu* authorities, believing isolation to be the best way to secure their hold on power, propagated the myth that such isolation had been a cardinal aspect, and was thus a crucial legacy, of the rule of the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616, shogun 1603-1605)².

So, while it may be accurate to say that for the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule Japan's commercial and diplomatic doors on the Western world, if not completely closed, were only slightly ajar, relations with her Eastern neighbors were another matter. Trade with the continent continued until the turn of the nineteenth century and, both on an intellectual and cultural level, China was an important source for the vitality of the period. Indeed, it has even been posited that the isolation measures of the 1630s, often identified in the West as being the start of Japan's seclusion, in fact, far from stopping the influx of Chinese influence, actually favored its escalation³ since, with Western influence to a great extent curtailed, it allowed for a Chinese inspired renaissance, "in which the whole breadth of Chinese learning came to be understood critically, comprehensively and creatively."⁴

1 For the details of the actual edicts see George Sansom, *A History of Japan, 1615-1867*. Dawson, 1963, pp36-39.

2 Bob T. Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, p59.

3 Masayoshi Sugimoto & David L. Swain, *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan*, Tokyo: Tuttle, 1989, p223.

4 Sugimoto & Swain, p223.

The term "*sakoku*" (closed country), as Ronald Toby has pointed out, was meaningful chiefly in respect to Japan's relations with the West, and specifically the proselytizing Iberians, it could not so easily be applied to relations with Japan's East Asian neighbors⁵. It has also been argued that China was no less "closed" than Japan (Chinese law had kept Japanese out of China since 1547 when the tally trade ended), and Korea probably more so, and, further, that such "closure" and the regulated and limited nature of official international contacts were in keeping with the practice that had long been maintained in all three nations of only allowing trade through highly structured, institutional channels⁶.

In this paper, which is in two parts, I wish to examine the role that China played in Japan over the period. I intend, in the first part, to consider how China functioned as a nation to be traded with and how the kinds of contact brought about via this trade were important for Japan. I will then go on, in the second part, to consider China's more abstract role, its function in the consciousness of Tokugawa Japan and how China, as a metaphor, was at the center of the development of Tokugawa political thought.

The China of trade and contacts through trade

During the Tokugawa period, Japan's relations with China were maintained on an informal basis. The *bakufu* rejected the possibility of formal relations which would have required acceptance of a tributary role in China's East Asian order since such an obviously subservient role was considered beneath the dignity of a sovereign Japan. That notwithstanding, Chinese trading junks were allowed to come to Nagasaki from ports in southern China and South-East Asia, but the contact was always unofficial and never on a diplomatic basis. The Japanese went so far as to explicitly warn that Chinese officials should not accompany the trading ships.

The overseas trade was diverse. Imports to Japan included silk, other cloth goods, deerskins, sugar, Chinese drugs, medicines and minerals, especially saltpeter which was unavailable in Japan and essential to the manufacture of gunpowder. Exports consisted mainly of silver, copper and other metals but also included small manufactured goods like umbrellas, fans and art objects. The diversity of goods, though, belied the fact that silk and silver were far and away the most important items of trade. Japan's new rulers wanted

5 Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984.

6 Tanaka Takeo, "Japan's Relations with Overseas Countries", in John W. Hall & Toyoda Takashi, eds., *Japan in the Muromachi Age*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, pp159-178.

Chinese silk because it was of higher quality than domestic varieties and silver was demanded overseas because of its use as a currency for trade and because the large amounts being mined in Japan made it cheaper in the archipelago than elsewhere, meaning that it could be acquired at low cost and exchanged abroad for a handsome profit⁷. China's demand for silver was particularly high since, in addition to it being needed for currency by the increasing numbers of Chinese traders in Southeast Asia, it was also used in China itself for the payment of taxes.

My period begins after the Tokugawa victory at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. As part of the process of consolidating power, and specifically in order to curtail the economic opportunities of possible rivals and to restrict Christian influence, the new shogun's regime decided to put foreign trade under its own direction.

Initially, Tokugawa Ieyasu was open to the possibility of restoring relations with Ming China. Relations were now at their worst after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597, but, despite this, Ieyasu was prepared to consider the resumption of a highly controlled tally trade with the Ming regime. Such a resumption didn't happen, however. In its place, the red seal system, set up originally by Hideyoshi, was expanded. This was a system of licensed foreign trade under which all ships trading out of Japan were obliged to carry licenses issued over the shogun's vermilion seal.

Records indicate that of 350 licenses (*shuinjo*) issued by the *bakufu* before their discontinuation in 1631, some 43 were granted to Chinese traders, who were evidently willing to flout their government's embargo on contact with Japan in order to gain a piece of the lucrative silver trade.

Seeking to further regulate trading, Ieyasu directed that from 1616 onwards, Chinese ships should only be able to do business at Nagasaki, regardless of which port they entered. This, it should be noted, was long before the formalization of such requirements under the 1630s' edicts of shogun Iemitsu (1604-1651, shogun 1623-1651), and to some extent the directive was ignored as Chinese ships continued also to trade at Hirado.

However, gradually trade became concentrated in Nagasaki and many of the mostly Kyushu based Chinese found it necessary to head there as well⁸. Rapidly Nagasaki came to

7 It has been calculated that at the start of the Tokugawa period, Japan accounted for around one third of the world's silver output, with some estimates putting the figure at over forty percent.

8 The *wako* pirate/trader activity of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, had resulted in small communities of Chinese living in scattered "Chinatowns", particularly along the coastline in various parts of Japan's main southern island, Kyushu.

have the largest number of overseas Chinese in Japan and up until the special Chinese quarter, the *Tojin Yashiki*, was constructed at the end of the first Tokugawa century Chinese could be found living in all parts of the city.

One consequence of this large Chinese community was the development, in the 1620s, of three temples for Chinese residents. These began as the informal activities of Chinese merchant leaders who later went on to invite formal incorporation by mainland priests. These temples then became avenues of invitation for Chinese monks, some of whom would later establish the Obaku temple of Mampukuji, the importance of which I shall consider later.

As already noted, part of Ieyasu's concern to bring foreign trade under direct *bakufu* control was spurred by his uneasiness about the political effects of Iberian missionary activity. The problem was how to control missionary activity without sacrificing foreign trade and his solution was to seek commercial alternatives to the Portuguese. Hence his enthusiasm for promoting trade with Chinese merchants and the ease with which these Chinese could settle in Nagasaki. Rapidly, the numbers of Chinese traders grew, their ships brought more and more silk cloth and, as Ieyasu had hoped, this undermined the market for the Portuguese carrack's yarn and spoiled the relationship between the Portuguese traders and their Japanese merchants. By the 1620s, around 3,000 Chinese were reportedly resident in the city and some thirty to sixty Chinese vessels were arriving annually.

The China trade grew to significant proportions⁹, dominated by the exchange of Japanese bullion for silk, and the *bakufu* derived from it a considerable profit which could be maintained for as long as Japanese mines continued to produce at high levels. Nagasaki was a city that lived on and for this foreign trade and as trade expanded so the city prospered.

However, by the 1650s, Japanese mines were declining in productivity and the problem of bullion scarcity began to shape trade policy. This forced the gradual imposition of import restrictions.

For some time the disorder of the Ming-Manchu struggles had cut into Sino-Japanese exchanges¹⁰ but when, in 1683, the Manchus finally managed to gain control of Taiwan and

9 Oba Osamu cites figures from Dutch records that show 97 Chinese junks arriving at Nagasaki in 1641. Oba Osamu, *Edo jidai no Ni-Chu hiwa*, Tokyo, 1980, p30.

10 Most of the trading being done during the time of the struggles was in ships coming from the south, under the control of forces opposing the Manchus. This led, in 1661, to the Manchu rulers ordering the depopulation of coastal areas in southern China in an attempt to cut off supplies to the resistance.

win over the last pockets of resistance to their regime, *bakufu* leaders became concerned that the restoration of peace would lead to an unmanageable expansion in the China trade. Fears were also sparked that given the new Q'ing regime's capacity to mount overseas operations (as demonstrated by the subduing of Taiwan), any trade disputes could have serious complications, including threats to Japanese territory.

Edo officials' fears seemed to be being realized when peace did indeed see a rapid escalation of the China trade¹¹. Although by this time the export of silver was being restricted, the market had shifted to copper and, as previously with silver, this resulted in a dramatic drain of copper out of the country. Consequently, in 1685, the measures of trade restraint known as the "regulations of the Jokyo era" were imposed. Now trade was to be restricted to 6,000 *kan*¹² of copper for the Chinese and half that for the Dutch. One outcome of this was that legitimate trade became severely limited, and this led to an increase in smuggling. In order to counter this illegal trading, Edo perceived it necessary, amongst other things, to establish firm control over Nagasaki's Chinese community, hence the confining of the community to the newly built Chinese residence in 1689¹³.

Gradually the problems stemming from the Manchu conquest of the mainland, including the fear of Manchu invasion, subsided. But Edo's efforts to contain trade, while they were successful in preventing expansion, did little to shrink trade volume and, to the extent that bullion scarcity was Edo's key concern, it was a problem that did not go away. Domestic demand for gold, silver and copper was growing along with the economy, and the scarcity of gold and silver was beginning to disrupt currency values and commodity prices in the domestic market. Responding initially to the problem of silver, shortages of bullion were such a serious concern that the *bakufu*, in 1688, placed a general ban on the export of silver and, in its place, promoted the export of copper which was in great demand in China because the Q'ing were minting a new coinage. However, copper mines too, by early in the eighteenth century, were beginning to be exhausted. Consequently, metal exports, once

11 Records indicate that in 1688, 193 junks arrived.

12 1 *kan* = approx. 3.75 kg.

13 It is recorded that in its first year, the seven acres of the residence housed 4,888 people when the junk fleet was in port. See Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World*, Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1992, pp29-30. Jansen goes on to describe the restrictions: "The Chinese were allowed to leave the quarter only for authorized purposes to handle freight, service ships or visit temples, and then only when accompanied by Japanese petty officials.....In time, however, the severity of these regulations was moderated, and by late Tokugawa days it was not unusual to find Chinese traders hawking their goods on the streets of Nagasaki."

viewed by *bakufu* officials as a source of material advantage, came to be seen as a source of material harm since supplies of precious metals for coinage were dwindling. Thus, the policy of trade containment was replaced by one of trade reduction. To this end, the "Shotoku regulations", instituted in 1715, tightened the 1685 measures and effected a gradual but substantial shrinkage of trading activity. As a result, by the end of the eighteenth century, the China trade had slowed to a trickle¹⁴.

Trade regulations were not the only actions taken to protect bullion supplies, there were also calls for Japan to eliminate imports by producing the same goods at home, and a program of import substitution was begun which, by the 1720s, under the encouragement of the shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684-1751, shogun 1716-1745), became a major part of trade policy.

The most important import substitution program was the development of sericulture, as the *bakufu* created an industry to free Japan from its dependence on Chinese silk.

With an assiduity comparable to that of the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Japanese set about learning Western technology, Chinese treaties on sericulture were brought into Japan, studied, and then Japanese works on the subject were written and distributed. In due course the entire process of the silk industry, from rearing worms and cultivating mulberry trees to the finished products, was established throughout most of the country and Japan became self-sufficient in the product which hitherto she had been most dependent upon obtaining from China and this, in turn, meant her previous balance of payments problems improved considerably¹⁵.

Clearly then, the China trade played an important function in Tokugawa Japan. For the *bakufu* it offered a channel to international markets that did not threaten internal stability in the way that trade with the Iberians did. In fact, despite its heavily regulated nature, the China trade could almost be described as apolitical in so far as it remained unsanctioned by the authorities in Beijing. Trade also provided luxury goods for a growing Japanese market and it also helped to consume the large stocks of precious metals that the Tokugawa authorities had overseen the mining of during their consolidation of power. As those stocks diminished, trade also had the effect of prompting programs of import substitution in

14 Oba gives figures charting the decline from 40 junks in 1717, to just 10 junks in 1791. *Edo jidai no Ni-Chu hiwa*, p33.

15 In the long term, the domestic production of silk was to have profound consequences, since, after reopening to international trade with the West in the mid-nineteenth century, it was raw silk and silk products which became Japan's major item of export to Europe and a main source of capital used to subsidized the country's program of industrialization.

commodities, like silk, that it had helped to create a wide demand for, and these programs helped to diversify the Japanese domestic economy.

The China trade was the lifeblood of Nagasaki and was also important for Kyoto, where the major industry was the Nishijin silk industry, which, until the domestic industry took off in the 1720s, depended upon Chinese imports for the bulk of its yarn. For Osaka, as well, the trade was important, mainly because metalworks in the city provided much of the export copper.

Specifically, then, Japan's foreign trade with China was important to certain groups and localities but, to put things in perspective, studies have shown that it was only a minor part of the total Japanese economy, the heart of which was domestic activity¹⁶. However, that notwithstanding, the real significance of trading activity was the channels for other kinds of contact that it kept open.

Commodity exchange was not the only way in which the China trade was important for Japan. In addition to merchandise, the junks from China also brought books and people who were not connected to the trading activities. They also brought news from the outside world. This news was in the form of reports, known as *fusetsugaki*, which, after 1644, Chinese and Dutch ship captains were ordered to prepare and hand over to Nagasaki officials with each arrival. These reports were forwarded immediately to the top authorities in Edo and, thanks to this requirement, Japanese authorities, despite their isolation, were able to remain remarkably well informed of events beyond their borders, like the progress of the Manchus in the civil war on the mainland¹⁷.

As literacy in Japan grew, so accomplishment in the Chinese classics became an index of cultural attainment, and the demand for books rose. This led to Chinese books, excepting any related to Christianity, being imported in increasingly large quantities. Books thus constituted another important part of the Nagasaki trade.

The *bakufu* was quickly aware of the implications, both positive and negative, of Chinese book imports. Educated Japanese could be expected to be literate in Chinese and the *bakufu* encouraged Confucian studies. The access to specific tomes and the ability to order additional titles through Nagasaki were also instrumental in the development of specific

16 Conrad Totman estimates the value of foreign trade in 1700 to have been less than 1.5% of domestic agricultural production. See Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p148.

17 Stepping briefly outside of my timeframe, the *fusetsugaki* provisions also enabled nineteenth century Edo officials to receive early warning of the Western powers pushing further into East Asia.

areas of knowledge, for example, calendrical astronomy, medicine and certain aspects of mathematics. China's administrative codes were also studied in order to find an appropriate model of administrative organization for adoption in Japan. However, along with the benefits, there was also an acute awareness of the potential danger of foreign texts. After the restrictions on religious thought and practice that accompanied the seclusion measures of the 1630s, imported Chinese books were subjected to a stringent censorship process to prevent the infiltration of Christianity via the written word. *Bakufu* appointed censors were instructed to report the appearance at Nagasaki of any works containing Christianity, military matters or "anything unusual", and a list of banned books was compiled and circulated to book dealers. The censorship system also benefited the *bakufu* in that it gave Edo officials a regular preview of incoming material, since the Nagasaki censors, in their caution, usually sent to Edo summaries of material they were unsure about. This communication worked in the other direction as well, as officials were offered access to foreign books by the censorship system enabling the ordering from overseas of desired tomes, and this greatly aided the growth of major *daimyo* collections and the *bakufu's* Momijiyama library.

The channel of access to foreign books was most vigorously exploited by the shogun Yoshimune. In 1720, in pursuit of a policy of agricultural development (part of the program of import substitution), he ordered Kaga's *daimyo* to present him with a Chinese thousand volume set of botanical lore and, the following year, in order to facilitate the study of Chinese botany, he lightened the general proscription on books from China, specifying only that they not be about Christianity. After this, it became possible to import not just a greater variety of Chinese books, but also Chinese versions of European books on science, medicine, astronomy and geography, which had previously been banned on the grounds that they had been written by Jesuits.

The China trade was now not just important for the importation of Chinese merchandise and learning, it was also the source of translated Western texts, which would inspire a whole new school of learning later in the Tokugawa period.

Yoshimune, in his program to investigate Japan's botanical resources, did not just seek books from China, he also ordered Chinese seeds and seedlings and also invited Chinese experts to Nagasaki to investigate the countryside and identify plants in order to compile lists of native botanical equivalents to Chinese species. But botany was not his only pursuit, it is well known that Yoshimune's interests were highly eclectic and, in pursuit of

these interests, he invited many other specialists - scholars, doctors and veterinarians - to come to Japan from China to share their expert knowledge, and these people then played important roles in Japan's development.

Other important men came to Japan after receiving their invitations from the Chinese living in Nagasaki.

The Zen Master Yin-yuan, known in Japan as "Ingen", came to Nagasaki on invitation from the Kofukukuji temple in 1654, and brought disciples with him to teach a more literal interpretation of the Buddhist precepts. His reputation quickly spread and he was invited to Kyoto where he had audiences with the retired emperor Go Mizunoo. Shortly afterwards, in Edo, he gained the patronage of the then shogun, Tokugawa Ietsuna (1641-1680, shogun 1651-1680). With such powerful support, Ingen lobbied for and was able to gain permission to construct a huge temple complex, the Mampukuji, in present-day Uji, near Kyoto. This temple, founded in 1661, was marked for its Buddhist architecture, characteristic of Ming dynasty China, and became the center of the Obaku Zen sect of Buddhism¹⁸.

Until 1740, all Mampukuji abbots were Chinese from the parent temple in Fukien, China, then Chinese alternated with Japanese clerics until 1786, after which only Japanese monks succeeded to the abbacy.

Mampukuji monks were welcome at the highest levels of Edo society and they had a considerable influence upon Japanese literati artists and scholars, especially in the art of calligraphy. Their coming coincided with the Genroku era, known for its prosperity, cultural blossoming and, some would say, extravagance. During this period, the court of the fifth shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646-1709, shogun 1680-1709), who was a keen student of the Confucian tradition, and the promoter of legislation ordering compassion for all living things¹⁹, welcomed many Chinese scholar monks from the Obaku temple to assist them in the study of the Confucian classics, and these monks can be seen to have had some influence upon the intellectual debate surrounding appropriate Confucian teaching, which was current at the time.

At around the same time that Obaku Buddhism was reaching Japan, a number of loyalist Ming Confucianists arrived seeking assistance and refuge from the Manchu invasion. Scholars had traditionally been regarded in China as interpreters of the Will of Heaven, so

18 Currently the third largest Zen sect in Japan.

19 Tsunayoshi's concern for the welfare of dogs led him to be named *inu kubou*, the "dog shogun".

with the fleeing to Japan of Confucian scholars after the fall of the Ming Empire, this, along with the disorder on the mainland, was interpreted in Japan as proof that a war-torn and now "barbarian" (Manchu) ruled China had lost the mandate of heaven, which had evidently been transferred, along with the scholars, to peaceful and orderly Japan, which was therefore the legitimate heir of Ming China.

About twenty scholars found refuge in Japan between the fall of the Ming in 1644 and the ascendance of the Kang Xi Emperor (a great patron of scholars), in 1661. Foremost amongst those who settled was the Ming loyalist Confucian scholar, Shu Shunsui (1600-1682), who first arrived at Nagasaki in 1642 and, after repeated failures to organize an anti-Manchu front in Annam, south China and Japan, was allowed to settle in Nagasaki in 1659. In 1665, Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628-1700), the Lord of Mito and a grandson of Ieyasu, invited Shu to Edo to serve as his tutor and advisor. At that time, Mitsukuni was engaged in the monumental project of assembling a group of scholars to compile the history of Japan (the *Dai Nihon Shi*) on the model of the official Chinese histories and he was eager to enlist the support of a Chinese scholar of Shu's caliber.

The *Dai Nihon Shi* was written in literary Chinese, infused with Confucian doctrines and followed the format of Chinese official historiography. Mitsukuni's main purpose in commissioning the history was to establish Confucian principles defining the correct relationship between ruler and ruled, "to indicate the legitimate emperors of Japan and to exemplify the proper attitude of subjects towards the imperial house". By doing this, he was aiming to console the tradition that claimed for the Japanese imperial lineage a unique function as "the embodiment, mystic or symbolic, of Japanese society and nationhood."²⁰

Shu had a deep impact on Mitsukuni and on some of the other scholars with whom he was compiling the *Dai Nihon Shi* and, in 1693, his disciple Asaka Tampaku was appointed head of the Shokokan, the bureau in charge of putting together the history. Through Asaka and other scholars, Shu influenced the early Mito school as well as the school of National Learning (*Kokugaku*) which developed from it²¹.

Shu settled in Japan because he refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Q'ing, but in doing so he lent credence to the idea that Japan was the only country where Confucian ideals could be fully implemented. In a letter to Tokugawa Mitsukuni, Shu wrote that because

20 Herschel Webb, "What is the Dai Nihon Shi?", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 19-2, Feb.1960, p35 & p39.

21 See Kate Wildman Nakai, "Tokugawa Confucian Historiography: The Hayashi, Early Mito School, and Arai Hakuseki", in Peter Nosco, ed., *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1984, pp62-91

China could no longer achieve the great principle of harmony, it was for Japan, under such benevolent rulers as Mitsukuni, to realize that ideal. In this way, Shu can be seen to have aided the transformation of the Chinese centered concept of loyalty to the Ming into the Japan-oriented idea that Tokugawa Japan, rather than Q'ing China, was the old regime's legitimate heir.

The influence of Chinese expatriates was also apparent in other fields. Chen Yuanyun (1587-1671), introduced Chinese martial arts into Japan. At this time also, "Ming-Q'ing music" first became popular in Nagasaki and then gained a somewhat wider following in the main population centers, and Chinese Nagasaki painters, largely unknown in China, established reputations in Japan far beyond the worth of their derivative styles.

The influence of contact with China can also be identified in the models for social and institutional engineering adopted under several shoguns as they attempted to structure and stabilize Tokugawa society. As has already been mentioned briefly, the administrative codes of China provided most appropriate models for adoption and, to this end, government sponsored scholarship, sometimes binational in character, was promoted to find, interpret and implement the most suitable Chinese models. The resulting Tokugawa studies of Ming law led to the recovery of much of the administrative record that was lost in the disorder of the Sengoku (warring states) period.

Tokugawa Ieyasu's search for literature on law and precedent was motivated by its relevance to his regulation of the court nobility. Precedent was a way to legitimize the resolution of disputes, but finding people competent enough in the relevant laws to be able to cite such precedents proved difficult.

Progress was made under Tokugawa Tsunayoshi in the late seventeenth century, and it was the presence of Ming emigre scholars that facilitated this progress. The practical problems of rule were now a primary concern for the *bakufu* and the apparent comprehensiveness of the Chinese examples, particularly the penal codes, made the model attractive. Efforts were made to acquire the Ming codes of law through Nagasaki, and Shu Shunsui, at the time working in Edo on the *Dai Nihon Shi*, was one of those consulted for help with the interpretation of the text of the codes²².

In the process of interpreting and implementing Ming legal codes, certain kinds of moral injunction were also translated and adopted. The *Tokugawa jikki*²³ notes how the *Liu yu*

22 Dan Fenno Henderson, "Chinese Legal Studies in Early Eighteenth Century Japan: Scholars and Sources," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 30, Nov.1970, pp21-56.

23 The official Tokugawa history, compiled in the early nineteenth century.

yen-i (the amplification of the six maxims) was translated.

The six maxims, first issued by the Ming founding emperor, T'ai-tsu, in 1398, and then expanded upon and frequently reprinted in late Ming and early Q'ing times, were six simple precepts for inculcating public virtue: respect for parents, for elders and superiors, harmony in the village, instruction for children and grandchildren, contentment with one's lot and livelihood, and abstention from wrong. These moral pronouncements, often reiterated by China's Confucian rulers, can be seen as one tool used by the Edo officials to strengthen the respect for authority in Japan. Shogun Yoshimune ordered a simplified translation of the *Lui yu-yen-i* prepared for use in lower schools and there are records of *daimyo* who ordered village leaders to explain its virtues at monthly village gatherings called for that purpose. Records also indicate the presence of traveling lecturers, often samurai, who were patronized by certain *daimyo* to travel through the communities in their domains lecturing on morals and the positive benefits found in submitting to authority. Stress was usually placed upon the importance of contentment with one's lot and appreciation for the concern shown by those who ruled (two maxims that authorities even today seem eager to stress)²⁴.

Yoshimune's encouragement of the study of Ming law led to the publication, by Ogyu Sorai²⁵, of a commentary on the Ming codes and also to further studies in T'ang law and to major projects devoted to the interpretation of the Q'ing codes. These studies of the Chinese system of law culminated in the publication, in 1742, of the legal code known as the *Kujikata Osadamegaki*, consisting of two parts. The first part outlined administrative procedures and civil regulations in 81 articles. The second part laid out criminal laws and penalties in 103 articles. This legal code became the most important body of law under the Tokugawa shogunate and remained in effect until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Direct access to Chinese nationals at Nagasaki was important to the scholarly achievements of many of these officially sponsored projects. One example, cited by

24 Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World*, Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1992, pp67-69. Jansen goes on to point out the "...clear link between these injunctions and the larger diffusion of Confucian morality in Edo times and the reverential position that was accorded the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education in imperial Japan." He also quotes the rescript, "Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends be true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all."

25 Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728), is considered by many to be the most influential Confucian philosopher of the Tokugawa era. An adviser to two shoguns, he had an even greater impact upon the world of letters and ideas. Sorai is given good coverage in Maruyama Masao's, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, University of Tokyo Press, Tokyo, 1974.

Jansen, was of Ch'en Hsieh-an who came to Nagasaki in 1727 and worked with the Japanese to explicate documents on T'ang law sent from China. It is recorded that, as an eminent scholar, Ch'en was honored with gifts from the shogun and allowed many special privileges, including being able to live outside the Nagasaki Chinese residence²⁶.

The China of the mind

Having examined the nature and importance of the actual physical contacts between the two countries during the period, I wish now to turn to more abstract fare, to consider the changing role that China played as a concept in the Japanese people's consciousness.

The perception of China and Chinese influence was obviously different depending upon social class, and, more specifically, the opportunities for literacy and sophistication. Prominent Sinologists, like Ogyu Sorai, who devoted their lives to the study of Chinese civilization were in a different category from less lettered samurai, whose values may have centered on fighting spirit, and both were even more removed from the general mass of commoners, whose horizons were ordinarily restricted to affairs concerning their own localities.

As scholarship developed through the seventeenth century, the central function of China was ensured by the resurgence of Confucianism. I would like, first, to consider the sociopolitical context in which this upsurge in Chinese thought and learning occurred.

After the Battle of Sekigahara, the victorious Tokugawa Ieyasu, based in Edo, established hegemony over the nearly 300 *daimyo* who exercised semiautonomous rule in their respective domains. The unstable social conditions of the previous warring states period - civil strife, shifting alliances and unsettling Western contacts - were then reversed as Ieyasu secured his peace and took measures to stabilize the society and consolidate his new regime. There followed the gradual implementation of regulatory legislation that sought to control material consumption and daily behavior by linking them to a highly stylized system of hereditary social stratification and high moral principles drawn from Confucian doctrines. However, while this extensive regulation applied to the world of material things, on an intellectual level the boundaries of acceptable thought were only roughly defined. With the exceptions of Fujufuse Buddhism²⁷ and Christianity, there were few taboos, so considerable

²⁶ *ibid.* pp. 70-71.

²⁷ A particularly uncompromising branch of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. It maintained a purist doctrinal position and its exhortative approach got it into trouble with the authorities.

space for intellectual enquiry existed and, with peace rendering their military skills redundant, the large samurai class - a fairly constant five to six percent throughout the rise in population from about 18 million to 30 million in the first half of the Edo era - increasingly turned to schooling, teaching and writing. Gradually, as the seventeenth century progressed, an intelligentsia emerged, Confucianism was accorded official recognition and a new class of Confucian scholar was born.

The national academic infrastructure took on new shape as the *bakufu* appointed its own Confucian teachers, promoted Confucian training of samurai, and sponsored libraries and printing. Many feudal domains followed suit, assigning their own Confucian teachers, founding the *hanko* (domain schools), and supporting the collection and publication of books. The schools were generally independent operations and their curricula varied, but Confucianism and Chinese learning were central to all of them.

In peace time, the *bakufu* was concerned to see the samurai class decommissioned. Hence these former military specialists were enjoined, both on a national level by the *bakufu* and locally by the *han* (*daimyo* domains), to master as complimentary disciplines both the literary and martial arts, in order that they might assume the role of civil administrators. This idea was enshrined in the new regime's first body of national law, the laws for the military households known as the *Buke Shohatto*, and was endlessly reiterated in government admonitions. Justifying such exhortations, a classic Chinese aphorism was cited, "On the left hand literature, on the right hand use of arms", both had to be pursued concurrently since this was the rule of the ancients²⁸.

The literature of the "left hand" was focused chiefly on the Chinese classics and especially on Confucianism, which the *bakufu* recognized as a potential ideological buttress to the military's dominant role in the social hierarchy. Although the Confucian cannons as interpreted in the Ming could in no way be construed as militarist, they did, as I indicated earlier, support an authoritarian, stability oriented and hierarchic order, and this was sufficient to recommend them to Japan's warlord leadership.

And so it came to be that learned men of the military classes made up the mainstream of intellectuals and bureaucrats in the Edo period, and the overall cultural ethos diffused under this samurai leadership was a fusion of Confucian and martial ideas. From this fusion the Japanese ruling classes acquired a high respect for learning and cultivated a military inspired discipline to obtain it. These conditions prompted the scholar Murayama Masao to declare

28 David John Lu, *Sources of Japanese History*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974, p201.

that "Tokugawa [was] the golden age of Confucianism in Japan."²⁹

As I have already mentioned, a major concern of the new class of samurai intellectuals was to justify the Tokugawa regime and, more broadly, to legitimize the samurai's privileged position in society. An early formulation by Hayashi Razan³⁰ anchored samurai privilege in Confucian doctrine:

"The five relationships governing ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brother, and friend and friend have been in existence from olden days to the present. There has been no change in these basic relations and they are thus called the supreme way...In everything there is an order separating those above and those below...we cannot allow disorder in the relations between ruler and subject, between those above and those below. The separation into four classes of samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants, like the five relationships, is part of the principles of heaven and is the Way which was taught."³¹

Needless to say, this rationale for samurai supremacy, with its premise of an ageless and sanctified "Way" which society ought to follow, gained currency among the elite in both Kyoto and Edo.

Chinese doctrines in addition to being used to sanction samurai privilege in general, also served to legitimize the specific regime of the Tokugawa. From Ieyasu's day forward, Tokugawa leaders actively employed cultural devices to lend credence to their rule and scholar advisors, like Razan, contributed to this effort. Again most notable were the invocation of the concept of a Heavenly Way, *tendo*, and the claim that the mere existence of the regime was sufficient indication of divine ordinance in accordance with the Way. "When as ruler of the realm, one enjoys trust and support, *tendo* accepts [that ruler's] authority over the realm..."³².

In 1652, when for the first time a child held the shogunal title, a succession that might have left the Tokugawa family's legitimacy open to question, their cause was bolstered by a new historical work, *Nihon odai ichiran*, according to which Ieyasu had received the Confucian Mandate of Heaven at Sekigahara when "...evildoers and bandits were vanquished, and the entire realm submitted to Lord Ieyasu, praising the establishment of

29 Maruyama, p7.

30 Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), an important Neo-Confucian scholar of the early Edo period. He is most known as the promoter of *Shushigaku* as the shogunate's favored school of Confucian learning.

31 Lu, p236.

32 Totman, p170.

peace and extolling his martial virtue."³³ Submission and praise from the realm were enough to indicate Ieyasu's receipt of the divine mandate.

So we can see that Chinese concepts helped to maintain the Tokugawa order and its hereditary samurai elite. This was possible because scholars developed arguments that successfully naturalized ideas of Chinese provenance, relating them effectively to indigenous traditions and enabling them to fit in with the prevailing Japanese conditions. The best efforts of these scholars however could not disguise the fundamental differences between dynastic China and feudal Japan. Chinese institutes of learning were, to a large extent, channels for the open selection of the ablest minds for public service, while learning in Japan was officially promoted to train only those whose right to rule was hereditary.

The process of naturalizing Confucian thought, then, was a complex one that demanded, as Conrad Totman puts it, "philosophical hairsplitting and a tad of sophistry." It involved transforming ideas from an initial form which presented Chinese culture as unique and superior, to forms in which cultural elements were interpreted either as universal phenomena found in China and Japan alike, or else as evidence of Japan's cultural superiority. From early in the seventeenth century onwards, this process of ideological manipulation and transvaluation was engaged in by scholars and it could, perhaps, be viewed as a kind of philosophical import substitution program, presaging the commercial one.

The first task was to establish that the Way of the Sages was universal and not exclusively Chinese, so that it could apply to Japan as well. To do this, Confucianism needed to be separated from the Chinese world order that designated Japan as a barbarian land. Razan achieved this by linking the Japanese native Shinto concept of deity, *kami*, with Confucian categories. *Kami*, according to Razan, "is the soul of heaven and earth", which were the two basic categories of Confucian thought. Kumazawa Banzan³⁴ extended this, arguing that the Confucian Way was universal and synonymous with Shinto. "That the Way is the Shinto of heaven and earth is the same as that there are not two suns in the sky...One may say that it is the way of the *kami* (Shinto) of Japan while at the same time it is the way of the sages of China."³⁵

A subsequent stage was one in which scholars sought to substitute Japanese concepts for

33 Nakai, p79.

34 Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691), was more of an eclectic popularizer than a systematic philosopher, and was best known for his writings on moral and social problems of the day.

35 Quoted in Kate Wildman Nakai, "The Naturalization of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan: The Problem of Sinocentrism", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 40-1, June 1980, p161 & p163.

the Chinese originals by emphasizing areas in which Japan might be considered superior to China. One scholar engaged in this task was Yamaga Soko³⁶ who, in 1675, described how he overcame his initial excess of Sinophilia. Having read extensively about China he wrote that he had been mistaken to think that Japan was inferior to its neighbor and that China was the only possible birthplace for a sage. Noting that "wisdom, humanity and valor are the three virtues of a sage", he set out to show that in those terms Japan was superior to China. Writing at a time when China was still unsettled after the Manchu overthrow of the Ming, Soko stressed how the Japanese imperial line had reigned uninterrupted "from the age of the gods" thanks to the loyalty of its subjects and the absence of "intrigues or outrages by rebels and traitors". This longevity bore testimony to the wisdom, humanity and virtuous nature of the rulers. As for valor, Soko asserted that "no alien had conquered even part of Japan," whereas Japan had twice conquered Korea and had "always won martial glory throughout the world." So that by the criteria of "wisdom, humanity and valor", he concluded, "we find that Japan is far superior" to China³⁷.

A further argument was also developed, that true Confucian institutions had been preserved in Japan after being abandoned in China. It was maintained that China had become corrupted while Japan remained pure. China had been invaded and conquered by the barbarian Manchus and since the "Great" Ming dynasty had fallen, it was no longer appropriate to use the honorific term "Great". Instead the term could properly be used to describe the Japanese themselves, since the Way of the Sages was better upheld in Japan than in China and geographically, Japan, surrounded by the four seas, was in a stronger position than China, which was surrounded and periodically conquered by the four barbarians³⁸.

By the start of the eighteenth century, scholars inspired originally by Chinese teachings had revitalized the domestic intellectual legacy and used it to adapt Confucian thought into an acceptable form for Japan. Totman makes the point that this adaptation of Chinese systems of thought "established precedents for the later adoption and adaptation of other alien ideas. At the same time they had created a basis for repudiation of Sinocentrism and, beyond that, repudiation of any body of "foreign" ideas."³⁹

36 Yamaga Soko (1627-1685), was the earliest of the Ancient Learning, *kogaku*, advocates. Originally a student of Razan, he attended and was influenced by the Edo lectures of Shu Shunsui, after which he criticized the abstract theories of Neo-Confucianism and called for a return to the Confucian sages. Soko is most famous for formulating what came to be known as *bushido*, the Way of the Warrior.

37 Totman, p174.

38 Jansen, p79.

39 *ibid.* p176.

The naturalization of Confucianism was accompanied by a movement in scholarship towards the development and elucidation of Japan's own legacy and it was this school of nativist scholars who set about undermining the China of their Confucian contemporaries. These were the scholars of national learning, the *kokugakusha*, who emerged in the eighteenth century to advocate the rejection of much of the Chinese cultural legacy.

Motoori Norinaga⁴⁰, asserting that the Japanese, as inheritors of the Chinese tradition, had carried it to new heights, railed against the entire cultural tradition associated with the Sages. According to him, China was a country of violence and disorder and the so-called Sages were nothing more than a bunch of frauds peddling deceits that had erroneously become popular. A solid grounding in Japanese values enabled one to recognize the full error of the Way of China and only those who had come to this realization could usefully study Chinese books⁴¹. "If one wishes to penetrate...into the spirit of the true Way, then one must purify oneself from the filthy spirit of Chinese writings and proceed to the study of the ancient texts [of Japan] with the pure spirit of the sacred land. If that is achieved one will come to know, gradually that we are not obligated to the Way of China. But to know this is to receive the Way of the *kami* itself."

So it can be seen, as Harry Harootunian has pointed out, that in Tokugawa Japan the China of the mind functioned metaphorically⁴². Initially it was associated with moral concepts such as *tendo* and the five relationships, indeed, it was the metaphor for civilization itself. But this was a civilization removed from any real historicity - China was referred to as *Chuka*, the central florescence, an abstract term dislocated both temporally and geographically from the real China. It was *Chuka* that was revered as the home of the sages and *Chuka* that was the model for ethical conduct that was the standard for thousands in their ascent to civilized life. But as Harootunian also makes clear, the notion of *Chuka* also created problems since, "(the) most apparent purpose of [the *Chuka* metaphor] was to dramatize the opposition of inner and outer, civilization and barbarism,"⁴³ the civilization of the Central Kingdom and the barbarism of the periphery, including Japan.

For the *bakufu* and Tokugawa scholars, this designation of Japan as barbarian presented

40 Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), was the scholar most responsible for bringing the National Learning movement (*kokugaku*) to its culmination.

41 Jansen, p82.

42 Harry D. Harootunian, "The Functions of China in Tokugawa Thought", in Iriye Akira, ed., *The Chinese and the Japanese*, Princeton: Princeton U.P. 1980, pp9-36.

43 *ibid.* p10.

problems. The *bakufu*, wishing to confirm its growing autonomous structure of legitimacy, was not prepared to have itself subjugated according to the so called "Chinese world order" and so declared itself independent of that order and established an alternative Japan-centered order of international relations which, by rejecting direct government to government exchanges, relegated China to the lowest "barbarian" level in the international hierarchy. This process was completed in the second decade of the eighteenth century⁴⁴.

On the non-government, intellectual level, for the Tokugawa Confucianists, the identification of their country with barbarian status could not be reconciled with the Japanese self-perception based on the mythology of imperial divinity. Consequently, just as Chinese ideas were naturalized to justify the Tokugawa order, it became necessary, in order to reconcile the contradictions created by the adoption of the Chinese system, to reinterpret the whole concept of *Chuka* so that it could designate the centrality of Japan itself.

In the writings of the later nativist scholars, like Motoori, China functioned as a reminder of Japan's centrality and the original premises governing the *Chuka*/barbarian opposition were now reversed. With this reversal, so China's metaphorical function was also reversed and, as Harootunian says, "In the end the nativists transformed China to mean the Other; China, which had served metaphorically to convey the sense of civilization as juxtaposed with the rudeness of nature, was transformed into its opposite."⁴⁵ This China, an exemplar of error, was just as dehistoricized and just as much a metaphor as the previous China which had served as the apotheosis of the good.

Away from the intellectuals, the function of China in the popular imagination is more difficult to gauge. Harootunian observes that the term for imported goods, *hakuraihin*, acquired the meaning of goods produced from China exclusively, and that this identification came to mean "elegant products". Along with other evidence, this would seem to indicate that the popular view, at least to some extent, reflected the official and scholarly positions. Thus, in the early decades of the Tokugawa regime, Chinese doctrines, culture and produce were all esteemed over native accomplishments, but as the views of the *kokugaku* scholars gained prominence so China was seen increasingly as an "instance of decline".⁴⁶

Studies of the popular perception of outsiders in the Tokugawa period bear out the contention that China gradually lost its singular definition as a specific geographic location

⁴⁴ Toby, p197.

⁴⁵ Harootunian, p25.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p11.

and instead served, as it did among the elite, as a metaphor for the "other" or "outside". Part of the evidence for this is the way in which the term *Tojin*, which in early Tokugawa times referred only to Nagasaki's Chinese community, with a variety of other terms used for the non-Chinese outsiders, was gradually transformed into the generic term used to describe all foreigners, thus postulating a "this" Japan against any "other"⁴⁷. The two Chinese characters making up the word *Tojin* are *To* - the character representing the Chinese T'ang dynasty, and *Jin* - meaning person, and it has been suggested that the term was in no way complimentary in that it denied the millennium of Chinese history and all the dynasties that followed the T'ang. It is certainly the case that, as well as becoming a catch-all term for foreigners, it acquired another pejorative meaning, which persists even today, used to describe anyone perceived to be dull or lacking in wits.

By the end of the eighteenth century, China's special role in Japan had all but disappeared. Import substitution programs saw Japan achieve economic self-sufficiency and as trade restrictions were gradually tightened so contacts declined. Of course, paralleling this diminishing role was the rising profile of the Western powers in Japan's consciousness.

Spurred by shogun Yoshimune's relaxation of restrictions on imports of Western books, the new openings to Western knowledge appeared just at the time that Japanese scholars were growing dissatisfied with traditional learning. The apparent superiority of Western scholarship manifested itself clearly in fields such as medicine and astronomy and served to further discredit China and encouraged a movement away from reliance upon Chinese sources of learning.

On an intellectual level, for most late Tokugawa writers, China was simply one more country among the nations of the world. No longer identified with civilization and excellence and with even trading contacts cut to a minimum, it lost its privileged position in Japan. Chinese concepts had been thoroughly naturalized and the *kokugaku* scholars regarded China with, if anything, contempt. Harootunian makes the point, "China, by losing its privileged position in discourse, [disappeared] as an object of serious consideration."⁴⁸

If a common pattern in all of this can be discerned it is, perhaps, that in Tokugawa Japan both the "China of trade" and the "China of the mind" were first embraced and imitated and then adapted and, finally, once the adaptations proved to be workable, vilified and rejected.

47 Jansen, p86-88.

48 Harootunian, p29.

This is a pattern in Japan's dealings with the outside world, that has been repeated on many occasions and in many different fields down to the present day.

APPENDIX

Major Isolationist measures of the early Tokugawa Regime.

(From Masayoshi Sugimoto & David L. Swain, *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan*, Tokyo: Tuttle, 1989. p225)

- 1616** Entry by foreign vessels was restricted to the two ports of Nagasaki and Hirado.
- 1633-36** Successive prohibitions were placed on overseas travel and trade by any Japanese, and those already abroad were barred from returning to their homeland, upon penalty of death.
- 1634** The shogunate ordered the Nagasaki merchants to build a tiny artificial island in Nagasaki harbour, and the Portuguese traders were ordered to move from Hirado to this island, called Dejima.
- 1635** Construction of vessels capable of navigating the high seas was prohibited, and all such vessels were destroyed.
- 1639** All Portuguese ships were banned from all Japanese ports; illegal attempts at entry were repelled by armed attack, and violators were put to death. (Spanish ships had already been banned in 1624; and the British, unable to compete successfully with the Dutch and Portuguese, had given up the Japan trade in 1623.
- 1641** The Dutch trading company in Hirado was moved to Nagasaki and confined to Dejima.

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