

Book Review 【書評】

DOI: 10.6163/tjeas.2017.14(1)171

Kiri Paramore,  
*Japanese Confucianism:  
A Cultural History.*  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.)<sup>§</sup>

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Kiri Paramore's *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History* offers an exceptionally objective and balanced presentation of Japanese Confucianism as a multifaceted, living tradition in Japan. The study also offers continuing analyses of Confucianism vis-à-vis the larger East Asia sphere, including China, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. Occasional nods are made to the more limited but indeed global spread of Confucianism into the West, including the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia as well. Perhaps the only corner overlooked is Confucianism in overseas East Asian communities, especially Japanese-dominated ones wherein the persistence or absence of Confucian tendencies is undoubtedly relevant. The book is structured topically and chronologically, highlighting the key roles played by, and developments issuing from, Confucianism as a force in Japanese history and culture.

Studies of Confucianism, especially those produced in the West, have tended toward either condescension and critique, or sympathetic enthusiasm and optimism. Maruyama Masao's 丸山眞男 (1914-1996) *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (*Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* 日本政治思想史研究) had much to do with the first tendency. Naively perhaps, Maruyama endorsed

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§ Kiri Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 249 pages.

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Hegel's evaluation of Confucianism as informing the static, unchanging, even "unhistorical" nature of Chinese history, and presumably the history of all that it, Confucianism, came to touch culturally as well. Accepting Hegel's appraisal of Confucianism as a starting point, Maruyama proceeded to narrate Tokugawa Japan's dialectical escape from the bondage of the confining straight-jacket of Confucian thinking via a succession of "attacks" and "assaults" on Confucian doctrines, launched most effectively and finally by Maruyama's intellectual protagonist, Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728). Writing intellectual history that echoed imperial Japan's military advances – which he, ironically, opposed – Maruyama credited Sorai with the defeat and dissolution of the Zhu Xi Neo-Confucian mode of thought, liberating Japan from the fetters of a Chinese-style continuative mode of thought that had egregiously mixed politics and ethics, public and private, into one homogenous, allegedly misguided unity. Many echoed Maruyama's views, critiquing Confucianism as a force antithetical to historical change, progress, and modernity. Thus H. D. Harootunian's early work, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan*, for example, declared that Confucianism "could not admit the possibility of change or process."<sup>1</sup>

More positive appraisals of Confucianism in Japanese history, as well as in East Asian history and culture, have appeared in postwar scholarship. One of the leading figures is Wm. Theodore de Bary (1919- ) at Columbia University. De Bary's enormous oeuvre has left no doubt that there is much that is progressive, profound, and even seminal in Confucian thinking. De Bary's impact has spread through many of his students who have similarly emphasized the importance of seeing Confucianism as a living, rich tradition that includes spiritual as well as deeply philosophical dimensions relevant to the modern and contemporary world. De Bary's efforts have been matched by Tu Weiming (1940- ), formerly at Harvard University, whose writings have stressed the vitality of Confucianism as

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<sup>1</sup> See H. D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 21.

a teaching centered around self-cultivation, but impacting developments related to economic transformation as well as political discussions of human rights and democracy in East Asia and the global arena. Most recently, Watanabe Hiroshi's 渡辺浩 *A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600-1901* (*Nihon seiji shisōshi, 17-20 seiki* 日本政治思想史, 17-20 世紀), has further advanced the view that Confucianism has made positive contributions to Japanese history and political culture well into modern times. Watanabe's views on the significance of Confucianism in Japan and East Asia stand in clear opposition to the earlier claims of Maruyama's *Studies*. In the opening line of his book, Watanabe declares, for example, that "Confucianism is perhaps the most powerful political ideology yet conceived by the human race."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, however, Watanabe's study has not been followed by another volume that brings the history of Japanese political thought, and Confucianism's place within it, through the twentieth century and its roles in the dark valley of Japanese militarism, and the aftermath.

Few would endorse Maruyama's comprehensive analyses today without considerable qualifications, yet they stand, nevertheless, as grand precedents for the longue durée analyses that Paramore's *Japanese Confucianism* advances. Although relatively limited in its survey of modern times, Maruyama, writing during the Fifteen Year War (WWII) in East Asian history, did extend his coverage as close to his contemporary moment as he felt safe to do, bringing it into the Meiji. Implied, however, as he later noted, was his pointed opposition to the National Morality (*kokumin dōtoku* 国民道徳) thought of Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855-1944) and a host of others. Paramore's *Japanese Confucianism* follows the model of Maruyama's earlier study, attempting as comprehensive a work as possible, examining Confucianism as a cultural force well into modern and contemporary times. Unlike Maruyama, however, Paramore's appraisals are somewhat in line with the views of de Bary, Tu, and Watanabe in seeing

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<sup>2</sup> See Watanabe Hiroshi, *A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600-1901* (Tokyo: International House Press, 2012), p. 9.

Confucianism as a powerful and largely positive force in Japanese history and culture.

Another important source for Paramore's work is Warren W. Smith's *Confucianism in Modern Japan: A Study of Conservatism in Japanese Intellectual History* (Hokuseidō Press, 1959). An early student of Joseph Levenson at Berkeley, Smith focused on Confucianism in modern and contemporary history, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s, which he refers to in his analyses politely as "conservatism." Smith's book makes a signal contribution with its study of imperial Japan's appropriation of Confucianism as a means of facilitating its creation of a sizable puppet-state in northeast Asia, Manchukuo. In particular, Smith highlights the Japanese ideology of "the way of the true king" (*wang dao* 王道), drawn from the *Mencius*, "in attempting to rationalize their [imperial Japan's] expansion on the Asiatic continent and to maintain social and political control" (1959, p. 184).<sup>3</sup> Smith's interpretation of Confucianism as "conservatism" became, with Maruyama's *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, published in 1963, Confucianism as a form of fascism, albeit one without mass movements as in Italy and Germany. Paramore, taking up the task in the wake of Smith and Maruyama, also sees in the Japanese appropriation of Confucianism for imperialist, militarist, and expansionist ends, not a form of conservatism, but instead fascism, or as he calls it in a section subtitle, "Confucian fascism" (p. 157). The importance of Smith's book for Paramore's is apparent in the opening paragraphs of *Japanese Confucianism*, where Paramore recaps the story of Manchukuo, a Japanese creation "billed as the apex of both East Asian Confucian tradition and industrial high modernity," as an expression of "the Confucian dream," but then deconstructs the claim by declaring, "Of course, it was a lie" (p. 1).

Paramore does not mean to suggest that Manchukuo was characteristic of

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Smith, *Confucianism in Modern Japan* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1959), pp. 121, 123, 128, 131, 134, 152, 184-198, 211-212, 219-220.

anything Confucian in Japanese history. Indeed, he flatly denies that, and admits that Manchukuo “is probably one of the most negative examples of Confucianism in over 2000 years of history” (pp. 1-2). Rather his intent is to upend stereotypes about Confucianism as “premodern,” “traditional,” “harmonious,” and “Chinese” by presenting it as “the ideology of Japanese occupation in China” (p. 2). While this point might have been made any number of ways, it is clear that one of the strengths of *Japanese Confucianism* is its recognition of “multiple manifestations of Confucianism” in Japanese and East Asian history. In this regard, Paramore’s interpretive approach resonates with the views of National Taiwan University’s emeritus professor, Chun-chieh Huang, who, since 2010, has emphasized the importance of approaching Confucianism as a plurality of expressions, as “Confucianisms,” rather than a singular, homogenous entity (2010, pp. 11-13, 99-100). Similarly, Paramore and Huang share common ground with Wm. Theodore de Bary’s long-standing opposition to viewing Confucianism as a monolithic, static intellectual force, stagnant in history.

Paramore’s book is not intellectual history in the form of doctrinal analyses of individual thinkers but instead consists of studies of “the sociology of Confucianism,” especially its impact on society, culture, and politics in Japan and across East Asia. Major topics considered are Confucianism as “cultural capital” (chapter one), as “religion” (chapter two), as “public sphere” (chapter three), as “knowledge” (chapter four), as “liberalism” (chapter five), as “fascism” (chapter six), and as “taboo” (chapter seven). Paramore also examines Confucianism as “science,” as “ultra-individualism,” as “relativism,” and as “subversive politics,” at every turn emphasizing the many roles it has played in Japanese history. Continually, Paramore’s focus shifts from Japan to the larger region, establishing continuities with expressions of Chinese and East Asian Confucianism as well. The book concludes with an epilogue comparing “modernities” in China and Japan in relation to the varied Confucian revivals in those countries.

Paramore defines Confucianism as “a constellation of ways of thinking, writing, behaving, and practicing brought together and theorized as a single unified tradition closely associated with the imperial state during the Chinese Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE).” The book acknowledges that many interpreters use the word Confucianism differently, to refer to “the intellectual and religious factions active before the Han dynasty, identified with the Chinese word “*ru*” and with certain historic personages including Confucius.” Paramore’s use of the term emphasizes, however, that “Confucianism” as a “historical tradition” only emerged in the Han as an “ideological construction” of Han historian-officials such as Ban Gu (32-92 CE) in his *Hanshu (History of the Han)*, who recognized the existence of the tradition “post ipso facto.” In Paramore’s view, then, the “origination of the tradition ... began with the launch of a commentarial tradition in the Han.” It was this commentarial tradition that continued to “transform and take on new manifestations through the course of the rest of history.” Moreover, it was “this dense, constantly developing, changing commentarial tradition” rather than the classic texts, that provided most of the doctrinal basis of Confucianism, and was “one reason why Confucianism is in a constant state of historical change” (p. 5).

Confucius the historical thinker, however, is deemphasized considerably. After being compared unfavorably to Jesus, Buddha, and Muhammad, Confucius is characterized as having been “famously ineffective as a political advisor.” To the extent that Paramore sees Confucianism predating the Han, he finds its foundations several centuries before Confucius at a moment, surely legendary, when “Heaven’s mandate had ruled the earth,” and associated with the “Ancient Sage Kings like Yao and Shun” (2016, pp. 5-6). Yet Paramore also acknowledges a later version of Confucianism, the “so-called Neo-Confucianism.” By this term, he refers to thought and practice dating from the Song dynasty (960-1279), and thereafter, as reformulated in the wake of the Confucian encounter with Buddhism generally, and Chan/Zen Buddhism in particular. This development of Confucianism, he emphasizes, “became the basis

of most forms of Confucianism which emerged thereafter, and indeed most understandings of Confucianism advanced today” (p. 6). Somewhat controversially, Paramore regards Confucianism primarily in terms of religion and culture, even though he admits that his view differs from other approaches that have understood it in terms of philosophy. Somewhat surprisingly, despite Paramore's affirmed pluralistic, multidimensional perspective on Confucianisms, with an emphasis on diversity of expression and practice, his book seems to have little use for philosophical approaches to Confucianism.

The most controversial, even questionable, chapter is the seventh, wherein Paramore suggests, somewhat dramatically, that Confucianism has been rendered “taboo” in the postwar period, shunned by intellectuals and scholars, as well as the educated public due to its ties to the ideological expressions of the 1930s and 1940s through 1945. Little explanation is given regarding why the same fate did not befall Shinto and Zen Buddhism, both of which figured prominently, even more so than did Confucianism in fascist wartime ideologies. That aside, Paramore states that since WWII, Confucianism has disappeared “... from almost all aspects of Japanese life ...” (p. 15). Rather than simply declare Confucianism “dead,” as some have indeed done, due to its supposed “disappearance,” Paramore explains the latter by stating that Confucianism “became taboo,” as a result of its appropriation by “the fascist politics which had brought about the devastation of the war.” (p. 167). As evidence, the scholarship of Tsuda Sōkichi (1873-1961) and Maruyama Masao is cited. Paramore explains, “The initially central and then completely absent role of Confucianism in Maruyama's career and oeuvre is the best example of the establishment of the Confucian taboo in postwar Japanese society” (p. 169). Paramore notes how Maruyama's early work, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, discussed Confucianism at length, but then his later publication, known in English as *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (1963), mentions “Confucianism” only once, and then only to challenge an argument made by Tsuda Sōkichi. As a result of this alleged shift in Maruyama's focus, Paramore claims that the “Maruyama

rule” emerged, holding that scholars should “avoid using the word [Confucianism] completely and prefer alternative Western-originated culturalist conceptual packagings instead of Confucianism” (p. 180). Paramore adds,

Yet although choosing Confucianism as the central vehicle of his wartime struggle, in the postwar he [Maruyama] would not even name Confucianism. The reason is intimately related to Confucianism’s postwar associations with fascism, an association Maruyama had stressed in his earlier work, and which now saw not only Maruyama, liberals, and socialists but also most conservatives in Japan avoid any reference to Confucianism in the public sphere (p. 169).

Paramore’s analysis of Maruyama’s scholarship overlooks, however, an important essay that Maruyama authored on the great Tokugawa Neo-Confucian scholar, Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇齋 (1619-1682) wherein he mentions Confucianism (*Jukyō* 儒教) seven times in the opening three pages! Given that Ansai was one of the most important thinkers in Japanese intellectual history, and an advocate, first, of pure Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism, and then later, of an eclectic blend of Neo-Confucianism and Shinto known as Suika Shintō 垂加神道, even when Maruyama does not use the word “Confucianism,” his lengthy, seventy-page essay is discussing it. Due to its importance in providing a fuller picture of Maruyama’s thought, the essay was translated into English by Barry Steben as “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Legitimacy’ in the Yamazaki Ansai School,” and published in a volume edited by Chun-chieh Huang and John Allen Tucker, *Dao Companion to Japanese Confucian Philosophy* (2014). Maruyama’s essay, entitled “Ansai’s Learning and Ansai’s School” (*Ansai gaku to Ansai gakuha* 闇齋学と闇齋学派), was first published in 1980 as part of the Nihon shisō taikai volume, *The School of Yamazaki Ansai (Yamazaki Ansai gakuha* 山崎闇齋学派), a volume co-edited by none other than Maruyama Masao himself, along with Abe Ryūichi 阿部隆一 and Nishi Junzō 西順藏, and published by Iwanami



shoten. Neither the volume nor Maruyama's essay is an obscure or inconsequential piece. If factored into the interpretive equation, it shows, following Paramore's line of reasoning, that Confucianism is by no means still taboo, if it ever was. Any number of other works of postwar Japanese scholarship on Confucianism could be cited, but given the fact that Paramore privileged Maruyama's oeuvre, this essay by Maruyama (which Paramore does not mention), strongly questions if it does not sufficiently rebut, the notion that Confucianism has become a postwar taboo. If the "Maruyama rule" ever existed, Maruyama can be credited with having broken it as well.

Nevertheless, Paramore is on to something. When asked by Japanese outside the Japanese academy about my research specialization, I typically reply that it is *jukyō* or Confucianism. The response is often uncertainty as to exactly what that, i.e., *jukyō*, is. However, upon mention that I study Hayashi Razan 林羅山, Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行, Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋, Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠, and Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰, of course, they have at least heard of every name. From the time of the late-Tokugawa survey of Japanese Confucianism, the *Sentetsu sōdan* 先哲叢談 (*Discussions of the Earlier Philosophers*), forward, the Japanese tendency has been to present Japanese Confucianism not as *Nihon no Jukyō* 日本の儒教, but instead more nativistically via reference to native Japanese Confucian thinkers. Consequently, the term "Confucianism" was never as widely used in Japan as other names and rubrics that convey, essentially, what Westerners tend to call, for convenience sake, "Confucianism," and Japanese have rendered as *jukyō*. Thus, when one goes looking for references to "Japanese Confucianism," it might seem that there is not much to be found. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Confucianism isn't there. As surely as volumes on Japanese Confucian scholars comprise a substantial third of major compilations on Japanese thought, both popular and scholarly, such as *Nihon no meicho* 日本の名著, *Nihon no shisō* 日本の思想, and *Nihon shisō taikai* 日本思想大系, pronouncements about death or taboo seem sensational exaggerations.

Edwin O. Reischauer (1910-1990), in his *The Japanese Today* (1977), explained the ironic situation somewhat differently:

Contemporary Japanese obviously are not Confucianists in the sense that their Tokugawa ancestors were, but Confucian ethical values continue to permeate their thinking. *Confucianism probably has more influence on them than does any other of the traditional religions or philosophies* [italics added]. Behind the wholehearted Japanese acceptance of modern science, modern concepts of progress and growth, universalistic principles of ethics, and democratic ideals and values, strong Confucian traits persist, such as the belief in the moral basis of government, the emphasis on interpersonal relations and loyalties, and faith in education and hard work. *Almost no one considers himself a Confucian today, but in a sense almost all Japanese are* [italics added].<sup>4</sup>

Along still different lines, Kaji Nobuyuki has recognized that Confucianism in postwar Japan “virtually disappeared from public school curricula” where it had once been standard (1991, p. 58). However, rather than pronouncing it dead or under taboo, Kaji notes “signs of a reevaluation of Confucianism” underway in Japan and throughout East Asia due to the economic success of the Republic of Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and the PRC, areas wherein Confucian teachings have had a profound influence.<sup>5</sup>

Going beyond Reischauer and back to Inoue Tetsujirō’s writings on *kokumin dōtoku*, we find what is arguably the single most important and empirically observable expression of Confucianism in Japan today, and in a mode that *Japanese Confucianism* privileges: that of religion and spirituality. In

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<sup>4</sup> See Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> Kaji Nobuyuki, “Confucianism, the Forgotten Religion,” *Japan Quarterly*, vol. 38, no.1, pp. 57-58.

his *Outline of Our National Morality* (*Kokumin dōtoku gairon* 国民道德概論, 1912), Inoue linked ancestor worship and the Confucian virtues of filial piety (*kō* 孝 C: *xiao*) and loyalty (*chū* 忠 *zhong*), two of the most central teachings of Confucius and virtues at the core of any expression of Confucianism. Inoue asserted that ancestor worship and the family system, another distinctively Confucian emphasis, were intimately related. From a very different perspective, Robert J. Smith's *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* has argued that "Buddhism as it came from China had a greater direct impact in this [Japanese ancestor worship] regard than Confucianism."<sup>6</sup> Even so, that Smith would find it necessary to argue for the greater influence of Buddhism reveals the extent to which Japanese ancestor worship is, apart from indigenous sources and developments, a practice grounded in Confucian notions, and resembling similar practices found in China, Korea, and East Asia generally. Smith has since added, "... the essentially Confucian basis of classical Japanese ancestor worship must not be overlooked. To be sure, its idiom is Buddhist, but the veneration of the ancestral spirits has its rationale in Confucianism."<sup>7</sup>

Along similar lines, Kaji affirms the intimate connection between ancestor worship and Confucianism, noting, "the religiosity of Confucianism is evident in the rites of ancestor worship ... to disassociate Confucianism from ancestor worship would be to rob the philosophy of its *raison d'être*."<sup>8</sup> Regarding claims that ancestor worship is Buddhist instead, Kaji replies that in Japan, one finds practiced a form of "'Confucianized' Buddhism" that is very different from the Buddhism of India.<sup>9</sup> Kaji goes on to suggest that to the extent that the "family" (*kazoku* 家) and "family system" (*ie seido* 家制度) are important to Japan

<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, "Nanzan Colloquium on Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan," *Nanzan Bulletin*, No. 7, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Kaji Nobuyuki, "Confucianism, the Forgotten Religion," *Japan Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No.1, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

philosophically, ideologically, and practically, they reflect, in part, the fact that “From the ideal of filial piety, Confucius built a system of family ethics that extended to society and politics.”<sup>10</sup> While one might question the decidedly chauvinistic, patriarchal, even arguably misogynistic nuances of ancestor worship, its continued presence in contemporary Japan and its deep roots in Confucianism, philosophically, spiritually, and in praxis, seem substantial counterevidence to claims that Confucianism has become taboo at any level other than mere mention of the word *jukyō*. Yet admittedly, despite the deeply Confucian dimensions of ancestor worship, few Japanese would simply refer to their “family altar” (*kamidana* 神棚) as a Confucian site of family worship. Instead, the Confucian contribution to ancestor worship, and much of Japanese daily life involving ritual decorum, is so profoundly embedded and intermeshed with the indigenous that it is simply mistaken for the latter. Rather than taboo, Confucian teachings and practice about family rituals, filial piety, and spirituality are so ingrained in Japanese life that they have become indistinguishable from it and thus, at the ordinary level of understanding, invisible, leading to a situation wherein no Japanese claims, consciously, to be a Confucian, but, as Reischauer shrewdly noted, virtually all are, to one degree or another.

Even if ancestor worship is recognized as one way in which ideologically Confucian spiritual practices survive at the mass level in modern Japan, it must be admitted that, as Paramore notes over and over again, Confucianism lacks the kind of “social-embeddedness” that might provide it with resilience and the sort of autonomy that gives rise to new expressions of socially progressive thought and action that critique rather than kowtow to the powers that are. Buddhism, despite its readiness to serve the ideological interests of the 1930s and early 1940s in imperial Japan,<sup>11</sup> quickly and effectively reformulated itself in the aftermath by working through its “social-embeddedness,” i.e., its temple networks well-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 60-61.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen War Stories* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1997).

integrated into neighborhoods, communities, regionally and nationally, to metamorphose into peace-loving sites of progress and social responsibility. Confucianism in Japan had little to no such social-embeddedness from which to launch its comeback from shameful association with fascists, militarists, and ultranationalists. Lacking such a resilient social network, and having little other than academic scholarship to save it, Confucianism receded into its most primary form, ancestor worship and the fundamentals of private morality, operative and deeply ingrained at the family/household level.

In calling attention to this sociological predicament of Japanese Confucianism in modern Japan, Paramore's study makes an important, albeit still controversial, contribution to understandings of where Japanese Confucianism is today, and where it might lead, if at all, in the future. In prompting further thinking about the historical and socio-religious influences shaping modern Japan, *Japanese Confucianism* offers a provocative survey that deserves attention and discussion, even if not the last word. No doubt, it will be a valuable resource for students of Japanese history, culture, religion, and philosophy. ♦

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♦ Responsible editor: Chieh-Ju Wu

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