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Japanese Confucianism and War

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Abstract

It is a widely held belief that State Shinto was the main indigenous ideological driver of Japan's descent into ultranationalism and war in the 1930s. However, much less is known today of Japanese Confucian justifications for war in the same era. This article joins a small group of other studies researching a now little-known educational and research association formed in 1918 by Japanese Confucian scholars and Sinologists, the Shibunkai (斯文会) which reached the peak of its influence and patronage from Japan's political elite in the 1930's. This article reviews the Shibunkai's early efforts to revive traditional Confucian morality and promote Chinese learning, its pursuit of "Confucian Diplomacy" with the Kong family estate at Qufu in Shandong Province, and its elaboration of a Confucian Pan-Asian doctrine that accorded Japan, with its supposed purified version of Confucianism, the role of leader and guardian of East Asia's spiritual and moral culture.

Last, this article analyses some of the seldom-studied war-era literature produced by Shibunkai scholars to argue that a modern Japanese "Imperial Way" Confucianism played a role in the moral legitimation of Japan's war against China in 1937-1945. Based on its analysis of the Occidentalism and self-Orientalism in the Shibunkai's wartime publications, the article concludes that there is a need for more critical reflection on Occidentalist and self-Orientalist trends in Confucian normative theorizing amidst the troubled geopolitical conditions of East Asia today.

Keywords: Imperial Way Confucianism, Shibunkai, imperialism, Orientalism, Occidentalism

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It is sad to think that . . . genuine intellectual power should be led to offer its dignity and truth to be sacrificed at the shrine of the dark gods of war.

— Rabandranath Tagore in a letter to Noguchi Yone, September 1938

I. Introduction

In the vice-principal's office at Daitō Bunka University in Tokyo, there hangs a remarkable dedicatory poem, composed in classical Chinese, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the university's foundation. Written by the Confucian philosopher Takada Shinji in 1963, it celebrates the university's founding ambition to restore to Japan the "pure wind of Confucianism," which had been broken by "westernization" and testifies to the resolve of its scholars to "earnestly study the Imperial Way." However, the poem also contains a "Lost Cause" elegy to Japan's war dead in World War Two, paying tribute to former students who perished in that conflict:

> Died the nameless soldiers in vain? Nay, they did not.
> Everyone is deeply moved by the abundant righteousness of the soldiers of East Asia.
> Each country became independent,
> And each united on their own.
> (Takada 2019)

During the war, Takada had been a leading member of the Chinese and Confucian studies organization, the Shibunkai (斯文会). A small and obscure organization today (Paramore 2016, 181-82), in the 1930s and 40s it was a powerhouse scholarly institution which enjoyed considerable political patronage. In 1937, Takada and his Shibunkai peers justified Japan's war aims in the Second Sino-Japanese War in Confucian and Pan-Asianist terms.

My aim here is to probe into the ideological frame of mind through which the Shibunkai Confucians convinced themselves of the righteousness of Japan's "Holy War" (*seisen* 聖戦) against China; a war that

enlarged into a wider Pacific-Asia conflict in 1941-1945 and claimed some 20 million lives, mostly civilians, and mostly Chinese. In demonstrating a compatibility between Confucianism and Japan's wartime authoritarianism and militarism, I do not propose to condemn it as inherently prone to cooption by such ideologies. Instead I will draw attention to modern occidentalist and self-orientalist patterns of thought which can potentially justify reinventing and repurposing Confucianianism for such cooption. These patterns of thought are present to some extent in contemporary Confucian philosophical theorizing. I shall argue that Confucian theorists should become more cautious about them, and be mindful of their potential to be once again mobilized for authoritarian, hegemonic national aggrandizement in the unstable geopolitics of twenty-first-century East Asia.

II. The Shibunkai, Japanese Confucianism, and the Imperial Way

One difficulty in explaining the importance of Confucianism in Japanese intellectual and political life in the early twentieth century is that *modern* Japanese Confucianism has only been sporadically studied since 1945. The reasons for its obscurity are complex, but the collapse of Japanese Confucianism's status in Japanese universities after 1945 and the retirement, death, or post-war disgrace of its major pre-war scholars are a part of the explanation. Moreover, late twentieth-century collaborations between Japanese and American scholars resulted in extensive scholarship on and translation of the Kyoto School thought of Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji, and of closely associated philosophers like Watsuji Tetsurō (Heisig 2001, 21-23). These collaborations established the reputations of these scholars abroad as representative modern Japanese philosophers, influenced by Buddhism. There was no corresponding scholarly collaboration to translate and promote works by twentieth-century Japanese Confucian philosophers such as Inoue Tetsujirō, Hattori Unokichi, or Takada Shinji. The Kyoto School philosophers also wrote more profoundly than their Confucian counterparts, and this advantage no doubt aided in the dissemination of their work abroad, while the modern Japanese Confucians largely

remain in obscurity today.

Owing in large part to this obscurity, when the ideologies driving Japan's wartime authoritarianism and militarism are examined in Anglophone scholarship, it is usually State Shinto, or a radicalized Shinto ultranationalism (Skya 2009), or a militarist Zen Buddhism (Victoria 1997) that comes to mind, not Confucianism. When the complicity of scholars with wartime militarism comes under discussion, it is usually the "representative" philosophers who are mentioned, such as Nishitani Kenji or Watsuji Tetsurō. This omission of the Japanese Confucians is understandable, but it also needs to be corrected. A brief intellectual history background discussion and an analysis of the seldom studied war-era publications of the Shibunkai will help me to correct the record here.[1]

The Shibunkai scholars of the early twentieth century were the heirs of rich, diverse traditions of Japanese Confucianism dating back as far as the late sixth century CE, and which attained new vitality during the Edo period, beginning in the early seventeenth century. This Edo-period Confucianism, far better known to Anglophone intellectual historians than modern Japanese Confucianism, developed in different institutional circumstances from the Confucianisms of Ming-Qing China, Joseon Korea or of Vietnam between the Lý and Nguyen dynasties. In the feudal, military caste-led political system of the Tokugawa Shogunate, there was never a comprehensive, statewide system of examinations based on Zhu Xi learning through which men from the merchant classes and nobility could compete for public service office. Examinations were instead administered on a limited scale for senior bureaucratic appointments to the Tokugawa bureaucracy from the late eighteenth century onwards (Paramore 2016, 82-85). Nevertheless, Confucianism did enjoy official patronage from the Shogunate, whose leaders saw in it a means for maintaining social order. Many schools and academies rose and flourished in the succeeding centuries, interpreting, arguing over, and expanding the

[1] One of the few scholars who has evaluated the Shibunkai's war-era literature is Chen Wei-fen (2002, 71-109). Other scholars such as Warren Smith (1959), Kiri Paramore (2016), and Kong Ming (2022) have researched the Shibunkai's history but have not analyzed in detail its publications from the later 1930s and 1940s.

ethical, political, and metaphysical ideas inherited from Chinese neo-Confucianism.

Yet Confucianism in Japan had to adapt to the complex realities of a Japanese political order which divided sovereignty between the temporal authority of the Shogunate's hereditary, authoritarian rule, and the ritual, symbolic authority of the hereditary imperial court. It also had to contend with the institutional power and influence of Buddhism, and with a Shintoist scholarship rising in reaction to its own influence, which focused on the ancient myths and rites of the imperial system as the source of Japan's spiritual vitality.

These institutional and ideological conditions stimulated diverse Confucian schools of thought, but those schools advocating a Shinto-Confucian syncretism are of chief interest here. The elaboration of this syncretism was no easy task, for the political and moral perfectionism of the Mencian Confucian tradition—and its ultimate sanction against moral failure in rulers, authorized by the Mandate of Heaven—ran up against both the particularistic Shintoist myths of the unbroken lineage, divine ancestry, and moral infallibility of Japan's emperors, and the political sensitivities of the Shogun patrons of Confucian learning. As a result, even as ideals of moral cultivation and ritual-based statecraft were upheld for temporal rulers and ministers, the doctrines of the Mandate of Heaven and of virtuous abdication were radically interpreted to minimize their normative import, rationalized away, or rejected as incompatible with Japan's political order (see Maruyama 2014, 331-411).

Moreover, a proto-nationalist consciousness emerged of the distinctiveness of Japan's Shinto-Confucian order, founded on an imperial lineage descended from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, which sometimes found expression in the conviction that Japan, not China, was the true Middle Kingdom (*Chugoku* 中國) home of Confucianism (Huang 2015, 230-31). By the early-mid nineteenth century, with growing awareness of the threat posed to Japan by foreign powers and Christianity, this proto-nationalist element sharpened among reformers and loyalists, supplying the basis for the State Shinto ideology that later developed under the modern Japanese state. The notion arose of a distinctively Japanese national polity or *kokutai* (國體), a ritual-based order binding

together the eternal, unbroken lineage of imperial rulers with their subjects, who practiced a unique "oneness of filial piety and loyalty" (*chukō icchi* 忠孝一致) (Wakabayashi 1986, 157-58). In this way, Japan was believed to have brought to perfection the Confucian Kingly Way (*ōdō* 王道) (Chang 2017, 4-12). A shift of loyalty to the emperor, advocated by Confucianism-inspired reformers, and a corresponding loss of faith in a weakened shogunate paved the way to the latter's collapse, to the imperial Meiji-era "restoration" in 1868, and to Japan's embrace of modernization.

Modernization brought loss and opportunity for Japanese Confucians. The old academies that taught classical Chinese literacy and Confucianism closed and were replaced with mass schooling, teaching European humanities and science curriculums. But in Japan's new universities, a generation of scholars trained in Europe emerged in the late nineteenth century eager to reinterpret Confucianism as philosophy (*tetsugaku* 哲學) and thought (*shisō* 思想) on equal terms with European philosophy. They were the first East Asian thinkers to write comparatively on Confucian and European philosophy (for an early instance of this, see Inoue 1892). Contemporary academic Confucian philosophy is the legatee of their pioneering efforts (Paramore 2016, 150; O'Dwyer 2019, 10-12). These scholars also interpreted Confucianism as a major constituent in a primordial national morality (*kokumin dōtoku* 國民道德) that would strengthen national unity in the face of Western encroachment, and serve as a means for projecting Japan's moral leadership in East Asia. From the 1890s onwards, Confucian philosophers like Inoue Tetsujirō exerted some influence on state moral education policy.

The Shibunkai was incorporated in 1918 as an amalgamation of literary Chinese studies (*kangaku* 漢學) and Confucian societies, including a lapsed predecessor society titled the *Shibun Gakkai* (斯文學會) (Smith 1959, 99-100). Its founders were the Tokyo Imperial University Sinologist and philosopher Hattori Unokichi, Vice President of the Privy Council Kiyōra Keigo, and leading industrialist Shibusawa Eiichi. They accepted a fundamental ideal of mid-nineteenth-century Confucian reformers like Sakuma Shōzan: of "combining eastern morality with Western technology." But like their peers who founded Daitō

Bunka Gakuin a few years later, they too believed that the pendulum of modernization had now swung too far, breaking "the pure wind of Confucianism." The Shibunkai Confucians acknowledged that the material civilization imported from the West was needful for Japan's national development. Nevertheless, they expressed anxiety at the negative impacts of this imported civilization, including rising industrial conflict, and the spread of socially disruptive foreign ideologies such as socialism, feminism, utilitarianism, and individualism (Smith 1959, 270). Finally, and most importantly, they worried about the disappearance of Chinese learning and Confucian morals from modernized school curriculums in Japan. One of the society's main aims was to promote classical Chinese literacy, Confucianism, and cultural understanding of China in schools (Smith 1959, 111, 114-15).

Furthermore, the First World War had revealed the ultimate, disastrous consequences of a single-minded focus upon material civilizational development. In such circumstances, the Shibunkai's founders re-emphasized the Confucian Way's traditional role "as both a means for self-discipline and a rule for governing peacefully," and urged its rejuvenation to spread "our nation's characteristic morality" and "arouse spiritual culture" (Smith 1959, 269-70). We need not assume that there is an anti-Western bias in such utterances. Anti-Western voices can be found in the Shibunkai's publications in its early years. But there was also a desire to mitigate the effects of rapid material progress, by revaluing (and inventing) "national" moral traditions through which moral self-cultivation could be sustained amidst such progress.

There was also an international dimension to the Shibunkai Confucians' revivalist ambitions. Members such as Shibusawa Eiichi and the medieval Chinese literature scholar Shionoya On initiated a policy of Confucian diplomacy in China, commencing regular ritual visits to the Temple of Confucius in Qufu, in Shandong Province, during the early years of the Chinese Republic. In Qufu they also cultivated relations with the Kong family descendants of Confucius, nursing hopes for an eventual Chinese imperial restoration under the descendants' rule (Kong 2022, 37-41).

At this time, during a relatively open "Taishō-era democracy" which lasted into the 1920s, the Shibunkai was a politically conservative

organization. Its aim was not to encourage the repudiation of Western materialistic culture, but to limit its damaging moral and spiritual effects through regenerating traditional Confucian morality and adapting it to modern conditions. Shibunkai thinkers such as Hattori Unokichi also expressed conditional support for assimilating Western constitutional democratic ideas, so long as they were modified to respect Mencian doctrines of sovereignty, and imperial rule (Hattori 1919, 331).

From its beginning, the Shibunkai received significant government and business sector support. The government donated a famous Confucian temple in Tokyo, the Yushima Sage Hall (Yushima Seidō 湯島聖堂), to become the Shibunkai's institutional base. A notable House of Peers member and head of the Tokugawa Clan, Prince Tokugawa Iesato, became president of the Shibunkai in 1922 (Smith 1959, 122). The Shibunkai's prestige was further enhanced in the same decade by the appointment of Imperial Family scion Prince Fushimi Hiroyasu as the Shibunkai's governor ("Shibun kai" 1947, 3). In his 1959 study *Modern Japanese Confucianism*, Warren Smith observed that the Shibunkai's strongest followers "were important businessmen, influential political leaders, university professors, high-ranking military men, and noted scholars . . . a cross-section of Japan's elite" (Smith 1959, 236).

According to Smith, Prime Ministers and cabinet members began attending the Shibunkai's annual Confucian ceremonies from 1922, and by 1926 they were also presenting speeches to its gatherings, which were published in its journal *Shibun* (斯文). From the early 1930s onwards, these political leaders were taking the Shibunkai's educational aims seriously enough to publicly advocate "guiding the thoughts of the nation with Confucianism." As simmering resentments against the Western powers intensified following Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and subsequent resignation from the League of Nations, they urged a fortifying of Japanese morality against influxes of Western ideas. Anxieties over domestic economic distress, political discord, and national survival became entangled with ambitions for a more authoritarian political order and for renewed expansionism overseas. Popular support for the Imperial Japanese Army's adventurism increased, and as military factions exerted more political power civilian political leaders lost the capacity to rein in that adventurism, or actively aligned themselves with

it. In this context, Confucianism's increasing synthesis with national polity (*kokutai*) ideology and State Shinto precepts enabled nationalists to "preempt and use the force of Confucian values for their own purposes" (Smith 1959, 137-38).

The Pan-Asianist Imperial Way (*Kōdō* 皇道) Confucianism which Japanese Confucians began to articulate in the 1930s appealed to Japanese leaders who craved a moral justification for Japan's expanding imperial influence. This Confucianism was assiduously promoted in Japan, in Manchuria, and in coopted Confucian institutions in Korea such as the former Joseon-era Confucian academy Sungkyunkwan (成均館), renamed Keigakuin (經學院) during the Japanese colonial era (Kang 2022, 111-30). The gist of the Confucian Imperial Way doctrine lay in reinterpretations of older Confucian-Shinto doctrines to justify a global mission for Japan as the spiritual and temporal leader of the Orient. Although interpretations varied, they agreed that Japan's unbroken, divine, imperial lineage supported a national polity (*kokutai*) which had purified Confucianism, perfecting the Kingly Way as the Imperial Way. This purified Confucianism consisted of a continuous refinement and cultivation of virtues such as filial piety and loyalty not possible in China's variant of the Kingly Way, where continuity was disrupted by revolutions, dynastic changes, and abdications (Inoue 1921, 280-89). Such a purified Confucianism, and Japan's growing technological and military power in relation to the West, suited it for its global mission. For civilian and some military leaders of the time, this Pan-Asian, State Shinto-affiliated Confucianism was far preferable to the nativist ultranationalist factions which often repudiated Confucianism, and which used assassinations and attempted coups d'état to try and seize political power in the 1930s.

In the early to mid-1930s, we can discern a quickening of anti-Western sentiment in Shibunkai literature. More disturbingly, however, Shibunkai scholars also held forth on the destructive influence of Western ideologies imported into China, which had distracted the Chinese from the Confucian Way since the foundation of the Chinese Republic in 1912. They believed that Japan and the new "empire" of Manchuria would provide a model that China should emulate—under Japan's guidance.

Such thinking was on full display at the most significant event in the Shibunkai's history; a grand conference on the "Confucian Way" held in April 1935 in Tokyo to commemorate the rebuilding of the Yushima Sage Hall, which had been badly damaged in the 1923 Kanto Earthquake. Members of the government cabinet including the education minister Matsuda Genji, and the puppet emperor of the "Empire of Manchuria" Pu Yi, were present for its ceremonies. Sixty scholars from Japan, China, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and colonial Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan read papers to the conference. In spite of intense lobbying from the Japanese government, the designated 77th descendant of Confucius, Kong Decheng, declined an invitation on the advice of Chiang Kai-shek's government (Kong 2022, 47-48). Instead, Kong sent some dedicatory poems for Yushima Sage Hall, which were read to the conference (Kong 1936, 415-16). In a compromise gesture, the Chinese Nationalist government did permit other representatives of the ancient Confucian Kong and Yan lineages to attend (Kong 2022, 48; Fukushima 1936).

The spiritually depleted state of the West, and the morally debilitating effects of Western ideologies on China were much on the minds of some prominent conference attendees. In a presentation titled "The Way of Confucius and World Peace," Shionoya On listed the moral and spiritual shortcomings of Western societies. There were the heresies of fascism, nazism, and communism in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, utterly opposed to the Kingly Way, and the spiritual weakness, moral decadence, and disorder of France, Britain and the United States (Shionoya 1936, 219-28). Yet in Shionoya's eyes, China also suffered from severe moral shortcomings through its forsaking of the Kingly Way, and the fault lay entirely lay with the Nationalist government and its "Three Principles of the People" doctrine (*sanminshugi* 三民主義). This doctrine, Shionoya scolded, was an ideological jumble derived from American democracy, nationalism, and communism. China was "falling into ruin" due to the corrupting influence of these Western ideologies. China's salvation lay in re-cultivating the "Kingly Way and the Five Classics" (Shionoya 1936, 229). Japan's duty was to model its Confucian Kingly Way for the world to follow, including China.

Shionoya's older Shibunkai colleague Inoue Tetsujirō also condemned the Three Principles of the People. Inoue hoped that Pan-Asianist aspirations for "spiritual unity" and "closer bonds of amity" between Eastern nations would be furthered by the conference, grounded in "the unity of a spiritual world with Confucius as its center" (Inoue 1936b, 386-87). Yet Inoue believed that Republican China had disastrously departed from the Confucian Way, and from the Confucian Pan-Asianist unity he had testified to: "The Republican government has given more weight to the Three Principles of the People than to Confucian teaching, Western ideas are encroaching, [China's] intellectual world is in disorder, and morality has no authority anymore" (Inoue 1936b, 390). What China needed to do was to follow in the Manchurian Empire's steps by "emulating Japan's Imperial Way as its policy." Inoue also expressed the long-standing Shibunkai hope that China would restore its monarchy, with the descendants of Confucius (*Kōshi no shison* 孔子の子孫) occupying the throne (Inoue 1936a, 132).

III. The Shibunkai at War

The Chinese did not restore their monarchy, and nor did they revive their Confucian Kingly Way to Japanese satisfaction. Within two years the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937 sparked the outbreak of hostilities between Chinese Nationalist and Japanese armed forces. The Shibunkai Confucians duly rallied to support the war. In the pages of their journal *Shibun* from late 1937 onwards, we find essays justifying the war and vilifying China's leadership, alongside traditional scholarly fare on Chinese studies and Confucianism. What is striking about these essays, apart from their bellicose language, is their framing of Chinese war responsibility and Japan's war aims in moral and spiritual terms—with scant regard to the geopolitical and material interests at stake. Thus in a January 1938 *Shibun* article titled "The China Incident Seen from the Viewpoint of Confucianism," Inoue Tetsujirō averred that "one major cause for the China Incident was that China (Shina 支那) became the Republic of China (Chuka minkoku 中華民國) and excluded Confucianism (*Jukyō wo sogai shita koto ni aru* 儒教を疎外したことにある)"

(Inoue 1938, 1).

In an article published in September 1938, Shibunkai member and educator Uda Hisashi gave a striking statement of the spiritual war aims in China, under the heading "Thoroughly Grasping the Meaning of Holy War (*Seisen* 聖戦)":

> In all respects the present war is being waged for the fundamental reform (*konponteki kakushin* 根本的革新) of China itself, for the liberation of all Asian peoples, and for the construction of a higher spiritual culture; and thus it cannot fall short of the "Grand Way of Heaven and Earth and the Universal Law of Humanity".[2] This is truly the ideology of the Imperial Way. (Uda 1938, 4-5)

In such a statement there are striking parallels with official government propaganda publications supplying moral and spiritual justifications for the war in China, such as the 1941 *Way of Subjects* (*Shinmin no michi* 臣民の道):

> The purpose of the "China Incident" is to enlighten China (*Shina no mō wo hiraki* 支那の蒙を啓き), to strengthen Sino-Japanese co-operation, to foster co-existence and co-prosperity, to set up a new East Asian order, and to contribute to establishing world peace. (as quoted in O'Dwyer 2019, 154).

I will now focus in more detail on the rationale for war set forth in one *Shibun* article published in December 1937 by the Confucian scholar and historian of China Iijima Tadao, titled "Clarifying the National Polity and the Awakening of China." This article is of interest for a number of reasons. Like other Shibunkai members such as Inoue Tetsujirō and Hattori Unokichi, and like one Confucian scholar not affiliated with the Shibunkai, Yasuoka Masahiro, Iijima sometimes acted in an advisory role to the government on Confucianism and China affairs. He was one of the draftees of another major government propaganda publication

[2] 天地の公道人倫の常經 *Tenchi no kōdō jinron no jōkei*. The "Grand Way of Heaven and Earth and the Universal Law of Humanity" slogan is quoted from the Japanese government's 1882 *Imperial Rescript to Soldiers* and has antecedents in Warring States and post-Han Dynasty Chinese Confucianism.

issued in March 1937, *Principles of the National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongi* 國體の本義). This tract combined attacks on Western individualism, democracy, and communism with affirmations of Japan's Shinto ethos and of its Confucianism, "purified" by the national polity (*Kokutai no Hongi* 1937, 370). In his 1937 article, Iijima constructs an elaborate Confucian moral justification for the war with China, which deliberately echoes the language of the dehumanizing wartime slogan "Punish Savage China" (*bōshiyōchō* 暴支膺懲).

Iijima commences his article with the observation that "clarifying the national polity is, in the end, the elucidation of the Great Principle of Ruler and Ruled (*kunshin no taigi* 君臣の大義)" (*Iijima* 1937, 1). He thereby links a venerable principle originating in Warring States Confucian texts such as the *Analects* (2001, 18.7) and the *Book of Rites* (Legge 1885, 245, 246, 446, 456, 460), with an illiberal modern ideological campaign, the "National Polity Clarification Movement" (國體明徵運動 *Kokutai meichō undo*) which convulsed Japanese politics early in 1935. This movement silenced or weakened conservative constitutional voices in Japan's Diet. It also accelerated the radicalization of State Shinto into an authoritarian Shinto ultranationalism (Skya 2009, 256-57). Iijima adds that the Meiji Restoration of 1868 had been established on the Great Principle—which was also the "way of loyalty" to the emperor so fundamental to Japan's national polity. But that principle had been in danger of being forgotten amidst the influx of Western ideas in the following decades. The "clarification of the National Polity" had been instrumental in calling attention to this danger (Iijima 1937, 1).

So much for Japan then, where this great principle of Confucianism had, with some effort, been conserved. China had, however, taken a disastrous turn since the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic based on the Three Principles of the People. It had thus abandoned the tradition of Confucianism. As Iijima saw it, "a republic is a nation that does not recognize the Great Principle of ruler and ruled" (Iijima 1937, 1-2). To illustrate the fallen moral plight of the Chinese under Republican ideology, Iijima cites a passage from Mencius, in which he had been denouncing the heretical ideologies of Mozi and Yang chu: "To ignore one's father on the one hand, and one's ruler on the other, is to be no different from the beasts" (Lau 1970, IIIB9). For

Iijima, "China has tragically become a nation of beasts" (Iijima 1937, 2).

Even worse, the Chinese, already having dispensed with their traditional rulers, were also accepting communism, "which demolishes not only the great principle of ruler and ruled, but also the five fundamental human relations (*gorin* 五倫)" (Iijima 1937, 2). Taking up the same passage he had earlier cited from Mencius, Iijima finds another analogy for the fallen state of the Chinese in Mencius' quote of the warlike exploits of the Duke of Chou celebrated in the *Book of Poetry*: "It was the barbarians he attacked. It was Ching and Shu that he punished" (Lau 1970, IIIB9). Yet for Iijima, the heretical Chinese were in an inferior state even to the barbarians "of the North and West" and the Ching and Shu states who, in Mencius' words, "ignored father and prince."

From this argument by analogy, it is easy to infer Iijima's conclusion: that just like the ancient barbarians, the Chinese deserved punishment for having succumbed to the "father- and ruler-denying" republican and communist ideologies. In fact, Iijima asserted—echoing an Edo-period naming convention we have noted above—that Japan could now be said to occupy the "Middle Kingdom" role that the ancient Chinese occupied in the time of the Duke of Chou. "Now it is our Japan that should be called the 'Middle Kingdom' (Chugoku 中國). And China (Shina 支那) is the barbarians of the North and West, and the Ching and Shu" (Iijima 1937, 2). And so, "if the Ching and Shu defy the Middle Kingdom, they cannot by any means escape the punishment (*yōchō* 膺懲) of its rulers." Iijima concludes this part of his article—published in the same month as the Nanjing Massacre—with the following encomium to the Japanese army's exploits, replete with Confucian archaicisms:

> The Imperial Army, now serving so conspicuously in many districts in China, is none other than the "emperor's army" of punishment (*yōchō no ōji* 膺懲の王師). We must truly attribute its successive victories in battle to a Mandate from Heaven (*Tenmei no ki suru tokoro* 天命の歸する所). (Iijima 1937, 2)

Iijima hoped that this punishment would be remedial and would assist "those among the Chinese people who are igniting a (Confucian) revivalist spirit (*fukko no seishin* 復古の精神)" (Iijima 1937, 3). The revival

or restoration of the Great Way between rulers and ruled, father and child, husband and wife, older and younger siblings, and between friends was, he believed, necessary for the "peace and happiness of the Chinese people" (Iijima 1937, 3). Seven years later, in the final wartime volume of *Shibun*, Shionoya On wrote hopefully of a peace treaty signed in October 1943 between Japan and a government of those seeking to "ignite a Confucian revivalist spirit." This was the Japanese puppet regime in Nanjing led by Wang Jingwei, a devotee of Wang Yangming Confucianism. The treaty provided for the withdrawal of Japanese troops from China and the restoration of China's full sovereignty at the end of the war—under the rule of the Chinese signatories of the treaty. Amid signs of Japan's deteriorated war situation, Shionoya expected that the "Sacred Imperial Army" would still eradicate the "violence of the English and Americans from the lands of the East," enabling this outcome for China (Shionoya 1944, 10).

IV. The Shibunkai's Authoritarian Morality, Orientalism, and Occidentalism

In hindsight, it is astonishing that a reputable Japanese scholar of Chinese culture would mobilize Mencian Confucian rhetoric to endorse the waging of total war on China, or that other Shibunkai members could associate such a war with a Pan-Asianist campaign to rebuild Asian spiritual culture, restore Confucianism, and resist the West. How to explain such scholars' rationalizations for a war of conquest against "Savage China"? I will offer three complimentary explanations here.

First, it could be said that the very logic of Confucian Imperial Way ideology required its adherents to justify any military action carried out in the emperor's name as morally right. According to that logic, the emperor was the descendent of an unbroken, eternal imperial line of divine descent, endowed with an irrevocable Mandate of Heaven. His imperial ancestors had—in the words of Japan's 1890 *Imperial Rescript on Education*—"deeply and firmly implanted virtue" in their subjects through their moral perfection and suasion. In light of the emperor's own moral perfection, a "Holy War" waged in his name was not to be

questioned, and it was the duty of Shibunkai scholars to justify it in Confucian terms.

Second, there is the refinement of this explanation in the structural perspective political scientist Maruyama Masao developed to make sense of the moralizing tone in Japanese ultranationalism. Per his explanation (Maruyama 1969, 1-25), Japan never experienced the reorganizing of political and moral life that emerged in Europe from the violence of the Reformation era. This reorganization gave rise to the "neutral state" conception of political legitimacy, in which state authority to adjudicate the moral life and beliefs of its citizens was progressively constrained. Morality and belief became the domain of "internal values" in the subjective lives of citizens, while the domain of state power was confined to the "external function of maintaining public order" in institutions of law and administration.

In Japan's case, no such transition had securely occurred prior to the Second World War. The modern Japanese state, its authority personified in the emperor, arrogated to itself "the right to determine values" and to "base its control on internal values" (Maruyama 1969, 1-25). So we could assume that the Shibunkai Confucians, lacking any commitment to the notion of a domain of internal values fenced off from state *dictat*, acquiesced in a normalization of the ultranationalistic values determined by dominant political and military factions in the 1930s and 40s.

These explanations are convincing. Still, within their frames it is possible to see the Shibunkai Confucians as mere reactive agents reflecting the dominant ideology of the times, whether it was the conservative constitutionalism of the 1920s, or the ultranationalism that prevailed during the war. Within these frames it is possible to infer that they were pressured by Shinto ultranationalists to abandon orthodox Confucianism, or at least to "pragmatically" adjust their public utterances so that they aligned with official ideology, much like other intellectuals did during the war.[3] However, we cannot ignore the closeness of these scholars to their patrons in government and the armed forces. Nor should we overlook the role some undertook as advisors to the wartime regime on educational affairs and Chinese

[3] I am obliged to one of the peer reviewers for bringing this interpretation to my attention.

culture, their confidence in exercising that role, or how their institutional connections may have also motivated their ideological output during the 1930s and 40s.

Takada Shinji provides us with an instance of a leading Shibunkai representative who exerted his influence beyond the limits of what might be termed "reactive agency"; who, as we have seen, upheld an unrepentant "Lost Cause" Imperial Way Confucianism almost 20 years after Shinto ultranationalism was discredited with Japan's defeat in 1945. Early in 1938, when the Imperial Japanese Army was moving to occupy Shandong Province, Takada wrote to its commanding officers warning them that if the hallowed Confucian sites in Qufu were destroyed, Japan would be responsible for the destruction of the "world's cultural heritage." Perhaps in acknowledgement of Takada's urgings, special care was taken by Japanese occupation forces to safeguard the Qufu Confucian sites during the war (Zhang 2012).[4] In a 1942 *Shibun* article, Takada boasted of Japan's military victories over the British and Americans, and of Shandong's Confucian and Mencian "legacy" being under the rule of "our Imperial Army" (1942, 5, 17).

The first two explanations can help us understand why the Shibunkai Confucians would have gone along with the mainstreaming of ultranationalist authoritarianism and militarism. But we also need to understand why they were motivated to draw on Confucian traditions of thought to offer what they believed to be a legitimate Confucian justification for war. How could Shibunkai Confucians like Iijima Tadao or Takada convince themselves, and not just be induced to declare, that the Imperial Japanese Army enjoyed the Mandate of Heaven, or that the "Way of the Sages (was) now being put into practice by the Japanese Empire" in wartime (Takada 1942, 17)? This brings me to my third explanation: that in their support for imperialism, the Shibunkai Confucians were practicing a novel variety of both Orientalism and Occidentalism.

It is well known that Edward Said first drew attention to the discursive—that is, epistemological and imaginary—dimension of imperialism fulfilled by European orientalists, beginning in the late

4 My thanks are due to Jiang Dongxian for sharing this information with me.

eighteenth century. They accumulated and interpreted a vast corpus of literary, ethnographic, and historical knowledge and data, to formulate laws and generalizations about the "oriental character" in the Middle and Far East about which "the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except as pretexts for a text whose usefulness was not to the natives" (Said 1979, 84). In the process of imperial expansionism,

> The Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them—beyond the modern Oriental's ken—as the true classical Orient that could be used to judge and rule the modern Orient. (Said 1979, 92)

With a little imagination, it is not difficult to see the Shibunkai Confucians as practicing their own variety of Orientalism towards China. It is a strangely fraternal variety, and comprehending it as such requires a modification of Said's thesis that Orientalism was a European imperial undertaking both constitutive of and imposed upon a subordinated "Orient." The notion that Confucianism constitutes the deep moral culture of East Asians, differentiating them from the materialistic culture of the West is, as Arif Dirlik put it, a *self*-Orientalism. Self-Orientalisms can be elaborated from a position of political subordination, such as when colonial nationalist intellectuals theorized "alternative modernities" against those theorized in the nations subjecting them to imperial domination (Dirlik 1996, 112-13). They can also be elaborated from a position of relative geopolitical strength (and cultural anxiety) in latecomer nation states' cultural exchanges with the Euro-American sphere. The early twentieth-century Japanese, militarily powerful and confident in their appropriation of European thought and technology, were early practitioners of this self-Orientalism. Yet it was an Orientalism that scholars, political leaders, and military leaders also used to provide moral justification for an imperialism imposed on East Asia.

Shibunkai Confucians and Sinologists such as Inoue Tetsujirō and Shionoya On were well versed in applying European literary, philological, and intellectual historical methodologies to Chinese studies, to

"knowing" China.[5] They drew on their Chinese learning to hold up an anachronistic ideal of the true, classical Chinese "national spirit" as they believed it should be, which "could be used to judge and rule" modern China—or to justify punishing it, if need be.

Complimenting this imperialist self-Orientalism was an Occidentalist fear of the cultural inroads a stereotyped "West" appeared to be making in China, which supplied additional reasons for Japanese military intervention there. Occidentalism—a term for diverse intellectual constructions and imaginings of the West in the formation of postcolonial nationalisms and "non-Western modernities"—is not always anti-Western (see Bonnett 2004). The "materialistic West" was certainly a foil for early twentieth-century Pan-Asianists as varied as Rabandranath Tagore and the Shibunkai Confucians, as they elaborated contrasting self-orientalist ideals of Japanese and Eastern spiritual culture. We have seen that such an Occidentalism could still deem originally European liberal and democratic ideas to be worthy of adoption. Yet as anxieties grew over the infiltration of Western ideologies into China, and over the openings such infiltration seemed to offer for the Western powers to expand their influence in Asia, a more militant, antagonistic Occidentalism took hold.[6] This militant Occidentalism was dominant in a now mainstreamed ultranationalism, and the Shibunkai Confucians actively endorsed it. In light of its presumptions, a morally "corrective" but also forceful course of action appeared justified against China's republican rulers, and an eventual war to expel the Western powers from Asia was also justified.

The China knowledge of the Japanese Confucians was useful to Japanese leaders eager for moral legitimation of Japan's military intervention and rule in China. Those leaders continued to attend

[5] Inoue had studied philosophy at Heidelberg, Leipzig, and Berlin Universities in 1884-1890 following his graduation from Tokyo University. Shionoya studied at Leipzig University and beginning in 1918 he published studies applying European literary critical approaches to medieval Chinese drama and novels (Průšek 1970, 230-32).

[6] The concept of Occidentalism discussed here, which encompasses valorizing, ambivalent, and antagonistic constructions of the West, diverges from Chen Xiaomei's (1995) understanding of Occidentalism as a *valorizing* imagination and appropriation of the West by post-Mao-era Chinese intellectuals. I am grateful to Stephen Angle for highlighting this divergence to me.

Shibunkai events in the early years of the war. At the 1939 Spring Confucian Festival at Yushima Sage Hall, Prime Minister Hiranuma Kiichirō and other members of his cabinet delivered addresses to the Shibunkai—including former army general, militarist ideologue, and education minister Araki Sadao. In his address Araki praised the Shibunkai, observing that it had "consistently applied itself to elucidating Confucian teaching (and) to honoring rites and music." Araki also reminded his audience of the exigencies confronting the nation "in its current urgent situation," including "fulfilling the objectives of our Holy War and establishing the 'Grand One Hundred Year Plan for the East'" (Araki 1939, 2).[7] Later in the war, as Japan's leadership recognized the power of the wholly modern nationalism driving continued Chinese resistance to occupation, the perceived utility of Confucian ideals for imperial governance declined (see Smith 1959, 226-28). The Shibunkai Confucians' influence also faded as this understanding took hold.

V. The Japanese Occidentalist and Orientalist Legacy in Modern Confucianism

In this journal Stephen Angle recently asked his fellow Confucian scholars to pay attention to the following unsettling concern: "that Confucians both historically and in the modern era have shown themselves to be too quick to compromise with unscrupulous power-holders and too willing to support authoritarianism" (Angle 2021, 9).

This article can be taken as a response to Angle's statement, bringing to Confucian scholars' attention the complicity of modern Japanese Confucianism with authoritarianism, militarism, and imperialism. I understand that there will be pushback against this response. It will be protested that what I am calling "modern Japanese Confucianism" was by the late 1930s stripped "of any real content independent of radical Shinto ultranationalist ideology" (see Skya 2009, 281). Here we return to the argument that Confucianism was wholly compromised

[7] After the war Hiranuma and Araki were both sentenced to life imprisonment for war crimes.

by Shinto ultranationalism. From the point of view of normative Confucian philosophy, there is a legitimate hermeneutical approach emphasizing the universalistic ethical dimension to Confucian thought. In that approach all rulers are morally perfectible, morally fallible, even replaceable in light of universal moral standards including virtue ideals, sagely exemplars, and (at least for pre-modern Confucians) the Mandate of Heaven. For such an approach, the Shibunkai scholars jettisoned too much of this moral-political universalism to be intelligibly called "Confucians."

However, from an intellectual history perspective, it is important to take a wide as well as long view. Then we can comprehend how different *Confucianisms* through the dynastic, feudal, and modern histories of China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam were continuously reinvented and repurposed for different political and cultural environments (Huang 2015). We can comprehend how Confucianism's universalist elements were variously downplayed to suit the interests of hereditary political orders and modern authoritarian regimes in Asia. From this perspective, we can also pick out repeated themes in modern nationalist and authoritarian appropriations of Confucianism which progressive, liberal, and perfectionist Confucian philosophers concerned to uphold universalist Confucianism must be on their guard against. Two such themes I will touch on here again, from my overview of the Japanese Confucians and war, are those of anti-Western Occidentalism and self-Orientalism.

An expressly anti-Western Occidentalism of the variety that became dominant in 1930s Shibunkai literature presents dangers for universalist Confucianisms. The cultural essentialism characteristic of Occidentalism is hardened into a civilizational difference and confrontation between a reified "East" and "West." Stereotyped Western ideas of individualism, democracy, rights, and the "autonomous individual" are denounced for their destructive moral effects on Western societies. Such ideas are also conceived of as being destructive to the Confucian way of life in eastern societies. Anti-Western Occidentalism in Confucian thought thereby compels a strong incompatibilist view of concepts of democracy, rights, and autonomy that moderate perfectionist, liberal, and progressive Confucians believe Confucianism

should accommodate. As we have seen, it is also wholly compatible with authoritarianism and imperialism. Today such an anti-Western Occidentalism is found in the fundamentalist Confucianism of scholars like Jiang Qing (see 2013, 53-54) or in the publications of illiberal ideologues such as Jiang Shigong, who urges a syncretism between "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and traditional "Chinese Confucian culture" that will challenge global "Western hegemony" (Jiang 2018).

Anti-Western Occidentalism does not appear in progressive, liberal, and moderate perfectionist Confucianisms. Yet self-Orientalism is more widespread in contemporary Confucianism and it also requires critical attention. For this self-Orientalism, Confucianism constitutes the deeply shared moral and spiritual culture and identity of East Asians, their common "habits of the heart" underlying more diverse political and religious attachments. The erosion of this culture—and of these habits through the deracinating effects of economic liberalization, culturally monistic globalization, and social atomization—is seen as a source of community breakdown and anomie. The notion of a duty to restore, protect, and cultivate this Confucian culture then arises.

If—as Sungmoon Kim argues—Confucian self-definition emerges out of an organic process of cultural self-determination, through which East Asians develop pluralistic democratic polities "accommodated to Confucian ends and goods that they still cherish," then I agree with him that it stands as a *reasonable* democratic cultural nationalism (Kim 2016, 69-70, 112), even though critics might still term it "self-orientalist." That is to say, it is reasonable insofar as 1) citizens in particular East Asian states would endorse a polity accommodated to those Confucian ends from the point of view of their otherwise diverse conceptions of the good life, and 2) they understand themselves as being mutually bound in a voluntarily assumed duty to uphold those ends as their shared, public culture (Kim 2014, 120).[8]

Dangers arise with the unreasonable, potentially coercive extension of such a duty to all East Asians, to preserve their Pan-Asian Confucian cultural identity, and to stem the tide of westernization—and with

[8] Of course, Kim is here influenced by John Rawls' political liberal definition of reasonableness (see Rawls 1993, 58-63).

the notion that they are morally deficient if they fail to do so. I have shown that in its extreme form, such an extended self-Orientalism can become the moralizing raiment for military conquest and imperial rule. In Marius Jansen's ironic assessment of Japan's militarist aims against China in 1937, this was to "justify the rule of might with oriental maxims of right" (Jansen 1954, 496).

For instance, what does it mean to assert in today's geopolitical conditions that Taiwan ought to revive the Confucian Way, when many Taiwanese have become indifferent to Confucianism and the "traditional Chinese cultural values" which had once been imposed on them as constituents of the former Kuomintang regime's ideology (Makeham 2005, 187-211)? When a Confucian philosopher misrepresents this longue durée "de-Chinese-fication" as the result of a deliberate (and we might presume) unvirtuous policy by Taiwan's current government to promote independence from China, and speculates that for Confucians "some form of pressure" amenable to "the principle of humaneness" could hypothetically be justified to prevent a declaration of independence, is there a presentiment of "the rule of might" underlying such speculation (Bai 2020, 212)? It is not impossible to imagine that a rising great power in East Asia cultivating both ultranationalism and insecurity over "Western" influence might coercively demand a restoration of Asia to the Confucian civilizational tradition (Jiang 2011).

I will conclude with a plea for a greater deterritorialization in Confucian moral and political theory, which is, in any case, already underway. And that is to emphasize that Confucian political perfectionist and progressive arguments for promoting Confucian (or Confucian-like) values in democratic governance and civil society, and Confucian moral philosophical arguments for virtue- or role-ethics, all have value in global philosophical discussion and potential application in social contexts far from Confucianism's historical-cultural homelands. In such arguments there is a counter-balance to any revival of a self-orientalizing, imperial Confucianism that once lent its moralizing tone to Japan's war in Pacific-Asia eight decades ago.

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