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The Way of the Gods: The Development of Shinto Nationalism in Early Modern Japan

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The Way of the Gods: The Development of Shinto Nationalism in Early Modern Japan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

by

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Abstract

This research looks at the development of Shinto nationalism in Edo Period Japan (1603-1868). It focuses on the development of intellectual thought and the relationship between the *kogaku* school in Japanese Confucianism and the *kokugaku* school in Shintoism. The primary goal is to demonstrate that there was a trend wherein members of these two schools looked back to the past in order to rediscover a lost utopia and Way. This study examines the works of Yamaga Soko, Itō Jinsai, Ogyū Sorai, Kamo no Mabuchi, and Motoori Norinaga to demonstrate how this line of thought helped contribute to the development of Shinto nativist sentiment in Japan.

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Introduction

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Japanese thought underwent a remarkable transformation. The previous model that relied upon a Chinese model of thought and culture began to melt away. Left in its place was a new Japanese-centric line of thought which sought to replace China as the ultimate source of ideological and cultural authority in East Asia. A long line of scholars and philosophers propagated this idea. Some of these philosophers believed that China should serve as an example for the Japanese but that Japan could be better than China at living out the cultural ideas that China espoused. Others believed that Japan should wipe away any Chinese influence and look toward traditional Japanese culture as a guide for the future. This idea that Japan did not have to live in China's shadow began with the Confucian scholars, those that followed the hierarchical system made popular by Confucius, and shifted over to the Shinto scholars, those that studies Japan's indigenous religion. What can be seen in the end is a fundamental shift in philosophy, away from the Confucian scholarship of China and toward a nativist reinterpretation of reality, based on the ancient Shinto texts.

This shift is remarkable because of the wide spread influence that Chinese culture and thought enjoyed prior to this movement, not only in Japan but throughout most of East Asia. Beginning as early as the third century, smaller nations throughout China's sphere of influence in East Asia were expected to pay tribute to the Chinese state and its emperor. In return, the Chinese emperor would invest the sovereign of the tribute state with the title of king. This created a “sinocentric” zone of influence wherein Chinese ideas, thoughts, and culture reigned supreme. Historian John King Fairbank goes as far as to call all the nations that participated in this system “umbilically tied” to China by means of a common governing systems, culture, and, in some

cases, written language.¹

Japan also took part in this system although admittedly to a much lesser extent than that of some other nations. This created a situation where many Chinese institutions and ideas made their way onto the Japanese islands and became a firm fixture in the culture. Buddhism, disseminated to China from India, found its way into Japan via Korea as well as by Japanese monks who traveled to the Chinese mainland. Confucianism also, a native Chinese invention, came to Japan and by the Tokugawa Period became a mainstay of Japanese political and moral ideology.

This study concerns the change away from this mode of Chinese thinking and toward a political philosophy and identity that was based on interpretations of traditional Japanese texts. Specifically, it examines how Japanese thinkers turned to the past, to ancient manuscripts, in order to rediscover their identity as Japanese. The identity that they eventually discovered was one rooted in nativism that was highly influenced by the Shinto tradition. My thesis is that prior to the Japanese turning to a nativist form of thinking there was already a form of thought that had developed in the Early Modern Period in which Japanese thinkers were turning to the past. The nativist speakers built upon the works of these early scholars and infused their thought with their own Shinto ideas to develop a fully coherent Shinto nativist ideology.

This thesis will be examined by looking at two forms of thought across two separate religious ideas. In the first section we will examine the early develop of nativism through the changes that took place in Japanese Confucianism in what is called the *kogaku* 古学 (Ancient Studies) movement. This movement was a movement within Japanese Neo-Confucianism which

¹ Fairbank, John King, ed. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 2-3.

sought to rediscover the past and the old Way of the Chinese sages by looking back to ancient texts. The scholars that comprised this movement were undoubtedly still sinocentric in their motives and thought but in the process they discovered many new ideas which started the evolution of the Japanese identity. Specifically, they looked at ancient Chinese texts in an attempt to find what constituted the true Way but in the process many of them found that the old international order, based upon China as the dominant cultural unit in the region, did not hold.

This will be accomplished by looking at the ideas of three Confucian scholars. The first is Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622-1685) who through his scholarship regarding military matters came to the realization that the Way that was being practiced in Japan at his time was not sufficient given the laziness of the samurai class. Upon further investigation he came to the conclusion that the Chinese dynasties had gradually corrupted the Way and urged that that it needed to be rediscovered. We will then move on to Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627-1705) who built upon this idea and began an investigation into the distant past in order to find the true Way. He specifically attempted to find the Way by looking at the original texts of Confucius, the venerated founder of the Confucian ideology, and Mencius, the most well known Confucian disciple who popularized Confucius' teachings. Finally we will look at Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728). Of the three men listed here Sorai is the most important since he went the furthest back in time, opting to focus on the ancient Confucian classics rather than the commentaries like Jinsai and also because of the impact that his thought and idea had upon the later scholars.

In part two we will look at a separate movement: the *kokugaku* 国学 movement or National Studies. This movement consists of the so-called *kokugakusha* 国学者 or *kokugaku* scholars. *Kokugaku* was a Shinto movement that borrowed from the earlier *kogaku* movement

that occurred in Confucianist circles. Like *kogaku*, *kokugaku* attempted to look to the past and to ancient texts in order to discover the true Way. However, they started from different starting points since *kogaku* was a Confucian philosophy and *kokugaku* was a Shinto one. Due to this, the texts that the two schools consulted were of a much different nature. Even given this, *kogaku* and *kokugaku* share a strong link. Both of the *kokugakusha* that will be examined in this study received extensive training in Confucianism in their early years, especially in the teachings of Ogyū Sorai, to whom they owed a great deal.²

The first of the two *kokugaku* scholars that we will look at is Kamo no Mabuchi 加茂真淵 (1697-1769). While there were nativist scholars that preceded Mabuchi (one of which Mabuchi studied under) Mabuchi can be easily called the first major *kokugaku* scholar because of the importance of his scholarship and the impact that he had on later scholars. Mabuchi believed that the Chinese influence that came into Japan was a scourge upon the Japanese character and believed that the only way to remove that mark was to return to the traditional Shinto sources and study them in order to find the way that the ancient Japanese lived. He believed that this life was in perfect harmony with what he called The Way of Heaven and Earth. Mabuchi's source of choice were ancient Japanese poetics, in particular the Man'yōshū 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), a Japanese anthology of poetry dating to the eighth century. He believed in the importance of poetry because by his estimation poetry was the contents of the heart poured out onto paper. Thus, in order to find the heart of the ancient Japanese it made sense to study poetry, a written remnant of the content of their hearts.

Finally, we will turn to the central figure of the nativist movement, Motoori Norinaga

2 Harootunian, Harry. *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 22-25

本居宣長 (1730-1801) . Norinaga was a student of Mabuchi who eventually broke away to conduct his own studies on Shinto texts. Norinaga shared Mabuchi's disgust with the influence of Chinese culture on Japan and also believed that it was a stain upon the heart of the Japanese people. He too sought for a way to reverse the effects. In order to find a way to do this Norinaga turned to one of the oldest Shinto texts still in existence, the ancient anthology of Japanese myths, the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters). Norinaga believed that the myths in the *Kojiki* contained the secret on how to live in accordance with the gods' requirements. This was a Way that he aptly named The Way of the Gods. However, as might be evidenced by the name Norinaga's his philosophy was much more religious in nature than that of Kamo no Mabuchi. Norinaga believed that the Shinto gods were active on earth and controlled the actions of every-day humans. Furthermore, he believed that the Japanese sun goddess, Amaterasu 天照, reigned supreme in the heavens and provided her divine providence to all nations but especially to her living descendant on earth, the Japanese emperor. Using the idea that Japan was the land of the gods because of what he read in the *Kojiki*, Norinaga came to the view that Japan was superior to all nations.

As can be seen this study covers a time frame that extends from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century. Many scholars that have examined *kokugaku* have taken their studies farther. Peter Nosco's study, *Remembering Paradise*³, extends much further into the nineteenth century as does Mark McNally's recent monograph, *Finding the Way*⁴. Both of these authors chose to include the scholarship of Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776-1843) as part of

3 Nosco, Peter. "Remembering Paradise: Nostalgic Themes in Japanese Nativism, 1690-1823" (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1978).

4 McNally, Mark. *Proving the Way: Conflict and Practice in the History of Japanese Nativism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005).

their analysis but I have chosen to leave it out because of our differing goals. The goal of this study is not to chart the path of Shinto nativism all the way to its eventual rise to political prominence in the late Edo, a feat usually attributed to Atsutane, but to follow its road to becoming a coherent philosophy, which was accomplished by the time of Norinaga. For the purposes of this study we are only interested in its development through the examination of ancient texts and not in its subsequent politicization and fallout.

The ideas that can be seen in the brief overview provided here will be given much more detailed treatment in the pages to come. We will see that there was an overarching theme, throughout two movements and two religions of looking back to ancient texts in order to find the Way. The end result of this was the creation of a nativist movement based upon the Shinto myths as the Japanese began to see themselves as superior to China and even the world through the myths in the *Kojiki*. This would have strong repercussions for Japan, not only in the Edo Period but in the century afterward.

Part I
Changes in Tokugawa Confucianism

Like any ideology or doctrine, Shinto nativism owes a significant amount to the ideas that preceded it. While Shinto itself is arguably older than either Buddhism, the religion that first came about in India and is interested in seeking enlightenment through meditation, or Confucianism and can even more easily be argued to have predated either of these two philosophies on the Japanese islands, both Buddhism and Confucianism had more power in the eras preceding the nineteenth century. Buddhism, especially, has an extensive history within Japan. Its introduction from the Korean kingdom of Paekche dates to as early as the sixth century and it received official state recognition as early as the seventh century. Thereafter, it became more important in Japan's cultural history over the next one thousand years.⁵ For the purposes of this paper, however, the ideology from which Shinto nativism will be examined will be Confucianism not only due to its important role in the staging of nativist thought but also because of the essential part that it played in the structure of Tokugawa society as a whole. While Buddhism holds a significant advantage over Confucianism in terms of its longevity of state sponsorship, the Confucian doctrine became the supreme ideology of the Tokugawa *Bakufu* 徳川家康幕府, the government of Tokugawa Japan, during its reign. This is not to say, however, that Buddhism predated Confucianism as a presence on the Japanese islands since there is evidence that the introduction of Confucianism even predates Buddhism but merely that it did not have either the political weight or cultural pull of Buddhism for the majority of Japan's early history.⁶

5 Brown, Delmer M. ed. *Cambridge History of Japan Vol. I* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1993), 371-373.

6 Nosco, Peter, ed. *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1984), 5.

The primary purpose of this section is to establish Confucianism as an important precursor to the *kokugaku* movement. Although the *kokugakusha*, those people that adhered to *kokugaku* teachings, were openly hostile toward Confucian ideas all evidence points toward the fact that Confucian teachings, particularly those of *kogaku*, or ancient learning school, were an important part in the development of the thought that lead to the *kokugaku* movement.

Specifically, I shall begin with an analysis of the nature of Tokugawa Confucianism at the beginning of the Tokugawa period. By doing this I will establish a baseline from which a study of the changes that took place within Confucianism can be examined. After establishing this baseline, I will examine changes in Japanese Confucian philosophy that had a significant impact on the subsequent *kokugaku* movement. For the purposes of this study, the philosophies of three men will be shown to have significant impact: Yamaga Sokō, Itō Jinsai, and Ogyū Sorai.

Within the works of these three scholars I hope to demonstrate five facts that will provide a starting point for the study of the *kokugaku* movement. First, that there was dissatisfaction with the current state of Tokugawa Confucianism. Second, that these men believed that the Way had been lost. Third, that it could be found again. Fourth, that Confucian scholars were beginning to move beyond a Sino-centric model of Confucianism and toward one in which Japan could be seen as an equal or superior of China. Finally, and most importantly, that Confucian scholars were beginning to look toward the past as the source of universal truth. These particular Confucianists believed that one could only discover the truth of the universe and rediscover the Way by studying knowledge and texts that originated as close to the ancient sages as possible.

These items will all be important to the development of Shinto thought in the Tokugawa period. What is evident is that the *kokugaku* scholars owe a significant amount to the Confucian

scholars that preceded them despite the feelings of disgust that they felt toward all things Confucian.

Chapter One Japanese Confucianism at a Glance

Confucianism was introduced to Japan as early as the third century but prior to the sixteenth century it failed to gain a significant following among the populace or any sort of state sponsorship. Its primary form of dissemination was through the circles of the academic and religious elites. The general population of Japan was unaffected by the Confucian academics that took place in the upper levels of society, choosing rather to focus more on Buddhism. Buddhist emphasis on teaching regarding life beyond the current realm of existence was particularly attractive to a Japanese peasant whose life was constantly in a state of flux and uncertain stability. However, as Japanese life stabilized in the time following a period of civil war in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, known as the *Sengoku Jidai* 戦国時代 (1467-1603), Japanese commoners were afforded the luxury of looking into how one might live one's life in the current world and what practices and ethics would constitute good moral character. While Buddhism still maintained a significant place in Japanese society for religious ceremony, Confucianism became increasingly popular as a means to determine good morality. By the seventeenth century it was no longer considered only the domain of educated elites, samurai, and feudal lords but gained wide spread acceptance among the population. This was partially allowed by the availability of Confucian documents published in the vernacular which is in contrast to the Chinese custom of all documents being published in classical Chinese.⁷

At its heart Confucianism is a set of guidelines which directs a person in the ways in which one should behave toward one's fellow man. Although all men have different skills and talents the teachings of Confucius urged the practitioner toward a scenario where all abilities

⁷ Whitney Hall, John, ed. *Cambridge History of Japan Vol. IV* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1991), 396-397.

would be put to the better use of the society. For this reason, those with like skills and abilities were typically grouped into hierarchies. These hierarchies were not only an integral part of government and other official groups but also served as a means of stratifying all of society. In all areas of life including family life, service to the state, work life, and other areas those with a lower status were expected to give the proper respect to those that were above them. For example, a child is the inferior of his father and a younger man the inferior of his elder. Confucianism relied upon five basic relationships in order to maintain this hierarchy: ruler to subject, father to son, elder to younger, husband to wife, and friend to friend. These relationships formed the backbone of society. With regard to the state, the state was seen as the father of the country. This is a view that persists even into modern Chinese culture today. As a result of this strict hierarchical system, the stratification of society became one of the defining traits of the Tokugawa system when Confucianism was adopted by the Tokugawa in the early seventeenth century.

Confucianism is also particularly concerned with the conducts of rulers and the ways in which these rulers nurture the moral righteousness of the people. A good Confucian practitioner was expected to achieve a certain level of moral edification and use the talents acquired through life in the service of the state. This concept can be applied to any person throughout society from the lowest farmer even up to a king or emperor. Yet it is best exemplified in the civil service examinations that took place in China and Korea whereby those hoping to procure a government position could do so by passing a test. Confucianism practiced in its purest form, then, would be a merit based system yet also a system in which people used their abilities to the betterment of society. In more legalist Confucian traditions in which the state commanded a significant degree

of power and respect, the work toward the betterment of society was sometimes replaced by working for the advancement of the state and its goals beyond the desires of the individual. However, traditional Confucian thinking placed the individual before the state noting that the mechanisms of the state were “instruments evolved for the betterment of the individual.”⁸ This means that while people worked for the betterment of the state the ultimate goal was to produce a positive effect for the individual operating within society.

Confucian leaders were expected to nurture the moral upstanding of the people and act in a just way. They were expected, as were all members of society, to practice the concept of *Li* 理 (Japanese *Ri*) and to nurture the people toward that purpose. *Li* is most easily defined as guidelines that instructed a person on the types of behaviors that were acceptable in a given society. Similar, to the Confucian hierarchical system, it governed not only how one should behave in official government settings or at high class functions but also in all parts of daily life, even for the common people. This included the daily rites, rituals, and behaviors that collect a group of people into a civilized society. It is an unwritten law, separate from traditional state law, that dictates how one should act in social situations, toward elders, while partaking in religious rituals or dealing with superiors. That is to say that it is the rituals that exist in any society that permeate all areas of daily and official life and provide a code of conduct to live by. A Confucian would argue that it was through the practice of voluntary rituals that a nation could properly be led and edified. It was only through proper ritual practice that a nation could distinguish itself from the barbarians. Civilization itself was dependent upon the proper practice of *Li*. Likewise, Confucianists believed that state success was dependent upon *Li*. A nation that practiced *Li* and

8 Twitchett, Denis and Michael Loewe, ed. *The Cambridge History of China Volume I* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), 704-706.

nurtured their people in such a manner that the people would live up to Confucian standards would enjoy an increased quality of life and peace within the realm. Those that did not would face disaster and ruin. *Li* could be practiced in many ways including through poetry, music, or any other form of ritual that brought about cultural edification.⁹

In the most comprehensive work on Chinese history, *The Cambridge History of China*, Michael Loewe gives a set of examples that help to define what *Li* is. He wrote in the first volume:

Li prescribed the proper conduct at religious services to the powers (*t'ien*), to Heaven, to the *shen* or the *kuei*; it also dictated how respect should be rendered to ancestors, whether alive or dead. It set down the correct orders of precedence in public life and in the family; it maintained a dignified order of action and the necessary degree of discipline in the palace, at an official's court, or in a domestic residence. *Li* regulated matters of everyday life, imposing time schedules for work in town and country.¹⁰

So one can see that *Li* is in control of every aspect of society. As mentioned already it is not dependent upon the written rules of the state in order for it to work but is an unspoken law that people follow. A Confucian would argue that all societies, even modern societies, have some aspect of *Li*. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any society where unspoken rules of etiquette and proper behavior are not practiced. However, in ancient Chinese Confucian culture *Li* was a vital part of behavior in state and society. For Confucians it was important to harness the power of *Li* for the use of the state and create a set of rituals that would control the daily life of the populous in a much more efficient way than any official means could do. The primary job of the ruler, then, was to rule in accordance to the Way of righteousness and edify the people so that the rituals instated would be adopted and lead to a culturally civilized realm.

This, of course, is the form that classical Chinese Confucianism took and while it is

⁹ *Ibid.* 706-708

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 706

important to know the general background of classical Confucianism, specifics must also be laid out regarding the form Japanese Confucianism took. Like any religion or philosophy of any great size, Confucianism is broken into many sects and groups, each of which have small differences in belief. The Japanese of the early Tokugawa period were primarily interested in Neo-Confucian thought as envisioned by the twelfth century Chinese Confucian scholar Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130-1200). Chu Hsi's philosophy was transmitted to Japan via the enclaves of Zen monks who studied it alongside Buddhism. It was then acquired by various *Daimyō* 大名 lords, the feudal rulers of the Japanese provinces, and became especially popular with the political elites of Japan during the *Sengoku* Period.¹¹ Like other forms of Confucianism that preceded it, however, Neo-Confucianism failed to gain popular support during the tumultuous period of time between the collapse of the Heian court and the establishment of the Tokugawa Bakufu. It was only after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's successive invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597 when the Japanese were exposed to new Korean and Chinese interpretations of Chu Hsi's writings that Neo-Confucian thought became a prominent political force in Japan.¹²

The philosophy of Chu Hsi was an odd mixture of rationally driven thought cloaked within a veil of mysticism through which it espoused the existence of a single, universally present force. Confucianism had long been known for a rational approach to philosophy given its emphasis on cultivating morality and cultural education for the good of the state. It was Chu Hsi's insistence on the existence of an all encompassing force that combined the old version of Confucianism with a sense of spirituality that would give it such power in the Tokugawa Period. Chu Hsi referred to this all encompassing force as the "Supreme Ultimate". According to Chu

¹¹ Cambridge History of Japan Volume IV, 396-398

¹² Nosco, *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* 6-8

Hsi, before the world and all things in it existed there was only the Supreme Ultimate and all things are derived from it. Since all things are derived from the supreme ultimate he described it as a single element that was inherent in all things: Principle. For Chu Hsi, Principle was one of two elements that made up the foundation of all existence. Peter Nosco, in his work on the *kokugakusha* writes that the purpose of Principle was to “underlie the existence of all creatures and things.”¹³ This principle came out of the Supreme Ultimate. Chu Hsi advised those that followed his teachings to pursue a dual philosophy wherein one would rationally examine the world while adhering to the “Way” of the Supreme Ultimate.¹⁴

The second important element of existence in Neo-Confucian thought was what Nosco refers to as Ether, which is also called *Chi*. While Principle is exuded out of the Supreme Ultimate and is the basis by which all of the world exists, Ether served to determine the nature of how things were. When combined together with Principle, Ether would serve to create the nature and form of all things. Chu Hsi believed that all things had a sense of Ether. Animals, insects, fish, and all things had a distinct Ether that gave them the nature of the form that they took. However, according to Chu Hsi, the greatest Ether of all things was housed within men. More importantly, the Ether of all men was inherently good. While men certainly had different forms of Ether which gave them different talents, abilities, and consequently roles that they should serve in society, the Ether of all men was good and useful. This point is especially important since it would later serve as one of the base beliefs of both *kogaku* and *kokugaku*. Chu Hsi argued that the corruption of man was not due to an inherent preference toward evil but rather was the result of man forgetting his natural Ether by being deceived into following the ways of

13 Nosco, Peter, “Remembering Paradise: Nostalgic Themes in Japanese Nativism, 1690-1823” (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1978), 26.

14 Nosco, *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* 6

the world. The most basic and fundamental goal of Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism, therefore, was to rediscover this original Ether that followers of this sect believed still dwelt within every man.¹⁵

How, then, was a follower of this form of Confucianism expected to discover the true nature that dwelt within himself and within the world around him? Chu Hsi argued that the scholar of Confucianism should busy himself with an investigation of the natural world in order to discover the truth of nature and existence.¹⁶ The proximity to the goals of modern science aside, the scholarship of the Neo-Confucian scholars should not be equated with anything resembling a modern scientific pursuit for two basic reasons. First, the Confucian scholars had no knowledge of the modern scientific method and had no inclination to conduct empirical experimentation. Theirs was a philosophy which relied upon observation and then mental rather than physical observation. Second, and most importantly since it will provide with a better insight into the goals of these scholars, is that the Confucian scholars and modern science operated from entirely different starting points and with entirely different ambitions. While modern science starts with the assumption of a naturalistic view of the world, Neo-Confucianism starts with the assumption that everything is under the influence of the Supreme Ultimate. Their goals, thus, are entirely different. The Neo-Confucianists are not so much concerned with *how* things in the world work but with the principle of *why* things work the way they do and what is the philosophical foundation underlying all of this. The Neo-Confucian investigation was conducted not with the intention of understanding the mechanics of the natural world, as in science, but more so with the discovery of the Principle and Ether that were operating silently behind it. In the end, this investigation was a search for the Supreme Ultimate.

¹⁵ Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 24-28

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 28

Early Tokugawa Confucianism took the principles in Chu Hsi's philosophy and combined them with Shinto elements to create a unique philosophy that differed from that of Shinto and Chinese Confucianism. Indeed, in the early days of the Tokugawa Period many of the scholars that we today link as important names in Tokugawa Confucianism including Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窩 (1561-1619), the proclaimed father of Japanese Confucianism, and his disciple Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583-1657) busied themselves not only with treatises on Confucian philosophy but also in the composition of Shinto texts. As the Japanese historian Kurozumi Makoto aptly explained in his work on Tokugawa Confucianism, in the early days there was no “composite” or pure form of Confucian philosophy that was separate from Shinto thought. It would not be until the Tokugawa regime had passed its stage of early militancy and embraced a more civil and ritual based form of rule that Confucianism was liberated from Shinto philosophy and stood on its own as an independent force in the Tokugawa political sphere.¹⁷

Still, despite its early Shinto influences, Japanese Neo-Confucianism took on a different form and in some ways a much more important role than it did in either China or Korea. Several of the elements of Chinese and Korean Confucianism were conspicuously absent from its Japanese counterpart. Ancestor worship which had been a staple of Chinese Confucian ideology was absent from Japanese version of the philosophy as were the civil service examinations that formed an integral part of Chinese and Korean government employment. Japanese Neo-Confucianism, in contrast to its mainland neighbors, lacked an official state arm through which it was implemented even though the existence of a Confucian orthodoxy was evident as little as

¹⁷ Kurozumi Makoto and Herman Ooms. “Introduction to 'The Nature of Early Tokugawa Confucianism' by Kurozumi Makoto” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20:2 (Summer, 1994): 331-335, 337-395, 341-342.

fifty years into the Tokugawa Period.¹⁸ Yet despite the lack of official state implementation, Neo-Confucian thought was much more successful with the general populous in Japan than it was in China or Korea. Some scholars attribute this fact to many Confucian works being reproduced in the popular *kana* script whereas in China and Korea the study of the Confucian classics was only done in classical Chinese limiting its effective range to only those highly trained academics who could read them.¹⁹

The form that Japanese Neo-Confucianism took can be attributed to many factors, one of which likely being the already present belief system in Shinto and Buddhism. However, most important to point out is that the Tokugawa were primarily interested in Confucian ideology because of the stability that it could provide a shattered Japanese polity. The Tokugawa saw the philosophy of the previous age, which had been rooted in Buddhist beliefs, as an ineffective tool for setting up a new order. Rather than rely on the impermanence of Buddhist meditative doctrine, they sought a new one that could provide universal principles and a stratified hierarchy capable of creating a new order as the old one collapsed under the weight of the civil wars during the *Sengoku Jidai*.²⁰ Thus, the Tokugawa partially adopted the Chinese principle of the Way of Heaven, wherein the ruling party was given the authority of divine favor, yet distanced themselves enough so as to be separated from the pit falls of such a philosophy.²¹ What can be

18 Makoto, 340

19 *Cambridge History of Japan Vol. IV*, 397-398

20 *Cambridge History of Japan Vol. IV*, 404-405

21 The Chinese believed in the Way of Heaven as a universal force that governed all things. If the realm acted in accordance with the Way then there would be peace and stability. If not there would be disaster. Much of the impetus for leading the realm in the the proper Way fell on the ruler of the nation. Natural disasters such as floods, famines, and earthquakes could regularly be interpreted as the god's displeasure with the current direction and regularly lead to revolts and rebellions by those seeking to bring the nation back into accordance with the Way.

seen, then, is that Tokugawa Confucianism was perfectly suited to the needs of the ruling class of Japan. Using Confucian ideology, which espoused universal principles of morality as well a rigid social hierarchy, the Tokugawa were able to construct a new order with an intensely rigid social structure, creating a society that was stable and easily controlled.²² Civil service examinations provided a form of social mobility and would have thus undermined the Tokugawa desire to create a society that relied upon the ruling samurai class and bound the peasants to the farm lands. Such a system would have weakened the control of the typically hereditary noble positions. Likewise, ancestor worship would have undermined imperial authority which was the vein through which Tokugawa legitimacy flowed. So, despite the highly decentralized nature of Tokugawa politics, the system that was created was highly effective and stable, the proof of which is found in a longevity which would last for over 250 years.

²² Nosco, *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* 8

Chapter II Looking to the Past and Rejecting the Status Quo

Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism was a strong force in the development of thought in early modern Japan and played an essential part in the construction of Tokugawa society. In the early years of the Tokugawa Period it was the most dominant strain of Confucian thought in Japan. However, as with any major philosophy, it was not long before scholars developed new ideas about the nature of the world and the nature of men. By the middle of the seventeenth century new modes of thought arose that would challenge the hegemony of the Chu Hsi school over Tokugawa intellectual life. The most prominent, and most important for this study, was the *kogaku* school which emphasized a return to the past in order to discover the nature of the Way.

The *kogaku* school was an important forerunner to the *kokugaku* school. The beliefs and methods of this school would have a large impact on later thinkers such as Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801). In this chapter I will demonstrate that there are five key elements of *kogaku* that the *kokugakusha* would later share. *Kokugaku* will be discussed in the next chapter. First, adherents of *kogaku* were dissatisfied with the current nature of Tokugawa society. Second, they believed that at sometime in the past the Way of the sages had been lost. The people, and more importantly the government, were not living by the moral code that the sages had directed. Third, this lost Way could be found again. It was not lost forever. Fourth, there was evidence that Japanese intellectuals were beginning to outgrow their earlier Sino-centric focus and were becoming more focused upon Japan. While many of the *kogaku* scholars were still unashamedly sinophiles, they also came to reject the long-held belief that only China could be the standard bearer of proper Confucian civilization. Members of this school came to believe that Japan could also bear the torch of moral righteousness and, in some cases, they likewise believed that Japan

could even be superior to the Chinese. Finally, these men looked to the past for their truth. The key to finding the lost Way was to go back and study the past. According to *kogaku*, only those in the past had lived according to the Way. While it was now lost the Way could be found again by going back and studying the sages. In order to discover the Way that the sages lived by, it was essential to study ancient writings and manuscripts. This placed a great emphasis on history and historical inquiry. The key to discovering the Way was in reading the history of the sages and analyzing them to rediscover its contents. This is where the *kogaku* movement gets its way from since it means “Ancient Learning.”

These ideas and philosophies will be examined through the thoughts of three thinkers: Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行(1622-1685), Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627-1705), and Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠(1666-1728). Two of them, Sokō and Jinsai, are considered to be among the most prominent members of the *kogaku* school. Sorai, while not considered to be a direct member of *kogaku* and thought by many scholars to be post-*kogaku*, has thoughts in such proximity to *kogaku* and was so well known to some of the *kokugakusha* that to leave him out would be a mistake. The thoughts of these three thinkers will aptly demonstrate that the five ideas listed above were alive and well in the thoughts of *kogaku* scholarship.

Yamaga Sokō

The first scholar that we will be examining is Yamaga Sokō. Sokō was born to a *ronin* samurai father in 1622. In the Edo Period all samurai worked for a lord that in turn provided them with provisions for life. However, some samurai were left without such a retainer through special means. These samurai were known as *ronin* and Sokō's father was one of these. It could be difficult for a *ronin* to find employment in the Edo period due to the rigid class structure

which forbade samurai from working on the land. Since finding employment for a *ronin* was difficult outside of an official situation with a lord, many of them had to turn to mercenary work. However, Sokō's father was fortunate enough to find employment with a close friend who held a high position within the offices of one of the daimyō lords. It was a position that he would hold for a number of years. Years later when the daimyō that Sokō's father served died without an heir the Tokugawa government abolished his fief, leaving Sokō's family once again without a steady means of employment. Hoping to find a means of income, his father moved the family to Edo where he was able to set up a practice as a physician. It was here that he noticed that his son seemed to have a particularly keen mind, and a close friend urged him to send Sokō to study the Confucian classics. Thus, at the very young age of nine Yamaga Sokō went to study the classics under the Confucian master Hayashi Razan²³

Although Sokō considered himself to be a poor student, his educators were delighted with the quick pace that the boy managed in his time studying Confucianism. At a very young age he had already mastered classical Chinese and had begun to compose poetry which received praise from his elders and tutors. By age fifteen he was composing works analyzing the Confucian classics, and by age sixteen he was giving lectures on the *Works of Mencius* to audiences of 1,000 people some of which were high ranking bakufu officials.²⁴ The level of respect that Sokō was able to garner and the speed of his rise is nothing short of incredible.

During his education, Yamaga Sokō turned to studying a unique mode of thought in Confucian philosophy that would eventually lead to a strain in his relationship with the

23 Uenaka, Shuzo. "Last Testament in Exile. Yamaga Soko's Haisho Zampitsu." *Monumenta Nipponica* 32:2 (Summer, 1977):125-152, 126-127.

24 Yamaga Sokō. *Haisho Zampitsu* Manuscript. From Uenaka, Shuzo. "Last Testament in Exile. Yamaga Sokō's Haisho Zampitsu." *Monumenta Nipponica* 32:2 (Summer, 1977): 125-152, 131-132.

traditional understanding of Confucianism. While most Confucian scholars were concerned with things of cultural and moral edification, Sokō turned toward military matters for his critiques. He was enamored with military tactics, the state of the Japanese military, and western military equipment and techniques. He was particularly concerned with the sedentary lifestyle that many of the samurai class were living. While the samurai had lived up to their original purpose as warriors during the tumultuous Sengoku Period, the peace brought on by the establishment of the Tokugawa Bakufu had left them without wars to fight or enemies to conquer. The lot of the samurai was to be left to become a shells of what they had previously been, devolving into ranks of bureaucrats and administrators, more in line with what could be found in China or Korea than had come to be expected of Japan's ruling, warrior class.

Sokō, then, had a profound dissatisfaction with a certain element of Tokugawa society. To Sokō the samurai class had become a class that failed to live up to the purpose that was expected of it. A samurai, he stressed, should be a man of the utmost loyalty and always fulfill his duty. He must be an early riser and work throughout the day to see to the needs of both his master and his parents. His life must be one of service, devotion, and personal cultivation.²⁵ But this was not the samurai that Sokō and his disciples saw in the early years of the Tokugawa Bakufu. They saw a group that had abandoned the ways of the country and even more importantly the Way of the sages. For example, Sokō was disgusted with the way that the samurai class treated those beneath them. The samurai acted under the pretext that the commoners had forgotten their place in society. Rather, Sokō argued that it was the samurai themselves who had forgotten their place. He forgave the peasants, merchants, and artisans for not following the Way of the sages. He

25 Two students of Yamaga Sokō. "Preface to the Elementary Learning for Samurai (Bukyō Shōgaku)". Manuscript. 1656. From Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600-2000*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 189-192 , 190-191.

argued that theirs was a busy life and they had no idle time to pursue the Way. The samurai, however, should be the paragons of the Way.²⁶ Having forgotten their place and having given themselves over to idleness with no purpose, Sokō complained that they were not performing their duty and went as far as to say that “one who lives his whole life without working should be called a rebel against heaven.”²⁷

Writing in 1656 two of Sokō's disciples commented on the matter when they wrote about the samurai abandoning the lifestyle expected of them and the Way of the Confucian sages. They wrote that “The conduct of common samurai in this county has become thoroughly corrupt. Even while living in this country they are attracted to Chinese customs, or study rites and ceremonies in a foreign way or perform Shinto rituals in a strange manner.”²⁸ Additionally, Sokō himself was highly critical of the way in which the samurai were conducting themselves. In his treatise *Shidō* (The Way of the Samurai) Sokō remarked:

Man is the most highly endowed of all creatures, and all things culminate in man. For generation after generation, men have taken their livelihood from tilling the soil, or devised and manufactured, or produced profit from mutual trade, so that people's needs were satisfied. Thus the occupations of farmer, artisan, and merchant necessarily grew up as complementary to one another. But the samurai eats food without growing it, uses utensils without manufacturing them, and profits without buying or selling. What is the justification for this?...The samurai is one who does not cultivate, who does not manufacture, and does not engage in trade, but it cannot be that he has no function at all as a samurai. He who satisfies his needs without performing any function at all would more properly be called an idler. Therefore, one must devote all one's mind to the detailed examination of one's calling.²⁹

To some of Sokō's disciples what lay at fault was that the samurai had ceased investigating the world as was required in a Confucian world view. Rather, they had set

26 Yamaga Sokō, *Way of the Samurai*, 399-400

27 Yamaga Sokō, *Way of the Samurai*, 399

28 *Ibid.*, 190

29 Yanaga Sokō. “The Way of the Samurai.” Manuscript. From Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600-2000*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 192-194, 192-193.

themselves to mere imitation, mimicking the Chinese rites, rituals, and customs in a vain attempt to make themselves seem as though they were a civilized culture.³⁰

For Sokō, however, the problem with the samurai was only part of the problem inherent throughout Tokugawa culture. He believed that Japan itself had abandoned the Way. According to Sokō, the Way was only known in the past. The ancient sages knew and understood the Way as had some of the Confucian scholars that had come afterward. Yet as time went by the Way became increasingly corrupt and lost. Again we can point to his disciples to see an example of the things that Sokō had been teaching. They wrote that “the Sages lived far in the past and their precise teachings have gradually sunk into oblivion. The scholars of Han, T'ang, Sung, and Ming dynasties have misled the world, piling confusion upon confusion. And if this has been true in China, how much the more has it been true in Japan.”³¹ So for Sokō and his disciples the current Way being taught in China, Korea, and Japan was corrupt, broken, and merely a shell of what the sages had originally taught. In order to return to the true Way they believed that the current forgery had to be washed away.

How did they intend to do this? This brings us to one of the more important contributions of Yamaga Sokō, at least for the purposes of this study. Soko believed that the only way to bring back the true Way was to begin with a criticism of the nature of Tokugawa Confucianism itself and to create a commentary on the Way of the ancient sages. The purpose being to highlight those scholars who best transmitted the Way.³² For Sokō this meant Confucius himself. While Sokō saw value in the teachings of Chu Hsi and believed the Confucian master to be among the most legitimate of the Confucian teachers, he was adamant that no works, other than those

30 Two Students, 190

31 Yamaga Sokō's Disciples, *The Essence of Confucianism* (400)

32 Yamaga Sokō's Disciples, *The Essence of Confucianism* (401)

written by Confucius could be considered Confucian cannon. Sokō believed that Confucius was the sole source of legitimate Confucian authority. All philosophers who had followed Confucius failed to live up to his standards. Sokō believed that the Way of the sages had been degenerating in China, and consequently Japan and Korea, since the time of Mencius. Although Mencius did not live up to the greatness of Confucius, Sokō believed that Mencius had managed to transmit the proper Way.³³

The other philosophers, however, had fallen woefully short. Sokō argued that these men had been transmitting baseless heterodoxies instead of transmitting the true Way and teaching in the manner of Confucius, a criticism that extended even unto such great thinkers as Chu Hsi. Sokō accused each successive generation of Confucian scholars of getting further and further away from the true Way. The doctrines of Confucius had been pure and taught the true Way, that of Mencius and his generation slightly less so and so on until the current time.³⁴

This, of course, was a profound critique of Tokugawa society and the government. The Tokugawa had set up their government system on a Confucian hierarchy and yet Sokō was arguing that the current mode of Japanese Neo-Confucianism was devoid of truth and did not practice the Way as it had been practiced in the past. He was advocating for a return to the teachings of the past, to the original teachings of Confucius. Only there, he argued, could the true Way be found.

Due to the controversial nature of his ideas, Sokō's disciples urged him not to publish such revolutionary writings. They noted that writings like those that Sokō intended to publish

33 Yamaga Sokō. "The Succession to the Way." Manuscript. *From* Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600-2000*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 197-200, 197.

34 *Ibid.* 197

could easily agitate the Tokugawa authorities who had a vested interest in maintaining the legitimacy of Neo-Confucianism in Japan.³⁵ Sokō, however, was adamant that he should publish and in 1665 he released a work in which he argued that the teachings of Chu Hsi were not useful for the purposes of the samurai. Rather, he taught that only the teachings of Confucius were relevant.³⁶

Unfortunately the warnings of his disciples proved to be prophetic. Shortly after publishing he published, Yamaga Sokō was arrested for publishing a book on “matters that did not concern” him.³⁷ He was brought before the Council of Elders and later exiled.

What conclusions can we draw from the thoughts of Yamaga Sokō and what direction did his ideas seem to point in? We can see that he was deeply dissatisfied with an aspect of Tokugawa society, in his case the lax state of the samurai. Likewise, he blamed it and other problems in the Tokugawa Period on the fact that the Way had been lost. The samurai were ignoring their place in society. They had given themselves over to idleness with no purpose and did not use their free time to study the Way. He also blamed the Chinese dynasties for corrupting the true Way of the sages. He believed that each successive generation had changed the Way slightly until it was now unrecognizable from its original form. However, he believed it could be found again by going back and studying the ancient texts. In his particular case he emphasized the writings of Confucius over all others. Given his emphasis on finding and bringing the Way to Japan, it is natural for one to conclude that he also believed that Japan could find the Way for itself. The Chinese had been corrupted. They were no longer the standard bearers but perhaps Japan could be.

35 Yamaga Sokō's Disciples, *The Essence of Confucianism*, 400

36 Uenaka, 128

37 Yamaga Sokō, *Haisho Zampitsu*, 143

In Sokō's philosophy we see the five elements of change that I listed before discussing Yamaga Sokō. He was profoundly dissatisfied with the the form of Tokugawa Confucianism. He believed that Chu Hsi Confucianism was heterodox and that the samurai had lost their way. He blamed this on the fact that the proper Way transmitted by Confucius had been lost at some point in the past. However, he believed that it could be recovered and Japan could adopt it for itself if there was an examination of the past. He would, of course, not be the last person in Japanese history to take these changes in thought to heart and many would be especially keen to adopt his ideas about China into their own ideology.

Itō Jinsai

Yamaga Sokō was not the only Confucian philosopher that believed that heterodox ideas had infiltrated Confucian beliefs. Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627-1705) was another such scholar. Like Sokō, Jinsai likewise believed that all the Confucian philosophers that had followed Confucius were inherently flawed, unable to stand up to the perfection that was the *Analects*, the original writings of Confucius. However, unlike Sokō, Jinsai saw no problem promoting the works of Mencius to the level of Confucius. Any philosophers following this, however, were considered to be flawed and full of heterodoxies. In his philosophical treatise on Mencius and Confucius, *Gomō Jigi* 語孟字義 (Meaning of the Words in the Analects and Mencius), Jinsai sought to define the terms that were essential to the understanding of the two books that he considered to be the most important in the Confucian cannon, the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. While doing so, he espoused the purity of the original works of Confucius and the flawed nature of everything that followed.

The words of the *Analects* are plain and honest, but its principles are deep and profound. Adding even one word would be excessive. Taking away one word would leave it imperfect. The

Analects is the most perfect work of literature in the entire world. It is truly the greatest book in the universe!³⁸

These words by Itō Jinsai clearly demonstrate the sheer fanatic reverence with which he held the *Analects*. For Jinsai the *Analects* were not only a document which contained the true nature of the sages or the proper mode of Confucian conduct. It was inherently perfect with not a single word being out of place. It was a distinction that he afforded to only one other work within the Confucian canon:

The *Mencius* explains the *Analects*. The words of the *Mencius* are very clear, and its principles [are] quite pure. The *Mencius* is not like the *Record of Rites* which was reconstructed by the Han Confucians after the first emperor of the Qin dynasty tried to burn all Confucian literature and execute all Confucian scholars. Other than the *Analects*, the only Confucian work that is free of textual corruption is the *Mencius*.³⁹

Jinsai clearly states his views here but what is important is what he implies about the *Record of Rites*. Jinsai notes that the *Mencius* is a perfect book, on the level of the *Analects* in terms of the purity of the truth that is contained within. In regards to the *Record of Rites*, though, he notes that the *Mencius* is “not like the *Record of Rites*”. If the *Mencius* is perfect but the *Record of Rites* is not then it is quite obvious that he is accusing that book of being flawed, corrupt, and inadequate to be included in standard Confucian canon. He accuses it of being “reconstructed” by the Han Dynasty. In this way he implies that the book is not even the original document but a poor reproduction. He casts serious doubt on the possibility of the *Record of Rites* being legitimate because if the book is a reconstruction, not true to the original, then in what way can it be trusted to guide Confucians in their conduct and behavior?

Casting doubt on renowned Confucian works was something that Jinsai was not afraid of

38 Itō Jinsai. *Gomō Jigi*. Manuscript. From Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600-2000*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 205-218, 215

39 *Ibid*, 215

doing. In another case he took the *Great Learning*, a book which had been attributed directly to Confucius himself and cast the book aside claiming that the book was a heterodox teaching and more importantly that it had not been written by Confucius at all. Jinsai claimed that the *Great Learning* had originally been part of the flawed book the *Record of Rites* but had been edited by an unknown person at a later date.⁴⁰

Jinsai pointed out that the *Great Learning* was full of inconsistencies and did not match with the actual teachings of Confucius. While the *Great Learning* taught of a formula for attaining knowledge, Jinsai pointed out that this was something that Confucius would never have concerned himself with since learning was something that Confucius had believed could be brought about through moral cultivation and could be achieved easily without the need for a set formula. Jinsai wrote:

The *Analects* states that the sage Confucius “taught four subjects: culture (*bun*), moral conduct (*kō*), loyalty, (*chū*), and trustworthiness (*shin*).” Clearly these were Confucius's teachings. The *Analects* also says “A person of wisdom has no doubts; a humane person, no worries; a courageous person, no fears.” These three – wisdom, humaneness, and courage – refer to the ultimate virtues of the world. Progress in learning involves nothing more than the progress in these. But the *Great Learning* implies that progress along the moral way is as difficult as climbing a nine-story pagoda. We climb up story after story, until finally reaching the top. Yet the Confucian way is nothing other than the moral way of humanity. Because it is meant to be cultivated, how could it be so remote? Confucius himself remarked, “Is humaneness far away? As soon as I want it, there it is.” Mencius added, “The Way is close but can be sought even in distant places.” These passages imply that the Way is very close by! Why must we climb a tall pagoda to reach it?...⁴¹

Jinsai was very cautious of heterodoxy and like Sokō accused many of the later Confucian philosophers of being guilty of it. He points out that it is not a recent development that Confucianism has fallen to heterodox belief but that this is a problem that extends back into the distant past. He was specifically critical of the Neo-Confucian idea of the Supreme Ultimate. To

40 *Ibid*, 216

41 *Ibid*, 216

Jinsai, the Supreme Ultimate had no grounding in fact but was a myth developed by the Neo-Confucians in order to supplement the ideas of Yin and Yang. Jinsai wrote that

“...in addition [to principle], Song Neo-Confucians devised their theory of the non-finite Supreme Ultimate. The analogy of square pegs being jammed into round holes aptly conveys the mistaken nature of their reasoning. The claims of the Song Neo-Confucians such as that “principles exists and then generative force exists,” and “before the existence of heaven and earth, there was principle,” are nothing more than subjective opinions. Like legs added to a picture of a snake or a head growing atop another head, they will never really be confirmed by experience!”⁴²

Jinsai's criticism of this important facet of Neo-Confucianism is evidence that he truly believed that the Confucian of his time was not in line with what Confucius had originally taught. Jinsai placed the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of the Chinese which we see in a few works published after his death.

For more information on Jinsai we must look to another author. Unfortunately, Itō Jinsai was not the most well documented political thinker in the Tokugawa Era. Unlike some of the others who wrote prolifically, Jinsai chose to teach most of his disciples by oral instruction rather than through the composition of long treatises. Virtually none of Jinsai's ideas were committed to paper during his lifetime. Luckily, however, one of his most devoted disciples, his own son Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯 (1670-1736), took the time to put many of his father's ideas down on paper and add to them writings of his own. It is through his works that we can reach further into the depths of Itō Jinsai's philosophy.

Like Sokō, Jinsai believed that the current mode of Tokugawa Confucianism was not rooted in the ideas of the ancient sages. They were so far gone from the ideas of Confucius and Mencius that they were an entirely different doctrine. Also like Sokō, he blamed this change in ideology on incremental changes that stacked up over an extended period of time. Recording his

42 *Ibid*, 210

father's ideas, Itō Tōgai wrote that the changes came in two fundamental steps. The first was a change in the importance of Confucianism following the collapse of the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE). He argued that the kings of the Zhou Dynasty were good kings that followed the Confucian way and put emphasis on rites and rituals. However, the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE) introduced a period of strife in which Confucianism lost its place and many Confucian scholars were murdered. When the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) rose to power some time later, they regarded Confucianism as a good philosophy but kept it separate from the actions of the government. The primary purpose of Confucianism, then, was taken away. The Confucian scholars and government officials began to walk different paths.⁴³

The second step happened during the Sung Dynasty (960-1297). Tōgai noted that the Confucianists of the Sung Dynasty had the appearance of classical Confucianism. They encouraged rites and rituals and their skill and prowess at research was unquestionable. However, it was a problem of metaphysics where they apparently faltered. They put much too much emphasis on the concept of Principle, believing it to be the sole element from which a person's being was derived. Furthermore, they believed that many of the Confucian virtues such as righteousness and wisdom were already inherent to person and that one only needed to work to find one's true nature in order to unlock these virtues.⁴⁴

It should be noticed that attempting to unlock one's inner nature was exactly one of the ideas taught in Japanese Neo-Confucianism at the beginning of the Tokugawa Period. This was covered in more detail in a previous section, but it is worth reminding that Tokugawa Neo-Confucianism believed that all men had a good Ether and the ultimate goal was to unlock it.

43 Ito Tōgai, Preface to *Changes in the Confucian Teaching, Past and Present (Kokon Gakuhen)*, 412-413

44 *Ibid*, 414

Jinsai was against this idea and considered it to be an usurpation of what the ancient sages actually taught. He considers this idea, that one must unlock his inner being, to be an interpolation from Buddhist and Taoist ideas. Just like the Buddhist attempts to eliminate the need for desire, Jinsai saw Confucianists beginning to do the same thing without attempting any of the work necessary for true righteousness.⁴⁵

Rather than find a way to eliminate desire or unlock elements that were already inherent in every person, Jinsai believed that the true teaching of the sages was that a person had to work hard in order to achieve the qualities that a true Confucian strove for. They were not an inherent thing but something that had to be cultivated. If the things that are good in a man such as righteousness and decorum are already self inherent there is no need for cultivation. This, Jinsai says, was not the way of the ancient sage kings, and the Tokugawa way was not in line with the true Way. The Way of the sages was a method of “fulfillment and cultivation”, not of unlocking something that was already there.⁴⁶ As evidence he gives the example of Confucius himself. While Confucius may have been teaching from a young age it was only when he was in an old age, seventy years or older, that he finally felt that he had achieved some level of cultivation. This came only after hard work and discipline.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Tōgai wrote:

All of the great men and heroes in history, who have set an example for all time either by attainment of virtue or through personal accomplishment, have done so by a steady husbanding of effort to bring their powers to maturity. Look at what they started with; and you will find that they did not have much in reserve then to fall back upon. See how the same principle applies to all the affairs of the world: all those whose artistry and craftsmanship have been acclaimed as “divine” or “wondrous,” all those who have reached the very zenith of creative excellence, have

45 Itō Tōgai, *Critique of the Doctrine of Returning to One's Original Nature (Fukusei-ben)* 416-417

46 Itō Tōgai, Preface to *Boys Questions (Dōji-mon)* 418

47 Itō Tōgai, *Critique of the Doctrine of Returning to One's Original Nature (Fukusei-ben)* 416-417

been able to achieve their end only through sustained effort.”⁴⁸

So we can see that Jinsai clearly rejected the idea that righteousness was an innate thing. He believed that a man had to work hard in order to become a cultivated Confucian and properly follow the Way.

When we summarize Itō Jinsai's ideas we see a man who truly believed that the Tokugawa brand of Confucianism was inherently flawed. He did not agree with the idea of innate righteousness just as much as he thought that any ideas after Mencius were corrupted. So, at the heart of Jinsai's philosophy we see a desire to return to the past. He believed that Confucianism had lost its Way but he did not believe that that Way was lost forever. It still survived in the *Analects* and *Mencius*. At some level he also believed that the Chinese had corrupted the Way over the years. Thus, past was of the utmost importance to Itō Jinsai since that was the only place where the true Way could be found. Jinsai's writings clearly demonstrate the five basic principles that we are looking for in these Japanese Confucian writers.

Ogyū Sorai

The final and perhaps most significant Confucian thinker that must be considered is Ogyū Sorai. Sorai's importance in the field of Japanese intellectual history has ballooned in recent decades due to his cross-philosophical influence in Tokugawa Period intellectualism. That is to say that his works are highly relevant not only to scholars who study the Confucian thinkers of the Tokugawa Period but also to those who study the Shinto side of Tokugawa intellectual life because his ideas served as an important basis for thoughts of the *kokugakusha* scholars.

Sorai, like many of his counterparts, was born into a family of physicians. His father was a physician as was his grandfather before him. Prior to that his family had been a member of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 417

samurai class which had afforded them a certain level of status. Given his family background, when Sorai was born in Edo in 1666 it would be only natural to assume that he would follow in the footsteps of his family members and take on a life of studying medicine, which to some extent he did. Sorai, however, was a poor practitioner of medicine. He openly admitted that his skills as a physician were not suitable to consider medicine a life long profession. Where Sorai excelled and where his true interests lay was in the study of Confucianism. In many ways, Sorai could be considered to Confucian prodigy of sorts. Unlike most of the important Confucian thinkers, Sorai did not study under a Confucian master but self taught himself the Confucian classics to the extent that in his twenties he was able to find employment within the shogunate. However, he left this position soon afterward to pursue Confucian studies full time.⁴⁹

By the time Sorai reached his forties he was ranked among the most influential Confucian scholars of his day. He was afforded a professorial status that exceeded most of his contemporaries. This was especially true in the field of Chinese literature wherein he had no equal and was considered the foremost scholar on the subject. However, the Sorai that we know from his forties and early works is significantly different from the Sorai that we see in later life.⁵⁰ In his early days Sorai's philosophy was not limited to only Confucianism but took influence from a variety of Chinese sources. Of particular interest was Taosim, from which he took a significant amount of metaphysical ideas. However, as his thinking evolved he became increasingly hostile toward Taoist ideas. The Sorai of later years rejected Taoist thought entirely and held strictly to a historical mode of Confucianism.⁵¹

49 J.R. McEwan. *The Political Writings of Ogyu Sorai*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 1-3.

50 Olof G. Lidin, "Ogyu Sorai's Place in Edo Intellectual Thought," *Modern Asian Studies* 18:4 (1984): 567-580, 567-568.

51 *Ibid*, 571

Sorai's beliefs about Confucianism also went through a stark transformation. In his early days Sorai held to the predominate views of his day. That is to say that he was a Chu Hsi Neo-Confucian just like most of his contemporaries. However, by 1717 he began to see flaws in the Chu Hsi model of thinking and began to openly attack it in his writings as an outdated belief. One of the tenets of Neo-Confucianism that he openly attacked was the idea that one could discover the Way by an observation of nature.⁵²

Sorai held to the argument that the human mind and the natural world were too different for the Way to be discovered simply through observation. Nature, he argued, is infinite. The human mind, on the other hand, is severely limited. Sorai put forth a simple question to his fellow Confucianists: how could a thing as finite and limited as the human brain even begin to comprehend the infinite limitlessness of the universe and nature? To Sorai the whole idea was ludicrous. Anyone who based their whole idea of life, government, politics, and society on the strict observation of nature would certainly miss key points simply due to the fact that his mind was unable to grasp nature's universal truths. For Sorai the only means of investigation into the Way that was both a good basis upon which to base a world view and was also verifiable was historical inquiry. Sorai believed that if one devoted oneself to studying history, specifically the history of the ancient Chinese kings, then one could reach back into the time of the sages, when society was first created, and discover the true Way. If one could understand the meaning and purpose behind the creation of society and how it was accomplished then a method of benevolent governance would reveal itself.⁵³

This, of course, was a major departure from most of Confucian thought which held that

⁵² *Ibid*, 575-576

⁵³ *Cambridge History of Japan Volume IV*, 601-602

nature was governed by the Supreme Ultimate and it would be by discovering this that the Way could be investigated. Sorai's philosophy lead him to the inevitable conclusion that human history was not an eternal thing that stretched back into the distant past. Scholars have noted that Sorai believed that:

...human history was not 'natural' but was 'created', fashioned with artificial means. Unlike nature, which was infinite, having neither beginning nor end and thus being in this sense timeless, human history had a determinable beginning, an epoch when societies were forged and thus separated from nature. In a state of nature human beings did not possess history, but in society they did. Once the intent behind that creation could be uncovered, however, history, like natural time, could persist indefinitely into the future.⁵⁴

As a result, rather than place emphasis on ethics or an investigation into nature, Sorai emphasized law, regulation, ritual, and rite as the proper way to Practice the Way. He came to the conclusion that if history had a beginning then it could be not be eternal and thus had to have been created. This meant that political hierarchies were only tools created by societies in order to structure themselves. There was no truth to be found in political institutions since they were not reproductions of the eternal force of nature as previously thought. They had only been made for political purposes, but to understand them a deep study of history was necessary.⁵⁵

Thus, for Sorai, the Way was not a thing that occurred naturally in nature but was a man-made mechanism. Specifically, it was created by the ancient kings of China at the beginnings of human society. We can see Sorai confirm these beliefs in his own words when he wrote “The Way of the early kings was something the early kings themselves created; it was not the natural way of Heaven and Earth. The early kings, by virtue of their high intelligence and perspicacity received the mandate of Heaven and ruled over the world.”⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that Sorai

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 604

⁵⁵ Najita, Tetsuo. *The Intellectual Foundations of Modern Japanese Politics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 5.

⁵⁶ Confucian Way as a Way of Government, 424-426

did not completely rule out the role of heaven in this equation but neither did he ascribe the Way to a universal, heavenly principle. For Sorai, the sages were ordinary men, blessed with above average intelligence that had created a system by which to govern.⁵⁷

Sorai's opinion of the nature of the Way brought him into direct conflict with some of the other scholars already mentioned in this study, most notably Itō Jinsai. As previously mentioned Jinsai focused the majority of his ancient studies on Confucius and on Mencius whom he considered to be the most perfect of the Confucian scholars. All scholars after that had perverted the true Way. Jinsai especially liked Mencius because Mencius believed that virtue was a non static element. It was not something that had to be uncovered by long meditation and was apparent in people's everyday lives rather than manifesting itself in some grand event. It also indicated that there was a hierarchy among men since all the virtue was not innate, equal, or the same for all men. Sorai did not disagree with Jinsai on this point but was disappointed in the fact that Jinsai had only recognized that this part of Mencius' philosophy indicated that there was a hierarchy among men. Jinsai did not get to the real point and determine why there was a hierarchy at all.⁵⁸

Sorai also saw virtue as entirely different from how other Confucianists saw it. While Jinsai admired the idea in Mencius' philosophy that the virtue was a staple of society, and non static, Sorai did not see virtue as being inherent at all. While he acknowledged that some tiny bit of virtue was inherent with all men, a trait he referred to as the “little virtue”, there was a much larger element that men inherently lacked and that could only be discovered through a disciplined investigation of the past. This “Big Virtue” was only existent at the beginning of

57 Nosco, “Remembering Paradise”, 49

58 *Cambridge History of Japan Volume IV*, 602-603

society, in the days of the ancient kings, and had been lost in subsequent generations.⁵⁹

This leads us to a particular quality of Sorai's thought that is most critical to the reason he looked to the past. Sorai was adamant that the true virtue of men and the true Way was only found in the past. However he went much deeper into the past than did Jinsai. Sorai did not hold the same level of veneration for Confucius and Mencius that Jinsai did. However, this is not to say that he did not consider both of them to be great Confucian philosophers. He certainly considered the way of Confucius to be the Way of the early sage kings. This was because Confucius busied himself studying the Five Classics (The Book of Poetry, The Book of Rites, The Book of Documents, The I Ching, and the Spring and Autumn Annals) as well as history.⁶⁰ However for Sorai the *Analects* of Confucius did not contain the facts of the Way. All the *Analects* did was interpret the Five Classics. If one wanted to truly learn the Way of the sages he had to go back to read the Classics themselves. According to Sorai, one could not rely upon a commentary, Mencius, or even Confucius to deliver the Way.⁶¹ While Jinsai believed that the Way after Confucius and Mencius was lost without the works of Confucius as a guide, Sorai dug deeper into the past and believed that the Way could only be found within the writings of the ancient kings.

Sorai contends that after the ancient kings the Way was corrupted when Confucianism began to split into different schools and sects. “The true Way is the Way of the early kings of China,” he wrote, “but after the appearance of Tzu Ssu 子思 (481-402 BCE) and Mencius it degenerated into the Confucianism schools which began to contend for supremacy among the

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 605-606

⁶⁰ Confucian Way as a Way of Government, 425

⁶¹ Distortion of the Way through Ignorance of the Past, 426-429, 429

'hundred philosophers' of the late Chou, and by doing, itself demeaned the Way."⁶² Sorai presents evidence for this in the works of Tzu Ssu and Mencius. Tzu Ssu, he notes, was determined that Confucius should be ranked among the sages. However, Confucius did not meet the criteria for a sage. By traditional standards, a sage was one who created the Way. While Confucius was a great philosopher he did not create the Way but merely interpreted the Classics and passed his knowledge along. To counter this idea in his own time, Tzu Ssu changed his definition of a sage from a creator of the Way to one who held to the ideas of the Way with "true sincerity". This, Sorai contended, was a corruption of the truth.⁶³

So we see that Sorai was critical of two major thinkers in the Confucian world, even leveling some attacks against Mencius. However, Sorai contended that the problem only got worse with time. He is particularly critical of the Ch'eng-Chu school, A contemporary Chinese form of Confucianism which was popular during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), which he accuses of introducing foreign, Taoist and Buddhist words into the Confucian cannon and misinterpreting the Confucian classics⁶⁴. Likewise, he is critical of Chu Hsi and other Confucian scholars who attempted to interpret the way without being familiar with the ancient style of writing. Sorai believed that it was a given that to interpret ancient texts that one would have to be familiar with ancient language and style and he did not understand how one could interpret the Way if one could not understand this basic principle. He was highly critical of other Confucianists for relying on other works. He wrote:

Thereafter came the two Ch'engs and Chu Hsi, admittedly scholars of great stature, yet

⁶² *Ibid*, 426

⁶³ *Ibid*, 427

⁶⁴ Yamashita, Samuel Hideo. "Nature and Artifice in the Writings of Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728)" in *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*. Peter Nosco ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 145-146.

nonetheless unacquainted with the ancient language. Unable to read and understand the Six Classics properly, they showed a preference for the Mean and Mencius because the texts were easy to read. Thus, the writings of the philosophers contending with other philosophers came to be taken as the true expression of the Way of the Sages in its original form. In addition to that, they read the ancient style of writing as if it were the modern style, and since they were ignorant of what was actually referred to, a discrepancy arose between reality and discourse, whereupon sense and reasoning took secure paths. Thus the teaching of the early kings and Confucius was seen no more.⁶⁵

Sorai is quick to point out that Jinsai made the same mistake of putting too much emphasis on the *Analects* and *Mencius* and not basing his works off the Classics. He also accuses Jinsai of falling into the bad habit of reading these sources in Japanese fashion just as the scholars in question once did. This prompted Sorai to once marvel that Jinsai could consider himself a scholar of ancient learning when, by Sorai's standards, there was nothing ancient about his scholarship at all.⁶⁶

Sorai believed that not one should not only focus on the ancient sage kings as part of one's scholarship but that their works must be studied in the original. One should not rely upon commentaries, modern translations, or Japanese readings of Chinese characters in order to make the task easier. Any change away from the original would corrupt the Way and render it lost.⁶⁷ This emphasis on the Classics came from logical reasoning which believed that if there were no sages in the current day then the only way to find the Way was to look to the past. Sorai wrote, "Japan has never produced a sage. The West has never produced a sage. This is because only the ancient literature, records, proprieties, and music constitute correct teaching."⁶⁸

Sorai argued that the Japanese in particular needed to go back to the classics to discover

65 Distortion of the Way through Ignorance of the Past, 428

66 *Ibid*, 428

67 Ogyū Sorai. Richard H Minear, transl. "Ogyū Sorai's Instructions for Students: A Translation and Commentary." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 36 (1976): 5-81, 15-18.

68 *Ibid*, 11

the Way. He reported that centuries earlier a man named Kibi no Mabi 吉備真備 (693-775) had traveled to China and translated the Classics into a language that the Japanese could understand and brought them back with him. However, when he did so he changed the original perfection of the classics and perverted it. Sorai contended that this turned the classics from true expressions of the Way into “barbarian dances.”⁶⁹ “These are the ancient literature, records, proprieties and music of Kibi,” he wrote, “They are not the ancient literature, records, proprieties, and music of the Middle Kingdom. The damage is probably worse than that which occurred when we considered them gibberish.”⁷⁰ This problem was confounded over the generations as subsequent Japanese scholars based their writings on Kibi and then on the commentaries that came after him instead of returning to reading the classics themselves in their original language. Sorai wrote:

Space is like time; time is like space. Thus, if we see the old words in terms of today's words, or today's words in terms of the ancient words, then in both cases they will be gibberish. There is no difference on this point between the ancient Chinese language and the Indian. The times change, bearing the words along; the words change, bearing the Way along. That “the Way is not clear” is due chiefly to this fact. To descend a hundred generations and then to transmit the Way of a hundred generations earlier – isn't this like piling up nine layers of translation between the land of Yueh-ch'ang and the Middle Kingdom? How great the difference was between the original and the ninth translation we have no way of knowing.⁷¹

Thus, for Sorai the commentaries and Confucian classics of his time were useless because they were not solely based upon the past. He lamented that by his time the Classics had become “fragmentary and incomplete.”⁷²

So, Sorai was adamant that the Way was only contained within the classics because in his opinion scholars had fragmented the true Way. There are many reasons why he believed this to be so. According to Samuel Yamashita, Sorai was enamored with the Classics for three main

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 12-13

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 14

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 16

⁷² *Ibid*, 32

reasons. First, the classics recorded the acts of the sages. Second, they transmitted Chinese culture and the teachings of the sages. These two combine to demonstrate what the Way is. Finally, they are written in an authoritative style.⁷³ This last point is of particular importance since Sorai placed significant emphasis on words and philology. Sorai argued that philology was the way to authenticate the Way and truly study the works of the sages. He is adamant that a true Confucian scholar must write his prose in the same style of the Classics in order to hold to the true Way. He points out that the sages were never interested in the content of what they were writing. The most important thing for them was the style in which it was written.⁷⁴ This is an important point to keep in mind because many of the *kokugaku* scholars such as Kamo Mabuchi and Motoori Norinaga who are discussed in later chapters adopted Sorai's emphasis on philology for their own studies.

We have seen that Sorai puts absolute importance on studying the Five Classics and the history of the ancient kings. This is not to say, however, that Sorai believed that the Way of the ancient kings was automatically applicable to his time. He had the sense to realize that historical changes meant that the applicability of the Way could have changed significantly. He insisted that in order to apply the Way the changes in society and politics over the ages had to be taken into account.⁷⁵

Before moving on it is important to make a quick note about the nationalism found in Sorai's works, especially his earlier ones. There should be no doubt that Sorai was a sinophile. He considered China and Chinese culture to be the most civilized, prestigious, and important in the entire world. However, even in his early life Sorai realized that Japan did some things better

73 Yamashita, 140-141

74 *Ibid*, 143

75 Nosco, "Remembering Paradise," 50

than the Chinese and by his late life he considered that the Japanese were better stewards of the Way than the Chinese were. However, this was not because he considered Japan to be superior to China. He remained, even into old age, as seeing China as the superior country. On the contrary, he only saw Japanese superiority as a manifestation of them better holding to the old Way. The Japanese, in Sorai's view, were not inherently superior to China but only had some superior qualities because they had become more Chinese than China itself.⁷⁶

To finish with a slight summary, Ogyū Sorai is important for a number of reasons in the development of Shinto nativism in Japan. When the *kokugaku* school arose in later times, they would adopt many of Sorai's teachings and use them for their own devices. Among them, was Sorai's emphasis that the sages were only highly intelligent men and not divine in any way which the *kokugakusha* used to discredit Confucianism as a doctrine. His emphasis on philology was also later adopted by the *kokugakusha* which we will see when they embark on important philological examinations of great Japanese works such as the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*. Finally, and perhaps most significantly is his emphasis on the past. Sorai placed a significant emphasis on the past and did so even to a level that his contemporaries did not. He recognized that the successive Chinese dynasties over the years had corrupted the Way and he believed that the only means by which to find the lost Way was to go back and study the ancients. For these three reasons Sorai is indeed among the most important Confucian thinkers when it comes to the development of Shinto nativism in early modern Japan.

The three scholars we have looked at here were at one point or another all part of the major intellectual movement in the Tokugawa Period known as *kogaku*, Ancient Learning. For some of them, such as Sorai, the time they spent on these studies only took up a small amount of

⁷⁶ Lidin, 570

time in their intellectual lives. However, the contributions they made would be important for the later nativist Shinto scholars. They provided these later scholars with an important framework which began with the idea that the Way had been lost and could only be found again in the past. While there would be fundamental differences between the two groups on what exactly the Way was (Shinto scholars would argue that it was the Way of the gods that was supreme) they both believed that it was missing in their time. This brings us to what may be these three scholars biggest contribution: the idea of an idyllic past. Although the *kogaku* and *kokugaku* scholars would have great differences in many ways they both believed that at some point in the past was a utopia where their idea of the true Way was known and practiced. For the *kogaku* this utopia would obviously involve the way of the sage kings and the teachings of Confucius. For the *kokugaku* scholars this would be the time when the Way of the Gods was naturally expressed by the Japanese, before it was forgotten and covered over by the foreign heterodox religions such as Confucianism and Buddhism. The idea of the idyllic past is one of the biggest binding ties between these two modes of thought and will play an important roll as we turn to look specifically at the *kokugaku* scholars in the next section.

Part II Shinto Nativism

In the previous section I demonstrated that there was a common idea among members of the *kogaku* school of Neo-Confucianism that held that there existed a utopia in the past during which people had better followed the Confucian Way. While the philosophers that were discussed each had their own idea about what this Way was and where it came from it can be seen that they held in common the idea that such a Way existed in some form. They believed that an investigation into the past was necessary to finding this Way. They also believed that this Way had been lost primarily due to the gradual degradation of the Way in the Chinese dynasties until their present time when it was no longer a force in its true form.

These beliefs were not only native to the *kogaku* school of Neo-Confucianism. As we will see in this section, the belief that there was a Way that existed only in the past also appeared within Shinto circles. In many cases, the Shinto philosophers that taught this doctrine did so out of a direct influence from the *kogaku* school, either in a positive sense whereby they took ideas from them or in a negative sense whereby set up their ideas to be intentionally at odds with the ideas of Confucian scholars.

This section will highlight many of the similarities between the two schools of thought while keeping in mind the stark differences between the *kogaku* and *kokugaku* scholars. We will establish the following facts: First, like the *kogaku* scholars the *kokugakusha* believed in a utopian past that had been lost, and they believed that the Way to rediscover that past was to return to the ancient sources. Second, they accomplished this task primarily through philological investigations of important Shinto works as well as works of poetry. Third, they were adamant that the fault for the disappearances of the Way in Japan lay with China and the influence of

foreign philosophy, including Confucianism. Finally we see that this led many of the *kokugakusha* to a significant step in the development of nativism in Japan, which was the development of a myth of national superiority. These *kokugakusha* often used the myths of ancient Japan and even some of the arguments of their Confucian predecessors to set Japan up as the premiere nation on earth. So while the Confucian scholars at times believed that Japan could be considered a better steward of the Way than China but always held to a sinocentric value system, the Shinto scholars of the *kokugaku* school took the extra step of raising Japan's status to be above that of China.

While the two *kokugaku* scholars that will be examined in this section are not the first scholars to use Shinto as a vessel for nativist teachings, they are considered by most to be among the most important. They were preceded by a small number of scholars to which they owe some of their ideas such as the Buddhist priest Keichū 契沖 (1640-1701) who taught *kokugakusha* many ideas that were similar to *kokugaku* including an affinity for verse and an idea about a utopian past. However, we will be focusing primarily on two scholars, Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori Norinaga, because of their universally accepted importance to the movement.

I will begin this section with an analysis of the thought of Kamo no Mabuchi. Mabuchi is considered by many scholars to be the first of the *kokugakusha*. His school of thought and his emphasis on verse established many of the ideas that later influenced *kokugaku* scholars. Next, I will move on to an analysis of Motoori Norinaga who is considered by most to be the greatest of the *kokugakusha* and for this reason is among the most well known of any of the philosophers examined in this work. After looking at these two scholars we will have examined enough information to draw a conclusion regarding the evolution of nativist thought in Japan and the

way in which the two philosophies that we have examined fit together.

Chapter Three Kamo no Mabuchi

Kamo no Mabuchi is considered by many scholars to be the first of the *kokugakusha*. Mabuchi's philosophy is essential to later *kokugakusha* and also has ties back to the Confucian scholars discussed in the previous section. Specifically, Mabuchi's scholarship introduced the idea of the importance of poetic verse into the *kokugaku* movement, emphasized the study of ancient literature, and promoted a belief in a utopian past where there existed an ancient Way that was now lost to the Japanese people. Mabuchi was especially taken with the eighth century anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Man'yōshū*. While many of these ideas are not unique to Mabuchi, and he was certainly not the first to propose some of them, his ideas are an important building block in the construction of a Shinto nativist philosophy in early modern Japan.

Kamo no Mabuchi was born in 1697 in modern day Shizuoka prefecture in a village called Iba that was situated near one of the more heavily traveled roads between Japan's two most important cities, Edo and Kyoto. He was descended from an important family in the Shinto tradition, the Kamo family, which had for years been the caretakers of the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto.⁷⁷

Mabuchi began his formal education at the age of ten when he was given over to the wife of a man by the name of Sugiura Kuniakira (1648-1740). While seemingly innocuous on the surface this would prove to be an important moment in the young Mabuchi's life. As one might expect, Mabuchi was well educated in the Japanese classics during this period of his study, but it was the proximity to another important thinker that would have a great impact on his life. This is due to the fact that the woman through which Mabuchi was receiving his formal education was

⁷⁷ Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 153-154

related to Kada Azumamoro 荷田春満 (1669-1736), an important nativist scholar in Japanese history.⁷⁸

Although a Shinto priest and a subscriber to a nativist philosophy, Azumamoro was himself strongly influenced by the philosophy of Ogyū Sorai. He, like Sorai, believed that Japan needed to turn to the past for guidance and for where to find the Way. Also like Sorai, he believed that one needed to study the ancient texts in order to unlock this Way.⁷⁹ This is, of course, stated with the acknowledgment of the fundamental difference that Sorai came from the understanding of a Sino-centric Confucian scholar while Azumamoro held no deference toward the Chinese or Confucian philosophy. Both Azumamoro and Sorai believed in an ancient time when a universal Way was practiced by the people. As we have seen, for Sorai this universal Way was the Way of the ancient sages. For Azumamoro, however, this was the Way of the ancient spirits which, to him, was Shinto. For Sorai the process by which one could discover the Way was to read the ancient Chinese sources, especially the Confucian classics. For Azumamoro, the process was accomplished by reading the ancient Shinto sources, especially through the eighth-century historical work the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀.⁸⁰

It is somewhat striking how similar the philosophies are with the only main difference being in the textual sources the two philosophies drew their ideas from. Both believed that there was an ancient Way that had been lost and could be found in ancient sources of the literature. They had disagreements about which literature to look for it in. However, despite these similarities all *kokugakusha* were inherently opposed to Confucian ideas. Azumamoro, Mabuchi,

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 154

⁷⁹ Jansen, Marius B. *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 205.

⁸⁰ Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 129-132

Norinaga and others all considered Confucianism to be a curse upon Japan that came in and swept away their natural culture. Azumamoro was, in fact, dismayed that Confucianism and Buddhism had found such a foothold among the Japanese populace. These, he would argue, are foreign philosophies. He wanted the Japanese to focus upon philosophies that were close to home, specifically ancient Shinto texts. He lamented that the study of these texts had suffered a sharp decline.⁸¹ He was adamant that the Confucian doctrines were completely false and were no match for the purity of the Shinto texts. In 1728 Azumamoro submitted a petition to the Shogun, the military ruler of Japan, requesting that he be allowed to open a school of national learning in order to solve this problem. Within his petition his disdain for the Confucian texts is quite clear.

He wrote:

Alas, how ignorant the Confucian scholars were of the past, not knowing a single thing about the imperial Japanese learning. How painful, the stupidity of later scholars – who cannot bewail the destruction of the ancient learning? This is why foreign teachings have prevailed, and one meets them in street conversations and corner gossip. This is why too our teachings have so declined. False doctrines are rampant, taking advantage of our weakness...⁸²

Furthermore, we can see Azumamoro's wrath turned toward Shinto scholars who began to use Chinese phrases and terms in order to classify Shinto terms. Azumamoro was disgusted with the idea that Confucian terms had infiltrated Shinto studies. In the same document Azumamoro noted:

Those who now treat Shinto all follow theories of yin-yang or of the Five Elements. Those who consider *waka* tend to adopt the explanation of Tendai doctrine or of the Four Disciplines of Chinese poetry. If these scholars are not the dregs of the T'ang and Sung Confucianists, they are exudations from the Womb and Diamond Mandalas. If their writings are not fabrications composed of vain theories and idle hair-splittings, they are eccentricities devoid of foundation or thought. They speak of “secrets” and “traditions,” but of the true traditions of

81 Kada Azumamoro. *Petition for the Establishment of a School of National Learning*.

Manuscript. From Wm. Theodore de Bary ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600-2000*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 511-512

82 Azumamoro, 513-514

the wise men of old, what knowledge have they? They speak of “depths” and “recondite meanings,” but how many are the forgeries of recent men!⁸³

We can quite clearly see Azumamoro's hostility toward these scholars. He refers to them as being “empty of thought” and to their theories as “vain” “forgeries”.

Kamo Mabuchi's ideas took obvious cues from both Kada Azumamoro and Ogyū Sorai. That the former would have a major impact on Mabuchi's thoughts should come as no surprise due to his initial proximity to Azumamoro and the fact that Mabuchi formally enrolled in the Shinto scholar's school in 1732. However, Mabuchi also had education in the works of Ogyū Sorai. In fact, for a short time beginning in 1723 Mabuchi studied under Watanabe Mōan 渡辺蒙庵 (1687-1775) who was a member of the Sorai school. Mōan had completed his schooling under the tutelage of Dazai Shundai 太宰春台 (1680-1747) who was one of Sorai's most celebrated disciples. Mabuchi's time studying under Mōan was short lived, lasting only a few years, but it is at least indicative that Mabuchi was very familiar with the ideas of the Sorai school. Peter Nosco reports that Sorai's thought likely had an impact on Mabuchi although it was likely in a negative sense. That is to say that Nosco believes that much of Mabuchi's ideas were likely formulated as an opposition to the Sorai school's line of thought.⁸⁴ This is likely true in some sense since, as we will see, Mabuchi was highly antagonistic toward Confucianism. However, it might be premature to rule out any positive influence on Mabuchi's thought since Sorai's ideas were so heavily pervasive in Japanese intellectualism during the height of his school's popularity.

Despite the fact that Mabuchi studied under Azumamoro for a number of years and that

⁸³ *Ibid*, 512

⁸⁴ Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 156-160

his philosophy was obviously influenced by the teachings of the Shinto scholar, Mabuchi's idea of the Way differed from that of Azumamoro. While Azumamoro believed in the idea of the Way of the ancient spirits Mabuchi believed in what he called the Way of Heaven and Earth. The Way of Heaven and Earth was a mysterious force which brought man into harmony with his natural surroundings. It gave him a spirit of calm and peace and brought him into communion with nature. Furthermore, the Way of Heaven and Earth was completely natural. It was not man made nor created in any way. This, Mabuchi argued, is in contrast to the idea of the Confucian Way. Mabuchi argued that the Confucian sages were mere men who created the Way and since the Confucian Way was created by men it could not be eternal like the Way of Heaven and Earth. While this assessment may have rankled some Confucianists it is still in line with the thought of Ogyū Sorai who likewise saw the sages as mere men, albeit especially wise men.

Mabuchi's Way also had other unique characteristics. The Way of Heaven and earth did not discriminate between man and beast or human and insect. It treated all creatures on an equal footing. In fact, Mabuchi argued that since men had abandoned the Way of Heaven and Earth in the ancient times that man should be considered the most base of all creatures. This is, of course, in stark contrast to Neo-Confucianism which believed that the Ether of man was the most supreme of all creatures. In one of his most celebrated works, *Kokuikō* 国意考 (1765) or *A Study of the Idea of the Nation*, Mabuchi wrote:

In China they place a great value on humans as the loftiest of all things but in my opinion humans should be considered the worst of all things. Just as Heaven and Earth, and the sun and the moon, continue unchanged, birds, beasts, fish, plants, and trees all remain as they were in the past. Humans, however, with their half-baked understanding of things, pursue their own reasoning. As a result, various wicked intentions arise between people, and the world becomes disordered. Even in times of good government people deceive each other. If there were only one or two intelligent people in the world, things would likely be fine, but when everyone is intelligent, people attack each other over every little thing, and in the end their intelligence is

useless. So in the eyes of birds and beasts, it must be humans who look bad, and they must teach that it is wrong to imitate us.⁸⁵

This is an important quote from *Kokuikō* because it not only gives an example of the universality of Mabuchi's Way of Heaven and Earth but also introduces another key concept in Mabuchi's overall philosophy: the idea of straightforwardness. Mabuchi believed that many of the problems plaguing Japanese society were due to the fact that the Japanese did not live with a straightforward heart as they had in ancient times. He believed that due to corruption from the Confucians and other forms of Chinese thought, the Japanese had ceased to live according to the Way of Heaven and Earth. Mabuchi argued that this was not how the ancient Japanese were. For Mabuchi, the ancient Japanese were perfect in mind, body, and soul. Mabuchi did not mean that they were perfect in the sense that they did no wrong or never committed evil. Rather, he believed that the people were perfect in the sense that they did not ever seek to conceal anything within their hearts. If the ancient Japanese ever did wrong then they did it with in a naive sense and they did not seek to hide it from anyone but were open about it. Thus, in Mabuchi's opinion, minor evils committed by the ancient Japanese were of little consequence.⁸⁶ Mabuchi wrote in regards to the spirit of the ancient Japanese:

When things are few and people's hearts are straightforward, complicated teachings are unnecessary. Even without teachings, things go well because people are straightforward. People's hearts are diverse, so bad things do occur, but since even bad things are done with a straightforward heart, people do not conceal them. Not being concealed, they do not develop into anything major and come to an end after only a momentary disturbance. It is not as if there were no teachings of good people in ancient times, but light guidance was all that was needed⁸⁷

Mabuchi referred to this state of being as the “True Heart” that he believed resided within

85 Kamo Mabuchi. Peter Fluekiger, transl. *Kokuikō*. Manuscript. From Flueckiger, Peter. “Reflections on the Meaning of Our Country: Kamo no Mabuchi's *Kokuikō*”. *Monumenta Nipponica* 63:2 (Autumn: 2008), 211-263, 246-247.

86 Nosco, Remembering Paradise, 186-187, 201-203

87 Mabuchi, 250

every Japanese person. He believed that this sincerity that was inherently held within the hearts of all Japanese linked them to the Way of Heaven and Earth and made them the perfect citizens. A person with the True Heart worshiped the gods and revered the emperor of his own accord. He did not need laws and regulations in order to tell him to do so. Rather, he knew intrinsically what he should do, what was right, and how to go about doing it. He was truly in tune with the Way of Heaven and Earth.⁸⁸ This is why in the above quote Mabuchi is insistent that in the old times there was little need for “complicated teachings” and that people only needed a little bit of “light guidance.” He believed this because there was no need to go through complicated measures to explain a Way to the ancient Japanese that they already knew intrinsically inside of their hearts.

However, Mabuchi's philosophy was in line with many of the philosophers that we have already studied. He believed that this True Heart had been lost since the ancient days. The Japanese in his current time did not know of the Way of Heaven and Earth nor did they attempt to seek it out and find it. We can see this belief demonstrated in Mabuchi's conception of history. Mabuchi believed that there once existed a golden age where the Way of Heaven and Earth was widely practiced among the Japanese and the True Heart was held closely by every soul. Mabuchi places the timing of this epoch at some point around the Nara Period (710-794). Sometime thereafter a time came when the Way of Heaven and Earth began to fade from the minds of the people. It was replaced by Chinese philosophies, vain theories, and indirect thoughts. Foreign culture overwhelmed the previously perfect Japanese citizen and caused him to lose sight of the True Heart and descend into wickedness. Mabuchi refers to the Japanese people losing sight of the Way of Heaven and Earth as “The Fall” and he argues that The Fall had serious consequences in Japanese society. While the people of the divine age needed little

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 186-187

instruction to act morally and obey the laws and regulations of the emperor, the people of the second age did not respect the emperor but followed foreign philosophy and dressed themselves in vain, Chinese apparel in order to achieve a grand appearance. Mabuchi wrote an apt description of this event in Japanese history:

This country was originally governed well in accordance with the heart of Heaven and Earth without such petty theorizing but when these teachings that seemed plausible were suddenly introduced, they spread widely because people of antiquity, being straightforward, naively took them to be true. From ancient times things had generally flourished rein after reign, but following the introduction of Confucianism, in the reign of Emperor Tenmu 天武 (631-686) a great disturbance occurred. Subsequently at the Nara court, caps, robes, furniture, and other things were changed to the Chinese style. While on the surface everything became elegant, there came to be many people with wicked hearts. Since Confucianism leads people to have crafty hearts, they made the ruler excessively lofty so that people would revere him, and this people came to have a servile mentality.⁸⁹

For Mabuchi this change in Japanese culture had serious consequences. The first and most obvious was that the True Heart was lost. However, a second and equally important idea in Mabuchi's theory was that Japanese culture experienced a process of feminization from the influx of Chinese culture. Mabuchi viewed the Way of the ancient Japanese in very masculine terms. This is in contrast to Chinese culture which Mabuchi saw as weak and feminine.

Mabuchi's concept of The Fall had one more important facet to it that is impossible to overlook. For Mabuchi, The Fall was not a one time event that took place in the distant past but was an event that reoccurred on a daily basis. He believed that at birth every Japanese person was born with the True Heart. It was an inherent, natural part of the Japanese emotional make up. However, the True Heart that a Japanese child was born with at birth was incredibly fragile, and Mabuchi believed that it was easily covered up by the Chinese culture that had invaded Japan. So, for Mabuchi, The Fall was a tragedy of cultural change that happened on a loop, a daily

⁸⁹ Mabuchi, 243-244

travesty committed against the Japanese spirit and against the Way of Heaven and Earth.

However, despite his view on this matter he was openly optimistic that the True Heart could be recovered. Kamo no Mabuchi, like all of the other philosophers studied so far, did not believe that the ancient Way was lost forever but believed that it could be recovered if the Japanese people only returned to the ancient Japanese manuscripts.⁹⁰

Mabuchi's method for recovering the Way of Heaven and Earth and restoring the True Heart to the people of Japan was similar in many ways to Ogyū Sorai's approach to restoring the Way of the ancient sages. Both men believed that the method lay in reading the ancient sources, and both men believed that this had to be done through a philological investigation of those sources. However, the sources that they used were quite different even beyond the obvious difference that Sorai focused upon sources of Confucian origin, and Mabuchi focused on those of native Japanese origin. Sorai focused on the prose of the Confucian classics while Mabuchi was particularly interested in verse and poetry. Mabuchi saw a special role for poetry in society. He believed that it could reveal a lot about the inner working of a person's heart and thus their motives. According to Peter Flueckiger Mabuchi also believed that poetry “promotes a gentle, magnanimous disposition that facilitates proper interpersonal relationships.”⁹¹ So for Mabuchi poetry contained a significant amount of power and importance. “Poetry,” he wrote “is something that expresses the human heart. Although it may seem to be something of no use that we could just as well do without, when one understands poetry, one will also naturally understand the causes of peace and disorder. Indeed, it must have been for this reason that even

90 Information about The Fall is taken from Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 190-193, 205-209
 91 Flueckiger, Peter *Imagining Harmony: Poetry, Empathy, and Community in Mid-Tokugawa Confucianism and Nativism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 160.

Confucius did not discard the Odes, but made them first among the books.”⁹² Through this we can get some idea of why Mabuchi placed such an important role on poetry. However, the most important role of poetry in Mabuchi's philosophy was that Mabuchi believed that through a systematic study of ancient poetry one could uncover the lost Way of Heaven and Earth and restore one's True Heart.

He placed special emphasis on two important pieces of Japanese literature through which he felt that the Way of Heaven and Earth could be rediscovered. The first was the eighth century *Kojiki*. The *Kojiki* is a mythical collection of Japanese historical accounts that tell the stories of the creation of Japan and the deeds of the various gods and goddesses. He favored the *Kojiki* over similar ancient historical texts like the *Shoku Nihongi* because the *Kojiki* was written in Japanese style whereas the *Nihongi* showed significant Chinese influence. Mabuchi's second source was the previously mentioned anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Man'yōshū*. Beginning in his early forties Mabuchi devoted a significant portion of his life to the study of the *Man'yōshū*.

Mabuchi favored poetry over prose for a rather unique reason. It is important to remember that Mabuchi believed that the ancient people were straightforward. The True Heart did not allow them to hide anything. They were unable to conceal anything from the people around them. Mabuchi extrapolated this idea and came up with the concept that when emotions in a person that had a True Heart's came to the point that they were unbearably powerful they would overflow onto the page in the form of poetry. In poetry, and especially the *Man'yōshū*, Mabuchi saw what Nosco refers to as the “undiluted yearnings” of the ancient Way spilled out in the form of words. Thus for Mabuchi, poetry was not just mere literary amusement or beautiful words, but was the True Heart of the ancient people poured out onto paper in a pure

92 Mabuchi, 244

unadulterated sense.⁹³ We can see this idea expressed in Mabuchi's own writings in the quote above when he wrote that “poetry is something that expresses the human heart.” Through this Mabuchi's emphasis on poetry makes sense. When we consider that the goal of Mabuchi was to discover the True Heart then it stands to reason that he would look back to poetry where the contents of True Heart was placed on paper.

Furthermore Mabuchi believed that poetry had the power to inspire good government and ideal citizenship. Mabuchi believed that good poetry inspired good government because it had the ability to bring peace and tranquility to a person's soul and give birth to “the truth of emotion.” Furthermore, he believed that all that was needed for good government was for those who were in positions of power to rediscover the True Heart through the study of ancient poetry and then everyone below would benefit.⁹⁴ This belief led Mabuchi to write at one point that “should a ruler emerge who valued the past and wished for the world to be straightforward, then all the world would become straightforward within the space of ten or twenty years.”⁹⁵

Given what we have seen it is easy to see the roots of ethnocentrism inherent in Kamo no Mabuchi's philosophy. If Mabuchi believed that the Japanese were born with an inherently perfect spirit that only became corrupt after it was exposed to the wickedness of foreign culture then in what regard did Mabuchi hold other countries? Indeed, Mabuchi saw Japan as the pinnacle of perfection among nations. He saw it as superior to all other nations, including China, which is an obvious point of departure from the Sino-centric Confucian philosophers we dealt with in the last chapter. This is a sign of obvious ethnocentrism but also of the nativism and nationalism that quickly became an inherent part of *kokugaku* ideology. In addition to his belief

93 Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 181-183

94 *Ibid*, 166-173

95 Mabuchi, 259

in the True Heart and the superiority of the Japanese spirit we can point to two other reasons why Mabuchi saw Japan as superior to China and all other nations.

The first lies in Mabuchi's views of the Japanese imperial system. Kamo Mabuchi believed that the Japanese emperor was the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. He believed that reverence of the emperor was of the utmost importance if one wanted to act in accordance with the old ways and be a good citizen.⁹⁶ It is easy to see how this could shape his opinion about Japan's place in the world. If the emperor was the direct descendant of the sun goddess then what would that make the emperor other than a god himself or at the very least a demigod. This also afforded a very special status to the Japanese. If the emperor was a god living on earth then Japan was nothing less than the land of the gods and the Japanese citizens nothing less than servants acting within a divine kingdom. Given this level of religious ethnocentrism it is easy to see how Mabuchi held strong nativist feelings close at heart.

The second reason is in some sense closely linked with the first. Since Mabuchi believed that the emperor was the direct descendant of the sun goddess this also meant that the imperial line could be traced back, unbroken into the distant past. This meant that the Japanese had been good citizens for centuries, honoring and revering their god-like leader, the emperor, without usurping the rule that was rightly his in accordance with the Way of Heaven and Earth. Mabuchi contrasted this with the history of China where the dynasties had changed several times in history and where the rulers were under constant threat of overthrow and usurpation. Nosco notes that “according to Mabuchi (and Azumamoro), Japan was superior to China because China was a land that changed its masters...For Mabuchi, Chinese history represented a relentless tale of revolution and counter-revolution with constant vying for power by forces who (by birth) had

⁹⁶ Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 178-180

no legitimate claim to authority.”⁹⁷ So here we see strong basis for Mabuchi's ethnocentrism, nativism, and nationalism. His ideas were founded upon the idea that Japan was a kingdom that had relied upon the Way of Heaven and Earth from its origins and where its ruler, the emperor, had a literal divine right to rule. For Mabuchi, the Japanese were superior in heart and spirit as well as in historical divine right. It was only the evil of the foreign cultures that had temporarily obscured the Way of Heaven and Earth in Japan that had made Japan less of a country than it should be. However, he remained convinced that if Japan returned to the old ways and studied the ancient texts that the Japanese could once again discover their True Heart.

Kamo Mabuchi is considered the first of the *kokugakusha* and in his philosophy we can see many ideas that will carry over to the other scholar to be covered in this work. For this reason it is helpful to briefly summarize his ideas so that we can keep them in mind as we move on to the next important thinker in the *kokugaku* movement. Mabuchi believed in what he called The Way of Heaven and Earth, a way of living that brought one in concert with nature and one that the ancient Japanese had practiced for centuries prior to the cataclysmic events of The Fall. The Fall occurred when the Japanese people lost sight of the true Way and turned to the Chinese ways in order to clothe themselves in grandeur instead of remaining simple. This resulted in a corruption of the Japanese heart. However, Mabuchi likewise believed that this Way could be recovered. He believed that the True Heart still dwelt within the Japanese people and that they could recover it if they studied ancient texts. In particular, Mabuchi pointed to the poetry anthology, the *Man'yōshū*. Mabuchi believed that poetry was the key to discovering the Way since in his estimation poetry was the result of an outpouring of emotion that could no longer be

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 210

contained in the heart. Thus, if one read the poetry of the ancient people one could understand the heart of those people and use it as a guide by which to understand the Way of Heaven and Earth and live by its guidelines. He hoped that this would bring about a new age wherein people would revere the old ways and the imperial system, a desire that was certainly shared by the next scholar, Motoori Norinaga

Chapter Four Motoori Norinaga

The final thinker that we will look at on our path to understanding the development of Shinto Nationalism in Early Modern Japan is the renowned Shinto scholar Motoori Norinaga. Out of all the scholars that we have examined up to this point, Norinaga may be considered the most famous. He is widely considered by scholars to be the central figure of the *kokugaku* movement both due to the profound influence that he had on nativist thinkers in later periods of Japan's history but also because he took the earlier nativist philosophies that preceded him and turned them into a coherent and well organized set of philosophical ideas.

The thoughts and ideas of Motoori Norinaga differed slightly from those of his predecessors but still showed the same regard for the past and ancient historical texts. Norinaga was particularly influenced by Kamo no Mabuchi although he altered many of Mabuchi's ideas to form a philosophy that was all his own. What we will see is that Norinaga's philosophy took the nativism of Kamo Mabuchi and gave it a decidedly religious spin. While Kamo Mabuchi expressed belief in the universal principle of the Way of Heaven and Earth, Norinaga took this one step further and espoused the Way of the Gods. He used ancient Japanese myths in order to demonstrate his belief that Japan was not an inferior country. Neither was it China's equal or its mere superior. According to Norinaga, Japan was the central nation on all of the earth, the home of the sun goddess Amaterasu and her earthly descendants, the emperors of Japan. Furthermore, he believed that the Japanese gods were not merely disinterested deities who either observed or simply did not take part in human affairs. Rather, he believed that the Japanese gods were the leading force in the world, the cause of all acts of good and evil in human society. Norinaga believed that all human actions were the direct result of the Japanese gods influencing people to

do their wills. This gives Norinaga's philosophy an air of mysticism that is not undeserved. For as we shall see, Norinaga used this philosophy not only to advocate his nativist ideas but to give testimony to what he considered to be a mysterious world filled with sometimes unexplained phenomena and unanswerable questions. Norinaga's belief in a world that could not be fully explained through observation or philosophical reasoning puts him in direct conflict with the Confucian thinkers that we encountered earlier in this work. However, it sheds light on an important element of Norinaga's world view which consisted of a reality subject to the Shinto gods.⁹⁸

After a short biographical introduction we will examine Norinaga's line of thought and his contribution to Shinto nativism by looking at elements of his philosophy. First, we shall examine his belief in a utopian past which he envisioned in the form of a society that was in perfect alignment with the will of the gods. We will then expand upon Norinaga's basis for this utopia by examining his emphasis on ancient texts, particularly the *Kojiki*, in order to discover the nature of the Way. These two ideas, while consisting of his own personal philosophy, link him directly to the earlier thoughts of not only Kamo Mabuchi but also the Confucianists. A discussion on Norinaga's view of the *Kojiki* will naturally lead to an analysis of his views of the Japanese emperor which served to make up a great deal of the reasons behind why Norinaga placed Japan at the pinnacle of all nations. Following this, we will look at ideas that were unique to Norinaga including his idea that the world was under the direct influence of the gods. When all of this is put together a picture will be presented of a man who was absolute in his belief that the Japanese were superior to any nation on earth. This was a man who believed this because of things he had read in ancient texts which places him in the footsteps of the men that we have

⁹⁸ Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 233-236

already looked at up to this point. The thoughts and philosophies of Motoori Norinaga are the lynch pin in Japanese nativism that links the early development of nativism that is examined in this work to the later politicization of the movement. It is to Motoori Norinaga that we can give the credit for finishing the development of Shinto nativism as a fully formulated philosophical idea.

Motoori Norinaga's family has a rich history as a family empowered with the status and prestige that came with being a member of the samurai class. However, the patriarch of the family was killed in 1591 during the wars of the *Sengoku Jidai* causing Norinaga's family to renounce their samurai status and take up the mantle of a common merchant family. Thus, it was to a non-samurai family that Norinaga was born to in 1730 in Ise Province. His father was a Buddhist and a cotton farmer so the young Norinaga grew up in a the tradition of the Pureland Buddhist sect, an influence that would remain with him for the rest of his life.

However, despite the fact that his family did not have the status of the samurai class, Norinaga's family was able to provide him with a rich education in Confucianism, Noh theatre, tea ceremony, and other aspects of Japanese high culture. Norinaga studied Confucianism in Kyoto under the Confucian master Hori Keizan 堀景山 (1689-1757) and by the age of nineteen was well versed in the details of Confucian philosophy. However, while studying in Kyoto, Norinaga was exposed to ideas that would push him toward his later nativist writings. While Norinaga had maintained an interest in Shinto since his youth, it was in Kyoto that this interest blossomed and he first postulated the idea that Shinto was the “Great Way of Japan” at an equal level to the Way of Confucianism.

Despite his education in Confucianism and his developing Shinto philosophy, Norinaga's primary occupation was as a physician which he began to practice in 1757. However, throughout his time as a physician he maintained his studies and began to deliver lectures on ancient Japanese texts such as the *Man'yōshū* and the early eleventh century classic *The Tale of Genji* 源氏物語. It was at this stage in his life that Norinaga came under the sway of Kamo no Mabuchi and sought a meeting with the man which he managed to achieve in 1763.

Norinaga had come to the conclusion that a large scale study of the *Kojiki* was necessary in order to propagate Japanese studies. He believed that the best way to go about doing this was to consult the man who at the time was the most preeminent Shinto nativist scholar, Kamo no Mabuchi, and procure his advice and his blessing for the undertaking of such a study. Thus, in 1763 the event known as the “Evening in Matsuzaka” took place, named for the city in Matsuzaka where Mabuchi and Norinaga met.

From the start Mabuchi and Norinaga's relationship was strained. Mabuchi agreed with Norinaga that an intense study of the *Kojiki* was necessary but did not believe that Norinaga was the man to do it. Mabuchi believed that Norinaga lacked the necessary experience and had no skill with verse, which as we have seen was an area of study that was of great significance for Mabuchi. He advised Norinaga to instead study the *Man'yōshū* but Norinaga was stubborn and began his study of the *Kojiki* in 1764 against the Shinto patriarch's wishes. The two remained in contact several times after this meeting but the relationship remained strained with Mabuchi continuing to insist that Norinaga lacked experience and was not capable of pulling off an in depth study of the *Kojiki* on his own.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Biographical information for Motoori Norinaga is taken from Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 232-241, 249-252, and 260-263.

As a student of Mabuchi, Norinaga began his studies with many of the same assumptions about the Way that had been common in Mabuchi's writings. Included in this was the idea that the Japanese people had originally known the Way in the distant past but had suffered a fall through which the Way was lost. According to Norinaga, Japan had not only originally been the beneficiary of the receiving the Way of Heaven and Earth but was also the benefactor of the divine Way of the gods. Norinaga envisioned a world in which the Way of the gods was transmitted to the world through their chosen nation, Japan. Likewise, he argued that this Way could not be found in the meditations of Buddhism or in the philosophy of Confucianism. Only through service to the Shinto gods could one find the true Way.¹⁰⁰ For Norinaga this belief was based upon evidence that he had found within the ancient texts which indicated that the sun goddess, Amaterasu, had blessed the reign of Ninigi, the first Japanese emperor. Norinaga wrote that "She [Amaterasu] commanded at this time: 'May prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure forever.' This decree is fundamental to the Way."¹⁰¹ We see in this quote a belief in Norinaga's philosophy that Japan and its imperial line held divine favor and were destined to last forever.

However, Norinaga lamented that the Way that had been transmitted through the gods had been lost over the centuries. The Japanese people had allowed foreign influences such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Chinese culture to come in and take the place of the divine gift that the gods had given them.¹⁰² Like Mabuchi, Norinaga referred to this event as The Fall. Unlike Mabuchi who believed that The Fall happened every time a new Japanese was born in ignorance of the Way, Norinaga placed the Fall as an event that happened at one time in the

100 Motoori Norinaga. "Uiyamabumi" *Monumenta Nipponica* 42:4 (Winter, 1987): 456-493, 462

101 Motoori Norinaga "Tamakushige" *Monumenta Nipponica* 43:1 (Spring, 1988): 45-61. 46

102 *Ibid*, 49

distant past. He subdivided The Fall into two separate parts: The Fall began when ancient man was exposed to foreign culture, specifically Chinese culture. When this happened man became aware of the difference of his traditions from that of China and lost his innocence. This was followed by the second event which was when the ancient Japanese made the cataclysmic decision to abandon their old ways and follow the Chinese way. In earlier writings, Norinaga placed the date of The Fall sometime around the seventh century but in later writings he placed it much earlier, nearer to the third century.¹⁰³

Norinaga came to believe that the influence of Chinese culture had not only influenced Japanese cultural life but had also influenced the heart of the Japanese people and given rise to what he called the “Chinese Heart.” He refers to the spirit of the Chinese Heart upon the Japanese people as a “stain”, something that needed to be forcefully removed.¹⁰⁴ Peter Nosco reports that Norinaga believed that the first step to recovering the Way was to remove the stain of the Chinese heart; when Norinaga spoke of removing this stain on the Japanese heart he did so using the Japanese word *harai* 祓い, which translated means “purification” or “exorcism”.¹⁰⁵ So we can see that Norinaga considered the Chinese Heart to be a serious spiritual problem, closely akin to that of coming into contact with an unclean, demonic spirit.

The method that Norinaga chose to cleanse the spirit of the Chinese Heart was to study the ancient Japanese texts rather than the Chinese ones. Specifically, he believed that one needed to study the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* in order to successfully wipe away the stain of Chinese influence. However, Norinaga placed greater emphasis on the *Kojiki* than he did on the *Nihon*

103 Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 285-288, 300-305

104 Motoori Norinaga, Ann Wehmeyer, transl. *Kojiki-Den Book 1* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1997), 24.

105 Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 288-289

Shoki. Furthermore, he believed that if one wanted to be perfect in one's understanding of the ancient Way then the *Kojiki* should always be studied first. The reason for this was simple. Norinaga believed that the *Kojiki* was closer in style and content to the Way of the ancient Japanese than that of the *Nihon Shoki* which he believed was close but still had some evidence of Chinese interference. However, Norinaga was dismayed that during his time the *Nihon Shoki* received much greater attention than the *Kojiki* did. He was outraged that many people in the mid-Edo Period did not take the *Kojiki* seriously as a historical document. During this time, most scholars considered the *Nihon Shoki* to be more authoritative and the *Kojiki* to be a supplementary work that lacked the authority of the *Nihon Shoki*. This is despite the fact that the *Kojiki* was authored first.¹⁰⁶ This classification of the *Kojiki* as a supplementary work angered Norinaga. He believed that the only reason that the scholars of the day preferred the *Nihon Shoki* was because they gave preference to documents written in Chinese style, evidence of their corruption by the Chinese Heart. He wrote:

The Chronicle [Kojiki] does not adorn itself with embellishments, of graphs, and it is stated in the preface that efforts were made to use only the ancient language and not to lose the true conditions of the ancient times. Despite this fact, however, as I will say again and again since the appearance of the *Nihonshoki* the people of this world have in general revered and valued it only, and there are many who do not know even the name of the *Kojiki*. The reasons for this occurred somehow in the flourishing of the study of Chinese writings, wherein people venerated and preferred the ways of that country in all fields. People received pleasure only from works which resembled the format of the national histories of China, and when they looked at the purity of the *Kojiki*, they would pronounce that it did not have the proper format of a national history and therefore did not take it up.¹⁰⁷

As shown in the quote above Norinaga was angry that people preferred the *Nihon Shoki* merely for the fact that it was adorned in Chinese style. This was not the Way of the Gods or the

106 Burns, Susan L. *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan*. (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.

107 Norinaga, *Kojiki-den*, 16-17

Way of Japan, he would argue. The perfection of the *Kojiki* is found in its lack of adornment.

This is a belief that he would profess about the *Kojiki* in many of his writings. He expanded upon the above quote in another one of his works, *Uiyamabumi* うひ山ぶみ, *First Steps into the Mountains*, when he wrote:

In *Kojiki* there is no decorative Chinese rhetoric, and its most splendid feature is its unadorned records based on the traditions of antiquity. No writing surpasses it in illuminating the conditions of ancient times. Moreover, the events of the Age of the Gods are recorded in more abundant detail than in *Nihon Shoki*. *Kojiki* is thus the foremost classic for studying the Way, so scholars of ancient learning should forever study this book.¹⁰⁸

A quick example of the Chinese style inherent in the *Nihon Shoki* can be found by simply looking at its title. Many of the ancient Chinese histories titled themselves as a history of the period in which they were covering. Thus, the name of the period or dynasty name would always appear in the title. If we look at the title of the *Nihon Shoki* we can see that it is modeled in the same manner since *Nihon* 日本 means Japan and *Shoki* 書紀 designates it as a chronicle. Thus, its translated title, “The Chronicles of Japan”, is very much in the Chinese style. The *Kojiki*, on the other hand, does not title itself in the Chinese manner but maintains a simple style, with its name meaning “Records of Ancient Matters”. No country or dynasty name appears in the title as would follow the Chinese manner. Norinaga found this to be far superior to the Chinese style and praised the *Kojiki* for it.

The fact that the title of the *Kojiki* does not include the name of the country, unlike that of the *Nihon Shoki*, and that what it prominently displays is merely “ancient matters” is dignified and quite splendid. This is because it does not seek to ingratiate itself to a foreign country, and conforms only to the meaning of the land at the boundary of heaven and earth ruled by the ancestors of the heavenly deities¹⁰⁹

However, despite this belief. Norinaga did not believe that the *Nihon Shoki* was without

108 Norinaga, *Uiyamabumi*, 467

109 Norinaga, *Kojiki-den*, 65

merit. In fact, he encouraged his students to study it. However, he strongly believed that the *Kojiki* was superior and that it should be studied first. Norinaga never disagreed that the *Nihon Shoki* was an important document but he disdained its Chinese style. For this reason, Norinaga always encouraged his students to study the *Kojiki* first in order to avoid falling into a trap and being seduced by the Chinese style in the *Nihon Shoki* thus giving oneself over to the Chinese Heart.¹¹⁰

One thing that must be noted is that despite Norinaga's belief that the *Kojiki* was pure and free from Chinese influence, the book was actually written in classical Chinese. How then did Norinaga reconcile what seems to be contradictory evidence to his claims? The answer reveals both the consistency of Norinaga's philosophy as well as a new aspect of it.

In many ways that are similar to the ideas of Kamo no Mabuchi, Norinaga maintained that the Japanese people of the past were simple, straightforward, and without adornment. They had no need for such complicated things as books or a system of writing. Everything was dealt with in a straightforward manner. It was only after the development of the Chinese Heart that Norinaga claimed that the people adopted books and writing as part of the country. These things, Norinaga claims, are an entirely foreign invention that did not exist in Japan at the time that the tales of the *Kojiki* were first formulated. At this time the tales of the *Kojiki* were transmitted orally. Thus, it was only after the introduction of the Chinese Heart and the introduction of the writing system that the *Kojiki* was written down although its stories had existed for long before this. However, Norinaga claims that the classical Chinese of the *Kojiki* is different from that of the Chinese in the *Nihon Shoki*. He argues that the people that wrote the *Kojiki* down did the best with what they had and attempted to maintain the original style even while working in Chinese.

110 *Ibid*, 466-467

Thus, although it was impossible not to allow some small amount of Chinese influence to creep into the text the Chinese of the *Kojiki* is straightforward and unadorned in keeping with the style of the oral version. Much of Norinaga's scholarship on the *Kojiki* was devoted to getting beyond even this layer of Chinese influence and finding the true Japanese meaning of the work hidden within.¹¹¹

What Norinaga discovered in his analysis of the *Kojiki* would inspire a strong sense of Shinto nativism within him. This sense of nativism was not only nationalistic in character but also highly mystical which gave his philosophy a much more religious tone than that of Kamo Mabuchi. Norinaga's mystic sentiment stemmed from the belief that all actions in the world were controlled by the Shinto gods of Japan. Norinaga did not only ascribe the good actions of people to the gods, however, but all human action. All human actions were controlled by the gods and people were powerless to resist their will. In this way, Norinaga compared people to the puppets used in *bunraku* 文楽 theatre wherein a puppeteer, usually dressed in black, directly interacts with a puppet in order to make it seem like it is alive. Norinaga believed that this image closely mirrored reality. People's actions were directly controlled by the will of the gods in the same way that the puppeteer controlled the puppet in *bunraku*. Norinaga did not restrict this interpretation of reality only to acts of purity and virtue, however, but also included acts of evil. According to Norinaga, all actions, good and evil, were the will of the gods, because there are both good and evil gods at work in the world.¹¹² “All thing in this world,” Norinaga wrote “such as the changing of the seasons, the precipitation of rain and snow and all manner of events good and

111 *Ibid*, 75-80

112 Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 272-277

evil in the life of an individual are the work of the gods.”¹¹³ He expanded upon the nature of the gods in another document by noting:

The gods differ in essence from the Buddha and others. There are not only good gods, but evil gods as well, and their hearts and deeds are correspondingly good and evil. This is why it is common in the world that people who do evil deeds prosper, and people who do good deeds suffer. The gods are not to be measured according to whether or not they are in accordance with principles. One must simply stand in awe of their wrath, and accord them the utmost respect.¹¹⁴

However, this belief also allowed Norinaga to show some compassion upon those that had turned away from the Way of the Gods. If the gods controlled all actions, both good and evil, then Norinaga reasoned that turning away from the true Way was also the work of the evil gods. Thus, he found no fault in their falling away.¹¹⁵ However, he was adamant that people could still rediscover the Way despite the fact that gods controlled everything. While Norinaga believed that people could not defy the gods will he also believed that the gods occasionally ceded control to the human realm, which added a level of accountability to human action and gave hope for the recovery of the True Way.¹¹⁶

This belief in the preeminence of the will of the gods allowed Norinaga to link the secular matters of the state and religious matters into one bundle. If we continue with the analogy of a puppet play we can see how it all ties together. The world was likened to the stage upon which the puppet play was played out and the people were the puppets controlled directly by the gods themselves. Secular matters which included war and government were nothing more than the movement of the puppets on the stage. Thus, all matters of government, economics, or any other actions were also according to the will of the gods which gave this philosophy a distinctly

113 Norinaga, *Naobi no Miatama*, 221

114 *Ibid*, 235

115 Burns, 92-94

116 Norinaga, *Tamakushige*, 57

political element.¹¹⁷

So we see in these ideas the highly mystical nature of Norinaga's philosophy. He believed that everything that happened in the world was controlled by the gods that because of this there were some things in the world that could not be explained by human reasoning or understanding. For Norinaga, human knowledge was a finite, limited thing that lacks the ability to properly explain the universe which is why he opposed the Way of the Confucianists, which relied upon reasoning and observation, and instead relied upon the Way of the Gods.¹¹⁸ We can see what this mysticism in Norinaga's philosophy means when we begin to examine his opinions toward the most important of the Shinto gods: Amaterasu, the sun goddess and deity of the Japanese imperial family. Through Amaterasu and subsequently the imperial system, Norinaga developed a belief in Japanese superiority over all other nations on earth.

As we have previously seen Motoori Norinaga believed in the literal existence of the Shinto gods but the god that he gave the most status to was the sun goddess, Amaterasu. In the *Kojiki* Amaterasu is portrayed as a mother, a comforting and maternal deity that stands in stark contrast to her wild and destructive brother Susanō. She is said to be in control of the life giving power of the sun and is said to be the ancestor of the Japanese emperors. So in every sense of the word, Amaterasu is the mother of the Japanese nation. Norinaga took this materialistic portrayal of Amaterasu and extrapolated it into the real world in order to provide the basis for a myth of Japanese superiority. Norinaga made the case that Amaterasu was not only a maternal deity in the sense that she gave birth to the Japanese imperial system but that the entire world owed its existence to her divine grace.¹¹⁹ He argued that the very sun that hangs above every nation and

117 *Ibid*, 58

118 *Ibid*, 36-37

119 Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 279-282

provides light and warmth to the all people of the earth as well as the ability of all nations to grow food and sustain themselves, is nothing less than the physical embodiment of Amaterasu herself. The sun that people see in the sky is Amaterasu herself.¹²⁰

It is very easy to see how Norinaga would then take this idea and use it to argue that Japan was superior to every country on earth. He argued that according to the *Kojiki* Amaterasu is a goddess that has given her divine favor to Japan and Japan alone. Japan is her chosen country. This is evidenced by the fact that she has chosen it to be the seat of her divine lineage, the emperors of Japan. Furthermore, all of the earth's people owe their existence to her. There is not one nation on earth that does not rely upon her warmth and radiance which serves to make her the central and most important deity in the world. By Norinaga's estimation, Japan's status as the chosen nation of the most important deity in the world meant that it should be afforded the status of the central, most important, and most civilized nation in the world. He wrote on this matter saying “...ours is the country in which the Sun Goddess, who illuminates all other countries within the four seas was born. As the source and origin of all other countries, Japan is superior to them.”¹²¹ This was not a belief limited to only one document. It was a common theme in Norinaga's writing. In another treatise he expanded the idea stating that “The Imperial Country (Japan) is the land of the awesome goddess, Amaterasu-o-mi-kami, ancestor of the gods. Of the reasons why Japan is superior to all countries, this is the most salient. There is no country that does not receive the sacred blessing of this august deity.”¹²²

Through these statements Norinaga's nativism and his nationalism are clear. It is a religious fanaticism that feeds a political principle. He believed within his heart that Japan was

120 Norinaga, *Tamakushige*, 47

121 Norinaga, *Tamakushige*, 48

122 Norinaga, *Naobi no Mitama*, 213

superior based upon ideas that he read in the ancient text, the *Kojiki*. However, Norinaga's idea of Japanese superiority had an additional element that gave it weight which allowed it to propagate itself outside of the pages of the *Kojiki* and into the present age. Norinaga pointed to the imperial system as evidence that not only were the tales in the *Kojiki* true but that the grace of Amaterasu still strove with Japan because of the longevity and continued existence of the imperial line.

Peter Nosco notes that Norinaga used the imperial family as the lynch pin to link the past and the present together. The imperial family was the mid point in a divine hierarchy through which the Way of the Gods was transmitted. It began with the gods and then with Amaterasu herself who transmitted the Way to the emperors and provided them with a mandate to rule by. The emperors then used this mandate as a means of rule and gave instructions to their ministers who disseminated the Way to the people.¹²³ In this hierarchy we see that Norinaga sees the emperor as a continuation of the authority of the sun goddess. When an emperor inherits the throne he inherits the full authority of Amaterasu and the throne he sits on is the throne of the goddess herself. The emperor is literally a man with the authority of a god living on earth.¹²⁴

The Chinese also considered their emperor to have the qualities of a deity. He too was considered to have been given a mandate by heaven. However, in China this “Mandate of Heaven” could be revoked. A bad harvest, a series of floods or any other calamity that befell China could be interpreted that the gods were displeased with the emperor's rule and a change was in order. Norinaga allowed for no such interpretation in the case of the Japanese emperor. The rule and authority of the Japanese emperor were absolute. There was no action that an emperor could take that could weaken his mandate. It was divinely gifted to him, a literal rule by

123 Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, 278-279

124 Norinaga, *Naobi no Mitama*, 226-227

divine right. Norinaga wrote:

In foreign countries there is no predetermined ruler, so ordinary people suddenly become kings, and kings suddenly become ordinary people, or fall to ruin in death; such has been the custom since antiquity. Those who scheme to seize the country but are unable to do so are called rebels, and are disdained and despised, while those succeed are called sages and are revered and venerated. The so-called sages are are thus merely those who have succeeded in a rebellious act. Our sacred emperors do not stand in equal rank with the kings of such lowly countries. They are part of the imperial lineage granted to them by the ancestral deities who gave birth to this august country. From the beginning of heaven and earth, the realm under heaven was preordained as their realm to rule. As there is no decree on the part of the august deities that one must not submit to the emperor if he is evil, one cannot stand aside and judge whether the emperor is good or bad. As long as heaven and earth exists, and as long as the sun and moon shed their light, no matter how many generations pass, our lord will remain steadfast.¹²⁵

Norinaga was incredibly proud of the idea that the Japanese royal lineage extended backwards in an unbroken line all the way to the gods themselves and he used this as further proof of Japan's superiority over all other nations by using the Confucianist's own ideas against them. According to Confucian teachings, a good Confucian country should honor its rulers. Norinaga argued that no country had done that better than Japan. The Chinese, despite their professions of Confucian righteousness had certainly not done this. Their dynastic line had changed many times. The same was true of many other countries whose royal lineages came and went but never lasted for very long. Japan's dynastic line, on the other hand, had lasted for millenia, making them the standard bearer of virtue. He expanded upon this idea of superiority with a simple analogy, also based upon one of the Confucianist's favorite concepts: observation. He urged them to look at the natural world. Simple life forms such as insects and small rodents are born, live quick lives, and die. The span of their lives goes through a fast evolution taking merely a few days or years. The more advanced creatures on earth, such as humans, go through a much slower change. Their lives last for decades and in some cases longer than a century.

125 *Ibid*, 225

Norinaga argued that it was the same in government. These governments that changed dynasties so quickly, like the Chinese, were like insects in comparison to the majesty of Japan's unbroken royal lineage.¹²⁶

Norinaga argued that the True Way was not found in Confucianism but in following the Way of the Gods that was to be found in the mandate of Japanese imperial rule. Norinaga advised that if the country were to follow the Way and revere the emperor, then it would usher in a period of peace and prosperity. If Japan did not, then there would be a period of war and strife. Norinaga pointed to history in order to prove this point, arguing that it was only after the Heian Period (794-1185) when the warrior class took over and stopped revering Imperial rule that Japan fell into the terrible period of civil war that preceded the Edo Period. He credited Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536-1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542-1616), the three men that pulled Japan out of its civil war by unifying the nation, with reinstating reverence for the imperial line which allowed Japan to emerge from the difficult times.¹²⁷

By the time of Motoori Norinaga's death in 1801 Shinto nativism had fully formed as a coherent philosophy thanks in large part to his contributions to the field. If we take a look back at what Norinaga believed we see that he had an overarching theme of the supremacy of the gods and of reverence toward their chosen one on earth, the Japanese emperor. He built upon ideas propagated by the Confucian philosophers and Kamo no Mabuchi in order to develop a philosophy that espoused Japan as the central nation on earth. The reasons behind this were clear.

¹²⁶ Norinaga, *Tamakushige*, 48, 51

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 54-56

Norinaga believed that Japan was literally the land of the gods and that the heavenly goddess, Amaterasu, who was visible in the sky every day and poured down her blessing on all nations called Japan home. Furthermore, he believed that the imperial line was directly descended from this goddess and that they were responsible for propagating her mandate and the Way of the gods to the people of the earth. All of this was built upon the common thread that can be found among all the men that have been analyzed in this work: that the truth and the Way were to be found in ancient, written sources, in Norinaga's case, the *Kojiki*. While the story of Shinto nativism does not end with Motoori Norinaga he is the central figure in its development and he can be fully credited with taking the ideas that preceded him and forming it into a coherent philosophy that would have a great impact on Japan over the next century.

Conclusion

The story of *kokugaku* did not end with the death of Motoori Norinaga. After his passing another generation of scholars rose up behind him, carrying on the legacy of his teachings and giving them new political significance. The nineteenth century would mark one of the most tumultuous and yet remarkable periods in Japanese history as the nativist flair introduced by *kokugaku* scholars combined with the weakening of the Tokugawa shogunate and its inability to handle external threats as well as the internal demands of a changing society. This would all culminate in the 1868 Meiji Restoration 明治維新.

We can look at the story of the Japan in the early modern period as a quest for identity. Militarily, the so-called Pax Tokugawa was a period of peace that Japan had not enjoyed for many centuries. However, intellectually it was a brewing firestorm of new ideas and philosophies. The old ideas were falling away. The idea of Chinese cultural superiority was no longer seen as inherently valid which lead many scholars to speculate on what Japan's true place in the international order really was. Was it a subservient, barbarian nation as the Chinese would imply or could it take its place among the greats or perhaps even be considered the greatest of all nations?

In this study we have traced one line of thought that sought to answer this question. The scholars that we have looked at over the past several pages are very diverse, coming from different background and even different religions, but the similarities in their thoughts reveal an undercurrent of uniformity in Japanese intellectual life during the early modern period. Regardless of whether the scholars were Confucian or Shinto there was a sense that the Neo-Confucian ideas that permeated Japanese society were not fully satisfying. These scholars were

searching for a substantive answer to the question of what is the Way and what does it mean for Japan's place in the world. This search for knowledge and a desire to practice the true Way resulted in a palpable need to return to the past, to an idyllic age when the Way was practiced by all people and the realm was ruled in righteousness.

It began with the Confucian scholars of the *kogaku* movement. Yamaga Sokō, Itō Jinsai, and Ogyū Sorai among others looked to ancient Confucian texts in the hopes that they could find the Way that had been lost over the centuries. In doing so they rejected the idea that the Chinese were the standard bearers of the Way. Instead they blamed the Chinese dynasties as being the perpetrators of the Way's decline, of abandoning its teachings and changing them to suit their own needs. Thus the *kogaku* scholars attempted to get beyond the faulty teachings of contemporary Chinese Confucian scholars and return to the original teachings in the ancient texts. Yamaga Sokō urged very early on that an investigation into the truth of the Way was necessary and Itō Jinsai answered this call by analyzing the works of Mencius and Confucius. Ogyū Sorai went even further back and looked at the Confucian Classics. Furthermore, he urged his disciples to study only originals, to abandon commentaries, and shattered the idea of the Confucian sages as divine men.

All of these ideas were picked up by the *kokugaku* scholars. These men were highly educated in Confucian studies and thus were familiar with many of the teachings of *kogaku*, especially that of the Sorai school. Like his Confucian predecessors, Kamo Mabuchi blamed the Chinese for the decline in the practice of the true Way. He saw their influence on Japanese culture as a stain upon the hearts of the people. In order to cleanse that stain he encouraged that people go back and read ancient Japanese poetry, the *Man'yōshū* in particular, because he

believed that contained within those verses was the heart of the ancient Japanese who had lived in harmony with the Way of Heaven and Earth.

These ideas were further propagated by Motoori Norinaga who infused *kokugaku* with a sense of Shinto mysticism and religious fervor. He pointed to the myths written in the *Kojiki* as the source that one should turn to in order to discover the Way. He lauded the ancient Japanese for their simplicity in contrast to the complicated nature of Confucianism and argued that the true Way was to be found in such simplicity which was reflected in the ancient histories. He believed that the Shinto gods were in control of all aspects of life and human action both good and evil. He attributed the greatest of these gods, Amaterasu, with being one and the same with the life giving power of the sun. Norinaga would argue that every nation on earth benefited from the sun's warmth and energy, making them all forever in Amaterasu's debt. Yet, among all of these nations Amaterasu had chosen Japan as her home and the place to install her divine lineage. The imperial system was proof enough to Norinaga that Amaterasu's grace and favor continued into his own time. It was the link between the myths of the past and the present and it provided the basis for the creation of a myth of Japanese superiority.

The myth of the Japanese emperor's divine lineage would have significant impact on Japanese history over the next century. It was an idea that would be featured prominently in the Japanese political system until the end of the second world war. In the pages of the past the Japanese found their new identity, free of China, one that had existed for them all along.

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