

Richard BOWRING: *In Search of the Way. Thought and Religion in Early-Modern Japan, 1582–1860*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017. 13 + 329 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-879523-0.

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The present volume, *In Search of the Way*, is a continuation of Bowring's earlier *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500–1600* (Cambridge, 2005). It treats developments in thought and religion between 1600 and ca 1860. The perspective of the book is not the imminent modernization of Japan, but the Japanese intellectual world as it developed during the Early Modern Period (Edo or Tokugawa Period) from its medieval roots. The word "Thought" in the title of the book refers, not surprisingly, to Confucianism, *Kokugaku* ("National Studies"), and *Rangaku* ("Dutch Studies"); the word "Religion," rather more surprisingly, refers not only to Buddhism and Shinto, but also to Christianity. And in the interstices Bowring also deals with *Bushidō* ("The Way of the Warrior": Ch. 7), the "Way of the Merchant" (Ch. 10.4), and popular literature and *Shikidō* ("The Way of Lust": Ch. 14.3). It is a broad canvas indeed that Bowring uses to paint his picture of the intellectual life of Edo Japan. He also covers a long span of time; as he says himself, the European equivalent would be "From Elizabeth I until the Communist Manifesto" (p. 304).

The book is divided into three periods, each lasting for some one hundred years, in a chronology that is broadly based on the reigns of the successive shogun. The first period runs from Hideyoshi (no shogun, of course) to Ietsuna; the second, from Tsunayoshi to Ieharu; and the third, from Ienari to Iemochi. The turning points are closely related to the accession of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1680) and the coming to power of Matsudaira Sadanobu (1786), both of which had evident reverberations in the intellectual world.

Each section begins with a chapter covering the political developments of that specific period, and then branches out into a discussion of whatever Bowring sees as most typical of the period under consideration. Due care is taken that such topics as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto reappear in each section, but the arrangement is flexible. Christianity disappears after section I; *Kokugaku* is introduced in section II under the heading "Contesting Confucian values" (Ch. 14); Shinto is presented in section I ("The Way of the Kami": Ch. 6) and section III ("A new kind of Shinto": Ch. 18).

The basic, unifying theme, relevant for the whole of the Edo Period, is the relation between Chinese culture (Confucianism) and Japanese culture (Shinto, *Kokugaku*): “ ... Hayashi Razan writing in the 1630s [and] Aizawa Seishisai writing in the 1850s ... were working from a common base of assumptions and faced at least one common problem: how to retain the best of a venerated rational Chinese tradition from which it was clearly impossible to escape, while preserving an emotional Japanese core which obstinately survived but the origins of which were hidden” (p. 304).

Contents. The book is an intelligent and very readable summary of recent research. Read in combination with the relevant volume of *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, it provides an excellent introduction for students who want to orientate themselves in this field. For the specialist, too, it contains a number of ideas, comments, and hints that could serve as points of departure for future research. The book also contains a great many quotations from the original sources.

Everyone who should be treated, is. The only exception I noticed is Miura Baien (1723–89). He is not mentioned at all, while the other mavericks - Andō Shōeki (1703–62; pp. 160–65) and Yamagata Bantō (1748–1821; pp. 248–51), and, if you want to regard them as mavericks, Yamagata Daini (1725–1767; pp. 214–15) and Kaiho Seiryō (1755–1817; pp. 251–54) – are all treated at some length. Sometimes, some of the well-known people are quoted in an unexpected context, e.g. Kaibara Ekiken (1630–1714), whose *Jingi-kun* is quoted at length in the chapter on Shinto (pp. 103–105). On the other hand, Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) is mentioned only in connection with economic policy (pp. 169–72), while his *Kishin-ron* is ignored. Another example is Fujiwara Seika (1561–1619), who receives ample attention on account of his *Daigaku yōryaku*, but whose *Bunshū* and *magnum opus Bunshō tattoku roku* remain unmentioned (pp. 52–62). Never, however, does Bowring indulge in mere name-listing. Even in the chapter on Buddhism in the eighteenth century, where he mentions a great number of Zen monks - Mujaku Dōchū (1653–1745), Hōtan Sōshun (1654–1738), Myōryū Jizan (1637–90), Jiun Onkō (1718–1804), Manzan Dōhaku (1637–1715), Menzan Zuihō (1683–1769), Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) – at least Manzan, a Sō tō monk who tried to settle an institutional quarrel within his sect, is treated in depth (pp. 185–88). The Ōbaku-shū, a new Zen sect that was imported from China by Chinese monks in the middle of the seventeenth century and was treated earlier (pp. 42–45), is not referred to again in Section II.

There are also a number of “new encounters,” people who are not generally mentioned. Manzan is one of them; others are, e.g., one Masuho Zankō (1655–1742), a Buddhist monk turned “Shinto activist preacher,” who opened his own shrine in Kyoto. Bowring quotes his spirited case in favour of equality between man and wife (p. 192). One would have liked to have more than the three pages (pp. 191–93) that Bowring allots to him.

More attention than usual is paid to Nakae Tōju (1608–48; pp. 69–79), Kumazawa Banzan (1619–91; pp. 79–87), and Itō Jinsai (1627–1705; pp. 121–36), and also to Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–46) and his two representative writings *Okina no fumi* and *Shutsujō kōgo*. Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728; pp. 198–209) gets his due, but Bowring treats only one of his disciples: Dazai Shundai (1680–1747; pp. 209–13). Bowring discusses his three major works, all written after Sorai’s demise. These are *Bendōsho* (1735), *Seigaku mondō* (1736), and *Keizairoku* (1729).

Hiraga Gennai (1728–80) is treated at some length (pp. 224–29). Attention is paid to his activities as *honzō gakusha* and *Rangakusha*, but also as writer of satirical literature. Four of his more famous writings in the latter genre – *Nenashigusa* (1763), *Fūryū Shidōken den* (1763), *Naemara in’itsu den* (1767), and *Hōhi-ron* (1744) – are analysed as fitting products of the Way of Lust.

Due attention is paid to Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801; pp. 255–69) and his critics (pp. 269–74) Ueda Akinari (1734–1809) and Fujitani Mitsue (1768–1823). The last in line of the patriarchs of *Kokugaku*, Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), too, has a chapter of his own (pp. 275–87). Keichū (1640–1701), Kada no Azumamaro (1697–1769), and Kamo no Mabuchi (1669–1736) have been treated in an earlier chapter (pp. 216–23), so all famous *kokugakusha* (and a few less famous ones, such as Hattori Nakatsune; 1757–1824) are present.

The book ends with what is known as the “Later Mito School” (*Kōki Mitogaku*; pp. 290–300), and three scholars – Sakuma Shōzan (1811–64), Yoshida Shōin (1830–59), and Yokoi Shōnan (1809–69) – who were all concerned with the foreign threat. None of them had clear ideas about the policy to be pursued, and they could not very well have these, because they were outside the loop of *bakufu* policy makers and just lacked the necessary information (pp. 301–303).

Larger Issues. Japan was run by warriors, within a cultural context that was heavily determined by Chinese cultural values and the Confucian ideology. Therefore, the position of the samurai class in the classical Chinese division

of society into *shi* 士 – farmers – artisans – merchants became a matter of interest. The question was, “Are the samurai the Japanese *shi*?” Bowring focuses the problem through a long quotation from the travel diary of a Korean envoy, Sin Yuhan 申維翰, who visited Japan in 1719. Sin defined the four social classes in Japan as military 兵 – farmers – artisans – merchants, and places the doctors, monks, and Confucian scholars (in this order) outside the social classes, as a separate category. For a Korean visitor, it was evident that Japan was not a Confucian society. The military were in charge; rites and ritual were not observed; and the Confucian scholars were at the bottom of the social ladder. The reason was, of course, the lack of an examination system such as existed in China and Korea (pp. 106–108).

Many Japanese Confucians, no doubt, shared the diagnosis, but none of them did anything against it. The typical reaction was to indoctrinate the *samurai* with Confucian values through the establishment of *hankō* (“domainal academies”), and a half-hearted attempt to institute examinations. *Hankō*, however, only began to be established in appreciable numbers towards the end of the eighteenth century.¹ Examinations were held, on an experimental basis, at the *bakufu* academy in Edo (p. 241). In both developments, we recognize the hand of Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758–1829).

On the other hand, one *could* point out that in the eighteenth century such Confucian scholars as Ogyū Sorai, Dazai Shundai, and Yamagata Daini engaged in massive criticism of the social order, and also, that all those who did, were samurai (Ch. 13). The relation worked two ways (reviewer’s thesis): as samurai, they felt a responsibility for the fate of the country, and felt that they had the duty to speak out, and as samurai, living on their rice stipends, they felt less than happy in the monetised, commercial urban economy. The exception to this rule is the Osaka scholar Nakai Chikuzan (1730–1804), who wrote a voluminous memorandum, *Sōbō kigen* (1789; 5 fasc.), in which he voiced the usual criticisms of the state of the empire, and proposed such things as a lightening of the *sankin kōtai* schedule, a reduction in the size of Edo, and universal education to be provided by Confucian teachers. He did this, however, at the express request of Sadanobu himself, and did not try to publish it (p. 247). An exception in the other direction was Hayashi Shihei (1738–93), who was banished for his criticism of the *bakufu*’s coastal defence policy. The mistake he made, was that he printed the book, in which he articulated his criticisms, *Kaikoku heidan* (1791; p. 245).

¹ In 1703, 9 percent of the fiefs had a *hankō*; in 1814, this number had risen to 51 percent, and in 1865, to 73 percent. Cf. BOWRING, *In Search of the Way*, p. 241.

Confucians of merchant descent, e.g. Itō Jinsai, did not presume to express such criticism (p. 133, 258). Neither did the *Kokugakusha* make any appeal for social action; in Norinaga's words: "... the role of Man today is just to follow the rules established by the public realm, to follow the customs of the age. Ultimately this is the way of the deities" (p. 267).

Another recurring issue is the relation between Confucianism and Shinto. In his summing-up, Bowring says that the attempt made by the Confucian scholars to combine Shinto and Confucianism was "largely successful" (p. 305), but that "considerable intellectual gymnastics" were needed in order to establish equivalencies between concepts / words on the Chinese, and symbols / objects on the Japanese side (p. 306).

It seems to me that what is missing in the equation is an adequate perception on Bowring's part of the position the Chinese language and the Chinese corpus occupied in education. Both had been introduced in the seventh century, together with Buddhism. Ever since the eighth century an educated man needed to know Chinese. Schools were established at court and by noble families. Because the Chinese Classics were the basis of Chinese education, anyone studying Chinese could not fail to be imbued by Confucianism, too. Certain aspects of Confucianism such as leading by Ritual rather than by Law, came natural to the upper classes, and were imitated by people of lower rank.

In the Edo Period, knowing the Classics would not earn you influence. The only job it would get you was that of teacher in your own school, where you taught Chinese first, and Confucianism second, as a function of teaching Chinese. A mastery of classical Chinese was a required propaedeutic for the study of medicine. Otherwise, a Chinese education was an item of conspicuous consumption, predicated on the commonly shared assumption that any cultivated man should be able to turn out the odd Chinese poem, and that any intellectual worthy of the name should be able to read a Chinese text. In other words, Chinese had prestige, and the Chinese scholar was the arbiter within the intellectual community.

Confronted with Shinto, and with other things Japanese, the Confucian scholars chose either of two ways. These were, to ignore Shinto altogether, or to try and re-express it in Confucian terms. Examples of the first attitude are, e.g., Arai Hakuseki, who in his *Kishinron* completely ignored Shinto and Japanese gods, and exclusively makes uses of Chinese sources, or Ogyū Sorai, who fundamentally *denied* the difference between China and Japan, and held the teachings of the Classics to be universally valid. There were

even those who defended the thesis that after the Manchu conquest China was less Chinese than Japan (*kai hentai* 華夷変態, not treated in the book). Others acknowledged the need for adapting Chinese ritual prescriptions to Japanese practice, or the other way around (pp. 174–76). Typical issues were mourning (“three years of mourning is too long”) and adoption (non-agnatic adoption was very frequent in Japan, but was not allowed in China).

Especially in the seventeenth century, some scholars – Razan, Ansai, Banzan, Ekiken – attempted to establish a fundamental identity between Confucianism and Shinto. They were the ones who engaged in the “considerable intellectual gymnastics” mentioned by Bowring. Sometimes, the identity was deductively established by positing the universality of the Confucian Way. A typical example of this argument is “The Way of the sages is the Way of the Kami, because between Heaven and Earth there is only one Way” (Kaibara Ekiken; p. 105). The other option was to posit a historical relation by identifying Taibo 太伯, the uncle of King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty, with either Amaterasu or with her grandson Ninigi. The story is, then, that Taibo did not just hide among the aborigines in the Yangzi delta, but crossed to Japan, where he was venerated as a god and spread Chinese culture. Especially Razan and Banzan (*Miwa monogatari*) were interested in this theory (pp. 86–87). In the course of the seventeenth century, as the philological acumen of Japanese studies rose, the Japanese corpus became a legitimate object of research, and Chinese specialists could no longer keep pace, this discourse disappeared.

Further Points. There are a few points that need further discussion. The first is Christianity. Of course, if Bowring wants to do so, there is nothing to stop him from beginning his book with a chapter on Christianity (Ch. 2). Moreover, the chapter as such is fine. Quite a lot of attention goes to Habian (1565?–1621) and his *Myōtei mondō* and *Ha Daiusu* (“Deus destroyed”; pp. 25–26); especially the contents of *Myōtei mondō* are described and analysed in great detail (pp. 19–25). He also mentions the anti-Christian treatises that were composed in the seventeenth century such as *Bateren-ki*, *Kirishitan monogatari*, and the writings by Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655) and Sessō Sōsai (1589–1649), who were in charge of undoing Christian influence in Western Kyushu (pp. 26–29). Bowring could also have mentioned Habian’s encounter with Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) in 1606, which Razan described in his *Hai Yaso*, a Kanbun text that was included in his *Bunshū* (fasc. 56) and available for all to read. In it, Razan not only criticizes *Myōtei mondō*,

but also Matteo Ricci, whose *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 he had apparently read.

Nevertheless, one cannot help wondering why Bowring devotes such a number of pages to a religion that had become irrelevant by 1615, and had vanished by 1640. Of course, it left a trail in the form of the *terauke seido*, the *Shūkyō aratame yakusho*, the *Shūmon ninbetsu-chō*, and the *Kakure-kirishitan*, but that is hardly mainstream intellectual history. In this light, the conclusion that “It was the fate of Christianity in early modern Japan to arrive at precisely the wrong time” (p. 29), and his argument that, “If circumstances had been more propitious,” Christianity might have taken over from Buddhism as the leading religion (p. 304), are strange. Would Christianity have stood a better chance if it had arrived at an earlier or later moment? It does not seem very likely; neither does it seem likely that it could have taken over from Buddhism. In its dogma’s, habits of thought, language, organization, and personnel it was too different from East-Asia to succeed. Buddhism had a history of some 800 years by the beginning of the Edo Period. It had adapted to Japanese circumstances, and had something to offer to all Japanese believers. Not in a hundred years would Christianity have been able to adapt to this degree. The really interesting question is not, what Christianity might have become, if ... , but what made the Christian converts cling to their faith in the face of certain death. What did they believe?

A second point is the thesis that Nobunaga and Hideyoshi identified the Way of Heaven as their source of legitimacy (p. 30), which is the premise on which Ch. 3 is based. If this were true, why do such treatises as *Shingaku gorinsho*, which explain the ideology known as *Tentō shisō*, only emerge in the middle of the seventeenth century? And why were they published anonymously, and without official support? As Itō Tasaburō pointed out in an article of 1964, the ascriptions of these treatises to famous people (i.e., that of *Kana seiri* to Fujiwara Seika) are obviously false. And if either Nobunaga, or Hideyoshi, or Ieyasu would have felt any need of this kind of treatises, one can be sure they would have been printed and distributed. They were not. Apparently, the whole notion is anachronistic. What Hideyoshi and Ieyasu (not Nobunaga) did feel a need of was deification. Hideyoshi was deified through the offices of the Yoshida as Hōkoku Daimyōjin, and Ieyasu, after some squabbles, as Tōshōgū Daigongen through the offices of the Tendai monk Tenkai (pp. 32–33). One can question whether these deifications qualify as straightforward efforts at legitimation, but at least, here we see a clear involvement of the state.

A third point: I think that Bowring is somewhat too dismissive of the enormous conceptual difficulties such Rangakusha as Shizuki Tadao (1760–1806), Sugita Genpaku (1733–1817), and Ōtsuki Gentaku (1757–1827) had in understanding the fundamentally alien culture of Europe. Bowring points out that they did not show much interest in the areas of religion and philosophy, but my thesis would be that there was a difference between what they read and what they wrote, and that they wisely refrained from displaying too overt an interest in these areas, because before long you might find yourself reading the Bible. They did, however, have an inkling of the “origins of the scientific spirit” (p. 246), and Dutchmen like Titsingh and Doeff, and von Siebold and later physicians had quite lively exchanges with Japanese scholars. There were problems such as the conceptualisation of the cosmos, the use of mathematics, or the organisation of the judiciary system that were hard to grasp, but the scholars of the *Bansho Wa-ge goyō* were working on it. Bowring mentions the translation of Chomel’s household encyclopaedia, that was never finished (p. 244), but translating this encyclopaedia was the official task of the bureau and its reason for existence; of course, it was never finished. However, a great many other projects were undertaken on the side, and finished, making the *Bansho Wa-ge goyō* the centre of Dutch studies in the five decades before the opening of the country.

A fourth and final point: Bowring describes how the *bakufu* took over the Confucian academy of the Hayashi in Edo (1793), renaming it Shōheizaka Gakumonjo (1798), and turning it into the *bakufu*’s own Confucian academy (pp. 239–41). Sadanobu was also responsible for the founding of the *Wa-gaku kōdansho* (1793; p. 242) and the *Bansho Wa-ge goyō* (1811; p. 244) Bowring does not mention, however, that in 1791 Sadanobu had already taken over the private medical academy of the Taki family and turned it into the official medical school of the *bakufu*, the *Igakkan*. Add to these the already existing historiographical bureau in Mito, the *Shōkōkan*, and the astronomical observatory, the *Tenmondai* in Edo, and you have five institutes that functioned as the top of the intellectual world, sitting above a welter of private academies and fief schools. These institutions were funded by the *bakufu* (or Mito), and they had a threefold task: advising the *bakufu* (or the *daimyō*), teaching advanced students, and publishing basic materials – the Chinese Classics for the *Shōheikō*, the *Gunsho ruijū* for the *Wagaku Kōdansho*, the *Dai-Nihon shi* for the *Shōkōkan*, and Chomel for the *Wa-ge goyō*. The *Tenmondai*, of course, made the calendar. The existence of these institutions created a level of intellectual sophistication that greatly helped in the 1850s and 1860s, when Japan suddenly found itself confronted with the

American demand to open the country, but their influence, in terms of personnel and intellectual practice, continued into the early Meiji Period.

Finally, there is a number of small mistakes. One hesitates to mention them, but here they are: “Hideyoshi designed a new title – neither tennō nor shogun, but taikō.” Hideyoshi did nothing of the sort. He had himself appointed *kanpaku*, and when he retired as *kanpaku*, he used the ordinary form of address of a retired *kanpaku*, namely *taikō*. (p. 3) – “... alternate residence was made compulsory for all those who had been on the losing side in Sekigahara, the *tozama*.” The *tozama* were most certainly *not* the families who had been on the losing side in Sekigahara; with a few exceptions (the Mōri, the Shimazu, the Uesugi) they had been Ieyasu’s allies. (p. 5) – “1679: Kyūji hongī daizōkyō.” This should be Kuji hongī taiseikyō. (p. 11) – The Dutch traders came to Nagasaki only in 1641, not in 1639. (p. 18) – “Ichijō [Yoshida] Kanera.” Ichijō Kanera was a Fujiwara; never would he have stooped to using the name Yoshida. (p. 47) – 異国船打ち払い禮 should be 異国船打ち払い令. (p. 293)