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Itô Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627–1705) numbers among those Edo-period Confucian scholars who have attracted considerable attention in Japan as well as among non-Japanese researchers. Yet, for all his importance there had not been an extensive translation from his works.¹ This situation now has been remedied by the publication of John A. Tucker’s complete translation of the *Philosophical Lexicography of the Analects and Mencius* 語孟字義 (*Gomô jigi*)², one of Jinsai’s major works.

1. Introduction

In his dissertational thesis Tucker had traced the influence of Chen Beixi’s 陳北溪 (1159–1223) *The Meaning of Confucian Terms* 性理字義 (*Xingli ziyi*) on Japanese Confucian scholars in the first half of the Edo-period.³ He “ended

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² Hereafter referred to as GJ. Number of pages given in round brackets.


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up tracing the emergence of a hitherto unnoticed Tokugawa genre, that of philosophical lexicography, born shortly after the arrival of Beixi’s Ziyi in Japan in the late-sixteenth century with a “textual and philosophical connection” between the original by Beixi and the Japanese works modeled after it. (ix) This observation has strong repercussions on Tucker’s assessment of Jinsai’s philosophy in the book under review here.

The “Introduction” attempts nothing less than a reevaluation of Jinsai’s thought as such: “In seventeenth-century intellectual history, Itô Jinsai stands out as the Confucian scholar who articulated, most subtly and systematically, a socio-political vision primarily reflecting assumptions, ethical concerns, and material interests most characteristic of chônin, or that hereditary estate including merchants, artisans, and townspeople generally.” (1) Whereas Jinsai commonly is known for his professed return to ancient Confucian ideas as expressed in the Confucian Analects (Lunyu) and the Mencius (Mengzi) and his attack on the metaphysically tinged reformulation of Confucianism by scholars of Song-dynasty China like Zhu Xi (1130–1200), Tucker sets Jinsai in his historical background stressing his intimate relationship with one social stratum, that of artisans and merchants, as opposed to that of

4 The works that Tucker mentions as written under the influence of the Ziyi — Fujiwara Seika’s 藤原惺高 (1561–1619) Human Nature and Principle explained in Japanese 仮名性理 (Kana seiri), Hayashi Razan’s 林鹿山 (1583–1657) Vernacular Explanation of [Beixi’s] Meaning of Human Nature and Principle 性理字義透海 (Seiri jigi genkai), Matsunaga Sekigo’s 松永式五 (1592–1657) Ethics Primer 論倫抄 (Irin shô), Yamaga Sokô’s 山鹿素行 (1622–85) Compendium of Sagely Teachings 聖教要錄 (Seikyô yôroku), GJ, Ogû Sorai’s 萩生鶴齋 (1666–1728) Discerning Names 分名 (Benmei) and others – have been known to and commented upon by scholars for a long time. Tucker’s achievement lies in drawing attention to similarities between them and the Ziyi — although they considerably differ in length and number of key concepts discussed – as well as grouping them together as examples of an independent genre which he calls “philosophical lexicography.”

5 Tucker concedes that the connection between Ziyi and GJ “was somewhat familiar to at least several Japanese scholars.” He does not give the names of these scholars here and only mentions SHIMIZU later on. (23–24) SHIMIZU Shigeru: “Kaidai” 解題 (Bibliographical notes), YOSHICAWA, SHIMIZU 1971: 622–31. The use of “somewhat” makes Tucker’s claim an understatement. KOYASU Nobukuni 子安宜邦 stressed the links between both texts and characterized Jinsai’s choice of words and way of modelling his arguments on the Ziyi as “parodizing” Beixi’s text. KOYASU Nobukuni: Itô Jinsai. Jirin teki sekai no shisô 伊藤仁斎 人倫的世の思想 (Itô Jinsai. Thought of a world of human ethics), Tôkyô Daigaku Shuppan Kai 1982: 55. Already KAIZUKA Shigeaki 贝塚茂樹 noticed that the GJ not only had taken the Ziyi as a model for its structure, but as a “departing point” in its philosophical contents. KAIZUKA Shigeaki: “Nihon jukyô no sôshi sha” 日本儒教の創始者 (The founder of Japanese Confucianism): Itô Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (Nihon no meicho, vol. 13), Chûô Kôron Sha 1972: 17–18, 22.
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Jinsai’s thought appears as an “implicit critique” of “various attempts by samurai theorists to redefine Neo-Confucianism along lines which both flattered, socially and politically, and further empowered, at least intellectually, the warrior estate.” Tucker considers his teachings to have been “politically potent” as they – “implicitly” – “provided a socially legitimizing, uplifting ethic for townspeople and other non-samurai by affirming their full ethical parity with all people, especially samurai who claimed to be their superiors.”

The “challenging socio-political edge” that laid beneath the “lexico-graphic surface” of Jinsai’s writings, was “seriously at odds” with the assumptions of the ruling warrior estate. Underpinning this interpretation of the political dimensions of Jinsai’s thought is a view of Edo-period society in which a “bakufu-decreed social system relegated chônin to the bottom of society.”

A second major theme which is closely welded together with the first to form a coherent reading of Jinsai’s life-work in Tucker’s account is the reevaluation of Jinsai’s place in the Edo-period history of thought with respect to Song-Confucian learning. The delineation of distinct, even antagonistic schools of thought in Edo-period Confucianism has its roots among Edo-period Confucian scholars. Inoue Tetsujirô’s work did much to put the classification of schools on an academic basis.

In places Tucker exerts some caution in expressing his views. He concedes that Jinsai’s interpretation was “not specifically chônin in outlook,” but neither “hardly exclusive to samurai.”

Parts of a “significant alternative worldview” that appealed – “albeit tacitly” – to “most intellectually informed chônin” were Jinsai’s notions “about the material vitality of things,” his insistence on the natural integrity of human feelings and desires, his recognition of the universal ethical importance of self-cultivation, and his admission of a circumscribed realm of spiritual engagement.

Inoue Tetsujirô: Nihon kogaku ha no tetsugaku 日本古学派の哲学 (The Philosophy of the Japanese School of Ancient Learning), Fuzan Bô 1902.

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as a member of the School of Ancient Learning 古学 (Kogaku), that advocated a direct study of the earliest scriptures of the Confucian tradition and criticized the mitigating influence of Song-learning. Tucker holds that Jinsai’s attack on Song Confucianism is motivated by his merchant background: it is not so much an attack on the work of Song-dynasty scholars as such but rather on the “samurai-inspired social distortion of Neo-Confucianism.” (60) For this purpose alone Jinsai’s revision is cast in the form of a return to the “egalitarian themes in Confucius’ thought.” 12 (60) These, however, are consistent with the teachings of Zhu Xi and other Song-dynasty scholars as well. Seen in this perspective, Jinsai only “nominally differentiated” his teachings from those of Song-learning, “not because of irreconcilable differences with it.” (60)

Unfortunately, however, modern Japanese studies13 “often celebrate Jinsai’s ostensible rejection of the metaphysically sophisticated version of Neo-Confucianism,” thereby reflecting “an early twentieth-century bias chronic among Japanese scholars toward philosophies traceable to China.” (17) Many “Western scholars”14 uncritically followed this stance as if it were beyond doubt. (17) That it is not, as Tucker points out, can be made evident by comparing Jinsai’s treatment of concepts that figure prominently in Song-learning as well as in his own vision. What influenced Edo-period Confucian scholars was the definition of Song-Confucian key concepts by Zhu Xi’s student Chen Beixi in The Meaning of Confucian Terms. At the beginning of the Edo-period, Hayashi Razan appropriated this text for his own exposition of Confucianism. This thread connecting Japanese scholars with Beixi via Razan includes Jinsai, too. Tucker succinctly states that Jinsai’s “system sprang as much from the early-Tokugawa Zhu Xi School of Neo-Confucianism, and especially the semantically liberal teachings of Hayashi Razan, as it did from the ancient texts which were supposedly the semantic foundations of the Gomô jigi: the Analects and the Mencius.” (18) It cannot be denied, of course, that the GJ contains an antagonistic stance towards Song-learning. For this, too, Tucker offers an explanation: “To the extent that it criticized Neo-Confucianism, the Gomô jigi did so in explicit opposition to the seemingly narrow and, in Jinsai’s view, rather misguided philosophical claims expounded

12 Probably for Tucker this means moral perfectiability of every human being and welfare of the whole people as the highest aims of government.
13 Tucker does not give any names or titles. The same on p. 25.
14 Again, names or titles are missing.

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by Yamazaki Ansai [...]”¹⁵ as one of those “samurai theorists” who allegedly redefined Song-Confucianism “to serve the socio-political ends of bushi domination.” (18) Even if Jinsai’s “semantic analyses” sometimes oppose those offered by Zhu Xi, Beixi, and Razan, often they follow from them. (24–5) Therefore, the GJ should not so much be understood as a “doctrinaire anti-Neo-Confucian work,” but rather as one “furthering the semantic project advocated by Beixi and Razan via critical revision of existing philosophical lexicography.”¹⁶ (25) What then makes Jinsai an eminent figure of Edo-period Confucianism was not his antiquitarian treatment of Confucian concepts and refutation of Song-learning. Rather it has to be looked at in the impetus Jinsai gave to Confucian discourse in Japan, broadening its outlook and opening it up to strata of society other than the samurai only.¹⁷ (62)

2. Translation¹⁸

In the foreword Tucker explains his method of translation: “In order to maximize its accessibility, I have steered away from the awkward literalist approach, towards one which both translates and interprets the work, making

¹⁵ Tucker does not support this claim of “explicit” critique of Yamazaki Ansai’s 山崎安斎 (1619–82) thought by pointing out relevant passages in his translation. As a matter of fact, Ansai – at least by name – does not figure in the GJ at all. Jinsai’s attacks are invariably levelled against Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi, Chen Beixi and other exponents of Song-Confucianism in China.

¹⁶ Tucker points out similarities in the way Beixi and Jinsai treated topics central to both like the stress on “generative force” as against “principle” 理 (ri) (53) or the positive evaluation of “human feelings” 人情 (ninjô) (28). In the end, for Tucker the “difference between Jinsai’s ontology and Zhu Xi’s is, therefore, one of relative emphasis rather than real kind.” (26)

¹⁷ The advent of Confucian studies since the beginning of the 16th century marks a shift in the outlook of philosophical discourse. The “embrace of more ethically and politically well-defined uses of philosophical language [by Seika, Razan etc.] reflected a decisive intellectual and cultural shift towards an ontologically real and substantial order that was radically discontinuous with the ontic emptiness of Buddhist discourse. Jinsai’s Gomô jigi was decisive in influencing this shift because, in addition to its fresh, vitalistic metaphysics mirroring the new realism of the age, it implicitly precluded samurai domination of the nascent order” (62) Tucker speaks of Jinsai reconceiving “the Japanese polity along civil, essentially secular, and philosophically humanitarian lines.” (64)

¹⁸ The translation follows the NST edition of GJ. Cf. p. xiii. YOSHIKAWA Kôjirô 吉川幸次郎, SHIMIZU Shigeru 清水茂 (eds.): Itô Jinsai, Itô Tôgai 伊藤仁斎・伊藤東涯 (NST, vol. 33), Iwanami Shoten 1971. It is based on the printed edition of 1705 (Hôei 宝永 2). Reference to this edition will be made as “NST, page number” in the main text.

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it as transparent as possible.” (xiii) This is coupled with the hope that “many if not most interested readers will have, or will be developing, the language skills necessary to read the original text in Japanese.” (xiii)

Tucker has discharged his responsibility in an impressive manner. As a first glance will instantly reveal, his translation is immensely readable and gives a faithful rendering of Jinsai’s thought. However, there are mistakes, and the decision to steer “away from the awkward literal approach” has consequences that deserve some comments.

2.1 Preface

1. The second character in the original text written in Chinese is 賽 (jò, shô / katsute) meaning “formerly,” “in the past.” Thus, while a literal translation of the first sentence starts “When I formerly taught students,” Tucker chooses the present tense (“I teach students”). 2. Jinsai uses binominal expressions – ishi gomyaku 意思語脈 and imi ketsuyaku 意味血脈 – central to his method of argumentation. Each consists of two independent terms of complementary nature. Both expressions are synonymous, with gomyaku (“vein of words”) and ketsuyaku (“blood veins”) signifying fundamental categories like “humaneness” (jin) and “rightness” (gi) that run through the Analects and Mencius, and ishi (“intent”) or imi (“purport”) referring to the general orientation or meaning of Confucius’ and Mencius’ thought as they result from the fundamental categories.19 Tucker’s translation makes short thrift with both expressions without accounting for the independent meaning of their constituent parts although his own translation of the fourth paragraph in Chapter XX, “Learning,” suggests that imi and ketsuyaku are distinct in meaning. (187–8) Thus, he gives ishi gomyaku as “semantic lineage,” while the even more central imi ketsuyaku loses its distinctness in Tucker’s translation of Kô Mô no imi ketsuyaku 孔孟之意味血脈 as “semantic lineage of Confucian-Mencian philosophical notions.” Some aspects of imi ketsuyaku are expressed by “semantic lineage” whereas others seem to be contained in “philosophical notions.” 3. In the following sentence another key term in Jinsai’s exposition – jigi 字義 – is rendered as “meanings.” In the context of Tucker’s translation grammatically it relates to “philosophical notions” in the preceding phrase, however, although Jinsai uses it as a generic term in the sense of “meaning

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of words / characters.” In the following sentence it appears as “philological matters.” Thus it goes unnoticed that the same jigi is used in both cases. 4. The next but one sentence starts with “Too few scholars study such philological matters.” Tucker translates the character 小 (shô) as “few.” However, it means “small” or “small thing” and takes on the meaning of “precondition” here. Therefore, the sentence should be read as “For the learning of the meaning of words / characters this of course is a basic precondition.” 5. Tucker’s translation of the next sentence concerns the understanding of “semantic lines” (not “lineages” anymore), while the original subject – the discussion of the “meaning of words / characters” – is obscured. Actually the text says in a more literal rendering: “If in every single case [of elucidating the meaning of words / characters] one would take the Analects and Master Meng for a base and bring it into accord with their general thought (ishi) and fundamental categories (gomyaku), it would be proper.”

2.2 General remarks

The other paragraphs by far do not elicit as many comments as the “Preface.” For the most part Tucker offers sound translations. However, there are some peculiarities the reader should be aware of.

2.2.1 Insertions. It is common practice in academic translations to insert words or even whole parts of a sentence where the original lacks in transparency and to make them easily recognizable with square brackets. Tucker does not follow this convention. The last two sentences of the first paragraph of Chapter II, “The Way of Heaven,” e.g. contain two insertions. Jinsai describes Zhu Xi’s notion of the “great ultimate” 太極 (taikyoku; C: taiji) and states in the second but last sentence of this paragraph that Zhu Xi “considered the great ultimate the most highest.” While the Chinese philosopher in Jinsai’s reading accorded the “great ultimate” the highest position in his cosmological

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Tucker translates this sentence together with the following as “Detailed studies of the Analects and Mencius facilitate an accurate understanding of the semantic lines (ishi gomyaku) of those sagely texts, and keep students from erratically manipulating them by trying to impose their own subjective views (shiken) on them.”

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conception, Tucker translates this part as “Zhu Xi believed that the notion of the great ultimate [...] conveyed Confucius’ highest teaching [...]”, thus inserting “Confucius” and “teaching” and giving the text an interpretation not warranted by the original alone. (72) The next sentence of Tucker’s translation reads: “Zhu Xi then imposed that interpretation on the ‘Appended Judgments’ (Keiji 繳辭) of the Book of Changes which so clearly states ‘yin alternating with yang refers to the way’.” (73) The original, however, just states literally: “This is the reason that being at odds with the meaning of the ‘Appended Judgments’ is so extreme.” Obviously the difference between Zhu Xi’s interpretation and the passage in the Book of Changes is alluded to here.

Insertions of logical components required in the target language are common practice even if they contain the translator’s interpretation. However, Tucker not only resorts to this kind of insertion but often adds complete sentences to the original even if they do not bear information necessary to make Jinsai’s text intelligible. At best they smoothen the narrative or remind the reader of certain points made earlier. To the end of the fourth paragraph of Chapter VI, “Humaneness, Rightness, Propriety, & Wisdom” (121) the translator adds: “Confucius and Mencius offered many other teachings about humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom that equally illustrate these themes.” Or consider the following insertion near the end of the fourth paragraph of Chapter VIII, “Human Nature”: “Without trying to understand the teachings of Confucius and Mencius fully, the Neo-Confucians forced their substance-function dichotomy onto the sagely Confucian writings.” (139) While these insertions make for transparency in Tucker’s light, Jinsai’s mode of thought is obscured by them. Similar unmarked insertions of various length can be found in other places, too.

2.2.2 Omissions. At the beginning of the third paragraph of Chapter I, “The Way of Heaven,” Jinsai tries to prove the all-pervasiveness of the “unitary generative force” (Tucker’s translation for 一元気 ichi genki) by describing what happens in an empty wooden box. Although nothing is inside the box and it is closed by the top, “generative force” fills it, so that “mold” and even “termites” are born inside. What occurs inside this box also happens in the whole world at large, as “Heaven and Earth” are “one gigantic box” 一大箱 (ichi daikyô) themselves, and yin and yang act as the “generative force” within the box. (NST, 16) Where Jinsai explains how a box is put together from “six pieces” 板六片 (han roppen), Tucker translates “A box-maker makes a box by piecing together wood,” omitting the number of parts used for construction, but adding the box-maker. (73) That a box is put together
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by using six pieces of wood is not important by itself. However, it would have given a touch of narrativeness to keep this tiny facet. A whole subclause is omitted from a sentence in the second paragraph of Chapter X, “Human Feelings.” Tucker translates “If the minds (or sensibilities) of compassion, shame, deference, and right and wrong are not parts of the mind, what are they?”21, thus leaving out “that is to say something that has got a clearly visible form” 乃顯然有形者 (sunawachi kenzen to shite katachi aru mono) after “parts of the mind.” (NST, 138)

2.2.3 Inconsistencies. In some cases Tucker chooses different expressions in English to translate the same Japanese word. The translation of kokoro as “mind” or “minds (or sensibilities)” is an example in case. “Moral mind” (153) as a third variant. This might not be considered a serious inconsistency, but that cannot be said in cases where variations in the translations for one and the same expression obscure key concepts in Jinsai’s text. One such concept is gi or “rightness” as Tucker translates it in most places (e.g. 115). However, when gi appears in the ninth paragraph of Chapter II, “The Decree of Heaven,” it is translated as “morality” (p. 90: lines 11, 25; p. 91: 8), “moral issues” (p. 90: 14, 17; p. 91: 2), “morally” (p. 90: 29), “rightfully” (p. 90: 32), and “moral practice” (p. 91: 11). The character for this concept and the Japanese reading gi is only given in line 2 on page 91. One of the central concepts of Jinsai’s whole philosophy is jindô or the “way of humanity” as Tucker translates the term on p. 93 (but “way of man” on p. 101). However, without reading Tucker’s translation in comparison with the original, the reader would never surmise that this key term also hides behind “human affairs” on p. 94, the expression incidentally used on the same page as translation for jinji as translation for jinji or, literally, “the affairs of human [beings].”22

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21 This sentence calls for another remark on the translation of kokoro as “minds (or sensibilities),” literally “heart.” On the same page and in other contexts Tucker renders kokoro as “mind” in the singular. This is a key concept of the GJ to which the whole of Chapter VII is devoted. There it is defined in the first sentence: “The mind is the faculty with which people think and plan” (Tucker’s translation, 129). Now, kokoro here is the same kokoro as in the sentence under discussion which should be read: “If thus the heart, [that harbours] compassion and pity, shame and repugnance, modesty and deference, and [the sense for ] right and wrong [inside it], that is to say something that has got a clearly visible form, is not [considered] the heart, then what is it?” NST, 58. Cf. LEINSS 1995: 213.

22 Where jindô or hito no michi is mentioned in the same paragraph Tucker gives “way of humanity.”
2.2.4 Errors. Occasionally Tucker’s translation is mistaken. The reader might consider the following passage:

Immoral behavior (不善, ふざん) is, insofar as it exists in the world, even consists of actions like transplanting a mountain plant in a marsh, or relocating fish on top of a mountain or hill. Under such circumstances, neither the plant nor the fish could follow their natures for even one day.

The inability of people to be immoral for an entire day reveals the inherent goodness of heaven’s way. (78f.)

Giving the transplantation of a mountain plant in a marsh or the relocation of fish on a mountaintop as examples of immoral behaviour sounds nonsensical. But it only sounds this way as Tucker altered the underlying structure of this sentence. Literally the passage reads:

Existing between heaven and earth [i.e. in the world] by wrong-doing [literally not-goodness] is the same as planting a mountain plant in a marsh or leaving a water dweller (suizoku) on top of a mountain or hill; that is to say: it is inevitable that they cannot live out their nature for even a single day. That man, too, by wrong-doing cannot stand between heaven and earth even for one day is the same [as with the plant and the water animal]. (NST, 117)

The translation of 不通 (tsû zezu) as “misunderstood” in a sentence from the discussion of “propriety” (rei) in the tenth paragraph of Chapter VI, “Humaneness, Rightness, Propriety, & Wisdom,” does not fully meet Jinsai’s intention. Jinsai argues about the standard for proper behaviour in concrete situations. “Ancient [rules of] propriety” (korei) often do not fit contemporary circumstances. Everyday “common [rules of] propriety” (zokurei) will not do either. The next sentence in Tucker’s translation reads: “On the other hand, Chinese (Kanrei) rites are often misunderstood. Still the common and familiar rites of this country lack any significance.” 23 (125)

However, what Jinsai says is not that Chinese “[rules of] propriety” are misunderstood in Japan, which implies a mistaken interpretation on part of the Japanese, but that they do not make sense in Japan because they are not tailored to actual conditions there and thus do not fit for instant usage. Therefore the following translation is suggested: “Chinese [rules of] propriety

Note that Tucker renders rei as “propriety” at the beginning of this paragraph, as “ancient ceremonies” (korei) in combination with the character for “old,” as “vulgar rites” (zokurei) together with the character for “common,” as “Chinese rites” (Kanrei) together with the character for “China,” and once again in combination with the character for “common and familiar rites” (zokurei). For the sake of consistency I stuck to Tucker’s first suggestion, “propriety,” and added “rules of” in square brackets where necessary.

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often make no sense in this country [i.e. Japan], and common [rules of] propriety have no significance from the outset.” (NST, 131) This interpretation not only conforms to the commentary in the NST edition (NST, 44), but it also accords with the following sentence where Jinsai states that the adjusting of “[rules of] propriety” to contemporary circumstances needs a “brilliant and accomplished refined person” 名達君子 (meitatsu no kunshi, Tucker’s translation) to “use the old as standard as well as to take the present into consideration, to follow the [customs of the] land” and so on.24

At the end of Appendix A, “The Great Learning is not a Confucian Text” Jinsai explains that it is unknown who originally compiled the Great Learning 大学 (Daxue / Daigaku). He assumes that it may have been scholars from the ancient Chinese states of Qi 齐 and Lu 鲁. These scholars25 were well versed in the Books of Poetry 詩經 (Shijing / Shikyô)26 and History 書經 (Shujing / Shokyô), but did not know the “lineage of Confucius and Mencius.” The next sentence in Tucker’s translation reads: “Qi scholars rightly defined filial piety (kô 孝), brotherly deference (tei 弟), and compassion (ji 慈), and consideration for others.” (235) However, in the original “Qi scholars” are not mentioned. Instead it begins with 其家伝以下 (sono seika den ika) (NST, 161). Now, the character 齐 (sei) of course is the same as the one used for the name of the state Qi, and 家 (ka) frequently means “scholar” or “school tradition.” However, these deliberations are moot as 齐家伝 (seika den) has a fixed meaning.27 Seika, or “to regulate the family,” refers to one of the famous eight articles in the first part of the Great Learning28 (according to the division established by Zhu Xi), and den indicates the commentaries on single articles in the second part. A literal translation of Jinsai’s sentence reads: “In the commentary on ‘regulating the family’ and the following [com-

24 Tucker does not give an exact translation of this passage but renders it as “(i) pattern new rites on ancient models, (ii) mesh those rites with local customs.” (125)


26 Tucker gives the Japanese reading as Shikei on p. 209.

27 Tucker could have taken the meaning of seika den from the NST commentary if he had not known from the beginning. Cf. NST: 100. Apparently, however, he did know it as only a few lines onwards he correctly translates Jinsai’s quotation of the whole passage from the Great Learning.

28 “In order rightly to govern the state, it is necessary first to regulate the family.” Cf. SBBY: 1b, 2a, 7a–8a.

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entaries] that speak of filial piety, brotherly love, and compassion and discuss the way of the measuring square, there are things I would abide with."²⁹

3. Evaluation

The assessment of Tucker’s exercise must turn on two issues, one textual the other historiographical. Both domains subtract heavily from the achievement of publishing a full translation of GJ. Everyone engaged in translation knows the difficulty to produce a readable translation that still remains faithful to the text. Making the original “as transparent as possible” in itself is a commendable enterprise. Yet, if the translation explicitly addresses specialists as well as students in the same area, a much more faithful approach is called for. If the translation takes too much liberty with the original wording, as Tucker’s does, the reader will still be obliged to have a look at the original for himself as he never can be sure how interpretative the translation is rather than literal. At best, the translation will be (not more than) a help to find an exact rendering. So it is the freshman or the layman only who will be satisfied with readability and transparency. This notwithstanding, the translation reviewed here still is a valuable asset to the number of translations from the masterworks of Edo-period philosophers already in existence.

Historiographically, Tucker’s view of Edo-period society as consisting of four status groups with the merchants as the least respected bottom segment is problematic. In view of the level of discussion reached among historians of Edo society it appears either hopelessly antiquated or ideologically motivated.³⁰ There is no textual base for the pronounced opposition between merchants

²⁹ In several places there are misses due to oversight. In the sentence “True wisdom (chi no jitsu ちの質) understands humaneness and propriety without neglecting them in practice” (121) “propriety” should be “replaced” by “rightness” as Jinsai here refers to “humaneness” and “rightness” mentioned in the preceding two sentences. On page 139 Tucker gave the characters 不貪蔽其食心 but left out aete for 敷 in the transliteration and wrote hoshìmama for 麻 with one “i” only. A mistake of the same order is giving the characters for the name of King Liang of Zhou 周 as 王靈 instead of 霊王. (247) In the introduction several mistakes of the same order can be found as e.g. “Liebniz” instead of “Leibniz” on p. 24.

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and samurai concerns as well as a hidden critique of social organization in Jinsai’s thought.31 As a matter of fact this evaluation relies on conjecture only (e.g. 33). The argument that Jinsai’s thought owed heavily to that of Song-learning is not altogether new. Sakai Naoki had highlighted the degree to which Jinsai’s thought drew on Zhu Xi parasitically.32 Gerhard Leinss, too, concluded that “in view of the degree of the Song-Confucian inheritance it becomes clear that Zhu Xi’s system of thought acts as the decisive point of reference in Jinsai’s argumentation despite all his attacks.”33

However, Tucker’s attempt to delineate the degree to which Jinsai depended on Song-Confucian themes and arguments has to be valued highly. It is an important warning against any ready attempt to mark off distinct school affiliations and a naive view of the alleged “Japanization” of Confucianism during the Edo-period. On the other hand, in evaluating Jinsai’s thought on the whole, these dependencies should not preclude any differences. Reconsidering Jinsai within Song-learning is important to show up the range of possibilities for interpretation within its discourse. But at the same time taking Jinsai’s attacks on Song-learning seriously offers a chance to delineate how breaks could develop in this discourse and how new lines of argumentation could take their departure from within its folds!

Thus, Tucker’s work sets the stage for a fresh appraisal of Jinsai’s thought. Focusing on the contribution of the social background to Jinsai’s philosophy underlines the need to analyse a Confucian scholar’s work not only as a monolithic unit devoid of context but to see it in relation to a surrounding set of beliefs and preoccupations of thought shared by a broader social milieu, even if Tucker himself could only postulate this connection without drawing

差別社会の真実 (The truth of society practising status discrimination) (Shinsho Edo jidai, vol. 2), Kôdan Sha 1995. Edo-period status groups indicate (1) a community made up of functions, (2) an agglomeration of individuals without an encompassing coherence. In sociological terms, there was subordination, but not so ideologically.


33 Tucker mentions SAKAI 1992 in his bibliography but does not elaborate on his exposition of Jinsai’s Song-legacy. LEINSS’ study is not even in the bibliography although it goes into detail on Jinsai’s reliance on Zhu Xi in several places: pp. 86–87, 103–04, 108–12.

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into relief the beliefs of Jinsai’s contemporaries. Stressing Jinsai’s reliance on Song-Confucian conceptions, Tucker offered a possibility to do away with long held beliefs in distinct schools of thought clinically set apart from each other, opening up the way for sharpened sensibilities towards the degree to which Confucian scholars in Edo-period Japan relied on Song-period conceptions. This could result in a modification of earlier attempts to interpret Jinsai’s ‘solution’ for a “Japanization” of Confucianism. By paying minute attention to the method of argumentation, Jinsai’s use of Song-Confucian concepts as well as the points where breaks occurred – even on a small order – and new paradigms of thought took shape will come into sharper focus. Tucker’s book is a valuable opening to a discussion that hopefully will start off from here.