

Articles

Discourse on “Humanity” in East Asian Confucianisms: Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” and its Reverberations in Tokugawa Japan*

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Translated and Abridged by Jan VRHOVSKI***

1. Introduction

In the intellectual history of East Asian Confucian discourse on humanity there have been two major peaks. The first is Confucius’ statement that “to be humane is to overcome one’s self and return to ritual propriety” (*keji fuli weiren* 克己復禮為仁), which established a basis for the relationship of inseparability between humanity (*ren* 仁) and ritual propriety (*li* 禮), as well as for the mutual tensions which exist between them. The very same statement also initiated the subsequent discourses and polemics on humanity that ensued among Confucian scholars of China, Japan and Korea. The second peak is represented by the monumental work “Treatise on Humanity” (*Renshuo* 仁說), written during the Southern Song dynasty by the renowned Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹, Huian 晦庵, 1130-1200). In this article, we will explore and discuss the Tokugawa (1603-1868) Japanese Confucians’ response to Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity.” In the 9th year of the reign of Emperor Xiaozong of the Northern Song (9th year of the Qiandao 乾道 era, 1173), Zhu Xi composed the text entitled “Treatise on Humanity,” in which he expounded on the most important core-value in the Confucian philosophical tradition, “humanity”

* Translation from the Chinese original: Huang Chun-chieh, “Dongya rujia renxue zhi naehan: Zhuzi renshou jiqi zai dechuan riben de huixiang 東亞儒家「仁」學之內涵：朱子〈仁說〉及其在德川日本的迴響” in his *Dongya Rujia Renxue Shilun* 東亞儒家仁學史論 (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2017), chapter 6, pp. 299-329.

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(*ren* 仁).¹ In this monumental work, Zhu Xi inherited and carried on Cheng Hao's (程顥, Mingdao 明道, 1032-1085) and Cheng Yi's (程頤, Yichuan 伊川, 1033-1107) teaching, which proposes that "humanity is completely of the same substance as things" (仁者, 渾然與物同體)² and that "the mind of heaven and earth is to give birth to things" (天地以生物為心)³, and at the same time he also departed to some extent from Zhang Shi's (張試, courtesy name 敬夫, sobriquet Nanxuan 南軒, 1133-1180) "Treatise on Humanity" (*Renshuo* 仁說).⁴ Zhu Xi's monumental treatise caused an enormous response among Korean⁵ and Tokugawa Japanese Confucian scholars, thereby profoundly

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- 1 Wing-tsit Chan (陳榮捷, Chen Rongjie) proposes that Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity" was already completed in the year 1171. See: Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷. "Lun Zhuzi zhi Ren shuo" 論朱子之仁說 ("On Master Zhu's Treatise on Humanity"). In: Wing-tsit Chan: *Zhu xue lunji* 朱學論集 (*Essays on the Scholarship of Zhu Xi*). Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1982: pp. 155-157; Wing-tsit Chan. "Chu His's 'Jen-shuo' (Treatise on Humanity)." In his: *Chu Hsi: New Studies*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989: pp. 155-157. Liu Shu 劉述 and Shu Jingnan 東景南, however, advocate that the exact year of completion should be 1173. See: Liu Shu 劉述. *Zhuzi zhaxue sixiang de fazhan yu wancheng* 朱子哲學思想的發展與完成 (*On the Development and Completion of Zhu Xi's Philosophical Thought*). Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1982: pp. 139-146; Shu Jingnan 東景南. *Zhu Xi nianpu changbian* (*Zhu Xi Chronological Biography of Zhu Xi: An Expanded Edition*). Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001, Vol. 1: p. 506. Ming-huei Lee (李明輝, Li Minghui) maintains that, from the perspective of the content of the treatise, the year 1173 is the more credible date. See: Ming-huei Lee 李明輝. *Siduan yu qiqing – guanyu daode qinggan de bijiao zhaxue tanlun* 四端與七情—關於道德情感的比較哲學探論 (*Four Sprouts and Seven Emotions: A Comparative Philosophical Investigation Concerning Moral Sentiments*). Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2005: p. 80. In this text I adopt the year 1173 as the date of completion of Zhu Xi's treatise.
 - 2 Cheng Hao 程顥. "Shi ren" 識仁 ("On Understanding Ren"). See: *Henan Chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書 (*Posthumous Writings of the Cheng Brothers from Henan*), Vol. 2, Part 1. In: Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (ed.). *Ercheng ji* 二程集 (*Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981/2004, Book 1: p. 16.
 - 3 Cheng Yi 程頤. *Henan Chengshi cuiyan* 河南程氏粹言 (*Essential Sayings of the Cheng Brothers from Hunan*), Vol. 1, *Ercheng ji* 二程集 (*Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers*), Book 2: p. 1179.
 - 4 Ming-huei Lee 李明輝. "Zhuzi de 'Renshuo' jiqi yu Huxiang xuepai de bianlun" 朱子的"仁說"及其與湖湘學派的辯論 ("Zhu Xi's 'Treatise on Humanity' and its argument with the Huxiang school"). In: Ming-huei Lee. *Siduan yu qiqing – guanyu daode qinggan de bijiao zhaxue tanlun* 四端與七情—關於道德情感的比較哲學探論 (*Four Sprouts and Seven Emotions: A Comparative Philosophical Investigation Concerning Moral Sentiments*): pp. 79-122.
 - 5 Korean Confucians attached great importance to Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity." In his letter to I Hwang (李滉, Toegy 退溪, 1507-1570), the 16th century Korean Zhu Xi scholar I Yi (李珥, Yulgok 栗谷, 1536-1584) suggested that the "Diagram of the Treatise on Humanity" (仁說圖) made by the former should be placed before the "Diagram of the School of Mind" (心學圖). See: I Yi 李珥. "Sang Toegy seonsaeng

influencing East Asian intellectual history, and therefore most certainly deserves additional investigation.

In the present study, we will investigate how Zhu Xi’s teaching on *ren* 仁 (‘humanity’) was received and reinterpreted in the Tokugawa Japanese Confucian circles. In so doing, we will particularly focus on how this group of scholars deconstructed the metaphysical basis of Zhu Xi’s philosophical doctrine on humanity, as well as on the manner in which the notion of *ren* 仁 was assigned by them a new definition and significance within an entirely new socio-political context. The Tokugawa Confucians’ deconstruction and reconstruction of Zhu Xi’s notion of *ren* not only illustrates the emergence of the orientation of “practical learning” (*jitsugaku* 實學) in Japanese Confucian thought, but also reveals how the Japanese Confucian scholars diverged from and questioned Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosophy. In this essay we will also discuss the position taken up by these Japanese Confucians in their critical remarks on Zhu Xi’s theory of *ren* within the framework of the intellectual history of East Asian Confucianism along with theoretical limitations.

2. The Doctrinal Content of the “Treatise on Humanity” and its Relation to the Philosophy of the Cheng Brothers

Before proceeding with our discussion on the Japanese Confucians’ criticism and reconstruction of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity,” we will first briefly speak about the core structure of the argumentation of the treatise and about its origin in the thought of the Cheng brothers.

Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” is comprised of three long paragraphs.⁶ Zhu Xi first quotes Cheng Mingdao’s maxim that “the mind of heaven and

munmog” 上退溪先生文目 (“An Inquiry Presented to Master Toegye”), see *Yulgok seonsaeng jeonseo* 栗谷先生全書, Book 2, Vol. 9. In: *Hanguk munjip pyeonchan wiwonhoe. Hanguk yoktae munjip chongso* 韓國歷代文集叢書. Seoul: Gyeongin munhwasa, 1999, Book 211: pp. 81-82. Kim Changhyeop 金昌協 (courtesy name Junghwa 仲和, sobriquet Donggeum geosa 洞陰居士, Hanbyeog juin 寒碧主人, Samju 三洲, Nongam 農巖, 1651-1708) from the 17th century and Yu Chimyeong 柳致明 (courtesy name Seongbaeg 誠伯, Jeongjae 定齋, 1777-1861) from the 18th century in their work both discussed differences and similarities between Zhu Xi’s and Zhang Shi’s “Treatise on Humanity.” See: Kim Changhyeop 金昌協. *Yeodoii* 與道以, see: *Nongam seonsaeng munjip* 農巖先生文集 (*Collected Works of Master Nongam*), Book 3, Vol. 19, In: *Hanguk yoktae munjip chongso* 韓國歷代文集叢書, Book 250: pp. 332-334. Yu Chimyeong 柳致明. “Dab sam jongje jungjiao jungsa byeolji” 答三從仲教仲思別紙. See: *Jeongjae seonsaeng munjip* 定齋先生文集 (*Collected Works of Master Jeongjae*), Book 3, Vol. 16. In: *Hanguk yoktae munjip chongso* 韓國歷代文集叢書, Vol. 995: pp. 275-281.

6 Zhu Xi 朱熹. “Renshuo” 仁說 (“Treatise on Humanity”). In: Chen Junmin 陳俊民 (rev.) *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 (*Collected Writings of Zhu Xi*). Taipei: Caituan faren defu wenjiao jijinhui, 2000, Vol. 67: p. 3391.

earth gives birth to things,”⁷ which in turn he paraphrases into the statement that “in their generation, man and things acquire the mind of heaven and earth as their own mind.” Subsequently, Zhu Xi further explains the meaning of *ren* in terms of four different orders, as Lee Ming-huei (李明輝, 1953-) has so aptly noted and described: “Zhu Xi listed four different orders: an ontological order (origination, endurance, advantage, and stability), a cosmological order (spring, summer, autumn, and winter), an onto-ethical order (humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom), and an ethico-psychological order (love, respectfulness, appropriateness and the discrimination between right and wrong).”⁸ Although these four sets of order can be differentiated from one another, they are all founded on Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *li* and *qi*. In his “Treatise on Humanity,” Zhu Xi asserted: “What I argue for, is to use the name *ren* for the principle of love.”⁹ Furthermore, in many different places of his *Collected Commentaries* (*Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注), he also gave a detailed exposition of his standpoint that “humanity is the virtue of mind and the principle of love.”¹⁰ When Zhu Xi spoke about *ren* as “the principle of love,” by so doing he in reality regarded the doctrine of *qi* and *li* as the ontological and cosmological basis of humanity (*ren*). The gist of his “Treatise on Humanity” was repeatedly expressed in almost all his writings throughout his entire life; thus, for example, in his commentary to the sentence “all people have a mind, which does not tolerate the suffering of others” (人皆有不忍人之心) from *Mencius* 2A:6, Zhu Xi noted: “The mind of

7 *Henan Chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書 (*Posthumous Writings of the Cheng Brothers from Henan*), Vol. 3. In: *Ercheng ji* 二程集 (*Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers*), Vol. 1: p. 366. Following the explanation of Ming dynasty scholar Chen Gui, Wing-tsit Chan maintains that these words came from Cheng Mingdao. In consequence, nowadays we follow this explanation. See: Wing-tsit Chan 陳榮捷 (Chen Rongjie). *Zhongguo zhexue wenxian xuanbian* 中國哲學文獻選編 (*A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*). Taipei: Juliu tushu gongsi, 1993, Book 2: p. 766.

8 Ming-huei Lee 李明輝 (Li Minghui). *Siduan yu qiqing – guanyu daode qinggan de bijiao zhexue tanlun* 四端與七情—關於道德情感的比較哲學探論 (*Four Sprouts and Seven Emotions: A Comparative Philosophical Investigation Concerning Moral Sentiments*): p. 88.

9 Zhu Xi 朱熹. “Renshuo” 仁說 (“Treatise on Humanity”). In: *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 (*Collected Writings of Zhu Xi*), Vol. 67: p. 3391.

10 For example: *Mengzi jizhu – Liang Hui Wang I 1* 孟子集注-梁惠王上1 (*Collected Commentaries on Mencius – Chapter “King Hui of Liang I 1”*). In: Zhu Xi. *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (*Collected Commentaries on the Chapters and Sentences of the Four Books*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, Vol. 1: p. 201. Also: “Humanity is the principle of love and the virtue of mind”. See: Zhu Xi 朱熹. *Lunyu jizhu – Xue Er 2* 論語集注-學而2 (*Collected Commentaries on the Analects – Xue Er 2*). In: *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (*Collected Commentaries on the Chapters and Sentences of the Four Books*), Vol. 1: p. 48.

heaven and earth gives birth to things. And because all things thus born acquire this mind of heaven and earth as their own mind, all people have a mind, which does not tolerate the suffering of others.”¹¹ In his commentary to the above-mentioned text from the book *Mencius*, Zhu Xi also remarked that: “Humanity is the mind of heaven and earth that generates (gives birth to) things.”¹² Finally, in 1172 during the Southern Song dynasty, when Zhu Xi reached the age of 43 years, he composed a letter for his friend Shi Zichong entitled “Records from the Studio of Self-Mastery” (*Ke zhai ji* 克齋記), where he put forward the following few explanations of the concept of *ren*. In this essay Zhu Xi emphasized that the four fundamental virtues of “humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom” belong to the category of ethical values that are present before emotional arousal (*wei fa zhi qian* 未發之前), and that “compassion, shame, courtesy, modesty, and the distinction between right and wrong” all belong to the category of mental states of affair that arise after the emotions have already been aroused (*yi fa zhi ji* 已發之際).¹³ However, these values and mental states were all founded in the cosmological proposition claiming that: “The mind of heaven and earth gives birth to things.”

The most vital pivotal point of Zhu Xi’s discourse on humanity (*ren*) resides in how he treated humanity in terms of “the principle of love” (*ai zhi li* 愛之理). Summarizing the doctrinal structure of Zhu Xi’s teaching on humanity, Mou Zongsan (牟宗三, 1909-1995) once noted that “humanity is the principle which makes love what it is, and the virtue which is ultimately possessed by one’s mind.”¹⁴

Mou Zongsan also offers further explanation, saying: “‘That by which things are the way they are’ (*suoyiran* 所以然, ‘*raison d’être*’) is a transcendental cause of their thusness. The principle (*li* 理) is a static principle. It belongs to the ontological principle of being; it is the existence of actual love and love’s existence. The mind and emotions have the states of ‘already aroused (manifested)’ (*yifa* 已發) and ‘not yet aroused (manifested)’ (*weifa* 未發), respectively, yet there in the principle, there is no state which could be called “already aroused” and “not yet aroused”. On the contrary, the principle

11 Zhu Xi 朱熹. *Mengzi jizhu* 孟子集注 (*Collected Commentaries on Mencius*). 四書章句集注 (*Collected Commentaries on the Chapters and Sentences of the Four Books*), Vol. 3: p. 237.

12 Ibid.: p. 239.

13 Zhu Xi 朱熹. “Ke zhai ji” 克齋記 (“Records from the Studio of Self-Mastery”). In: *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 (*Collected Writings of Zhu Xi*), Vol. 77: pp. 3861-3869. This work was written one year before “Treatise on Humanity.”

14 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三. *Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體 (*Substance of Mind and Substance of Human Nature*). Taibei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1968/1973, Vol. 3: p. 244.

is existence, which does not possess anything called the state of being in movement or standing still (*dong jing* 動靜, ‘dynamic and static’).”¹⁵

The most important contribution of Zhu Xi’s discourse on *ren* consists in its promotion of the level of importance and scope of a human life, which instigated the Song dynasty Confucians’ “search for understanding of the greater self” (大我之尋證)¹⁶ to enter its cosmological and ontological stage. At the same time, the notion of a human life became rooted in a transcendental domain. In the pre-Qin school of Confucianism, the notion of humanity was often spoken about in terms of concrete human behavior. Hence, the *Analects* (“Xue Er 6”) reads: “to overflow in love for the masses and seek closeness to the humane (*ren*)” and “when Fanchi asked about the meaning of humanity (*ren*), Confucius replied, ‘it is to love other people’” (“Yan Yuan 22”). Both speak about *ren* as “love” (*ai*). Even in *Mencius* (“Jin Xin I 46”) do we find a passage saying: “The humane person loves people.” As Liao Mingchun noted, according to excavated documents, it has been proven that the character *ren* 仁 was originally composed of the ideograms *ren* 人 (human) and *xin* 心 (heart/mind), which suggests that the original meaning of the character *ren* was “to love people” (*ai ren* 愛人).¹⁷ Similarly, the Tang dynasty scholar Han Yu (韓愈, Tuizhi 退之, 768-824) asserted that “universal love (*boai* 博愛) is called humanity (*ren*),”¹⁸ which is highly in accord with ancient learning. However, in Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *ren*, the latter is interpreted as the principle (*li* 理) of love (*ai* 愛). Thus, the notion of *ren* as an ethical value put within the social context of interactions between “the self” and “others,” what Han dynasty Confucians referred to as “to greet and salute with human care and affection” (*xiang ren ou* 相人偶), is transformed in Zhu Xi’s teaching into a transcendental principle, called “the principle of love,” which interpenetrates and links together one’s “self” with the substance of the universe. Here, the concept of *ren* taken as a transcendental principle, is exactly what Mou Zongsan called “the existence of love’s existence” (愛之存在的存在性),¹⁹ namely a principle, which originates from heaven and yet is still contained in every human mind. In consequence, Chen Lai called Zhu Xi the representative of substantialism (*shitulun* 實體論) in China, pointing out that: “Chinese

15 Ibid.

16 Qian Mu 錢穆. *Guoxue gailun* 國學概論 (*An Introduction to Chinese Studies*). In: *Qian Binsi xiansheng quanji* 錢賓四先生全集 (*The Complete Works of Mr. Qian Binsi*). Taipei: Lainjing chuban gongsi, 1994-1998, Vol. 1: p.278.

17 Liao Mingchun 廖名春. “‘Ren’ zi tan yuan” 仁字探源 (“Exploring the Origin of Character *Ren* 仁”). In: *Zhongguo xueshu*, Vol. 8 (April 2001): pp. 123-139.

18 Han Yu 韓愈 (au.), Ma Qichang 馬其昶 (comm.). *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1986, Vol. 1: p. 13.

19 See note no. 15.

substantialism is not concerned with properties and types of substance, but pays close attention to its application (employment), flow and spread.”²⁰ Insofar as the main focus of the “Treatise on Humanity” resides exactly in the application and spread of the virtue of humanity, we can concur with Chen Lai’s theory.

However, if we closely observe the ideological connotations of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity,” within his argumentation we can find two major propositions that were adopted from the brothers Cheng. In the first place, Zhu Xi’s explanation of *ren* as “the principle of love” was in fact inspired by Yichuan’s (Chen Yi) assertion that “humanity is innate human nature (*xing* 性) and love is emotion (*qing* 情).”²¹ Since it is already long ago that this was pointed out by Lee Ming-huei,²² there is no need for us to elaborate on it any further. Secondly, the proposition that “in their generation, man and things acquire the mind of heaven and earth as their own mind,” which Zhu Xi states at the beginning of his “Treatise on Humanity,” can in fact be traced back to the work of Mingdao (Cheng Hao). It was he who already before Zhu Xi noted that: “Humanity is completely of the same substance as things. Thus, the virtues like righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness are all [parts of] humanity.”²³ Thus, the source for Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *ren* can be identified in this quote. Of the Cheng brothers, it was Cheng Yi who influenced Zhu Xi the most. Not only did Cheng Yi’s philosophy influence Zhu Xi’s doctrine of humanity, a great number of quotes from Cheng Yi’s doctrine can also be found in other works by Zhu Xi, such as *A Record for Reflection (Jinsi lu 近思錄)* and *Collected Commentaries on Mencius*.²⁴ In

20 Chen Lai 陳來. *Renxue bentilun 仁學本體論 (The Ontology of Ren)*. Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2014: p 205.

21 Cheng Yi 程顥. “Yichuan xiansheng yu si” 伊川先生語四 (Sayings of Master Yichuan – Part 4). See: *Henan Chengshi yishu 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumous Writings of the Cheng Brothers from Henan)*, Vol. 18. In: *Ercheng ji 二程集 (Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers)*: p. 182.

22 Ming-huei Lee 李明輝. “Zhuzi de ‘Renshuo’ jiqi yu Huxiang xuepai de bianlun” 朱子的“仁說”及其與湖湘學派的辯論 (“Zhu Xi’s ‘Treatise on Humanity’ and its argument with the Huxiang school”). In: Ming-huei Lee. *Siduan yu qiqing – guanyu daode qinggan de bijiao zhexue tanlun 四端與七情—關於道德情感的比較哲學探論 (Four Sprouts and Seven Emotions: A Comparative Philosophical Investigation Concerning Moral Sentiments)*: p. 97.

23 Cheng Hao 程顥. “Shi ren” 識仁 (“Understanding Humanity”). See: *Henan Chengshi yishu 河南程氏遺書 (Posthumous Writings of the Cheng Brothers from Henan)*, Vol. 2. In: *Ercheng ji 二程集 (Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers)*: pp. 16-17.

24 Wing-tsit Chan’s statistical analysis of the *Jinsi lu* revealed that in the entire text there are 338 instances where Zhu Xi cited from Cheng Yi, which surpasses by far the count of those taken from Cheng Hao (162 instances), Zhang Zai (110 instances) and Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤, Maoshu 茂叔, 1017-1073) (12 instances) together. Cf.: Wing-tsit Chan. “On the Chin-ssu Lu and Its Commentaries.” In:

one of his works, Mou Zongsan systematically listed the differences between the guiding principles in Cheng Hao's and Cheng Yi's expositions on humanity. Mou's contribution was most brilliant. In addition to his systematic comparison, Mou also pointed out that Zhu Xi's manner of speaking about *ren* is not entirely consistent with that of Cheng Hao and that he adheres to Cheng Yi's approach of abstract analysis, according to which *ren* is dissected into the structural layout of a tripartite division of "mind," "nature" and "emotion" on one side, and the dichotomy of "the principle" (*li* 理) and "material force" (*qi* 氣) on the other, which is ultimately syncretized into a single expression: "the virtue of mind and the principle of love."²⁵

3. The Tokugawa Japanese Confucians' Responses to the "Treatise on Humanity": A Deconstruction of Zhu Xi's Metaphysics

1. Rejection of Zhu Xi's Ethical Dualism

The following part of our investigation is devoted to a discussion of the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians' criticism and subsequent theoretical reconstruction of Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity." Following Confucius, the Chinese and Japanese Confucians' discourse on humanity encompassed innumerable texts. A member of the older generation of Japanese scholars, Yamaguchi Satsujō (山口察常, 1882-1948), collected the historical Chinese Confucian material on *ren* and compiled it in the form of a monograph. However, unfortunately, Yamaguchi never provided a thorough exposition on the topic of the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians' theories of humanity (*ren*), devoting to it just a brief parallelism in chapter 4 (section 9) of the above-mentioned book, which does not include any detailed discussion.²⁶

Wing-tsit Chan (tr.). *Reflections of Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967: p. 331. In Zhu Xi's *Collected Commentaries on Mencius*, there are altogether 48 citations from Cheng Yi, which is the highest number of citations taken from Northern Song Confucians in the above-mentioned work. See: Chun-chieh Huang. "The Synthesis of Old Pursuits and New Knowledge: Chu His's Interpretation of Mencian Morality." In: *New Asia Academic Bulletin (Hong Kong)*, No.3 (1982): p.216, table 2.

25 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三. *Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體 (*Substance of Mind and Substance of Human Nature*), Vol.3: pp.231-232. Yang Zebo's recent work collates interpretations of Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity" made by Mou Zongsan in his work *Substance of Mind and Substance of Human Nature*. It is a very well-structured piece of writing, which gets to the most essential points of Mou Zongsan's work. Cf.: Yang Zebo 楊澤波. *Xinti yu xingti jiedu* 心體與性體解讀 (*Interpreting the work Substance of Mind and Substance of Human Nature*). Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2016, (Chapter 7, Paragraph 2): pp.164-177.

26 Yamaguchi Satsujō 山口察常. *Jin no kenkyū* 仁の研究 (*Studies on Humanity*). Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1936: pp.433-479.

The first way of reasoning adopted by the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians in their response to Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” was a deconstruction of Zhu Xi’s discourse on humanity that focused on the concept of *li* 理 around which he had based it. In that way, they refuted Zhu Xi’s entire theory of *ren* as “the virtue of mind and the principle of love.” They also opposed Zhu Xi’s ethics for being constructed on metaphysical foundations, which they argued could not be accepted into the concrete and everyday moral life. Instead, they separately established an abstract and universal *li* 理 as a controlling original law or principle. A contingent of Zhu Xi scholars, and especially the Confucian scholars of the *Kogaku* school, advocated that what is called *ren* 仁 (Jap. *jin*) can only be sought for in concrete and specific moral conduct.

The historical background of the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians’ deconstruction of the concept of *li* 理 (the principle) in Zhu Xi’s philosophy in fact resides in the political system of the Tokugawa period. Watanabe Hiroshi’s research has shown that the politics of the Tokugawa shogunate (*Bakufu*) was established on the samurai rule of violence, which was adopted at the end of the Japanese Warring States period (*Sengoku jidai*). Thus, at the beginning of the Tokugawa period, the official theoretical orthodoxy promulgated was on very frail footing, and what had been strengthened was the image of the monarch, who preserved his sovereignty through “authority” (*Ikō* 威光).²⁷ Hence, the greatest limitations of Japanese Confucianism resided precisely in the fact that between the Confucian ideology of virtuous rule and the Tokugawa military regime there existed fundamental contradictions. Furthermore, the Confucianism sanctioned in Tokugawa Japan also lacked value concepts which it could rely on and thus was reduced to a “wandering spirit” (遊魂) of Japanese society. As a result, when Confucianism was disseminated throughout the society of Tokugawa Japan, the Neo-Confucian elements of the concept *li* 理 were gradually extracted from the tissue of its thought, and what was emphasized instead was the link between the *dao* (道) and the profane (*su* 俗).²⁸

In that way, Tokugawa Japanese Confucians inverted the idea that “the principle is above particular affairs” (理在事上) into an ideological trend in the belief that “the principle is inherent in particular affairs” (理在事中). This turn, which took place among the Tokugawa Zhu Xi scholars, occurred as early as in the 16th century. A Confucian official from the initial period of the Tokugawa *Bakufu*, Hayashi Razan (林羅山, Nobukatsu 信勝, 1583-1657), who

27 Watanabe Hiroshi 渡邊浩. *Higashiajia no ōken to shisō* 東アジアの王權と思想 (*Kingship and Thought in East Asia*). Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1997: pp. 18.20.

28 Ibid.: p.101.

had studied the learning of Zhu Xi under the renowned scholar Fujiwara Seika (藤原惺窩, also known as Shuku 肅, courtesy name Rembu 斂夫, 1561-1619), despite adhering to Zhu Xi's doctrine of "substance and function" (*ti-yong* 體用), nevertheless stressed the importance of "function" over "substance" and interpreted the notion of function (*yong*) as concrete moral conduct. Hayashi Razan thus asserted: "Now, if the virtue of the original mind is substance, filial piety and reverence towards one's seniors are its function. In the case of being humane, then filial piety and reverence towards one's seniors are the substance of humanity, and being humane to the people and loving all living beings is its function."²⁹ In the realm of Hayashi Razan's thought, the substance of practicing humanity is filial piety and fraternal duty, whereas its function is represented by an universal love towards all living creatures. Both aspects refer to moral conduct on the level of concrete everyday life.

Although the Tokugawa Zhu Xi scholars did not by any means all unequivocally criticize Zhu Xi openly—as did the "former Confucians" (先儒), notably in Itō Jinsai's work, or the "later generations of Confucians" (後世儒者) of whom Ogyū Sorai is representative—criticisms of Zhu Xi were often hinted at. Even when the Japanese Confucians were ostensibly following Zhu Xi's train of thought and expounding on *ren*, they were still discussing *ren* within the context of concrete moral behavior. Thus, for example, Kaibara Ekiken (貝原益軒, also known as Atsunobu 篤信, 1630-1714), a scholar from the Fukuoka domain, said: "The way (*dō* 道) of being humane resides in being generous (厚) in human relations, and nothing else. The priorities of the moral effort of being generous in human relations are love and affection, reverence, prudence in speech, and diligence. And their roots are filial piety and fraternal reverence...."³⁰ Thus, in the above excerpt we can observe how, instead of adopting Zhu Xi's definition of humanity as "the principle of love," Kaibara Ekiken set out to define the notion of humanity within human relations. Many Japanese Zhu Xi scholars believed that the principle (*li* 理) was an ice-cold and heartless thing (emotionless), and that only when there is the living "mind" (*xin* 心) can one start understanding what is called "the principle of love." Miyake Shōsai (三宅尚齋, 1662-1741), who studied under Yamazaki Ansai together with Satō Naokata (佐藤直方, 1650-1719) and Asami Keisai (淺見綱齋, 1652-1711), and who together with the latter two were known as the three distinguished scholars of the Kimon

29 Kyoto Shisekikai (Kyoto historical society) ed. *Hayashi Razan bunshū* 林羅山文集 (Collected Writings of Hayashi Razan). Tokyo: Perikansha, 1979, Vol. 67: p. 832.

30 Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒. *Shinshiroku* 慎思錄 (Record of Careful Thought). In: *Ekiken zenshū* 益軒全集 (Entire Works of Ekiken). Tokyo: Kokusho kankokai, 1973, Book 2, Vol. 1: p. 4.

school (*Kimōn san ketsu* 崎門三傑), put forward the following reinterpretation of Zhu Xi’s theory of *ren*:³¹

Humanity (*ren*) is the principle of love and the principle (理) is an emotionless (無情) thing. When the principle of love is embodied in the mind, then thoughts become flavored (with feeling) and the mood of cordialness and intimacy ensues.

Miyake Shōsai emphasized that “the principle (理) is an emotionless (無情) thing.” It is a dry principle, and not a moist creative virtue, existing universally in all things. He further advocated that the “the principle of love” needs to be personally experienced through humanity (*ren*), so as to return to principle as “a living thing.” In this way, Miyake Shōsai attempted to deconstruct the metaphysical bases of Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *ren* with the use of concrete life.

The discursive method utilized by Tokugawa Japanese Confucians in their effort to eliminate the metaphysical fundamentals of Zhu Xi’s philosophy resided in an attempt to deconstruct and discard the presuppositions of ethical duality concealed in his doctrine of humanity. As I have already noted in one of my previous works, Zhu Xi’s interpretation of humanity as “the virtue of mind and the principle of love” was in fact theoretically founded on his *li-qi* dualism. Thus, when in the first paragraph of his “Treatise on Humanity” Zhu Xi cited Confucius’ words “to be humane is to overcome one’s self and return to ritual propriety,” he explained their meaning in the following way: “They speak about how being able to overcome and eliminate one’s own selfishness and return to the heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理), the substance of this mind will then exist everywhere, and there will be none who would not carry out its function.”³² The binary ethical construction of the opposition between “the commonality of the heavenly principle” (*tianli zhi gong* 天理之公) and “the selfishness (privateness) of human desires” (人欲之私) can also be seen in Zhu Xi’s explanation of the phrase *keji fuli* 克己復禮 in the “Yan Yuan 1” chapter of the *Analects*. In his interpretation of this chapter, Zhu Xi remarked: “*Ren* is the complete virtue (*quande* 全德) of the inherent mind (*benxin* 本心). *Ke* 克 is “to overcome.” *Ji* 己 designates the selfish desire of one’s character (*shen* 身)... Therefore, the practice of humaneness (*ren*) must include a return to ritual propriety by overcoming one’s selfish desires. In this case, all affairs

31 Miyake Shōsai 三宅尚齋. *Mokushiroku* 默識錄 (*Record of Silent Knowing*). In: Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎, Kanie Yoshimaru 蟹江義丸 (ed.). *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*). Tokyo: Ikuseikai, 1901-1903, Book 7, Vol. 1: p. 482.

32 Zhu Xi 朱熹. “Renshuo” 仁說 (“Treatise on Humanity”). In: *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 (*Collected Writings of Zhu Xi*), Vol. 67: p. 3390.

are of the heavenly principle, and the virtue of the inherent mind will return to its wholeness in one's self."³³ Again, when Zhu Xi discussed the same matter with his students, he also remarked: "To overcome one's self and eliminate selfishness, and consequently to return to this heavenly principle, is the meaning of *ren*."³⁴ The presuppositions of "ethical dualism" in Zhu Xi's doctrine of humanity are precisely the element of his philosophy which was central to the Tokugawa Confucians' criticism of Zhu Xi, and which was consequently also the most intensely criticized element of his thought. Generally speaking, Japanese Confucians were all inclined to a standpoint that sought for the heavenly principle in human desires. A work representative of this tendency was the "Treatise on Humanity" composed by the 18th century Japanese Confucian scholar Toshima Hōshū (豊島豊洲, 1737-1814). In his treatise, the latter wrote:³⁵

Moreover, what speaks of the correct principle is his doctrine, which differentiates between heavenly principle and human emotions. However, Mencius said: "All the myriad things are provided (perfected) in me." This means that amongst the various principles within the heavenly sphere, there is no good or evil. All (their good and evil) are provided and contained within the discrimination of my inner nature. However, human desires are things that are necessarily endowed to a person from the time of his birth on. These desires are also bestowed [upon a person] by heaven. But whether they are ultimately considered good or bad is a choice made in one's own mind. This is the entire cause of human desires.

In the above excerpt, Toshima Hōshū advocated that "human desires" are "bestowed by heaven," and that what people call good or evil (bad) is all decided in the human mind. He further advocated the view that humanity can only be observed in concrete actions. When Toshima Hōshū proposed that all the various "principles" are "provided and contained within the discrimination of my inner nature," he was following the reasoning of Mencian philosophy. Moreover, he did not adopt Zhu Xi's "ethical dualism," but instead main-

33 Zhu Xi 朱熹. *Lunyu jizhu* 論語集注 (*Collected Commentaries on the Analects*). In: *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (*Collected Commentaries on the Chapters and Sentences of the Four Books*), Vol.6: p.131.

34 Li Jingde 黎靖德 (ed.), Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (comm.). *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (*Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986, Vol.41: p.1051.

35 Toshima Hōshū 豊島豊洲. "Jinsetsu" 仁說 ("Treatise on Humanity"). In: Seki Giichirō 關儀一郎 (ed.). *Nihon Jurin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (*Japanese Confucianism Book Series*). Tokyo: Ho shuppan, 1978, Book 6: p.5.

tained that humanity cannot be seen in the moral effort of overcoming “human desires” with the help of “the heavenly principle,” but rather in the spontaneous and autonomous awareness of the original mind, which naturally arises in concrete conduct in one’s life.

As a matter of fact, Toshima Hōshū’s treatise on humanity represents a common understanding prevalent among the 18th century Japanese Confucians. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the 18th century Asami Keisai (淺見綱齋, 1652-1711) in his *Kijinsetsu* 記仁說 wrote: “While I was reading the ‘Treatise on Humanity’ I also examined the *ren* diagram, and only then became aware that how *ren* interpenetrates substance and function, how the substance and function of love interpenetrate, and how the substance and function of human nature are interpenetrated, all represent the same substance and function, and that there is not even one tiny hair [of difference] between them.”³⁶ By following the overall context of Zhu Xi’s reasoning and thereby aiming to stress the consistency of substance and function, Asami Keisai proposed the inseparability of the abstract from the concrete. Similarly, Bitō Nishū (尾藤二洲, Kōhajime 孝肇, 1747-1813), one of the three Kansei-era professors (寛政三博士) also emphasized that: “One can grasp and understand the way (道) after one has observed the principles at work in heaven and earth. One must first observe the principles at work in one’s mind and person, and afterwards one can also grasp and speak about humanity.”³⁷ Further, the Japanese diplomat and sinologist Takezoe Koko (竹添光鴻, commonly known as Shinichiro 進一郎, sobriquet Seisei 井井, 1841-1917) also advocated that humanity can only be embodied and manifested in the five human relationships. He said:³⁸

To be a humane person is the way (*dao* 道) of treating (receiving, *jie* 接) people. The way of the sage is to receive (treat) everyone. The intimacy between father and son, righteousness between the ruler and his ministers, the differences between husband and wife, and the trust between friends, are all born during their mutual reception (treatment, 相接). The way of everything is to receive people. If during treatment of other people there is a lack of the mind of mutual love, then the five relations will disintegrate, and the way of the human (*dao*) will perish. Therefore,

36 Asami Keisai 淺見綱齋. “Kijinsetsu” 記仁說. See: *Keisai sensei bunshū* 綱齋先生文集 (*Collected Writings of Master Keisai*), Vol. 6. In: Tōru Sagara 相良亨(ed.) et al. *Kinsei Juka bunshū shūsei* 近世儒家文集集成 (*Series of the Literary Corpus of Early Modern Confucians*), Vol. 2. Tokyo: Perikansha, 1987: pp.124-125.

37 Bitō Nishū 尾藤二洲. *Sosanroku* 素餐錄. In: *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*), Book 8: p.356.

38 Takezoe Koko 竹添光鴻. *Lunyu huijian* 論語會箋 (*Collected Commentaries on the Analects*). Taibei: Kuangwen shuju jingben, n.d.: p.5.

humanity is the same as love.

Because of their rejection of the ethical dualism within Zhu Xi's doctrine of *ren*, the Japanese Confucians had to adopt the discursive approach of treating humanity as being equal to love.

2. Itō Jinsai's Transformation of the Discourse on Humanity

In the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians' undertaking of a critique of the metaphysical inner structure of Zhu Xi's doctrine on *ren*, the great master of the Kogaku school Itō Jinsai was the most representative thinker, and as such deserves additional consideration.

Itō Jinsai's taking into consideration of the socio-economic circumstances of the Japanese *chōnin* (町人, townsmen) social class gave rise to exquisitely delicate and meticulously composed treatises, the most representative of which was his *Gomō jigī* (語孟字義, *The Meaning of Terms in the Analects and Mencius*).³⁹ In his early years, Jinsai's thought was completely shrouded under the dogma of Zhu Xi learning, and only started to transform after he reached the age of 36. In his later years, Jinsai thus changed his intellectual orientation from the ideological world of Zhu Xi learning, with the concept *li* 理 at its center, to an ideological realm centered around the concept of *qi* 氣 ("material force"). When at the age of 32 years Jinsai composed his "Treatise on Humanity", he was still following the same reasoning as contained in Zhu Xi's synonymous work. Thus, Jinsai defined *ren* as "the excellence and virtue of human nature (性情), the original human mind," because "the great virtue of heaven and earth is called generation (*sheng* 生), the great virtue of the human is called humanity (*ren*). But what is called humanity also gathers this virtue of generation and regeneration (生生) of heaven and earth and endows (具) the human mind with it."⁴⁰ Hence, Jinsai advocated that *ren* both exists in the "whole," as well as residing scattered in different "parts"—which apparently superficially corresponds to Zhu Xi's exposition stating that "in their generation, man and things acquire the mind of heaven and earth as their own mind"⁴¹ and, thereby, interlinking cosmology with ethics and at the same time making cosmology the foundation of ethics. Similarly, in the following

39 Cf.: John Allen Tucker. "Introduction: Itō Jinsai and His Masterwork". in: John Allen Tucker. *Itō Jinsai's Gomo Jigi and the Philosophical Definition of Early Modern Japan*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998: pp.1-68.

40 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. "Jinsetsu" 仁說. See: *Kogaku Sensei shi bunshū* 古學先生詩文集 (*Collected Writings of the Master of Ancient Learning*), Vol.1. In: Tōru Sagara 相良亨(ed.) et al. *Kinsei Juka bunshū shūsei* 近世儒家文集集成 (*Series of Literary Corpus of Early Modern Confucians*), Vol.1. Tokyo: Perikansha, 1985: 60.

41 Zhu Xi 朱熹. "Renshuo" 仁說 ("Treatise on Humanity"). In: *Zhuzi wenji* 朱子文集 (*Collected Writings of Zhu Xi*), Vol.67: p.3390.

parts of his “Treatise on Humanity,” where Jinsai employed a variety of correlative concepts such as *ti-yong* (substance – function) and *xing-qing* (innate nature – emotions) in order to expound on the meaning of *ren*, we can also recognize the remaining shadow of Zhu Xi’s philosophy. Zhu Xi’s influence on the middle-aged Jinsai resided primarily in the latter’s treatment of *ren* as the common interface of the “what is” (*shiran* 實然) of cosmology and the “what ought to be” (*yingran* 應然) of ethics, which makes human life possess a certain amount of breadth and depth. However, if we penetrate further into the delicate tissue of his thought, we can discover that when 32-year-old Itō Jinsai discussed the meaning of *ren*, he had already set out on a path different from that of Zhu Xi. When Jinsai said “what is called humanity (*ren*) also arose by the virtue of the generation and regeneration of heaven and earth and endows with it the human mind,” according to his understanding humanity originated in heaven and earth’s great virtue of generation and regeneration, its stimulation and penetration is omnipresent, and all life imbibes on it. Here, Jinsai has already gotten closer to the meaning of *ren* as proposed by Cheng Mingdao, namely that “humanity is completely of the same substance as all things.”⁴²

In his *Gomō jigi*, composed in the year 1683 when he was age 56 and his thought had reached maturity, as well as in his work *Dōjimon* (童子問, *Inquiries from a Child*), composed when he was already 65 years old, he had abandoned to an even greater extent Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *li* contained in the latter’s “Treatise on Humanity.” Instead, Jinsai started explaining *li* (理, ‘principle’) as being akin to “the refined patterns [of veins] (文理) within jade, it is the ordered pattern that can describe an object, but which does not suffice to describe the mystery of the [never-ending] regeneration and transformation of heaven and earth.”⁴³ Furthermore, he also asserted that:⁴⁴

The Song dynasty Confucians thought that *ren* was innate human nature (性). I, however, am deeply convinced that in this they violated the way (道). Now, if we abide by the doctrine put forward by the Song dynasty Confucian scholars, then human nature is something which is not yet aroused (未發), whereas the human emotions are already aroused (已發). Thus, humanity (*ren*) abides in the domain of not yet aroused, akin to

42 Cheng Hao 程顥. “Shi ren” 識仁 (“On Understanding *Ren*”). See: *Henan Chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書 (*Posthumous Writings of the Cheng Brothers from Henan*), Vol. 2. In: *Ercheng ji* 二程集 (*Collection of the Works of the Cheng Brothers*), Book 1: p. 16.

43 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Gomō jigi* 語孟字義 (*The Meaning of Terms in the Analects and Mencius*). In: *Nihou rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編, Book 5, Vol. 1: p.p. 22.

44 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Gomō jigi* 語孟字義 (*The Meaning of Terms in the Analects and Mencius*): p.29.

water which is stored under the earth[‘s surface]. Like in the case of underground water, one cannot just extend one’s hand and obtain their humanity, and thus also cannot implement the effort at purification. The effort to apply [humanity] thus does not take place until it is put forth into operation (發用), and regarding its original substance there is nothing one can do about it.... Moreover, when Confucius and Mencius spoke about humanity, they only touched upon its function (用) and had not reached [the topic] of its substance. In that way, did Confucius’ and Mencius’ words without losing one aspect of humanity thus fail to provide its principle?

In the above text, Itō Jinsai emphasizes that one can grasp the essence of humanity through its function (用) and not its substance. This position completely reveals that he has adopted the ideological tendency of the school of Practical learning. On another occasion, Jinsai also remarked that: “In the books of the sages I [strive to] understand practical principles with practical language. Consequently, when the words are about filial piety, brotherly propriety, ritual propriety or righteousness, their *do* (道) becomes transparent by itself. On the question of what should be called the correct *do* (道), one need not spend too many words.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, he instructed his students to “completely disregard Neo-Confucian commentary , and focus on careful reading of the original text of the *Analects* and *Mencius* for two or three years and carefully ponder the subtleties of its content. Thus does one get close to having obtained [their meaning] by oneself.”⁴⁶ Therefore, although the train of thought expressed by Jinsai in his early years when he wrote his “Treatise on Humanity” is also quite close to Cheng Yi’s doctrine that “humanity unifies heaven, earth and the myriad things into one single body (一體),” Jinsai also clearly believed that the doctrine of humanity, which is based on the concept of *li* 理, is “difficult to put into practice” (難施之用).⁴⁷ Wielding the sharp sword of the thought of the School of Practical Learning, Jinsai attempted to chop off the entanglement between heaven and man as contained in Neo-Confucian thought, and in thus doing deconstruct the metaphysical fundamentals of Zhu Xi’s theory of principle (*li*). Thus, he asserted that “outside the human there is no *dao*, beyond the *dao* there is no human.... If one seeks for the *dao* outside of human relations, like chasing the wind and clutching at

45 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Dōshikai hikki* 同志會筆記 (*Notes of the Society of Comrades*). *Kogaku Sensei shi bunshū* 古學先生詩文集 (*Collected Writings of the Master of Ancient Learning*), Vol. 5: p. 107.

46 *Ibid.*: pp. 110-111.

47 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Dōjimon* 童子問 (*Inquiries from a Child*). In: *Nihon rinri then* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*), Book 5, Vol. 2: p. 134.

shadows, it is certainly impossible [to find it there].”⁴⁸

However, here we shall go one step further and point out that the sharp sword of practical learning Itō Jinsai held in his hands was unable to completely sever the tangles and bonds between cosmology and ethics within Zhu Xi’s doctrine of humanity. This was because, although Jinsai claimed that “the great virtue of humanity is described by only one word: ‘love,’ and that is all,”⁴⁹ on the other hand he also emphasized that “the way (*dao*) of man consists of humanity and righteousness, because in the heavenly way there are the principles *yin* and *yang*. Besides humanity and righteousness, how can there be another way (*dao*)? On the other hand, humanity embraces righteousness in the same way as *yang* governs over *yin*. It was for this reason that in the school of Confucius humanity was considered to be cardinal and righteousness only a virtue assisting the former.”⁵⁰ Here, the so-called “heavenly way” was still the referential framework from which Jinsai proceeded in his analysis and discussion of the notion of “the human way.” Therefore, it could be said that even though Jinsai’s new discourse on humanity, which in his later years he put forward as a critique of Zhu Xi’s old doctrine of humanity based on the concept of the principle (*li*), was firm and powerful, it still appears not to have proven to be fatal to the criticized dogma. On the contrary, his attempt might be aptly described as an “incomplete revolution.”

4. Tokugawa Japanese Confucians’ Responses to the “Treatise on Humanity”: A Reconstruction Within a Socio-Political Context

The second approach in the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians’ discourse on Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” was to reconstruct the meaning of *ren* within a sociopolitical context. If we say that a necessary condition of the Japanese Confucians’ deconstruction of “ethical dualism” inside Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” was to disassemble the latter’s doctrine of the principle (*li*), then we can also consider their redefinition of *ren* within a socio-political context as a sufficient condition of their dissection of the very same doctrine. These two trains of thought together define the special character of the Japanese School of Practical Learning from the 17th century onwards.

In our present discussion of the Japanese Confucians’ redefinition of the notion of *ren* within a socio-political context, we can set off from Itō Jinsai’s eldest son Itō Tōgai’s (伊藤東涯, Nagatsugu 長胤, 1670-1736) questioning of Zhu Xi’s proposition that “the mind of heaven and earth is to give birth to

48 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Dōjimon* 童子問 (*Inquiries from a Child*), Vol. 1: p. 80.

49 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Dōjimon* 童子問 (*Inquiries from a Child*), Vol. 1: p. 95.

50 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Dōjimon* 童子問 (*Inquiries from a Child*), Vol. 2: p. 104.

things.” Itō Tōgai said:⁵¹

Someone may claim: “The mind of heaven and earth is to give birth to things. Yet that the bird of prey will inflict harm on beings and a foul (evil) beast will bite humans is also born inside this [mind]. How can that be?”

One might answer: “**Heaven and earth’s generation of the myriad things does not go beyond the vital forces (*qi* 氣) of *yin* and *yang*.** And what is bestowed by them is not uniform any longer. **When things are created by receiving these vital forces (*qi*), there exist differences between their strength and weakness, alertness and sluggishness of spirit.** [Still] all of that is acquired by them from heaven and cannot be changed. The strong feast on the weak and the crafty catch the dimwitted. The division between them is only natural. Consequently, tigers and panthers eat people and venomous snakes poison them. Therefore, from the human point of view, they are considered evil creatures. [Concurrently,] humans slaughter [other] living creatures, cormorants [dive and] catch fish, the chickens and ducks peck ants. Viewed from the standpoint of these [slaughtered] creatures, could [humans, cormorants, ducks and chickens] not be regarded as evil creatures? Then, heaven and earth do not give birth to evil creatures. What is bestowed by them is abundant (thick) and that which is weak (thin) is not able to be its equal, and is [consequently] harmed by it. Therefore, a tiger’s and panther’s violence can injure people, and human wisdom can also kill a tiger or a panther, they overpower each other with their own superiority. Do heaven and earth give birth to inhumane creatures in order to harm humans? Though it is for that reason that because of some doubts one might say that this is the case, still this is not in accordance with the learning of the sage. So, if one exhausts [this possibility] there most certainly will not be any harm done, and if one does not exhaust [this possibility] then there also is nothing to regret.

In the introductory part of his “Treatise on Humanity,” Zhu Xi quotes Cheng Mingdao’s maxim that “the mind of heaven and earth gives birth to things,” and subsequently also supplemented these words, stating that “in their generation, man and things acquire the mind of heaven and earth as their own mind.” Nevertheless, questioning Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *ren*, Itō Tōgai

51 Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯. *Kanki hitsuroku* 閑居筆錄 (*Reflections of a Life in Leisure*). In: *Nihon Jurin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (*Japanese Confucianism Book Series*), Book 1, Vol. 2: p.59.

demonstrated that the former’s “Treatise on Humanity” is unable to provide an explanation for certain tragic occurrences that cannot be avoided in life, such as “birds of prey inflicting harm on beings and foul (evil) beasts biting humans,” where one life is often continued at the price of destroying another one. Hence, to offer an alternative explanation of this phenomenon, Itō Tōgai based his own theory on the doctrine of *qi*, asserting that: heaven and earth generate the myriad things from the vital energies of *yin* and *yang*, but even though all kinds of life are not bestowed with vital force (*qi*) of the same strength, yet still whatever vital force they obtain is all received from heaven. Thus, the fact that the strong devour the weak accords with the principles of nature. So does the fact that even though tigers and panthers can injure people, at the same time people can also kill tigers. In that way, there exists a mutual balance between them, and it is not at all the case that the mind of heaven and earth would not give birth to such things, but rather the consequence of the fact that “when things are created by receiving these [two] **vital forces** (*qi*), there exist differences between their strength and weakness, alertness and sluggishness of spirit.” Therefore, it does not matter whether Itō Tōgai’s explanation was able to effectively settle the question he himself directed against Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” or not, it is still the fact that his answer was founded on the theory of *qi*, which illustrates how from 17th century on the common fundamentals of the Japanese Confucians’ critique of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” consisted precisely in the theory of *qi*. Japanese Confucians did not accept the proposition of Cheng Mingdao and Zhu Xi that above the concrete human relationships of everyday life there also exists a transcendental entity of *li* 理, which acts as all-commanding and dominating abstract principle, or as Mou Zongsan so correctly noted, that the real meaning of Zhu Xi’s “humanity is the principle (*li*) of love” is that “the principle” in fact means “the existence of love’s existence.”⁵² Instead, the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians proposed the view that what is called “humanity” (*ren*) cannot be understood as “the principle of love” as spoken about by Zhu Xi, rather it ought to be understood as the exercising of “love” *per se*. By so reasoning, they wanted to draw down the concept of *li* 理, which in Zhu Xi’s doctrine of *li* and *qi* existed elevated “above” concreteness, and turn it into a notion of *li* which exists “inside” of *qi* (material force). It was exactly for this reason that they spoke about humanity in terms of love.

1. Yamaga Sokō, Itō Jinsai and Tōjō Ichidō’s New Definition of *Ren*: The Notion of *Ren* in a Socio-Political Context

52 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三. *Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體 (*Substance of Mind and Substance of Human Nature*), Book 3: p.244.

In his critique of Zhu Xi's statement that "the mind of heaven and earth gives birth to things," which the former adopted from Cheng Mingdao and quoted at the beginning of his "Treatise on Humanity," the Tokugawa Confucianist Yamaga Sokō (山鹿素行, 1622-1685) maintained that by so doing Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity" already violated the pre-Qin Confucian Youzi's manner of interpretation, according to which filial piety and fraternal duty are the root of humanity. In order to avoid repeating this violation, Yamaga Sokō was one among those Japanese Confucian thinkers who believed that in practicing what is called "humanity" one should turn back to "the way of everyday, proper human relations."⁵³ However, the most representative thinker among those Tokugawa Confucians who spoke about humanity in terms of love, was still Itō Jinsai, who said that:

1. When all the dimensions of the virtue of caring love are completely fulfilled and thoroughly understood, so that there is nothing of it left unfulfilled, that is called humanity.⁵⁴
2. Now, if we assume that the main body (substance) of the mind of humanity is love, then, consequently, this mind would be so broad as to encompass everything. There would be happiness without worries and all the numerous virtues would be provided by themselves. Consequently, whenever in his answer the Master (Confucius) had to bring up the mind of humanity, he said: "The humane person is slow and cautious in his words," "the humane person never worries," "the humane person concerns himself with benefits only after having overcome the difficulties," "humanity is like archery." All these answers emanate from a unified love and derive from the cause of accomplishing the numerous virtues. The scholar must pay attention to the obscure purport of Confucius' and Mencius' teaching, which cannot be sought after in the meaning of the characters in the text.⁵⁵

In the two short texts quoted above Itō Jinsai explained "humanity" as the "virtue of caring love," advocating that "the body (substance) of the mind

53 Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行. "Seigaku go: Jin" 聖學五·仁 ("Learning of the Sages 5: Humanity"). In: Yutaka Hirose 廣瀬豊 ed. *Yamaga Sokō sensei zenshū – Shisō hen* 山鹿素行全集·思想篇. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1940-1942, Book 9: p.457.

54 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Gomō jigi* 語孟字義 (*The Meaning of Terms in Analects and Mencius*). In: *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*), Book 5: p.26.

55 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Gomō jigi* 語孟字義 (*The Meaning of Terms in Analects and Mencius*): p.29.

of humanity is love.” He further remarked that:⁵⁶

After Confucius and Mencius, those who were able to understand the meaning of humanity were rare. [.....] During the Song dynasty, Confucian scholars particularly focused on speaking about humanity in terms of principle (*li*). As a result, they have also distanced themselves quite far from the virtue of humanity. They have done so to the extent that they even believed that being desireless is the substance of humanity, and that the state of inner emptiness and stillness is its root. They not only misunderstood the virtue of humanity, they also harmed the cause of [the teaching of] Confucius and Mencius. And the damage they thus caused was great indeed.

In his criticism of Zhu Xi’s exposition on humanity, Jinsai maintained that in his treatment of humanity in terms of *li* the former deviated from the original purport of why Confucius and Mencius spoke about the notion of *ren*. Contrary to Zhu Xi, Jinsai advocated that humanity can only come into being within the web of social interactions between people.

Following Jinsai, in the 18th century, the Confucian scholar Ōta Kinjō (大田錦城, Gensei 元貞, 1765-1825) composed the work *Jinsetsu sansho* 仁說三書 (*Doctrine on Humanity in Three Books*), comprised of the three books *Confucian Doctrine on Humanity* (洙泗仁說), *General Clarification of its Meaning* (一貫明義), and *Essentials of the Doctrine on Humanity* (仁說要義). In *Confucian Doctrine on Humanity*, Kinjō asserted: “Humanity (仁) is to be human (*ren* 人), it is the way (道) of accepting (接, receiving) other people. Its first and foremost meaning is love. Consequently, the wise and holy men passed down a teaching of humanity as love, which is how [humanity] undoubtedly should be [defined]....”⁵⁷ 151 years after Itō Jinsai, Tōjō Ichidō (東條一堂, Hiroshi 弘, 1778-1857) wrote *Rongo chigen* (論語知言, *Understanding the Words of the Analects*), in which he reviewed and reexamined—in many places throughout the work—Zhu Xi’s way of interpreting *ren* as “the virtue of mind and the principle of love.” Tōjō Ichidō said:⁵⁸

56 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Gomō jigi* 語孟字義 (*The Meaning of Terms in Analects and Mencius*): p. 31.

57 Ōta Kinjō 大田錦城. *Shushui jinsetsu* 洙泗仁說 (“Confucian Doctrine on Humanity”). In: *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*), Book: 9: pp. 456-472; for the above-cited text see: p. 460.

58 Tōjō Ichidō 東條一堂. *Rongo chigen* 論語知言 (*Understanding the Words of the Analects*). In: Seki Giichirō 關儀一郎 (ed.). *Nihon meika Shisho chūshaku zensho* 日本名家四書註釋全書 (*Complete Works of Annotations and Commentaries on the Four Books by Japanese Renowned Scholars*). Tokyo: Ootori shuppan, 1922-1926, Vol. 1: p. 35.

Zhu Xi comments [in the following manner]: “Humanity is the principle (*li*) of love”. “The principle (*li*)” is what Laozi chanted about. The [formulation of] the virtue of mind flowed out of the mouths of the scholars of the School of mind. And all was then loaded on the shoulders of the Teaching of Confucius. This altogether was adopted by Zhu Xi and made the dogma of his school. This is also what I refute.

He also said:⁵⁹

When Song dynasty Confucians discussed humanity in the learning of Confucius, their thinking was completely entangled in Laozi, Zhuangzi and Buddhism. Often, they set out to defame these others as heretical discourses and rejected divergent approaches and rejected them as heresies. In what manner is that restricted? Does Confucian doctrine on the humane way indeed contain such a discourse on *li*? Because those who are aggressive to themselves and are throwing oneself away cannot tolerate it, they slander and damage the Confucian learning, making themselves confused and far away [from the learning], thus mocking and ridiculing the human *dao*. Contrary to their intentions, they parrot the opportunist and calculating doctrines of artisans such as Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi and Han Feizi. These are all faults of the Song dynasty Confucians.

In the above two excerpts, Tōjō Ichidō pointed out that Zhu Xi’s doctrine on humanity is completely founded in the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi as well as on Buddhist teaching, stressing that: “the *Analects* cannot be yoked by Laozi’s and Zhuangzi’s ideas.”⁶⁰ He further indicated that the notion of “mind” (*xin* 心) as spoken about by Confucius is seen as above “things” (事) and that any human being who is endowed with “mind” consequently also possesses “humanity” (*ren*). He also noted that:⁶¹

Ren (humanity) is human mind. Although [the mind] be not very humane, it still would not be possible to describe it as absolutely devoid of humanity. Due to that reason, the ancients spoke about “inhumanity” (*buren* 不仁, ‘not humane’) which they never named “humane-less” (*wuren* 無仁, ‘without humanity’). The *Shuo Yuan* (說苑) reads: “Confucius replied to Zilu’s question: ‘When in the past, Guan Zhong

59 Tōjō Ichidō 東條一堂. *Rongo chigen* 論語知言 (*Understanding the Words of the Analects*), Vol. 1: p. 36.

60 Tōjō Ichidō 東條一堂. *Rongo chigen* 論語知言 (*Understanding the Words of the Analects*), Vol. 3: p. 128.

61 Tōjō Ichidō 東條一堂. *Rongo chigen* 論語知言 (*Understanding the Words of the Analects*), Vol. 1: p. 36.

wanted to reinstate prince Jiu and was not able to do so, Shao Hu was executed and Guan Zhong was not. This was humane-less (無仁).”⁶² The wording “humane-less” was first seen in this place, and Han dynasty Confucians were unfamiliar with this word.

Tōjō Ichidō was opposed to a separate establishment of a “principle” above concrete mundane human relations, which was supposed to master and manage “humanity.” Moreover, so-called “humanity” ought only to refer to the “human mind” and nothing else. In that way, he refuted Zhu Xi’s explanation of humanity through the concept of principle (*li*), and pointed out that “the formulation ‘to exhaust the principle’ (窮理) can be seen in the ‘Explanation of the Hexagrams’ in the *Book of Change*, but we do not see it in the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. However, the appellation ‘the principle’ (*li*) originates from Laozi and Zhuangzi and refers to the heavenly principle. It is empty words which have not any real function. And when Mencius speaks about *li* 理, it is the *li* as in the word *tiaoli* 條理 (‘proper order’), and has never involved such blank empty words as the heavenly principle. This went as far as when masters Cheng and Zhu took over the words of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which were handed over in the *Ten Wings* (*Shi yi* 十翼), and made them the method of their schools.”⁶³ Therefore, Tōjō Ichidō further asserted that: “Humanity is to be human. What makes a human a human is completely contained in it. But making love [one’s] master is what works as the root of the human *dao*.”⁶⁴ Thus, the path he took at this place was still one of speaking about humanity in terms of love. In Tōjō Ichidō’s “Treatise on Humanity” he explicitly and severely differentiated between the “heavenly way” (*tiandao* 天道) and the “human way” (*rendao* 人道), emphasizing that *ren* has nothing to do with the heavenly way, but exists completely in the “human way.”

2.) Ogyū Sorai’s Decipherment of the “Treatise on Humanity” in a Political Context

Apart from Itō Jinsai and Tōjō Ichidō’s bestowing a new meaning on *ren* within the sphere of social relations, as described above, which thus liberated

62 Here, Tōjō quotes the content extracted from Liu Xiang’s record on the divergent opinions of Confucius and Zilu held about the figure of Guan Zhong. For a complete dialogue between the two cf.: Liu Xiang 劉向, Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (ed. and comm.). *Shuo yuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證 (*Collations of the Garden of Persuasions*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987, Vol. 11: p. 290.

63 Tōjō Ichidō 東條一堂. *Rongo chigen* 論語知言 (*Understanding the Words of the Analects*), Vol. 3: p. 127.

64 Tōjō Ichidō 東條一堂. *Rongo chigen* 論語知言 (*Understanding the Words of the Analects*), Vol. 2: p. 93.

the concept of humanity from the framework of *li* 理, the Japanese Confucian Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠, Butsu Mokei 物茂卿, 1666-1728), who lived between the second half of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th, went even further and pondered over the concept of *ren* within a political context. Hence, in his work *Distinguishing the Meanings of Terms* (*Benmei* 辨名), one can find a section where Ogyū Sorai criticizes Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Humanity." Ogyū Sorai criticizes Zhu Xi's definition of humanity as "the virtue of mind and the principle of love" as a sign of his "not being familiar with the way of the sage and consequently also not being familiar with humanity."⁶⁵ He maintained that Zhu Xi's error resided in the fact that, being subjected to the influence of Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, he attached the utmost importance to "the principle" (*li* 理), and thereby maintained that humanity is simply inherent human nature. In that way, Ogyū Sorai ultimately did adopt the approach of explaining humanity in terms of love, but at the same time still interpreted the meaning of "to love people" as "regarding people as one's parents," and thereby assigned a new political meaning to the concept of humanity (*ren*). He further noted:⁶⁶

Why is it that, in the teaching of Confucius, humanity is of the utmost importance? It is because humanity is to be able to summon the way of the former kings and embody it. The way of the former kings is the way of pacifying all under heaven. Even though their ways were multifarious, their essential point was their [common] inclination towards pacifying all under heaven.

Sorai defined humanity as "being able to summon the way of the former kings and embody it." This definition of humanity is consistent with the approach taken in his statement that "the way (*dao*) is the way of the former kings."⁶⁷ They are bound together by a single thread in the way that they both reinterpret important Confucian concepts within a political context. Thus, Sorai also remarked:⁶⁸

Humanity designates a virtue which enables a person to grow and to

65 Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠. *Benmei* 辨名 (*Distinguishing the Meanings of Terms*). In: *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*), Book 6, Vol. 1: pp.38-39.

66 Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠. *Bendō* 辨道 (*Distinguishing the Way*). In: *Nihon rinri ihen* 日本倫理彙編 (*Japanese Writings on Ethics*), Book 6: p.15.

67 Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠. *Rongo chō* 論語徵 (*Commentary on the Analects*). In: *Nihon meika Shisho chūshaku zensho* 日本名家四書註釋全書 (*Complete Works of Annotations and Commentaries on the Four Books by Japanese Renowned Scholars*): p.324.

68 Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠. *Benmei* 辨名 (*Distinguishing the Meanings of Terms*), Vol. 1: p.37.

pacify the people; it is the great virtue of the sage. The great virtue of heaven and earth is called “life” (*sheng* 生, ‘creation/generation’) and the sage follows it as his guideline. Hence humanity is also called “a life-loving virtue.” Because in antiquity the sages ruled over under heaven, nothing should be esteemed more than the ruler’s virtue. This is why the following words have been passed on through the ages: “Being a ruler, one rests only in humanity.” One cannot become a sage by studying. Yet, when the later noblemen studied the way of the sage in order to accomplish their virtues, humanity was the highest among them.

In Sorai’s new interpretation, humanity was transformed into a political capability, “the virtue which enables a person to grow and to pacify the people.” In that way, Sorai’s “humanity” was no longer the abstract notion of “the virtue of mind and the principle of love” as it used to be in Zhu Xi’s philosophy. It was rather the case that, at the same time when Sorai was taking apart the metaphysical framework of Zhu Xi’s doctrine on humanity, he developed an over-politicized interpretation of humanity and by turning it into a political capability also considerably narrowed its former denotation.

Although one can readily admit that Sorai’s political interpretation of humanity made it possible for the concept of humanity to be incorporated into his own intellectual context as well as the local conditions of Japanese Practical learning, due to his excessive narrowing of the scope of humanity his reinterpretation also evoked a series of criticisms from the later generations of Japanese Confucians, which in turn became an infamous “incident” of Japanese intellectual history.⁶⁹ To give an example: when in the 18th century Toshima Hōshū composed his own version of “Treatise on Humanity,” in his work he also criticized Ogyū Sorai’s interpretation of *ren*, noting that in truth the source of the latter’s definition of humanity was the meaning taken from the *Great Learning* (“being a ruler, one rests only in humanity”), which speaks only about the nobleman who occupies the governing position and thus totally neglects the meaning of *ren* spoken about by Mencius, namely that “humanity is to be human.”⁷⁰ In opposition to Ogyū Sorai, Toshima Hōshū advocated the view that *ren* represents a virtue which does not differentiate between social classes, but is commonly possessed by all people. He therefore deduced that the practical expression of what Ogyū Sorai called “a virtue which enables a person to grow and pacifies the

69 Cf.: Koyasu Nobukuni 子安宣邦. “*Jiken*” to *shite no Soraigaku*「事件」としての徂徠學 (*Sorai Learning and the “Incident”*). Tokyo: Seidosha, 1990.

70 Toshima Hōshū 豊島豊洲. “*Jinsetsu*” 仁説 (“Treatise on Humanity”). In: *Nihon Jurin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (*Japanese Confucianism Book Series*), Book 6: pp. 5-6.

people” actually is to treat “the mind as universal love.”⁷¹ Toshima Hōshū’s discussion of the “Treatise on Humanity” represented an attempt to draw and return Ogyū Sorai’s explanation of humanity from within a political context back into a discourse of humanity within a social context.

To summarize the above discussion, we may conclude that the critical remarks and arguments raised against Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” by Japanese Confucian scholars after the 17th century clearly illustrates their attempt to deconstruct Zhu Xi’s world of ideas, which revolves around *li* 理 as its core concept, and to devote themselves to constructing and developing a world of ideas centered around the concept of *qi* 氣 to replace it.

When Japanese Confucians criticized the old discourse of Zhu Xi, where humanity was defined as “the principle of love,” they embarked upon a new path of defining humanity as “love,” which was set within a concrete social or political context.

5. Conclusion

From our investigation of the views expressed by the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians in response to Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity,” one can distill the fact that in the developmental history of modern Confucian thought in East Asia, Zhu Xi’s philosophy played a dividing role. Therefore, for a great number of treatises, regardless of whether they praised or opposed Zhu Xi’s philosophy, it was almost necessary to open their discussion of any given matter by mentioning Zhu Xi’s view and then to constantly revolve their arguments around a comparison with his.

The analysis reveals that before reaching middle age, the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians were mostly immersed in Zhu Xi learning and were consequently extremely well-versed and adept in every single argument of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity.” Nevertheless, they spared no effort in criticizing the very same treatise. The Japanese critique of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity” began its development in the early Tokugawa period, when Yamaga Sokō proposed that “the root of humanity” rests with “the way (*dao*) of everyday, proper human relations.”⁷² Following Sokō, Itō Jinsai and Tōjō Ichidō set out to expound on the meaning of *ren* in a political context. Finally, Ogyū Sorai also developed his own political interpretation of the notion of *ren*. All these cases reveal how the Tokugawa Japanese Confucians devoted their efforts to resolving conflicts between the dominant political ideology of

71 Toshima Hōshū 豊島豊洲. “Jinsetsu” 仁説 (“Treatise on Humanity”). In: *Nihon Jurin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (*Japanese Confucianism Book Series*), Book 6: p. 70.

72 Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行. “Seigaku go: Jin” 聖學五·仁 (“Learning of the Sages 5: Humanity”). In: Yutaka Hirose 廣瀬豊 ed. *Yamaga Sokō sensei zenshū – Shisō hen* 山鹿素行全集·思想篇. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1940-1942, Book 9, Vol. 37: p. 457.

their times and Zhu Xi’s doctrine by reconstructing the metaphysical foundations of Zhu Xi’s discourse on humanity, centered around the concept of *li* 理 (‘the principle’). With their minds thus set, they rejected the dualist opposition of “heavenly principle” and “human desires” in Zhu Xi’s ethics. After their deconstruction of the metaphysical fundamentals of Zhu Xi’s ethics was completed, they reintegrated the concept of *li* 理, which in Zhu Xi’s philosophy was elevated above “things” (*shi* 事), into the “thing” as such, and thus embarked upon a theoretical path of *qi*-monism. Concurrently, by transforming the meaning of *ren*, one of the core concepts of Chinese Confucianism, they rendered it into a more ideologically palatable form capable of adapting to the local intellectual conditions of contemporary Japan.

As I have argued elsewhere, the Japanese Confucians esteemed concreteness and were not at all fond of unfounded theories high up in the sky. They praised the evaluation of what actually is and misesteemed deep meditation on higher principles; they aspired to grasp the transcendental meaning of the “mandate of heaven” (*tenmei* 天命) in the everydayness and the ordinary and to embody the “single-threaded way” (一貫之道, ‘the way of all-pervading unity’) of Confucius in mundane human relations.⁷³ That is to say that the Japanese Confucians’ criticism and new commentaries on the “Treatise on Humanity” were raised exactly in the intellectual atmosphere and climate of opinion of Japanese practical learning (*Jitsugaku* 實學). In the 17th century, Japanese Confucians started dismantling the metaphysical architecture of Zhu Xi’s learning on humanity, rejecting the foundations of the “way of heaven” as the “human way” in Zhu Xi learning, but at the same time still encountered difficulties in their endeavor to completely dispose and cleanse away the metaphysical and cosmological elements of Zhu Xi’s discourse on *ren*. Consequently, in 17th century Japan, the “heavenly way” remained the referential framework for treating the “human way”⁷⁴ for Itō Jinsai while Itō Tōgai used the two generative forces of *yin* and *yang* (陰陽二氣) to explain a variety of unavoidable tragedies of life,⁷⁵ and in the 18th century, Toshima Hōshū believed that the “human desires” are “handed over to me by the heaven.”⁷⁶ We could say that Tokugawa Japanese Confucians’ rebellion against Zhu Xi’s

73 Chun-chieh Huang 黃俊傑. *Dechuan Riben Lunyu quanshi shilun* 德川日本論語詮釋史論 (*A Historical Study of Hermeneutics of the Analects in Tokugawa Japan*). Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2006 (1st ed.) 2007 (2nd ed.): p. 3.

74 Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋. *Dōjimon* 童子問 (*Inquiries from a Child*), Vol. 1: p. 95.

75 Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯. *Kanki hitsuroku* 間居筆錄 (*Reflections of a Life in Leisure*). In: *Nihon Jurin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (*Japanese Confucianism Book Series*), Book 1, Vol. 2: p. 59.

76 Toshima Hōshū 豐島豐洲. “Jinsetsu” 仁說 (“Treatise on Humanity”). In: *Nihon Jurin sōsho* 日本儒林叢書 (*Japanese Confucianism Book Series*), Book 6: p. 5.

“Treatise on Humanity” was in fact a kind of incomplete intellectual revolutionary undertaking. Furthermore, we could even say that with their new discourse on humanity, which they developed using *qi*-monism, they were unable to avoid turning the human into a “one-dimensional man,” and thereby lost the elevation and thickness which was ascribed to the notion of human life in Zhu Xi learning in China.

Lastly, even though Tokugawa Japanese Confucians invested great effort in their rejection and annihilation of Zhu Xi’s discourse centered around the assumption of *ren* as the “principle of love,” what they eventually established was just a new belief in practical learning that was set within the ordinary world of mundane human relations and centered around the doctrine of *qi*. Regarding this single aspect, from the 17th century on, Japanese Confucianists were quite similar to the continental thinkers of the 18th century in the way “they disdained metaphysics, yet still felt proud that they were called ‘philosophers’ by the people.”⁷⁷

As I have already disclosed in one of my previous works,⁷⁸ the “contextual turn,” one of the most commonly seen phenomena in the history of intellectual exchange in East Asia, also represents the theoretical basis of our present analysis and discussion on the discourse on *ren* in East Asian Confucianisms. In the present article, where we have taken a closer look at the Japanese Confucians’ responses to Zhu Xi’s doctrine of humanity, we have shown that when Japanese Confucians were responding to the argumentation of Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Humanity,” they first “decontextualized” the above-mentioned work by deconstructing its inherent metaphysical and cosmological foundations. In turn they disassembled its “ethical dualist” inner architecture so as to ultimately get rid of the notion of *li* 理 (“the principle”) as the “existence of love’s existence” (Mou Zongsan’s formulation). Subsequently, the Japanese Confucians then “recontextualized” the Confucian concept of *ren* into the Japanese intellectual climate of practical learning from the 17th century onwards and integrated it into the political and social atmosphere of the Tokugawa period. Their enterprise could indeed be compared to “tearing down the flags of Zhao and setting up the red flags of Han in their stead.”⁷⁹ In an unprecedented and unsurpassed manner, the Japanese Confucians succeeded in stealing heaven and exchanging it for the sun, turning their stolen dragon into a phoenix. Yoshikawa Kōjirō (吉川幸次郎,

77 Carl L. Becker. *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1932, 2003: pp.30-31.

78 Chun-chieh Huang, *East Asian Confucianisms: Texts in Contexts* (Göttingen and Taipei: V & R Unipress and National Taiwan University, 2015), chap. 2, pp.41-56.

79 Sima Qian 司馬遷. *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959 & 1963. Vol.92: p.2616.

1904-1980) believed that the sinology of the Edo period had conducted a Japanese-fashioned decipherment of Chinese culture, and was thus a kind of nationalist learning.⁸⁰ As a final conclusion, we must concur that this indeed was the case.

80 Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎 (au.), Qian Wanyue 錢婉約 (trans.). *Wode liuxueji* 我的留學記 (*The Records of My Study Abroad*). Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1999: p.4.