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**Review of Linnepe, A. (2023) “Wissen” und
“Handeln” bei Yamaga Sokō: eine studie zu den
begrifflichen grundlagen der politischen theorie
im Japan der Frühen Neuzeit**

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André LINNEPE, *“Wissen” und “Handeln” bei Yamaga Sokō. Eine Studie zu den begrifflichen Grundlagen der politischen Theorie im Japan der Frühen Neuzeit*, München: Iudicium Verlag 2023. 297 pp. ISBN 978–3–86205–646–0. EUR 66,00. E-Book: ISBN 978–3–86205–976–8. EUR 46,99.

W. J. Boot, Leiden

Yamaga Sokō undoubtedly is one of the more important and interesting thinkers of seventeenth-century Japan. He is, however, relatively understudied. The reason for this may be that, in the words of the lemma dedicated to him in Wikipedia Japonica, he was “the ancestor of the Yamaga School of Military Tactics 山鹿流兵法 and of the School of Ancient Learning 古学派.” In modern research, Confucianism and military lore are two mutually exclusive specialisms, but in this new book by Linnepe the twain do meet. He does make an effort to bridge the gap and to address both sides of Sokō’s intellectual and social activities.

In order to accomplish this, he has chosen the perspective of Knowledge and Action 知行 (the “*Wissen*” und “*Handeln*” in the title of the book): a scholar should not just study the Classics, but he must also apply the knowledge he has gained that way in the implementation of his social responsibilities. And when he is a warrior, as Sokō was, the link with military studies is easily laid.

Another reason why Linnepe has chosen this perspective is his dissatisfaction with the prevalent way of studying the history of thought of Early-Modern Japan. According to him, too much attention goes to the *reception* of Neo-Confucianism as such, and too little, to the underlying processes of the articulation of (new) concepts (in Japan) – in the author’s German “... den zugrundeliegenden Prozessen der Begriffsbildung.” (p. 7)

The central part of Linnepe’s book is Ch. III, “Sokō’s use of concepts” (“Sokō’s Begriffsverwendung”). Here, the author describes and analyses Sokō’s interpretation of the concepts of Knowledge and Action and provides examples of their practical application. Chapters I and II are introductory, and the Ch. IV consists of a translation of the *Preface* and four sections chosen from Sokō’s *Yamaga gorui* 山鹿語類.¹ The final chapter is a reproduc-

1 45 fascicles. *Preface* dated 1666. The book was not printed during the Edo Period.

tion of the parts translated, taken from one of the manuscript copies of the *Gorui*.

In Ch. I, after a summary of the various interpretations of Sokō's thought from Inoue Tetsujirō to Wm. Theodore de Bary (pp. 8–15), the author focusses on Sokō's criticism of Neo-Confucianism and on the importance of his samurai status. The first caused him to go back to the ancient Confucian corpus, which made it possible to cast him as one of the initiators of the School of Ancient Learning (*Kogaku* 古学). The second made it possible to claim that his thought on politics and government was inspired by, and directed at, the contemporary situation in Japan, governed by the warrior class; in other words, that his teaching should be seen as part of military studies as they were conducted in the Edo Period (pp. 23–40). Sokō's biography (pp. 41–44) and a short *compte-rendu* of eleven of his major writings (pp. 45–48) conclude the chapter.

In Ch. II, Linnepe discusses the relation between “Knowledge” and “Action.” The question is whether “Knowledge” is an aim in itself, or whether it is a precondition for “Action”: “knowing of” and “knowing how.” This is of course a well-known item in Neo-Confucian polemics. In Ch. II, however, Linnepe takes the long way round and first analyses each of the Five Classics and Four Books in turn, to see how these concepts are treated. This is a superfluous exercise. With help of Chinese Text Project and/or the existing indexes and translations, anyone can make such a survey. The point is not what the Classics say, but how Sokō read them, but Linnepe fails to address this issue. Of the several commentaries Sokō wrote on the Classics, only *Shisho kudoku taizen* 四書句詠大全 is briefly mentioned (p. 46).²

In the final section of this chapter (II.2), “The Neo-Confucian concepts of Zhu Xi and Wang Shouren,” Linnepe describes the conflicting interpretations of “Knowledge” and “Action” as exemplified in Zhu Xi's “going to things and extending one's knowledge” 格物致知 and Wang's “knowledge and action are one” 知行合一 (pp. 67–70). For Zhu Xi, “extending one's knowledge” meant completely knowing (“exhausting”) the *li* of all things

2 E.g. *Shisho kudoku taizen* (1667), *Shisho kudoku wakumon* (1667), and *Shisho genkai* (nrs, 39–41 in the NIJL Catalogue). See also the articles by LIM Ok Kyun, not mentioned in the Bibliography: “Yamaga Soko's Interpretation of The Analects – Centered on Comparison with Zhu Xi's Interpretation”, *Journal of Eastern Philosophy* 93 (2018): 153–78; “Yamaga Soko's Interpretation of The Great Learning – Centered on Comparison with Zhu Xi's Interpretation,” *ibid*: 89 (2017, 2): 139–69; “Yamaga Soko's Interpretation of Doctrine of the Mean – Centered on Comparison with Zhu Xi's Interpretation of Mind and Human Nature,” *ibid*: 90 (2017, 5): 151–74.

and thus becoming a Holy One 聖人. For Wang Yangming, “good knowledge” 良知 was already present in the heart; the important thing was to act according to this innate knowledge. Again, Linnepe does not spell out the possible relevance of this well-known discussion to the study of Yamaga Sokō. This is a pity, for Wang Yangming not only shared Sokō’s interest in “knowledge and action,” but also was active as military commander and provincial governor. The parallels are highly suggestive, but they are not worked out in the book.

Ch. III consists of five sections: (1) “Presuppositions,” (2) “The concept of Knowledge,” (3) “The concept of Action,” (4) “Areas of application,” and (5) “Conclusions.” The chapter begins with a statement by Sokō that he will stick to the teachings of Confucius and the Duke of Zhou, and study the teachings of the Holy Ones, ignoring the heterodox ideas (*itan*) of Taoism and Buddhism. Sokō sharply criticised mainstream Neo-Confucianism, because it was too heavily influenced by these two creeds. Linnepe concludes that Sokō regarded the human capacity to acquire knowledge as the condition for finding norms for human conduct (pp. 71–75), which conclusion sets the tone for the remainder of the chapter.

For Sokō, social stability was based on duty (*shokubun* 職分): everyone, from the warrior down to the merchant, had to fulfil his task in society, each in his own niche. In order to know one’s duties, study and training were necessary, both in the civil and, for some, also in the military arts. Study that aimed merely at personal, moral cultivation was wrong; study should be of practical use. This was especially relevant to the warriors. Everyone knew that “civil and military affairs are like the two wheels of a cart” 文武兩輪, but the second wheel was forgotten all too often. Too many warriors, apparently, concentrated on literary studies and civil virtues 文, neglecting their military training 武 (see quotation on p. 77). In Japan, however, the military officials were just as necessary for safeguarding the empire as the civil ones. Constant military alertness (*bubi* 武備) was required (pp. 75–86).

Section 2 specifically addresses the concept of “Knowledge” (*Wissensbegriff*). It begins with a restatement of Sokō criticisms of Neo-Confucianism, but this time, they are formulated from the point of view of “Knowledge.” Exemplary is the knowledge of the ancient Holy Ones (*seijin*), i.e. Confucius, the Duke of Zhou and King Shun. They had a unique insight into the normative, cosmic order, and this “legitimated their responsibility for the realisation of the Way of Man” (p. 87).

No “Knowledge” without “Observation.” Under this heading, Linnepe discusses Sokō’s criticism of the Neo-Confucian assumption that man is

born with a moral Nature (*xing* 性) and thus possesses innate moral knowledge. Like everything else, man consists of *li* 理 (principle) and *qi* 氣 (matter-and-energy), and thus is involved in a process of constant change. Through his senses, man observes his environment. Sokō describes this process in terms of “Things” 物 and “Affairs” 事, “Rules” 則, and “Logic” 条理. “Things” is unproblematic. “Rules” determine the relation between “Things” and “Affairs.” (The example given is the relation between Father and Son: Father and Son are “Things,” and “love” of the father for the child and “filial piety” of the child towards the father are “Affairs.”) *Jōri*, which as a good Kantian Linnepe translates as “praktische Vernunft” and Lau (in his translation of *Lunyu*), as “in an orderly fashion,” means something like “[acting according to] the logic of a thing.” Not through innate knowledge or deductive argument, but only through observation and practice does one learn what the “logic of a thing” is (pp. 89–99).

In this section Linnepe also explores Sokō’s interpretation of the *Daxue*. Sokō rejects Zhu Xi’s emendations of the text, doubts the reliability of the commentaries 伝, and concentrates on the first part, the “Classic” 経. Here, he disagrees with Zhu’s interpretation of the phrase 致知格物. Zhu’s interpretation implies that man could have direct knowledge of Principles without prior knowledge of “things” and “affairs.” Sokō disagrees. The norms for ordinary behaviour can only be accessed through experience. The phrase Linnepe quotes as Sokō’s definition is “to explain in detail affairs and things” 詳事物 (pp. 99–104).

Next, the ruler is addressed: how should he study, and what should he know. The answer is: he should acquire a knowledge of human nature, in order to be able to select the right personnel (pp. 104–08). This sounds reasonable. Next, however, Linnepe introduces two long lists of specific knowledge, one of which is a quotation from *Takkyō dōmon* 謫居童問, while the other is a synopsis of Sokō’s *Buke jiki* 武家事紀.³ The lists range from history and military strategy to geography and administrative organisation, and to the military arts of shooting with bow and arrow and horse riding (pp. 109–13). One would not envy the ruler who would have had to practise all this.

After the dissertation on “Knowledge” follows a disquisition on “Action.” According to Sokō, “Action” is motivated by “Feelings” 情 and “Desires” 欲, and these are integral parts of human nature. They cannot be done away

3 *Takkyō dōmon* (3 fasc.) dates from 1668, and *Buke jiki* (56 fasc.), from 1673. Both texts are available in modern printed editions, but neither was printed during the Edo Period.

with, but they must be controlled. Linnepe focusses on the rulers, who should keep their emotions and ambitions under control, and care about their vassals and the population at large. They should not strive for fame or wealth, nor indulge in food, sex, or hunting. The central concept is “Righteousness” 義, which Sokō opposes to “Gain” 利. Conduct that conforms to the “normative order of the state” (p. 122) is regarded as righteous.

Now, the normative order of the state is realised in practice through the “Rites” 礼. These Rites are not an absolute given, but should be adapted to the different historical situations. Ancient Chinese Classics like the *Yili*, the *Zhou li*, and the *Liji* should be studied, not in order to apply them literally, but to understand the fundamental principles underlying the rites they prescribe. It is in this sense that one can be said to act in conformity with the Rites and to adapt to the normative order of the cosmos (p. 127).

Again, applied to the lord, “Rites” mean that he should behave himself in word and deed. Linnepe quotes very concrete prescriptions by Sokō of this behaviour. Clothing, sitting and standing, writing and the other Six Arts 六芸 – everything was part of the ruler’s Rites.

From the account one can draw two conclusions: on the one hand, “Rites” are ancient and go back to the earliest Chinese Sages; on the other hand, one should not try to impose the ancient Rites, but act in conformity with contemporary society (pp. 127–32).

These general pronouncements about behaviour are made more concrete in section 4, in which mourning ritual (pp. 133–39) and urban government (pp. 139–47) are discussed. The type of mourning Sokō describes is Confucian, and not the Buddhist rites that were prevalent at the time. Nevertheless, he accepts the Buddhist mourning period of forty-nine days: “It goes against the feeling of a pious son, but one cannot change the common custom” (quotation on p. 136). For the same reason, the wearing of mourning dress or the abstention from meat and alcohol should not be continued for more than forty-nine days. In this respect, Sokō differed from other Confucian scholars, e.g. his teacher Hayashi Razan, who buried their family members according to Confucian rites. He regarded conformity to contemporary practice as more important.

The following pages, introducing Sokō’s ideas about urban government (pp. 139–47), are disappointing. It is interesting to know that Sokō occupied himself with these matters to this extent, but Linnepe only gives a dry summing-up, with notes that are longer than the text itself. He says (p. 142) that Sokō followed the *Zhou li*, but he does not give references to this text, only referring to passages in the *Yamaga gorui*, instead. Moreover, Linnepe tells

the story from Sokō's perspective, prescriptively ("this is how it should be done"), but most or all of the things Sokō, in Linnepe's rendering (p. 144: "Sokōs Entwurf der städtischen Verwaltungsordnung"), "designed," were already the case. The question remains, to what extent Sokō was describing existing practice, and to what extent his proposals (Linnepe counts fourteen of them; see pp. 144–45), were innovative and, more importantly, practicable. "To reduce the contacts between the warriors and the *chōmin*, and to keep the warriors away from the market" (p. 145), might have been somewhat difficult. In the final paragraph of the fourth section (p. 147), Linnepe points out that Sokō's approach to city government is different from Sorai's. A more detailed discussion than the one in note 430, and clearer references would have been welcome.

In the final section (5: Conclusions; pp. 148–52), Linnepe concludes that, according to Sokō, the teachings of the Sages specify the norms of behaviour, but that these are valid only if they agree with the general consensus of the realm (p. 149: "... die Gültigkeit der Normen, zu deren Erkenntnis die 'Lehren der Weisen' führen, sich aus dem gemeinsamen Einverständnis des 'Reiches' ableiten."): *Ergo*, in a new social context, new norms for action should be formulated, and these norms are legitimised by the fact that they contribute to securing the political and social order. The warriors must adopt these social norms as their frame of reference and reproduce these in the way they execute their official duties (pp. 149–50).

As regards Sokō's place in the context of the Confucianism of the Edo Period, Linnepe concludes that he differs from Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai; he is not a *kogakusha* but uses the standard Neo-Confucian corpus (Four Books & Five Classics, *Zhuzi yulei*, *Xingli dajuan*). On the other hand, he did not accept Zhu Xi's version of the *Daxue*, and he attached great importance to the Duke of Zhou, because of the detailed rules and directives ascribed to the Duke in the *Zhou li*. Yet he declared himself to be against the introduction of Confucian rites etc., because these did not agree with contemporary Japanese practice. Of prime importance was to him the establishment of a stable political order, that was acceptable to, and in the interest of, all.

These conclusions are interesting. They establish, at least, that Sokō was an original thinker, and that he recognised the problems involved in applying an ideology in a place and in circumstances that are completely different from the times in which the ideology was originally formulated: on the one hand, the intrinsic value of the ideology cannot be denied, and on the other, it has to be adapted.

There are, however, some problems with Linnepe's approach. The biggest one, as far as this reviewer is concerned, is his lack of historical acumen. Linnepe habitually quotes from various different writings of Sokō as if they all represent the same and identical "thought of Sokō." It makes a difference, though, whether a text is written in Japanese or Kanbun, and whether it was printed at the time or only existed in manuscript.

It also makes a difference in which period of Sokō's intellectual development a text was composed. As the above extract of the third chapter makes clear, there are certain inconsistencies in Sokō's thought, *e.g.*, that he praises the ancient Sages but sticks to the Neo-Confucian corpus, or that he prescribes the Rites but maintains that they should be adapted. One explanation might be, that Sokō composed the texts at different times during his life. Linnepe briefly mentions John Tucker's article "From Nativism to Numerology: Yamaga Sokō's Final Excursion into the Metaphysics of Change" (pp. 14–15), but he fails to address the highly interesting periodisation of Sokō's intellectual development that Tucker proposes here: Sokō's life in Edo before his banishment to Akō > life in Akō (1666–75) > life after his return to Edo.⁴

Linnepe also ignores the social and intellectual context in which Sokō was operating. Hardly a word is said about his superiors or about his students, and hardly any remark is made on contemporary scholars with whom he (dis)agreed. Sokō seems to have lived in isolation. In fact, Linnepe ignores Sokō's biography. The few pages dedicated to his life and to ten or eleven out of the 173 titles listed in the NIJL Catalogue under his name are completely insufficient. Linnepe seems to have gone through the corpus of Sokō's writings with his keywords "Knowledge" and "Action" in mind. Whatever, fitted these, was noted down. Hence, his proclivity to making lists; see, *e.g.*, the description of the *Buke jiki* 武家事紀 (pp. 110–11). The overall arrangement of the results is highly systematic, but when one looks more closely, too often a critical discussion is lacking.

The translation (Ch. IV) is carefully made, but it is not explained why these specific sections of *Yamaga gorui* have been selected. The reader may infer that they support the arguments made in the preceding chapter, but such a relation is not spelled out. It would also have been helpful if Linnepe had indicated which parts of the *Yamaga gorui* he has translated. Again, the reader can find out for himself, but why should he be made to do so?

4 The article appeared in *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 54, 2 (April 2004): 194–217. For the periodisation, see pp. 195–96.

Although *Yamaga gorui* seems to be the source most frequently quoted, no bibliographical description or analysis of this text is given. One could, of course, maintain that the extensively annotated translation of the Preface should suffice, but in that case, it should have been integrated into the rest of the text.

Finally, one of Linnepe's idiosyncrasies is that he translates all titles of Chinese and Japanese books into German. This reviewer fails to see who is helped by turning, e.g., *Shijing* into *Leitfaden der Lieder*, and *Zhongyong*, into *Mitte und Maß*. As the book is addressed to fellow scholars, the original titles would have been clearer. Another intriguing idiosyncrasy, not explained, is Linnepe's habit to write "WEG," in capitals, as the translation of 道. It begins on p. 8, with "WEGs der Krieger" as the translation of *bushidō*.

I do hope, though, that these criticisms will not stop either Dr Linnepe or anybody else from continuing their research on Yamaga Sokō. As is shown by the *waka* that he wrote for his son and which is quoted in the entry in Wikipedia Japonica referred to earlier, Sokō himself had high hopes for the future: "At the break of Spring / it still looked rather shallow / but Yamaga's stream / has filled the seas in / all four directions." (立春 (たつはる) の/あさくみそむる/山鹿派 (やまがは) の/ながれは四方 (よも) の/海にみちけり).