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“The Message of the *Taisei-kyō*”

Chōon Dōkai’s *Ken’yo-roku*

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The text I will discuss in this article is *Fusō sandō ken’yo roku* 扶桑三道権興録 (“Record of the origin of the Three Ways in Japan”) – a text written by the Ōbaku monk Chōon Dōkai 潮音道海 (1628–95).¹ It consists of 2 fascicles, and its preface is dated 1694. Occasionally, I will compare *Ken’yo-roku* with another text Chōon wrote: *Fusō gobusshin-ron* 扶桑護仏神論 (“On the protective Buddhas and Gods of Japan”; 3 fasc.; pref. 1687).²

Both *Gobusshin-ron* and *Ken’yo-roku* contain lengthy quotations from a third text, called *Sendai kuji hongi taisei-kyō* 先代旧事本紀大成経 (“The classic of the great completion [based on] the annals of ancient matters of former reigns”). This is a huge text, consisting of 72+2 fascicles; it is written in classical Chinese (*Kanbun*), and ascribed to no lesser a person than Crown Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574–622). It is, of course, a forgery – composed by persons unknown in the middle of the seventeenth century, on the model of the Chinese dynastic histories 正史, and printed, in two incomplete versions, in 1670 and in 1679. Because it said unwelcome things about Amaterasu, the shrines in Ise took offence, and the book was forbidden by the *bakufu* in 1681 and again in 1683, when it was also ordered that the woodblocks should be burnt.³

1 N.B. This article is based on the presentation I gave at the EAJS Conference in Gent, August 2023.

2 For *Ken’yo-roku*, I used the autograph, which is kept at the Naikaku Bunko 内閣文庫 (no. 17904–193). The full text of *Gobusshin-ron* 護仏神論, transcribed and translated by M.M.E. BUJNSTERS and me, can be found on the homepage of the Netherlands Association for Japanese Studies <ngjs.nl/specialist>. Our transcription is based on the manuscript in the keeping of the Kyoto University Library (和 103-fu-1).

3 For *Taisei-kyō* I used the copy (partly printed, partly manuscript) of Naikaku Bunko (no. 15161–143). A modern edition, edited by OGASAWARA Haruo 小笠原春夫, is published in *Zoku Shintō taikei* 続神道大系 (“Library of Shinto, continued”; 4 vols). N.B. This edition is based on a different manuscript from the one in Naikaku Bunko. The complete text is also available on the internet, on the site <<http://miko.org/~uraki/kuon/furu/text/sendai->

Chōon was responsible for the second printing of the text,⁴ in 1679, in Edo. Whether Chōon was also involved in the forgery itself is unclear. However, judging by the texts we will discuss in the article, I think we can safely conclude that he truly believed in the authenticity of the text and in its attribution to Shōtoku. This would also explain why he continued to propagate *Taisei-kyō* even after the shogunal government had decreed its ban. He did so, specifically, in *Gobusshin-ron* of 1687, and in *Ken'yo-roku* of 1694. In the first text, he frequently quotes from *Taisei-kyō*, treating it as an authoritative text, while the second text consists of long quotations from *Taisei-kyō*, followed by short assessments 評 (*hyō*) by Chōon.

Neither text was well known. *Gobusshin-ron* has survived in three manuscripts only, and *Ken'yo-roku*, as the autograph, one further manuscript, and two printed books. As the catalogue of the National Institute of Japanese Literature (NIJL) does not give any dates for the printed copies, they may have been privately printed at Chōon's own expense.

The reason for the poor distribution may well have been that Chōon was fighting for a lost cause. *Taisei-kyō* had been forbidden, and any attempt to reintroduce it through the backdoor was doomed to failure. He must have spent quite some time composing his texts, but apparently, he experienced little cooperation from publishers or patrons.

So – an obvious question – what purpose is served by studying *Gobusshin-ron* and *Ken'yo-roku*? My present answer is that both texts show what an intelligent and knowledgeable contemporary could consider as the message and the purpose of *Taisei-kyō*. This was: to distinguish Japan from China, to create a Japanese cultural hero comparable to Confucius and the Buddha, to tame the recently introduced Neo-Confucianism, to integrate the Three Teachings, putting Shinto at the top, and to place the whole at the service of the government of the imperial state.

kuji/taisei.htm>, again, with minor differences. The best study of *Taisei-kyō* still is KŌNO Seizō 河野省三, *Kuji Taisei-kyō ni kan-suru kenkyū* 旧事大成経典に関する研究 (“Study of ...”), Shūkyō Kenkyūshitsu 宗教研究室, Kokugakuin Daigaku 国学院大学, 1952.

- 4 The first printing dates from 1670; it was done in Kyoto with movable wooden type. It is known as the *Sasaki-bon* 鷗鶴本 or *Shōryō-den* 鷗鶴傳 (“The Sasaki text” or “Sasaki Tradition”; 31 fasc., 16 vols). A modern edition is MIYATŌ Naoomi 宮東斎臣, ed., *Sendai kuji hongī taisai-kyō: Shōryō-den* 先代旧事本紀大成経鷗鶴伝, Sendai Kuji Hongi Kankōkai 同刊行会, 1981. It also contains photographs of the original printed text. N.B. The characters 鷗鶴 can also be read “Sasaki.” Sasaki, usually written 佐々木, was the name of an aristocratic family that supposedly was the original owner of this manuscript tradition.

This is more or less what Chōon says in the preface of *Ken'yo-roku*. There, he states that the combination of the Three Ways of Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism – the Three Ways together – is needed to bring peace and order to the realm, and that this was the “long-cherished ambition” which made Shōtoku-*taishi* do his best to make all three of them flourish 是聖皇太子興隆三道本懷也. Rather surprisingly, in the next line Chōon replaces the Three Ways with two ways, which he calls *kōdō* 皇道 (the “imperial way”) and *shidō* 師道 (the “way of the teachers”). *Kōdō*, he explains, is the way of mutual creation, while the *shidō* is the way of mutual destruction. The paradigm of mutual destruction and mutual creation 相生相剋 is well-known, but usually it describes the two ways in which the Five Agents 五行 or Yin and Yang interact with each other. Chōon, however, compares *kōdō* and *shidō* to the four seasons: for a year to be a good year, you need spring and summer, which stand for creation, and fall and winter, which stand for destruction.

Chōon fails to explain why, from one line to the next, Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism are dropped in favour of the Way of the Emperor and the Way of the Teacher, and also, to what the latter two exactly correspond. It seems safe, however, to identify the *kōdō* with Shinto, and the *shidō*, with Confucianism and Buddhism. Anyway, the Three Ways and the Two Ways seem to be equivalent, for in the final sentence of the Preface Chōon states that “With the Imperial Way and the Way of the Teacher, it is also like this. When they mutually assist each other, how, then, shall the empire and the state not be at peace?” 皇道師道復亦弥也。互相扶助、則豈不天下国家清平哉.⁵

This preface makes clear that *Ken'yo-roku* is not just an anthology of “*les plus belles pages*” of *Taisei-kyō*, compiled for those who could not spare the time to read the complete work. *Ken'yo-roku* has a clear political angle (the creation of a well-ordered state), and one evident hero (Crown Prince Shōtoku). Presumably, Chōon selected those passages from *Taisei-kyō* that he thought would help him to underscore this message.

Apart from the preface, *Ken'yo-roku* counts thirty-three sections, divided over two fascicles. Each section of *Ken'yo-roku* is a quotation from *Taisei-*

5 For the Preface, see *Ken'yo-roku*, frame 2–3. (N.B. The autograph I refer to has no page numbering, so I refer to the frames in the digitalised copy, which contain two consecutive half-pages – verso on the right, and recto on the left side).

kyō, followed by Chōon's ." As a rule, the quotations are very long, and the "assessments," surprisingly short.

Twenty-four of the thirty-three sections of *Ken'yo-roku* were chosen from *Seikō hongī* 聖皇本紀 ("the Annals of the Sage Emperor"), which is the title of the final four fascicles of the printed edition of *Taisei-kyō* of 1679 – fascicles 35 to 38. They are a chronological biography of Shōtoku-*taishi* – the "Seikō" in the title.

Another seven sections are chosen from fascicles 30 to 34, the *Teikō hongī* 帝皇本紀 ("The Annals of the Emperors"), which cover the reigns of Emperors Kinmei to Suiko (539-628). One is quoted from fasc. 23, the *Tennō hongī* 天皇本紀 ("The Annals of the Heavenly Emperors"), which covers the reigns of Ōjin and Nintoku (trad. dates 270-399), and one, finally, is quoted from fasc. 59, the *Reikō hongī* 礼綱本紀下之上 ("Annals of the Rites").

All quotations except the first two and the final one are directly concerned with the words and deeds of Crown Prince Shōtoku. The first two quotations prepare the way for the rest, as they respectively tell about the introduction of Confucianism (under Emperor Ōjin) and the introduction of Buddhism (under Emperor Kinmei). The third of the Three Ways with which Shōtoku was concerned, Shinto, of course already existed in Japan, and did not need to be imported.

Apart from the first four and the final three sections, there is no systematic arrangement. There are, however, a number of recurring themes. These can be arranged as follows: Shinto – Buddhism – Confucianism – the Three Ways – Shōtoku-*taishi*. We will take them one by one.

The first theme is: Shinto

As a champion of the *Taisei-kyō*, Chōon had to prove that Shinto was older and more important than the other two ways, and just as sophisticated. In view of the Japanese creation myths, seniority was not much of a problem, but the absence of canonical texts certainly was, just like the absence of nation-wide religious organisations comparable to the Buddhist sects.

Under the heading of seniority, the most ambitious idea voiced in our text is that "we made them!" 吾之為彼 In *Ken'yo-roku* passages are quoted that maintain that the Japanese gods Takamimusubi and Ōnamuchi respectively created the Indians and the Chinese and that, thus, these are "all children of our country" 悉是吾国児孫. And Izanami already met the Old Buddha, and

Ōkuninushi received the Law and gave it to our heavenly ancestor. Thus, evidently, “Our country is the most highly esteemed” of the three 我国最尊勝国. In his assessment, Chōon just amplifies this message a little.⁶

Under the heading of canonical writings, a passage is quoted from *Taisei-kyō* in which, under Suiko 2, it is recorded how Shōtoku presented to the Empress a *Sōtoku-kyō* 宗徳経 (“Classic of Principal Virtue”) and a *Shin-kyō-kyō* 神教経 (“Classic of divine teachings”), which had been compiled by Shōtoku himself.⁷ It is the shortest quotation in *Ken’yo-roku* (1 line + 2 characters) and Chōon’s assessment is one of the longer ones (12 lines). In his assessment, Chōon introduces these texts as the two basic texts of Shinto, and he claims that herewith Shōtoku had laid the foundation of Shinto doctrinaire studies 神道経学, just like Confucius had laid the basis of Confucian studies by editing the Five Classics 孔子削成儒教、為五經。因之、儒教弘通于世。

Unfortunately, Chōon complains, modern Shinto priests are unaware of the existence of these texts. They still base themselves on the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (“Chronicles of Japan”) and related texts, thus turning Shinto into a kind of Confucianism. Even worse, he says, “because people practise divine studies, the Way of the Gods, the body of the gods, the virtue of the gods, and the authority of the gods have all collapsed and fallen into the Confucian logic. Shinto priests and Confucians are in complete accord, and together they have come to regard Shinto and Confucianism as one in principle, while maligning Buddhism as a heterodox teaching!”⁸ In fact, it is the other way around: it is Buddhist monks who are in charge of Shinto shrines, not Confucian scholars.⁹

Thirdly, under the heading of organisation, Shōtoku ordered the Inbe 忌部 and Urabe 卜部 to study the Shinto traditions of the other clan. In his assessment, Chōon explains that three Shinto traditions existed, each with its own secret transmissions and rituals of baptism. These were Sōgen 宗源, Saigen 齋元, and Reisō 靈宗, associated respectively with the Urabe, the

6 *Ken’yo-roku*, Section 14 (frame 26 right – 27 right), based on *Taisei-kyō* 36: 45b–46b.

7 Ibid, Section 17 (frame 29 left – 30 right), based on *Taisei-kyō* 37: 3b. *Sōtoku-kyō* and *Shinkyō-kyō* are included in full in resp. fasc. 39 and 40 of *Taisei-kyō*.

8 Ibid: 為神学故、吾国神道神体神徳神威、悉滅而落儒理。神職儒者、雷同、互誚神儒一理、而仏道邪道。N.B. The last sentence is translated according to the reading specified in *Ken’yo-roku: Shinshoku jusha, raidō-shite, tagai ni shintō judō ichiri ni shite butsu-dō wa jadō nari to soshiru*.

9 Ibid, Section 17 (frame 30 right).

Inbe, and the Aji 吾道 clans. Their mutual cooperation, that had come about at the initiative of Shōtoku, was what caused Shinto to flourish 於茲神道興隆矣.¹⁰

The next theme is: Buddhism

As a Zen monk, Chōon had no problems defending Buddhism. As he points out, the gods love Buddhism more than Confucianism. The evidence is that shrines and temples are often combined, and that as a rule Buddhist monks are running the Shinto shrines, and Confucian scholars, never.¹¹

In the final section (Section 33), Chōon makes a special case for Buddhist burial, most likely because it was a major source of income for the temples. The story, quoted from *Taisei-kyō*, is that, at the request of Empress Suiko, the god of Miwa gave an oracle about burials. In the oracle, the god said that burials should be left to Buddhist monks and that Confucian burials were intrinsically bad. In the god's own words:

“Funeral rites and sacrifices for the dead are shunned by the gods. When a priest has been in contact with [any of these things], then, for the next three years, no god will have dealings with this priest. In high antiquity, there was nobody [who performed rites for the dead]. If you would perform them, the gods would distance themselves [from you]. The gods did not take pleasure in the lingering pollution. Nowadays, there are the Buddhist monks. The gods are happy to put them to this [task]. The rites of the Confucian School greatly violate *Saigen* Shinto. Their [way of] acting is not ours. If you would leave it to them and have them perform [the funeral rites], there is no doubt that before long they will be using cows and deer. That would directly diminish the authority of the gods. ... funeral and sacrifices [are] better left to the monks and nuns. The monks and nuns, being guests [from the realm] beyond causation,¹² cannot be polluted. Leave to them what must be done.”¹³

10 Ibid, Section 20 (frame 32), based on *Taisei-kyō* 37: 5b–6b.

11 See above, note 8; same point is made in *Gobusshin-ron* 2: 1.

12 Translation of 無為. In this case, *mui* (glossed as *tada ari*) is not to be interpreted as the Daoist *wuwei* (“not acting”), but according to the Buddhist usage: “not caused by something > existing eternally > the Buddha’s nirvana > Buddhism.”

13 *Ken’yo-roku*, Section 33 (frame 48 left – 50 left), quoting *Taisei-kyō* 34: 5a, 7b–9b, 10a–11a. The same discussion in *Gobusshin-ron* section 2: 4 (pp. 2: 12b–20b).

In his assessment, Chōon concludes that monks and nuns have four duties: prayer, teaching, burial, and sacrifice. People who bury according to Confucian rites, are “enemies of the state, and enemies of the king.”¹⁴

However, Buddhism, too, has in some respects degenerated. In his assessment of *Ken'yo-roku*, Section 16, Chōon formulates it as follows:

“Shōtoku knew where the followers of the Buddha would go wrong in *Mappō* times. The leaders would tell their stupid followers that they did not need to follow the commandments and should just recite the name of the Buddha or the title of the sutra, and then they would immediately become Buddhas themselves. Ever since these mistaken teachings have been around, many, many times it has happened that the Correct Law was destroyed and the State, obstructed. Isn't this [a case of] the medicine causing the illness?!”¹⁵

The reader will only need to think of the revolts and unrest caused by the Nichiren Sect or the Pure Land Sect to understand what the objects of this criticism were. Conclusion: as far as Chōon was concerned, Japanese rulers should *discipline* Buddhism; they should certainly not try to suppress it and exchange it for Confucianism.

Which brings us to: Confucianism

It is important to remember that in seventeenth-century Japan, intellectually speaking, Chōon's main antagonist was Confucianism – more specifically, the Neo-Confucianism of the Song. There was a difficulty here – Shōtoku lived too early to have known about it, so he could not very well be portrayed as having criticised it, but in *Taisei-kyō* already ways had been devised to solve this problem.

The antagonistic attitude is reflected in the issues on which Chōon concentrates when discussing Confucianism. The main themes are the existence

14 Ibid, Section 33 (frame 50): 用儒葬、不随积葬、如此之人、為国敵、為王敵。可惡而可惡矣。

15 Ibid, Section 16 (frame 28 left), based on *Taisei-kyō* 36: 48a–b: 聖皇予知末法婦仏者所迷弁之。今時唱仏号、誦経題者、勸愚凡男女、曰、雖身不持戒、口唱誦仏号経題、即時往生成仏、無疑矣。此邪説相行以往、正法滅却、国家障礙、甚是{甚+多}矣。豈不棄還為病耶。 N.B. The character 甚+多 is not in the font, but see MOROHASHI, vol. III, 5818. It will be an *itaiji* of 夥 (*obitadashii*); the meaning is the same.

of an original Japanese variety of Confucianism, the definition of “gods,” and the efforts Shōtoku himself made to propagate Confucianism and to establish its curriculum.

The differences between “our” Confucianism and “their” Confucianism 吾儒・異儒 are already apparent in the very first section of *Ken'yo-roku*, in which the introduction of Confucianism under Emperor Ōjin is described. The passage, quoted from *Taisei-kyō* 23, mentions the son of Emperor Ōjin, Prince Uji no Waki Iratsuko 菟道稚郎子, who studied the newly imported Confucian texts under a Korean scholar called Wani 王仁. Wani is the teacher, but when he begins to say strange things about Japan's gods, Prince Uji corrects him. Thanks to Shōtoku, who edited the text, the complete discussion eventually ended up in fasc. 44 of *Taisei-kyō* as *Wani kai, Uji kun* 王仁解菟道訓 (“Wani explains, Uji teaches”). Unfortunately, it did not help, for in his assessment of this section Chōon had to remark that the Shinto scholars of his day still followed Wani's mistaken interpretations.¹⁶

Possibly because there was no direct relation with Shōtoku, Chōon does not quote from *Wani kai, Uji kun* in *Ken'yo-roku*. Chōon also fails to refer in *Ken'yo-roku* to “a god's three bodies” 三躬, which is a really innovative theory about the nature of the gods, and which Chōon discussed abundantly in *Gobusshin-ron*.¹⁷ So, a short excursion to this other text is indicated. In *Gobusshin-ron*, Chōon first states, in line with the other crown prince:

“The gods of our country are living gods and, therefore, they have a form. In China, one worships the souls of dead men and considers those to be gods. It is for that reason that Confucians think they have no form. Do not treat the gods of our country and those of the foreign country as identical.”¹⁸

Then comes the theory of a god's three bodies. Basing himself on *Taisei-kyō* (fasc. 4: *Ōsen hongī* 黄泉本紀 [“Annals of the Yellow Springs”]), Chōon states that the gods have three bodies: the *li* body 理躬 or *kotowari no mi*, the *qi* body 氣躬 or *iki no mi*, and the *jing* body 精躬 or *tana no mi*. (*Tana* will be the same as *tane*; in the present context, “sperm” would be a good translation.)

In *Ken'yo-roku* Chōon does not refer to this very interesting and innovative theory, though it would have helped him to make his point that “Japa-

16 Ibid, Section 1 (frame 4 left – frame 5 right).

17 *Gobusshin-ron* 1: 7 (pp. 14b–18a) and 3: 14 (pp. 3: 18a–19b), referring to *Taisei-kyō* 44. The idea of “a god's three bodies” is based on *Taisei-kyō* 4: 1b–2b.

18 Ibid (p. 1: 16a).

nese” Confucianism was superior to the Chinese variety. The reason may, again, have been that in *Taisei-kyō* this theory is not directly connected to Shōtoku.

Chōon returns to the differences between Japanese and Chinese Confucianism in Sections 7 and 8 of *Ken'yo-roku*.¹⁹ In his assessment of section 7, Chōon, quoting from *Gakuyō-den* 学要伝 (“Account of the main points of study”),²⁰ defines the distinction between the two as follows: “*Their* Benevolence and Righteousness prioritises man, logic, the self, and names,” while “*our* Benevolence and Righteousness is based on the gods, the rules, the imperial succession, and emptiness.”²¹

Basically, the foreign tradition is criticised as being too limited – confined to *this* life 彼限生中 and to *human* beings. The Japanese variety acknowledges the existence of the gods and encompasses the realm beyond death 我兼死外. “This is why their [Confucianism] *seems* to be the same [as ours], but is *not* the same.”²²

Chōon also raises two other points: in *Ken'yo-roku* 7, referring to the precedent of Wani, he suggests to the emperor that he employ Korean Confucian scholars, adding that we, Japanese, still can learn certain things from the Yellow Emperor 黄帝, the Duke of Zhou 周公, and Confucius. In his assessment of this section, Chōon remarks on the fact that Shōtoku studied foreign Confucianism with Korean scholars and “our Confucianism” with Nakatomi no Mikeko 中臣御食子 (dates unknown).

In the following section (Section 8) Shōtoku has a discussion with Korean scholars. Shōtoku tells them that their ideas of Confucianism are based on the sixth-century teachings of the Liang 梁 (502–57) and Chen 陳 (557–89) dynasties, and he explains to them where they are wrong. The Korean scholars leave happily, but in his assessment, Chōon ends on a more pessimistic note, pointing out that those scholars may have left happily, but that the Confucians of his own days “have created these heterodox [theories; with these,] they have led astray provinces and destroyed houses. The gods

19 Ibid, Sections 7 and 8 (resp. frame 13 left – frame 14 left, and frame 14 left – frame 18 right), based resp. on *Taisei-kyō* 35:15a-b and 35: 15b–21a.

20 *Gakuyō-den* is one of the doctrinaire writings contained in *Taisei-kyō* 41 (frame 13 left – 32 left).

21 Quotation from *Ken'yo-roku*, Section 7 (frame 14 right): 彼仁義、先乎人、先乎理、先乎我、先乎名。＜中略＞我仁義、素于神、素于法、素于祚、素于虚。

22 Ibid: 是所以彼似一非一也。Like the quotation in the preceding note, it is based on *Taisei-kyō* 41, frames 13–14 (Preface *Gakuyō-den*).

will punish them and the people will abandon them” 故学還成邪、迷国亡家、神祇罰之、民人捨之。

This does not mean, however, that either Shōtoku or Chōon were enemies of Confucianism. Confucianism was one of the Three Ways, and it did have its uses; Shōtoku was the first to acknowledge this. As proof, we have the beautiful story how Shōtoku, through the intervention of the Heavenly Emperor 天帝, summoned the Duke of Zhou and Confucius to his Hall of Dreams 夢殿 (Yumedono) in his palace in Ikaruga. After they had arrived, on chariots drawn by dragons, Shōtoku told them that he wanted to build a new shrine in Hirano, where they would be worshipped together with Emperor Kinmei and Uji no Waki Iratsuko, as protective deities of Confucianism. Both consented.²³

Shōtoku also established the Confucian curriculum. He made a distinction between “restricted learning” 束学 and “extended learning” 弘学. The curriculum of the first consisted of the *Xiaojing* (“Classic of Filial Piety”), *Daxue* (“The Great Learning”), and *Zhongyong* (“The practice of the mean”), which texts allowed the students “to learn the language, understand the purport, and study the effects” of Confucianism; they contained “the over-all meaning of the Confucian School.”²⁴ The second stage consisted of the Five Classics²⁵; it would allow the students to broaden their studies and investigate the principles of the Confucian School.²⁶ In his assessment, Chōon does not fail to point out, proudly, that thus, in the first year of Emperor Yōmei (540–85/87), Shōtoku had already lifted the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* out of the *Liji* – 450 years before the Cheng 程 brothers did the same in China.²⁷

23 The original *locus* is *Taisei-kyō* 38: 54b–55b. It is quoted both in *Ken'yo-roku*, Section 29 (frame 44 left – 46 right), and in *Gobusshin-ron* 2:1 (pp. 2: 3a–4a).

24 *Ken'yo-roku*, Section 11 (frame 20 left): 依孝經、大學、中庸、而習文解義學跡、名為束學者也、是儒宗大意也。

25 These are, of course, *Liji* (“Record of the Rites”), *Chunqiu* (“Spring and Autumn Annals”), *Shijing* (“Book of Odes”), *Shujing* (“Book of History”), and *Yijing* (“Book of Changes”).

26 *Ibid* (frame 20 left): 為弘學、是格儒宗理。

27 *Ibid* (frame 20 right – frame 22 right), based on *Taisei-kyō* 36: 32a–34b.

Which brings us to: The Three Ways

As Chōon stated in the preface of *Ken'yo-roku*, in order to secure the welfare of the state the Three Ways should be practised together. In order to explain their mutual relationship, Shōtoku famously produced the metaphor of the tree.

The story is told twice in *Taisei-kyō*, once in *Seikō hongī*, and once, in *Teikō hongī*. In *Gobusshin-ron*, Chōon follows the first, shorter version, while in *Ken'yo-roku* he quotes the second, much more elaborate version. It is interesting to note that the entry in *Seikō hongī*, i.e. in Shōtoku's own biography, is considerably shorter than the entry in the annals of Emperor Bidatsu in *Teikō hongī*.

The setting is the same. A still very young Shōtoku – in his seventh year, at the time – is summoned by Emperor Bidatsu. In *Seikō hongī*, the account is as follows:

“On the nineteenth day, third month of the seventh year of his reign, Emperor [Bidatsu] ... summoned the Crown Prince to the Great Hall and questioned him about the meaning of the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism. The Crown Prince said: ‘Confucianism is the Way of Human Relations; it is the same as the Way of the former emperors 先皇道. It is the branches and leaves of the Way. The Buddha [preaches] the Way of Great Awakening; he is the teacher of the Heavenly Ancestor. His [teachings] are the flowers and fruits of the Way. These two Laws have arisen independently, but they agree with our Way of the Gods. The three of them together are the great accomplishment 大成.²⁸ Our Way is the roots and trunk of the Way. When there is a trunk, there are branches; when there are branches, there are fruits; when there are fruits, they grow [new] trunks. [In this way,] spontaneously, you have the thread that runs through all three laws 自有三法経. The world reveres these [teachings] and practises them.’ The emperor heard him and could neither suppress nor reject [his words].”²⁹

In *Ken'yo-roku*, quoting *Teikō hongī*, the story is that the emperor has heard that Shōtoku is very wise for his age, so he wants to put him to the test, summons him, and begins his questioning by telling Shōtoku that he does not believe either Confucianism or Buddhism; it is all foreign stuff, different from the customs of our country coming from the divine age 吾国神代儀. Undaunted, Shōtoku answers that, apparently, the emperor only knows one

28 Chōon does not insist on it, but this *taisei* will be the origin of the title of *Taisei-kyō*.

29 *Gobusshin-ron* 1: 6 (1: 13b–14b), based on *Taisei-kyō* 35: 9a.

side of the problem, but that he, Shōtoku, has studied both Confucianism and Buddhism; hence, he can say without doubt that

“Shinto is the root and the trunk of the Way; it has arisen together with heaven and earth, and thus it explains the initial Way of Man 説人始道. Confucianism is the branches and the leaves of the Way; it has arisen together with mankind, and explains the middle Way of Man 説人 middle Way. Buddhism is the flowers and the fruits of the Way. It has arisen after man’s wisdom had matured, and it explains the final Way of Man 説人終道.”

Shōtoku continues for another five pages explaining the metaphor. He also spells out its implications for the present Japanese court and for the emperor’s likes and dislikes. The emperor’s final words are not recorded. This is strange; you would expect that in the “Annals of the Emperors” the emperor would be the leading character, but here it is the other way around.

Chōon, in his assessment, briefly summarises Shōtoku’s speech, concluding that “there is no doubt that the study of the Three Ways can throw light on the root, branches, and fruits.” He also repeats Shōtoku’s dictum that “the prosperity of the Three Ways is a matter of heavenly fate. It is outside of human control. One should not try to influence it one way or the other, and there is no point in the emperor making efforts to reject or promote it.”³⁰

On another occasion, Shōtoku discussed the Three Ways with Emperor Sushun. This time, the conversation focusses on study, more concretely, on the necessity to study all of the three teachings together: “Whether scholarship is appealing or offensive definitely lies in whether it is complete or deficient. Completeness means that the Three Laws are all included. Deficiency means, that of the three one [studies] only one or two.”³¹

At the end of the quotation, Shōtoku gives a double definition of the Three Ways, for the occasion called the Three Laws (*Sanpō* 三法). In his first definition, he associates the term with the three stages of human life: (the beginning with] birth, (the daily practice of) life, and (the end with) death 生元、存庸、死極. In the second, he associates it with the gods and spirits, the human relations, and the Holy Ones and Sages 鬼神、人倫、賢聖. Then, Shōtoku links the two as follows: “Within these two sets of the Three Laws, the gods and spirits combine with birth to form Shinto; the Human

30 *Ken’yo-roku*, Section 5 (frame 9 right – frame 12 left), based on *Taisei-kyō* 31: 9b–14b. Quotation on frame 2 left: 三道興亡、天数也。莫為強拒強興矣。

31 *Ibid*, Section 13 (frame 23 right – 26 right), based on *Taisei-kyō* 36: 42a–45b. The quotation is from *ibid*, frame 23 right.: 學問美忌、必在圓闕。其圓、三法相具、是。其闕、三為一二、是。

Relations combine with daily life to form Confucianism; and the Holy Ones and Sages combine with death to form Buddhism. Thus the Three Laws stand.”³²

In his assessment, Chōon ignores these subtleties and goes back to the division into “complete” and “deficient” learning mentioned at the beginning of the section, where it said: “Ruling a country correctly or incorrectly depends on the Way of Government. The basis to the Way of Government is, whether your studies are complete or deficient. “Complete” means the study of the Three Ways; “deficient” means the study of only one Way, ignoring the other two”. At the end of his assessment, Chōon refers to Tōshō *Dai-gongen* (= Tokugawa Ieyasu) as the ruler who governed the realm through the Three Ways; thanks to him, the realm is now at peace.³³

Finally, we have come to: SHŌTOKU-TAISHI

Shōtoku is the hero of *Ken'yo-roku* and in *Gobusshin-ron* takes second position only to *Taisei-kyō* itself. In *Ken'yo-roku* he is presented as the champion of the unity of the Three Ways, which for him was a necessary condition for a peaceful government of the realm.

Most of the sections in *Ken'yo-roku* are concerned with Shōtoku's activities in support of the Three Ways: he was the one who made the study of Confucianism, Buddhism and Shinto possible, by providing a script, by compiling textbooks, and by devising the curricula; he invited monks from Korea; gave advice to emperors, etc.

On the other hand, he is also presented as a mysterious character, who knew his own former incarnations and his future fate. Both his birth and his death were surrounded with miracles, as *Ken'yo-roku* does not fail to tell us.

In *Ken'yo-roku* sections 3 and 4 we find the stories, respectively, of his mother's pregnancy and of his birth: in a dream, his mother sees a divine

32 Ibid, frame 25 left: 兩三法中、鬼神生元、合成神道、人倫存庸、合成儒道、賢聖死極、合成佛道。故三法立。N.B. *Ken'yo-roku* has 生死 instead of 生元. I follow the text in *Taisei-kyō* 36: 45b, which makes much better sense.

33 Ibid, frame 25 left: 東照大権現、乘盛運、開国始、以三道治天下。於今一天太平、四海安穩。

man who says that it will be his task to save the world 吾有度世力,³⁴ and that, therefore, he wants to enter into her womb. The princess consents, and the divine man jumps inside, through her mouth. The next morning, she finds herself pregnant.³⁵

The story continues³⁶: when the baby is born, he speaks immediately, and says: “It does not behove a man to be bad-mannered. I am naked. Being naked is bad-mannered. Quickly give me some clothes.” Everyone is astonished. There were green and red lights from the west that shone for one hour. The baby smelled wonderfully; a bell was discovered of heavenly origin.

Sometime later, when he first opened his right hand, the stone (*sane*) of a gourd 一瓢実 was discovered. This was interpreted as a sign that the baby was a Holy One 聖人 and would spread Confucianism. The baby himself gave a little speech in which he laid a link with Confucius and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Two years later, when he finally opened his left hand, a relic of the Buddha (*jari*) was discovered – green and white, and as big as a small stone. Of course, it gave off a purple-yellow light. It was taken as a sign that he would spread Buddhism.³⁷

In his assessment, Chōon mentions the bell, the stone, and the relic, which stand for Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism. He then says that, regretfully, Shōtoku has not been honoured as he should have been. He had been the architect of the Three Ways, and yet the followers of Shinto criticised him for having destroyed Shinto, and the Confucians, for having abolished the Five Constant Virtues 五常. Even the Buddhists, although they compiled his biography, tucked it away in the *hōōbu* 接方応部 of *Genkō shakusho* 元享釈書 (“Buddhist Book of the Genkō Era [1331–34]”).³⁸

Equally interesting is his final day, or rather, night. Shōtoku was staying in his palace in Ikaruga. “His holy *Qi* was more cheerful than usual” 聖氣与常快如, so he and his wife took a bath, put on fresh clothes, and went to bed. In the second watch, the moon shone. The following morning, they did not wake up, and when the servants opened the doors, it was discovered that

34 For this meaning of 度世, cf. MOROHASHI IV: 9313–52–3–*ro*. The interpretation is facilitated by the *furigana tsutome* added to the character 力.

35 Ibid, Section 3 (frame 6 left – frame 7 right), based on *Taisei-kyō* 35: 1a–b.

36 Ibid, Section 4 (frame 7 right – frame 9 right), based on *Taisei-kyō* 35: 2a–5a.

37 Ibid, Section 4 (frame 8 left).

38 Ibid, frame 9 right. N.B. *Hōōbu* is the title of fasc. 15 of *Genkō shakusho*. In a modern edition, *hōō* is defined as “Biographies of people who saved the sentient being freely, as they liked” 自由自在に、思いのままに衆生を救済した人物の伝記. The association is with the word 方便 (“expedient means”).

they were dead, both of them. Everyone was terribly shocked. One detail of a long description: on the way from Ikaruga to their grave in Shinaga 科長, peasants stood on both sides of the road like a wall. *Et cetera*.³⁹

In his assessment, Chōon says that no history book did ever record that man and wife died at the same time and were buried together. The grief caused by Shōtoku’s death he compares to that caused by the *nirvana* of the Buddha.⁴⁰

CONCLUSIONS

As said above, Chōon’s main antagonist was the Neo-Confucianism of the Song. Therefore, *Gobusshin-ron* was conceived as a polemic against Haya-shi Razan, who in the contemporary debate (second half of the seventeenth century) generally functioned as the arch-representative of Neo-Confucianism. This competition also explains the attention Chōon paid in *Gobusshin-ron* to the definition of “gods.”

Second, Chōon proposed a unity of the Three Ways. In seventeenth-century Japan, this was a no-brainer. Buddhism was by far the biggest, best organised, and richest religion. Shinto had a firm local base and carried great political weight – as is shown in the position of the imperial house, and also by the genealogies of the aristocratic and military houses, most of which begin with a deity or a former emperor. Confucianism was the newcomer; it had no social base, just an aura of Chinese superiority. But it had its uses, especially in the access it provided to Chinese sources and as a practical political ideology: a decent society could best be organised through the family, the Five Human Relations 五倫, and Ritual and Etiquette 礼儀.

Third, the embodiment of his ideas Chōon found in *Taisei-kyō*, and more specifically, in the figure of Shōtoku-*taishi*. Everything Chōon wanted to

39 Based on *ibid*, Section 31 (frame 46 left – 47 right), and on additional information from *Taisei-kyō* 38: 65a–66a. N.B. Shinaga is nowadays written 磯長.

40 In his assessment, Chōon explains why in different sources two dates are mentioned for Shōtoku’s death: the fifth day of the second month, as in *Taisei-kyō*, and the twenty-second day, as in the *Shōtoku-taishi denryaku* 聖德太子伝略 (“Concise biography of ...”) of two fascicles. Chōon’s solution is, that Shōtoku died on the fifth, and was buried on the twenty-second.

happen in the Japan of his days had already been realised by this ancient prince: the fusion of the Three Ways as the basis of the imperial government, the creation of appropriate textbooks for each of the Three Ways, and the introduction of a curriculum for each of them.

The figure of Shōtoku-*taishi* as invented in *Taisei-kyō* and presented in *Ken'yo-roku* and *Gobusshin-ron* is a perfect embodiment of what Fung Yu-lan once defined as the spirit of Chinese philosophy: “Sageliness within and Kingliness without.”⁴¹ For the further spread of the ideology of *Taisei-kyō*, it was essential that it had such a figure at its centre.

41 See FUNG Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk BODDE, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1948), pp. 6–10.