

Nakai Riken's Interpretation of the *Mencius*: “Goodness of Human Nature” and the “Way” Redefined

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1. Introduction

The Zhuzi 朱子 school of Neo-Confucianism began to enter Japan in the fourteenth century. It has been reported that Zhu's *Four Books with Collected Commentaries* was first brought to Japan in 1319. By 1322, the emperor and the ministers were discussing the texts of Song learning. From the start of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), the Zhuzi school of Neo-Confucianism was made the ideology of Tokugawa Japan.¹ Voices critical of Zhuzi learning began to appear soon thereafter, including the classicist Itô Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627-1705) and the classical philologist Ogyû Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728). Masao Maruyama 丸山真男 (1914-96) has ventured to claim that the rise of Sorai's learning initiated the break up of the Zhuzi thought as the root of Tokugawa feudal ideology.² While this contention is controversial, that Zhuzi learning held sway in the early Tokugawa Japan is an undisputable fact.

After the seventeenth century, Japanese Confucian critics of Zhuzi learning concentrated on reinterpreting the *Four Books* 四書 in their effort to critique Zhu's *Four Books with Collected Commentaries* 四書章句集註. The *Mencius* became the lightning rod of their criticisms because that classic seemed to speak to their political situation. For example, Itô Jinsai analyzed Mencius' notion of “kingly way” as the pulse of his thought, and took “the benevolent heart of the king” as the heart of this kingly way. He regarded Mencius' doctrine of taking up arms against and banishing tyrants as expressing his core political ideals. However, Jinsai departed from Mencius' original understanding of the “goodness of human nature” as grounded in the

¹ Inouye Tetsujirô 井上哲次郎, *Nihon Shûshigakuha no Tetsugaku* 日本朱子學派之哲學 (Tokyo: Fuzanbo, 1905-1921), pp. 608-609. Recent studies have indicated that the Tokugawa regime had used Confucianism, Buddhism and other systems of thought. Cf. Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570-1680* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

² Masao Maruyama 丸山真男, Mikiso Hane trans., *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974).

“goodness of mind” by treating human nature solely in terms of the embodied person in context, stressing interpersonal conduct and physical characteristics. He thus neglected the necessity, transcendence and continuity involved in Mencius’ notion of human nature. In reading the *Mencius*, Jinsai took the opportunity to criticize the Song Confucian interjection of a transcendent *li* 理 (principle, pattern), which he viewed as an artificial construct, advocating that *tianli* 天理 (principle of nature) be sought in the sphere of human affairs. These intellectual tendencies reflected a broad new trend in the East Asian Confucianism.³

The present study is an examination of the interpretation of the *Mencius* set forth by Nakai Riken 中井履軒 (1732-1817) of the Osaka Kaitokudô Academy 大阪懷德堂. He and his elder brother, Nakai Chikuzan 中井竹山 (1730-1804), instructors there, were identified as the Confucians of the Osaka Zhuzi school. Originally a private academy, Kaitokudo was changed into a public academy with the backing of five businessmen called the “Five Comrades”.⁴ Active in local business affairs, these businessmen also liked to discuss court administration, focusing on economic issues as the nucleus of political issues. The Nakai brothers’ thought reflected this new practical approach and prefigured its role in breaking up the Tokugawa feudal hierarchy and laying the intellectual foundation for the Meiji reform.⁵ Working at his Shuzai-kan Studio, Nakai Riken developed his critique of Zhu Xi’s *Four Books with Collected Commentaries*, thus completing a shift in classical interpretation.⁶

Nakai Riken’s learning was broad and comprehensive. He annotated several classics, first compiling them into the *Shichikyô Chôdai* 七經雕題 in thirtysix folios, then condensing them in the *Shichikyô Chôdairyaku* 七經雕題略 in twenty folios. In later life, he drew upon these compilations in writing his *Shichikyô Hôgen* 七經逢原 in thirty-two sections. Zhuzi’s *Four Books with Collected Commentaries* was the starting point in Nakai’s classi-

³ See Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑, “Itô Jinsai’s Interpretation of Mencius” 伊藤仁齋對孟子學的解釋 (in Chinese), in: Huang Chun-chieh, ed., *Rujia sixiang zaixiandai dongya: riben pian* 儒家思想在現代日本: 日本篇 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1999), pp. 135-80.

⁴ See Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudo Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁶ Cf. Koyasu Nobukani 子安宣邦, *Edo Shisôshi Kôgi* 江戸思想講義 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shodeu, 1998), p. 209.

cal commentaries. Following the Kaitokudao approach to classical interpretation, he would quote from Zhu's commentary, then add criticisms and new interpretations. Nakai's critique of Zhuzi learning illustrates that by mid-eighteenth century fissures in Japanese Zhuzi learning were beginning to break open. Under the banner of Zhuzi learning, anti-Zhuzi trends were taking shape.

The present study examines Nakai's interpretation of the *Mencius vis-à-vis* Zhu Xi's commentary. While Nakai's critique reflected a spectrum of cultural and political factors, this study will confine itself to textual issues. Besides section one on Nakai's background, section two examines Nakai's historical approach to interpreting Mencius' thought. Section three analyzes the central theme in Nakai's interpretation of the *Mencius*: in redefining the goodness of human nature as the "extending" it outwardly from within." Section four analyzes Nakai's definition of Mencius' way as the "human way", thus cutting off the transcendental root of the original formulation. Again, Nakai's opposition to Zhu Xi and Song Confucianism reflected a broad new trend in East Asian Confucianism. Section five evaluates Nakai's interpretation of the *Mencius*. Finally, section six presents an overview and summarizes of the main points made in this inquiry.

2. Nakai's method of interpreting the *Mencius*: The historical approach

(2:1) Nakai adopted the historical approach in interpreting the *Mencius* and other classics. He applied this approach at two levels: a) interpreting Mencius' life world through the historical context, and b) reconstructing the classical Confucian transmission, and viewing the *Mencius* in that context. (2:2) Nakai's historical approach differed from the documentary approach, and he made a point of distinguishing his approach from that of the classicist Itô Jinsai. (2:3) In particular, Nakai employed the historical approach to Song Confucian interpretations of the *Mencius*. Let us consider some examples of Nakai's historical approach.

(2:1) Nakai viewed Mencius, the man and his book, in the context of the Warring States period (403-222 B.C.) in order to elaborate on the concrete meaning of his words. For example, in interpreting *Mencius* 1A.1, Nakai described the weakening and division of the Zhou court, followed by the rise of the feudal lords who started to call themselves "kings" and contended to expand their land and power. He concluded that the kings of Mencius' day

were not worthy of the title or the sort of respect Confucius had prescribed for kings in an earlier age.⁷

Nakai identified key differences between historical settings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and Mencius (371?-298 B.C.). In light of their differing historical contexts, Confucius venerating the Zhou court while Mencius met with King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 (r. 370-319 B.C.) did not constitute a deep conflict in their views. The conduct of each master was appropriate in his own time. Using this approach in interpreting the *Mencius*, Nakai criticized, “later Confucians for using Confucius’s *yi* 義 (sense of appropriateness) to evaluate Mencius’ words and conduct.” These “later Confucians” were the Song Confucians.

From the beginning, Mencius’ refusal of veneration for the Zhou court 周室 was controversial for the Song Confucians. For example, Li Gou 李覲 (1009-59), Zheng Houshu 鄭厚叔 (fl. 1135), Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-86) and Ye Shi 葉適 (1159-1223) all criticized Mencius for this, while Yu Yunwen 余允文 (1159-1223), Zhang Jincheng 張九成 (1092-1159), Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133-80) rose to dispute on Mencius’ behalf. As I have illustrated elsewhere, the Song Confucian historical background from the Five Dynasties period was marked by continuous strong centralized imperial authority. The political reality was a concentration of power in the imperial court, an autocratic monarchy, with declining ministerial authority. The rulers looked on the ministers as dogs and horses; the hue and cry to honor the imperial court filled the air. Nonetheless, the Song Confucians were transfixed by the political ideal of the people as the ultimate authority. Given this conflict between real and ideal authority, the Song Confucians were attracted by Mencius’ distinctions between kings and hegemony, rulers and ministers, etc., and disputed about them ceaselessly. However, the point that vexed the Song Confucians the most—reflecting their attitude toward the centralized power of the age—was the sharp contrast between the duty to honor the king as prescribed in the *Spring and Autumn* and Mencius’ not honoring the king. Indeed, Mencius’ not honoring the king posed certain implicit risks of apparent subversion in the context of Song political authoritarianism, hence it stirred unease and doubt in the Song

⁷ Nakai Riken, *Mōshi hogen* 孟子逢原, in Seki Giichirō 關儀一郎, ed., *Nihon meika shisho chūshaku zenshū* 日本名家四書註釋全書 (Tokyo 東京: Hō Shuppan 鳳出版, 1973), vol.10, *Mōshibu* 孟子部 2, p. 11.

Confucians.⁸ For his part, Nakai's tactic was to contextualize the *Mencius* in his own historical situation so as to deconstruct the decontextualization work of the Song Confucians.

Nakai laid particular stress on the differences between the historical backgrounds of Confucius and Mencius. For example, on *Mencius* 2B:10, "Mencius was about to go home, having resigned from office," Nakai reasoned that, given Mencius' commitment to work for a better world of political stability and social security in that age of turmoil, he would not linger with the king of Qi 齊 for idle conversation. Nakai called this sort of historical circumstance "the meaning outside the text."⁹ Also, on *Mencius* 4B:21, "After the influence of the Kings came to an end, songs were no longer collected. When songs were no longer collected, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were written," Nakai wrote that when the rulers are good, poetry is written without imperial proclamation. Confucius lived in a time of decline without any such new poetry, so he compiled the best poems of an earlier time. Of his own time, he could just collect the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. By Mencius' time, just deeds were recorded.¹⁰

Nakai also contextualized Mencius' unusual practice of friendship in light of the historical background. *Mencius* 6B:5 reads: "When Mencius was staying in Tsou 鄒, Chi Jen 季任, who was acting for the Lord of Jen 任, sought his friendship by sending a gift. Mencius accepted it without any gesture in return. When Mencius was in P'ing Lu 平陸, Ch'u Tzu 儲子, who was a minister of Ch'i 齊, also sought his friendship by sending a gift, Mencius, again, accepted it without any gesture in return." Nakai explained Mencius' seemingly cold manner of friendship by pointing out that the position of these local lords was so precarious that it was dangerous for Mencius to align himself with them in any way. He could pay them the respect of accepting their gifts but had to leave them in order to carry on his mission of saving the empire. Nakai thus interpreted Mencius' behavior in light of the historical context.¹¹

Even in interpreting Mencius' general discourses, Nakai appealed to features of Mencius' historical context. For example, on *Mencius* 7B:13, "There are cases of a ruthless man gaining possession of a state, but it has

⁸ Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑, *Mengxue sixiangshi lun* 孟學思想史論, vol. 2 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1997), pp. 127-90.

⁹ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 128.

¹⁰ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 246.

¹¹ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 362.

never happened that such a man gained possession of the empire,”¹² Nakai gave relevant historical facts about the reigns of Chinese history as a concrete basis for Mencius’ apparently abstract theme of moral political rule.¹³

(2:1b) The second level of Nakai’s “historical approach” lay in reconstructing the transmission of classical Confucian learning. He believed that Confucius’ and Mencius’ thought had been distorted by the later Confucians, which he deemed the reason why the true meaning in classical Confucianism had become blurred. Nakai claimed that Confucius in his later years had edited the “six classics” 六經 for instruction. By the fall of the Qin 秦 and Han 漢, the *Rites* 禮 and *Music* 樂 were lost and the rest of the classics were in disarray. Although the *Changes* 易經 had been transmitted, it was no longer understood, while the received *Spring and Autumn Annals* was not the one edited by Confucius.¹⁴ Consequently, the extant works that transmitted Confucius’ Way included just the *Analects*, the *Mencius* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*; but, these texts did not provide complete accounts of his learning.¹⁵

¹² Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, pp. 443f.

¹³ Nakai Riken sometimes made mistakes about the historical context. For example, regarding *Mencius* 1B:11, which records Mencius’ dialogue with the king of Qi 齊 after he had attacked Yan 燕, Zhu Xi had commented that Mencius had suggested that if Qi could deal with Yan in the manner that King Tang 湯 had dealt with Ge 葛, so that the people of Yan would be happy, Qi could rule the Empire. Nakai criticized Zhu’s comment, saying it was too early in the game to attribute such aspirations to Qi and it would be strange to apply such a standard to Qi’s case. Following Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權 (Hsiao Kung-ch’uan) in *History of Chinese Political Thought*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.*, F.W. Mote trans. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), pp. 167-70, we can say that Mencius’ real purpose was to encourage the king of Qi to practice Benevolent Rule and become a king worthy to unify the Empire. Noguchi Takehiko 野口武彦 thinks that Nakai Riken returned Mencius’ dialogues back to their historical context in the Warring States period in order to determine the relationship between ethics and politics. See Noguchi Takehiko, *Ôto to Kakumei no aite: Nihon Shisô to Mōshi Mondai 王道と革命の間: 日本思想と孟子問題* (Tokyo: Chikobô Shobô, 1986), p. 41.

¹⁴ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 246. Nakai also said that, “Confucius’ edition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* was lost in the Qin 秦 burning of the books. Its transmission is forever lost. As for the *zuo* and *gu* 左、穀 text that was transmitted, it was a damaged edition of the old *Spring and Autumn Annals*, not the work of Confucius. The text

Nakai submitted that the teachings of the *Mencius* formed a single line of transmission with the *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. He felt persuaded that Mencius' theory of the goodness of human nature had originated with the sages and worthies of early antiquity.¹⁶

As to the terms "nature" 性 and "goodness" 善, Mencius was the first one to define them. It was because other explanations of "nature" were appearing in the empire that Mencius specifically defined these terms. The belief [that human nature is good] had already been present in the world of the ancient sages and worthies. Texts like the *Guanzi* 管子 discussed the term, and its implication in the *Analects* 論語 and the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 was fully consistent with Mencius' usage. It could be said that before Mo Di 墨翟 and Yang Zhu 楊朱 began to write, the term "nature" was used without ambiguity in the empire. Then, Mo Di 墨翟 and Yang Zhu 楊朱 redefined "nature" in ways opposed to standard usage, and the Five Phases school 五行家 especially obscured the significance of the term. Unfortunately, later scholars became fascinated with the divergent views, and called Mencius' theory that human nature is good just "the teaching of a single master"... Afterwards, only the Cheng brothers 二程 and Zhang Zai 張載 offered sound explanations of the "nature". Still, following the advent of the Five Phases school, Confucian scholars could not shake off the five phases theory, and continued to speak of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣, original state and material composition, principle of nature and human desires. These dichotomies continue to muddy the waters and cannot be washed away.

Nakai thus reconstructed classical Confucianism in order to refute Cheng Yi's 程頤 claim that Mencius' assertion that human nature is good "proclaimed [a truth] that hadn't been expressed by the late Sages."

(2:2) Nakai also stressed authenticating documents. This did not amount to the "documentary approach" of the classicist Itô Jinsai. Understanding the difference between them is crucial for grasping the difference in interpretive approach between the seventeenth century classicists and the Osaka Kaitokudo Zhuzi school.

Nakai Riken emphasized that, "One cannot interpret the classics simply on the basis of one's intended words,"¹⁷ while Itô Jinsai had said, "General-

preserved as *zuo* and *gu* was fabricated as Confucius' edition. This distortion has caused confusion among later scholars."

¹⁶ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, pp. 141f. When interpreting the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Nakai expressed the same idea. He wrote, "*Doctrine of the Mean*'s continuing the nature and equilibrium and harmony match Mencius' theory that human nature is good. While knowing that the expression, "human nature is good," was coined by Mencius, its significance did not start from his writing brush." See Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, ch.1, p. 23.

¹⁷ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 40. Cf. 58, 66, and 453.

ly, those who intend to read the book of *Mencius* should take Mencius' own words as evidence. They should not interpret it subjectively according to their own ideas. Generally, what the old interpreters asserted was their own speculations, not Mencius' intended meaning.¹⁸ But, Nakai himself typically got drawn into textual considerations in interpreting the classics. Jinsai had drawn upon dictionaries and reference books and Han Confucian glosses in reconstructing the original meaning of Confucius and Mencius. Methodologically, however, since Jinsai confined himself to the old glosses in settling problems of interpretation, he unable to roam freely in Mencius' intellectual sphere, not to mention enter the Song Confucian intellectual realm. In the final analysis, he diminished Mencius' vital spirit and incorporated Han viewpoints into his interpretation. Hence, his criticisms of the Song Confucians were forceful but not lethal.¹⁹ Again, Nakai Riken paid attention to context, not just to literal meaning.

(2:3) How did Nakai apply the "historical approach" in deconstructing Song Confucian readings of the *Mencius*? His treatment of *Mencius* 6B:7 may serve to illustrate. Mencius said, "The Five Leaders of the feudal lords were offenders against the Three Kings.... Hence, the Emperor punishes but does not attack, while a feudal lord attacks but does not punish." In interpreting this passage, Zhu Xi defined the key terms in a general way.²⁰ Nakai criticized Zhu for neglecting salient details of that historic event and distorting Mencius' concrete meaning and specific message.²¹ In summary, Nakai considered that "historical" = "concrete" = "specific" = "manifest" in what he called his "time and circumstance" 時勢 interpretive approach, in deconstructing Zhu's "moral" = "abstract" = "general" = "idealist" interpretive approach. Thus, he thought Mencius' words and conduct should be reconstructed by going back to the historical roots, while Zhu's approach came close to what Dominick La Capra has called the "dialogical approach". Song Confucians, like Zhu Xi, brought their own issues to the table and, in effect, dialogued with the authors of the classics. Nakai adopted more the stance of the *observer* (rather than that of the *participant*) in reconstructing the origi-

¹⁸ Itô Jinsai, *Mô Shi Kogi* 孟子古義, in Seki Giichirô, ed., *Nihon meika shisho chûshaku zenshû* (Tokyo: Hô Shuppan, 1973), p. 284.

¹⁹ Chun-chieh Huang, "Itô Jinsai's Interpretation of the *Mencius*" (in Chinese), in: Huang Chun-chieh, *Dongya ruxueshi de xinshiye* (Taipei: Taiwan University Press, 2004), pp. 125-69.

²⁰ Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Tapei: Zhonghua Books, 1982), p. 344.

²¹ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 368.

nal meaning. Nakai Riken thus adopted La Capra's "synoptic reading approach" in seeking definite information about the text.²²

3. Nakai's reinterpretation of the *Mencius* on the goodness of human nature: "extending," not "mastering and ordering"

Nakai adopted the historical approach so as to enter into Mencius' specific world of thought. (3:1) He considered that the meaning of the goodness of human nature lay in "extending" outwardly the goodness that one definitely bears within. It was not a matter of observing the *li* 理 (patterns, principles) out there, and then "mastering" and "ordering" one's personal desires externally on the basis of those *li*. (3:2) Nakai believed that Mencius' concept of mind conceived of mind as the source of human values. (3:3) Nakai's account of Mencius' theory of mind and nature reflected his immanent, monistic intellectual position. We shall now elaborate on these three points.

(3:1) Nakai's discourses on the goodness of human nature are numerous. In *Môshi hogen* 孟子逢原, he pointed out the goodness of human nature meant that people bear a definite goodness within. Consequently, the essential lesson lay in "cultivation by 'extending' that good nature outwardly." In this regard, Nakai said:²³

Generally, whenever Mencius discussed the "nature" he proclaimed that it was good and that it had to be continued by nurturing from the start. Hence, that "everybody can be a Yao 堯 or Shun 舜" did not imply that a tiny infant has the same degree of virtue as a Yao or Shun, just that by nurturing the nature and *qi* 氣, they can cultivate their sense of *yi* 義 (appropriateness) to the same degree. The Song masters' account of the goodness of human nature was in error. They held that one reverts to goodness and virtue by restoring the Beginning. For this reason, they advocated cultivation by "mastering" and "ordering", not Mencius' original approach of "extending". Although the Song approach might not have been contrary to the great Way itself, it was not consistent with Mencius' approach.

²² Dominick LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," *History and Theory*, XIX: 3, 1980, pp. 245-76. Reprinted in: Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1983), pp. 23-71. On Dialogic reading and Synoptic reading, see Dominick LaCapra, "History, Reading, and Critical Theory," *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no.3, June 1995, pp. 799-828.

²³ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 84.

To Nakai, the significance of Mencius' "goodness of human nature" lay in "extending" it outwardly; since everyone possesses a definite goodness, one's cultivation effort just needs to involve "extending" one's goodness outwardly.

This was an entirely new interpretation of the *Mencius*. Nakai's stress on "extending" outwardly was focused against Zhu's notion of "restoring the Beginning". Regarding Confucius' saying, "To learn something and then to practice it when it is timely, is that not a pleasure?," Zhu had written: "Human nature is entirely good, but perception includes the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. *A posteriori* perception must model the effect of *a priori* perception, then it can illuminate the original goodness and restore the Beginning."²⁴ Zhu's ideal of restoring the Beginning harked back to a passage in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, ch.16, "Mending the Inborn":²⁵

Those who set about mending the inborn nature through vulgar learning, hoping thereby to return once more to the Beginning...mind joining with mind in understanding; there was knowledge but it could not bring stability to the world. After this, "culture" was added on, and "breadth" was piled on top. "Culture" destroyed the substantial, "breadth" drowned the mind, and after this the people began to be confused and disordered. They had no way to revert back to the true form of their inborn nature or return once more to the Beginning.

Here, "restore the Beginning," meant to shed all of the miscellaneous *a posteriori* knowledge and return to one's original nature. The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 "Shuzhenshun 俶真訓" chapter reads, "For this, the learning of Sage aims at returning to the spontaneity of [human] nature." Gao Yu 高誘 commented, "People are born in the midst of heaven and earth. Mencius said that the nature is entirely good but the emotions and desires harm it. Therefore, the Sage is one who restores his nature to the Beginning state." Zhu used the idea of "restoring the Beginning" in interpreting, not only Mencius' theory that the nature is good, but also Confucius' saying, "Mastering the self and returning to ritual action constitute *ren* 仁 (benevolence, human-heartedness)"²⁶:

²⁴ Zhu Xi, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁵ Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 171-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47. In *Analects* 12.1, Confucius says, "Returning to the ritual rites and mastering the self constitute *ren*. If for a single day a one could return the rites and master oneself, the entire empire would consider this *ren* to be one's own. However, the practice of *ren* depends on oneself alone, and not upon others." Confucians paid attention to

Ren is the complete virtue of mind. "Mastering" refers to overcoming. "Self" refers to the personal desires of the person. "Returning" refers to turning back to. "Ritual action" is the rhythm and culture of the principle of nature. One practices *ren* in order to complete one's virtue. Therefore, one who practices *ren* must have the means to overcome one's personal desires and return to ritual action; in that case, one's affairs will be in compliance with the principle of nature and the virtue of one's original mind will again be complete within one's greater self.

By emphasizing the mastery of personal desires, Zhu Xi was not, in Nakai's view, taking the path of "following the nature" or acting "from one's own self."

Nakai could not accept this sort of interpretation. In his reading of the *Analects*, he made his disagreement with Zhu Xi quite clear: As to Zhu's using "restoring the Beginning" to explain how to recover "the goodness of human nature," Nakai averred that Zhu's comments on "this chapter were not

this key passage from the Song dynasty on. Their readings of this passage reflected their position in intellectual history. By mentioning in a single breath "returning to the ritual rites and mastering the self" and "the practice of *ren* depends on oneself alone," Confucius hinted at the complex relationship between *ren* and ritual rites. Zhu's using "overcome" to interpret "master" is a case in point. When Zhu Xi interpreted *Mencius* 1B:5 by mentioning the "beginning (sprout) of mastering oneself and returning to the ritual rites," he was referring to cultivating by "mastering personal desires and returning to the principle of nature". Zhu's interpretation of "mastering oneself" in terms of "excising personal physical desires" attracted the criticisms of Ming and Qing scholars. Wang Yang-ming's 王陽明 Ming followers Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491-1562), Wang Longxi 王龍溪, Lo Jinxi 羅近溪 and early Qing scholars Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635-1704), Li Gong 李塨 (1659-1733), Dai Zhen 戴震 (1723-77) were among the harshest critics of Zhu on this point. They opposed the Song Confucian theory of human nature that involved preserving the principle of nature and excising human desires; they also opposed the Song dualist theory of human nature as divided into original nature and embodied nature, and advocated monism. Dai Zhen analyzed Zhu's expression "personal desires" into "personal" and "desires", advocating that one can excise the "personal" but there is no way to excise the desires. Dai Zhen initiated a turn away from the Song Confucian notion of "preserving the principle of nature, excising human desire," by taking the idea of "desire" as the starting point. This reading of "mastering the self and returning to the ritual rites" reflected a turning point in Confucianism during the Ming and Qing. The Japanese scholar Mizuguchi Yûzô 溝雄三 has written eloquently on this turning point. See his *Chûgoku Kintai Shisô no Kussetsu to tenkai* 中國近代思想の屈折と展開 (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1980), pp. 283-311.

adequate.”²⁷ Nakai also opposed Zhu’s comment on *Mencius* 1A:1, that, “*Ren* 仁 is the virtue of the mind. It is the principle of love. *Yi* 義 (appropriateness) is the controller of mind; it is the sense of appropriateness.” Nakai replied that, “If the virtue of mind and the controller of mind really came from “returning to the Beginning”, as claimed by the Song Confucians, there would be no way to interpret the seven chapters (of the *Mencius*).”²⁸ Nakai advocated that Mencius’ theory that human nature was good did not involve any *a posteriori* effort of “mastering” and “ordering”.²⁹

The goodness of the nature just involves “extending”. It does not involve any sort of forcibly subduing. Subduing is certainly the way to defeat vices of bad habits, and can not be interpreted as mixture. People seldom grow up without erring. Those who have succumbed to music and sensual delights are many. Is this just the result of their *qi* 氣-endowment? Intelligence and strength are qualitative results of their *qi*-endowment... But, as to good and bad, every common person, man or woman, can distinguish between them. It does not take a discerning mind. Now, this knowledge comes from the nature, indicating the presence of something that is definite and inalterable. Consequently, because of the fanciful accounts of the nature and the resulting lack of intention to do good and aspire to be a worthy, Mencius offered his theory of the good nature to encourage people to extend it outwardly. This intention to do good and aspire to be a worthy requires ceaseless daily progress. As for differences in *qi*-endowment, this is not a matter for pity. It is something that all common men and women understand, therefore drop that debate; who would dare to say they are not prepared (to judge between good and bad)?

Nakai also expressed this consideration in interpreting *Mencius* 4B:26: “In theories about human nature put forth by the world, there is nothing else

²⁷ Nakai Riken, *Rongo hogen* 論語逢原, in Seki Giichirô, ed., *Nihon meika shisho chûshaku zenshû*, p. 10.

²⁸ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 12.

²⁹ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, pp. 328f. Nakai interpreted the words, “Therefore, the gentleman venerates the moral nature,” *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch.21, as follows: “‘Moral nature,’ that is like saying the nature is good.... One venerates the good nature, and follows from therein.... This coincides with the ideas of heavenly mandate and following the nature expressed in the first chapter, and matches Mencius’ theory that human nature is good. Who can say that Mencius created the theory that human nature is good? ... Generally, because the Song Confucian theory of “restoring the Beginning” became prevalent, cultivation by mastering and ordering was stressed while cultivation by extending was neglected. For self-culture, this was not a serious deviation, but for interpreting the classics it was no small deviation.” See *Chûo hogen* 中庸逢原, pp. 78f. Nakai treated the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Mencius* as fully consistent, and as sharply contrasted with Zhu Xi’s interpreting the *Mencius* on the basis of the *Great Learning*.

other than resort to precedent. The primary thing in any resort to precedents is ease of explanation.”³⁰

Here “*li*” 利 (ease, benefit) is the “*li*” of *lidao* 利導 (smooth guidance). “*Ben*” 本 (basic, root) is like “*zhu*” 主 (main, guiding). It means to take this as a “basic matter”, and has the definition of “main point”. It is the *ben* of *bengan* 本幹 (main trunk), not the *ben* of *yuanben* 原本 (origin). (The expression means) appropriate to guide it smoothly. There shouldn't be any defect (in this explanation). And, it is consistent with the sense of “extending” by following the “good nature”.

Nakai thus interpreted Mencius' term “*ben*” as “main trunk”, not as “origin”, in keeping with his interpretation of Mencius' theory that human nature was good.

Why hadn't the Song Confucians grasped Mencius account of human nature correctly? On Nakai's analysis, it was because, “The Song worthies simply followed common old discussions in concocting their explanations. Attempting to interpret the classics in this way, how could they expect to succeed?”³¹ The Song Confucians had approached the classics with a set of presuppositions, hence, “In all of their tireless explanations, they expressed the Song theory of *li* and *qi* but it was at no time consistent with the words of Confucius and Mencius. This was an acceptable way to concoct another explanation but not an acceptable way to interpret the books of Confucius and Mencius.”³² For such reasons, Nakai proclaimed,³³

“Restoring the original nature” was not Confucius' or Mencius' intended meaning. Mencius only had the idea of “extending”. “Extending” meant to advance, whereas “returning to the Beginning” meant to go home. His “way” was like (the interaction between) *Yin* 陰 and *Yang* 陽. In general, none of the explanations that mention “restoring to the Beginning” is acceptable for interpreting the seven chapters (of the *Mencius*).

³⁰ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 252.

³¹ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 453.

³² Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 319. Nakai said that “the nature of man is like the sharpness of iron. If one uses iron to make a knife, its sharpness will be preserved. Through the cries of childbirth, the nature is preserved within. But, the effort of smelting iron is done after the ore is mined, likewise the effort of extending and nurturing the nature goes on after the cries of human birth. Later Confucians emphasized the nature too much. For example, seeing a forged knife, one cannot make the effort of grinding and polishing it, without the art of tempering. Their inconsistency with Mencius lies in this point. ‘Returning to the Beginning’ and ‘nurturing the nature’ are as different as coming in and going out.” *Ibid.*, p. 387.

³³ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 385.

In Nakai's view, "extending" meant to extend outwardly from within. As he put it, "'extending' means to advance." Furthermore, the Song Confucian notion of "restoring the Beginning" involved using *li* (principle) external to the self in order to "master" and "order" the mind. Thus, Nakai said, "'Restoring the Beginning' means to return home." Such Song Confucian explanations, in his view, were inconsistent with Mencius' original account of human nature.

(3:2) Nakai believed that one had to interpret Mencius' notion of mind in order to grasp "extension" as an implication of his theory that human nature was good. Realizing that, for Mencius, mind was the spring of value consciousness, including *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智 (benevolence, appropriateness, ritual propriety, wisdom), Nakai read *Mencius* 7A:1, "For a man to realize his heart fully is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven," as follows:³⁴

"Realizing one's heart fully" refers to realizing *ren, yi, li, zhi*, so one is prepared to grasp them and respond to affairs in a way such that the function of mind will be flawless. If it weren't the case that the knowledge of the nature included this truth, [mind] wouldn't be able [to realize the virtues and respond to affairs flawlessly]. Mencius said this entirely with reference to the embodied person. He did not mean to imply that, having explored the principles of things exhaustively, there would be nothing one does not know. "Realizing fully" was used in the sense of knowing entirely, like the difference between "in detail" and "to examine". "Knowing entirely" is like "in detail", "investigating fully" is like "examining"... By realizing this distinction in grasping the wisdom that Master Mencius bestowed to the myriad people, one realizes that his merit was all the greater. So, this principle resides entirely in the virtue of mind. To realize it in detail is no small matter.

Nakai considered that, for Mencius, mind gave birth to value consciousness. Hence, mind need not seek outer *li* (principles) to confirm the validity of her operations, and yet the function of mind could be flawless.

Nakai's interpretation of Mencius' notion of "fully realizing mind" differed from Zhu Xi's interpretation. Zhu had written:³⁵

The substance of mind is all-inclusive, and its function is all-comprehending. If one exhaustively grasps the *li* 理 and genuinely penetrates them, one will have fully realized the all-inclusive substance of mind and the all-comprehending function of mind.

He also said:³⁶

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Zhu Xi, *Mengzi huowen* 孟子或問. See the standard edition: *Zhuzi yishu* 朱子遺書 (Taipei: Yiwen Books, n.d.). vol. 5, sec. 13, p. 1a.

As to “fully realizing mind”, how does one realize it fully? Such realizing cannot be considered a psychological matter. Rather, one realizes the *li* of mind. As to realizing fully these *li*, if there is a thing one's mind is not acquainted with, once it appears before one's eyes, one will recognize it and realize that *li* in mind.”

In effect, Zhu Xi had changed Mencius' moral issue into an epistemological one. Zhu's interpretation of “fully realizing mind” 盡心 followed the same pattern as his using the idea of “fully understanding *li*” 窮理 to interpret Mencius' notions of “understanding words” 知言 and “nourishing *qi*” 養氣. That is to say, he drew upon the *Great Learning* concept of “investigating things to extend knowledge” in interpreting the *Mencius*, which, to Nakai, ran counter to Mencius' original meaning.³⁷ While Zhu Xi could be said to have based his interpretation of the *Mencius* on the *Great Learning*, Nakai based his interpretation on the concept of sincerity (*cheng*) expressed in the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Indeed, Nakai intended to use this concept of sincerity to penetrate the meaning of the *Four Books*.³⁸ In general, Nakai's learning took the path of projecting the objective through the subjective in order to integrate inner and outer and form a single body.

(3:3) In light of these two points, we could say that Nakai held an immanent, monistic stance in his reinterpretation of the *Mencius* and critique of Zhu Xi's learning. He made his stance clear in interpreting Mencius' “The ten thousand things are all included in me”:³⁹

“Included in me” refers to my “being stimulated by and responding to the ten thousand things.” That by which one deals with the ten thousand affairs is not something artificially attached from without. Father, son, minister, ruler, are all “things”. “Appropriateness” when together and “trust” when apart are all “affairs”. This term “things” covers things and affairs both.

³⁶ Li Qingde, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua Books, 1983), ch. 60.

³⁷ I discuss this in detail in *Mengxue sixiangshi lun*, vol.2, ch.5.

³⁸ See Sagara Tōru 相良亨, *Kinsei no zukyōshisō* 近世の儒教思想 (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1966), pp. 200-206. For example, in discussing the concept of *cheng* 誠 (sincerity, authenticity) in Tokugawa Confucian thought, Sagara pointed out that, whereas Song-Ming Confucianism took *jing* 敬 (reverence, concentration) as their starting point, Japanese Confucians took *cheng*, or sincerity, as their starting point. In my opinion, in the early Tokugawa period, when Zhuxi learning was pervasive, such scholars as Nakae Tōzu 中江藤樹, Yamaga Sōgo 山鹿素行 and Itō Jinsai entered into Zhuxi learning and only later constructed a Confucian system based on the notion of *cheng*. In the process of this intellectual development, Nakai Riken came to believe that the Confucian system based on sincerity was grounded in the classical texts.

³⁹ Nakai Riken, *Mōshi hogen*, p. 390.

In Nakai's immanent, monistic perspective, the myriad things and human affairs were combined in a network of complex meanings. Therefore, what one made of the overall significance of things would depend on one's subjectivity. This sort of explanation offered a viable reading of Mencius', "The ten thousand things are all contained in me."

Starting from this sort of immanent, monistic point of view, Nakai was unable to assent to the Song Confucian dualisms, for example, between mind and matter, substance and function, man's moral-rational nature and his embodied physical nature, etc. Thus, he maintained:

- (1) In the Song Confucian discourses, they tended to speak in oppositions, such as fundamental-embodied, *li-qi* 理氣, substance-function, clear-turbid, etc. In fact, these oppositions were prominent only because of the examination system. As this tendency was rampant at the time, the Song people remained unconscious of it.⁴⁰
- (2) The Song notion of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣 was inconsistent with the discourses of Confucius and Mencius, which contained nothing of the kind. It was essentially an independent theory, not necessary for interpreting the *Analects* and the *Mencius*.⁴¹
- (3) The ancients prior to Mencius did not have any theory of substance and function.⁴²

Therefore, Nakai thought that Mencius' term "mind" referred just to "original mind" and criticized Zhu's commentary for adding the complexities of "constant mind of inborn goodness," "mind of propriety and appropriateness," "original mind of shame and dislike," etc. How could the mind be divided into three or four or more as Zhu Xi suggested? When one speaks of the original mind, these several functions are already included.⁴³ Why should one toil to distinguish all of those facets?⁴⁴ These views also reflected Nakai's immanent monism.

4. Nakai Riken's interpretation of Mencius' way (*dao*): Reconstruction of the way as interpersonal relations

The second breakthrough in Nakai's reading of the *Mencius* was his reconstruction of the Way as interpersonal relations. (4:1) After Nakai had deconstructed Zhu Xi's hierarchical metaphysical interpretation of Mencius' way,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 381. Allusion to *Zhuangzi*, ch.2.

he sought to recover its interpersonal relations essence. (4:2) This effort to elicit this interpersonal relations essence bore witness to the intellectual capital the seventeenth century classicists had bequeathed to the eighteenth century Osaka Zhuzi school. Let us explore these points in depth.

(4:1) First, let us consider Nakai's reconstruction of the the way in Mencius' thought. I say "reconstruction" because Nakai had first examined Mencius' thought beneath the shroud of Zhuzi learning, then went on to critique methodologically the Song Confucian *li-qi* dualism and deconstruct Zhu Xi's transcendental *li* in order to recover what he considered to be the original "way" in Mencius' thought. Although he completed his critique of Zhuzi learning, Nakai was unable to capture the full content of Mencius' learning in his reconstruction: his gain was not adequate to make up for his loss in that project.

In interpreting *Mencius* 2A:2, "It is a *qi* which unites rightness and the Way. Deprive it of these, and it will collapse," Nakai demonstrated the interpersonal relations essence of the way in Mencius' thought:⁴⁵

The term "way" was originally used to indicate a road for coming or going. A place suitable for people to walk thus was called a "way". What was later called the way of the sage kings and nobles, the way of emperors Yao and Shun and kings Wen 文 and Wu 武 never departed from interpersonal relations. The *Yizhuan* 易傳 (*Book of Changes* with commentary) adds the expressions, "way of change" and "way of nature," and yin-yang and *gui-shen* 鬼神 all have their "way". But, these and similar expressions all depart from interpersonal relations. Thus, the heterodox explanations were many but despite the many differences among them, these interpretations became acceptable only due to their familiarity. In the sayings of Confucius and Mencius, the term "the way" did not depart from interpersonal relations. Hence, how could it be acceptable to offer an interpretation of the Way that departs from human relations? As for the spontaneity of the way of nature, one cannot say that it does not depart from interpersonal relations.... How can this be used to interpret the ancient texts? The reason why interpreters want to interpret the texts soundly is so that people

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87. Nakai Riken thought that Mencius' "way" was restricted to the way of daily human relations. He interpreted Confucius', "I set my will upon the way" (7.6), saying: "way", as in the way of the gentleman, way of Yao and Shun, way of husband and wife. There is no difference between these ways and the way of daily human relations.... The Collected Commentaries speaks of, 'the appropriate principles of things and affairs' and 'the appropriate principles of daily human relations.'. Judging these two matters, I don't know whether this meaning is to be found in the original classic. I doubt whether [Zhu Xi] didn't use his own idea in interpreting it." See Nakai Riken, *Rongo hogen* ch.6, p. 127.

can understand them easily. The scholars of this generation don't toil over reading the classics so much as they toil over [Zhu Xi's] *Collected Commentaries*.

Nakai here was focusing on Zhu Xi's interpretation. Zhu's *Collected Commentaries* contains passages like the following: "[The sense of] appropriateness is the mind's [inner sense of] restraint. The way is the spontaneity of the principle of nature."⁴⁶ In this way, Zhu added a transcendental "principle of nature" atop the "human way" in order to cover all of the intricacies of human affairs. In interpreting Mencius' idea of "knowing words," Zhu wrote: "One who understands words has realized the mind thoroughly and understands the nature; thus, he has the means to inquire into the principles signified by all of the words in the realm. And, he will discern the reason why things are [deemed] 'so' and 'not so' and why affairs are [deemed] 'a success' and 'a failure'."⁴⁷ Zhu Xi thus advocated that, in responding to the myriad things and affairs, people inquire exhaustively into their *li* (principles). Nakai discarded the *li-qi* dualism constructed by Zhu Xi and advocated that the way is "entirely inseparable from human affairs." With this reconstruction of the way as interpersonal relations, Nakai sought to deconstruct the transcendental dimension bequeathed to the way by the Song Confucians.

Nakai's reconstruction of the way as interpersonal relations appeared, not only in his reading of the *Mencius*, but also in his interpretations of the *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. For example, in *Analects* 4.15, Confucius said, "There is a single thread binding my way together." Zhu Xi interpreted this generally in the *Collected Commentaries*, affirming that, with the Master's integrated way, he could always respond in the most appropriate way. He resembled the utmost creativity and ceaseless activity of heaven and earth in his conduct, comprehending everything. "Ultimately, the substance of the way serves as the single root for the myriad differentiations; as for each of the myriad things having its suitable niche, the function of the way serves as the single root of the myriad differentiations. Looked at in this way, the meaning of Confucius' 'single thread connecting it' can be seen."⁴⁸

Zhu Xi thus drew upon the organic principle, "*Li* (principle) is one, but its manifestations are many," in interpreting Confucius' single thread binding his way. Nakai opposed this use of transcendent *li* to connect Confucius'

⁴⁶ Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 234.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

way. He proclaimed that, "Confucius' way just consists in being benevolent. There is no other way to speak of." He also pointed out that Zhu's expressions like, "integrated as a single *li*" and "the place of function is united with the substance," are empty words without practical content.⁴⁹ Nakai adopted the same approach in interpreting the *Doctrine of the Mean* proposition that, "As to the way, one cannot depart from it for even a moment":⁵⁰

The term "way" was submitted in the text. It should not be given other interpretations. If one has to make an interpretation, it would be appropriate to say that it is the road that people should take. Zhu in his comments mentions the "*li* (principles) that people should follow in their daily conduct of affairs." The "*li*" of which he speaks belongs to "matters, affairs," not to the person. This deviates from the original text. He also said that the "Way is the virtue of human nature." This expression burst through the distinctions and is obscure. Indeed, how can the way be contained within as a possession of the mind?"

Nakai Riken's use of the classicist interpretation of the way as the road that people should take followed the "wise precedent" of the old Han dynasty Confucian interpretations. The *Shou Wen* 說文 reads: "The 'way' is the road taken.... The path to reach it is called 'the way'." The "Interpretation of *dao* 道 (way)" section of the *Interpretation of Terms* reads: "The path to reach it is called the road (*daolu* 道路). *Dao* 道 (way) is pronounced *dao* (connoting 'steps'); *lu* 路 (road) is pronounced *lu* (connoting 'surface')." If one accepts this sort of practical interpretation, the transcendental interpretation of the way constructed by the Song Confucians collapses completely.

Nakai's reconstruction of the term "way" in Mencius' learning as "interpersonal relations" had some grounding in the classical texts. Doesn't *Mencius* 6B:2 read, "The Way is like a great road?" In fact, Nakai interpreted this passage in criticizing Zhu's comment, "Mencius said clearly that the way is not difficult to understand. But, the *Collected Commentaries* introduce the difficult matter that 'the nature is internal'. This comment complicates matters; it does not clarify them. Thus, we can know that there are some differences between the way as discussed by the Song Confucians and as discussed by Mencius."⁵¹ Also, *Mencius* 7B:16, reads, "As to benevolence, it is interpersonal. Discussed together, it constitutes the Way," and, furthermore, the *Doctrine of the Mean* reads, "Confucius said that the way is never distant from people; it is people who make the way distant. But, that

⁴⁹ Nakai Riken, *Rongo hogen*, p. 74.

⁵⁰ Nakai Riken, *Chūo hogen*, p. 20.

⁵¹ Nakai Riken, *Mōshi hogen*, p. 356.

can no longer be considered as the way.” There was some textual support for Nakai’s taking the way of Confucius and Mencius as referring to the human way, and seeking to sever any connection between the human way and the way of nature.

But, was Nakai’s critique of Zhu’s way of nature (*tianli* 天理) and reconstruction of the way (or *li*) as interpersonal relations an accurate reading of Confucius and Mencius’ thought? Below, we shall explore these questions. But, we should withhold discussion on this question for the moment.

(4:2) In Nakai’s redefinition of the way, we observe his intellectual connection with the seventeenth century master classicist Itô Jinsai.

Jinsai’s interpretation of *Analects* 9.3, “A ceremonial cap of linen is what is prescribed by the rites. Today black silk is used instead. This is more frugal and I follow the majority,” reads:⁵²

The way of the gentleman is derived from the relationship between husband and wife. Therefore, when Yao and Shun received *chan* 禪 it was in accordance with the common mind, and when Tang and Wu attacked, they also followed the common mind. That to which the common mind returns takes shape as customs. Therefore, just consider whether they comply with appropriateness or not. Why would we need to seek the way apart from human customs? Even if we were to seek the way apart from human customs, that would be to follow the heterodox teachings and not the way of the Sage [Confucius].

Jinsai raised the rhetorical question, “Why would we need to seek the way apart from human customs?” With this understanding of the way, he sought to deconstruct the Song Confucian transcendental way. Jinsai pushed this interpretation of Mencius’ way one step further by writing, “As to the way, it is the common practices of the empire, it expresses the commonality of the people’s hearts. That place to which the common mind reverts is where the way is preserved.”⁵³ Jinsai considered that the goodness of human nature is manifested only in the spectrum of daily life. He rejected the notion that there might be a metaphysical world lying beyond this concrete physical one.⁵⁴ Jinsai’s understanding of human nature was consistent with his

⁵² Nakai Riken, *Rongo hogen*, ch.5, p. 130.

⁵³ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, ch.1, p. 35f.

⁵⁴ Koyasu Toshikuni 子安宣邦 called Itô Jinsai’s intellectual world a sort of “world of human relations.” That was a rather extreme assessment. Refer to Koyasu Toshikuni, *Itô Jinsai: Jinron teki sekkai no shisô* 伊藤仁斎一人倫の世界の思想, (Tokyo 1982), especially ch.1, pp. 27-60.

interpersonal reading of the way.⁵⁵ Again, Nakai and Jinsai's secular point of views revealed that their thought was connected through a common intellectual transmission.

Enlarging our perspective, Nakai's Chinese contemporary Dai Zhen 戴震 (1728-77) also interpreted the way as the common practice of interpersonal daily affairs. For example, Dai Zhen said:⁵⁶

As to the human way, it includes everything that one does in daily life human relations. As to heaven and earth, *qi* 氣 transformation and operations--ceaseless birth and production--constitute the way [of heaven and earth]. As to human activities, all those matters of birth and production that are not done by *qi* transformation, are what are called the [human] way.”

Dai Zhen advocated observing the operation of the way of nature from the perspective of the human way of interpersonal daily affairs, on the view that we should not attempt to establish another metaphysical principle that transcends space and time to constitute the way of nature. Dai Zhen's approach was compatible with that of Jinsai and Nakai. In this, they reflected the intellectual trend in seventeenth and eighteenth century Sino-Japanese Confucianism.

Methodologically, practitioners of this trend followed a monistic path and rejected Zhu Xi's *li-qi* dualism. On *Mencius* 3B2, Zhu Xi wrote: “Now order, now disorder, *qi* transformation ebbs and wanes, that human affairs succeed and fail, revolving in succession is a pattern set by *li*.”⁵⁷ This sentiment incurred Nakai's sharp criticism:⁵⁸

The *Collected Commentaries*' use of *qi* transformation and human affairs to interpret order and disorder is inadequate. And, it's taking revolving in succession as a pattern set by *li* is unsubstantiated. This sort of explanation implies that *qi* transformation involves human affairs and that human affairs involve *qi* transformation. This relationship cannot be ascertained clearly and thus makes readers confused and distressed. What are interpretations for? All of the changes in nature are of *qi* transformation. Only Yu's 禹 channeling the waters was not a matter of *qi* transformation. It could be said that the rivers had gotten clogged and the problem had accumulated over the years. Nobody understood the cause of the problem, thus nobody was able to correct it; this was an obstruction in human affairs. Only Yu understood the reason, and acted to correct the problem; this was what a man can do. This was not a matter of the con-

⁵⁵ Chun-chieh Huang, “Itô Jinsai's Interpretation of the *Mencius*”, p. 155.

⁵⁶ Dai Zhen, *Mengzi ziyishuzheng*, in *Dai Zhen quanshu* (Beijing: Qinghua University Press, 1991), vol.1, sec.3, *Dao*, p. 194.

⁵⁷ Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 271.

⁵⁸ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 184.

stant principle of revolving cycles. It was a change of one time; it did not express a definite cycle of growth and decline; cycles of growth and decline are caused by human affairs.

In criticizing Zhu Xi's interactive *li-qi* dualism, Nakai advocated that *li* should be understood to be within affairs (although he did not put it this way); hence, he argued that one cannot seek the Way apart from human affairs.

Nakai's methodological approach was quite similar to that of Itô Jinsai. As Yang Rubin 楊儒賓 has pointed out, Itô Jinsai interpreted the meaning of the way from the angle of ethics, society and moral consciousness, then used linguistic and philological methods to analyze the mistakes in Zhu Xi's "It is so, therefore it must be so" line of thinking.⁵⁹ He also indicated that Zhu's readings of the Confucian canon were inconsistent with their contents, and that his arrangement of the position of classics was wrong. Jinsai's method of characterizing Zhu's *li-qi* dualism was the monistic descriptive approach. For example, Jinsai said, "It could be said that between heaven and earth there is just one *yuan-qi*, which produces the interaction of one yin and one yang. This is just a matter of the cycles of filling and emptying, declining and growing, departing and coming, sensing and responding, etc. Never ceasing, these processes comprise the whole body of the way of nature."⁶⁰ He also said, "It is not the case that first there was *li*, then *qi* was produced. On the contrary, what is called *li* is just the ordering that appears in *qi*."⁶¹ Jinsai thus replaced dualism with monism as consistent with the Chinese classics. His approach to the Song Confucian dichotomy between the pattern of nature and human desires was to dismiss it.

This sort of monistic descriptive method also appeared in the thought of eighteenth century Chinese thinker Dai Zhen, who said, "The interaction between one yin and one yang flows without cease. It is called the way."⁶² And, "In the *Six Classics* and the books of Confucius and Mencius, one does

⁵⁹ See Rubin Yang 楊儒賓, "Renlun yu tianli: Itô Jinsai yu Zhuzi di qiudao licheng 人倫與天理—伊藤仁齋與朱子的求道歷程" in Huang Chun-chieh, ed., *Rujia Sixiang zai xiandai Dongya: Riben pian* 儒家思想在現代東亞：日本篇 (Taipei: Academica Sinica, 1999), pp. 87-134, esp.123.

⁶⁰ Itô Jinsai, *Go-Mô Jigi* 語孟字義, in Inoue Tetsujiro 井上哲次郎 & Kanie Yoshimaru 蟹江義丸 eds., *Nihon Rinli Kaihen* 日本倫理彙編 (Tokyo: Ikuseikai, 1901-1903), Vol.5: B, p. 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶² Dai Zhen, *op. cit.*, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng*, sec.2, "Tian dao," p. 173.

not hear of the distinction between *li* and *qi*. But, as later Confucians discussed it creatively, and yin and yang became classified as within embodied forms, they deviated from the original meanings of the terms.”⁶³ This sort of descriptive monism was the intellectual method of eighteenth-century Japanese and Chinese Confucians to criticize the Song Confucians and cast off their idea of transcendental *li*.

5. Nakai's position in Mencius studies in intellectual history

We can now consider Nakai's position in Mencius studies in intellectual history. (5:1) Nakai's interpretation of Mencius' theory of mind and human nature—which involved the extension of one's inborn good nature in order to release the pearl—leaned toward Mencius' notion of cultivating sageliness within. Throughout *Môshi hogen*, Nakai elaborated on Mencius' teaching that benevolence and appropriateness lie within, thus that the nature was to be manifested outwardly through the mind. In this way, Nakai undermined all of the subtle interpretations. He thus said that Mencius' “extension and cultivation is directed outwardly, while for the Cheng-Zhu school, extension and cultivation is directed inwardly.”⁶⁴ This criticism was quite clear in intent. (5:2) Nakai interpreted Mencius' way as human way, completely shaking its connection with a way of nature: (a) Nakai's original purpose was to criticize Zhu's construction of a transcendental *li*. (b) But, at the same time, he lost sight of the transcendental dimension in Mencius' use of the term “way”, so he missed much of the breadth, depth, loftiness and perspicacity of Mencius' position.

(5:1a) In section 4, we indicated the textual support for Nakai's interpretation of Mencius' way as human way. Now we will examine how Nakai reconstructed the way as interpersonal relations in order to deconstruct Zhu's transcendental way.

As noted, Nakai inherited the scholarship of seventeenth century classicist Itô Jinsai, for instance, Jinsai's advocacy that the “way resides in social customs” and emphasis on the “way of human relations in daily life.” Nakai further stressed viewing “the message of the Way in the context of concrete daily life,” contending that interpretations that went beyond this were “con-

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, p. 139.

cocted and required forced unnatural thought.”⁶⁵ But, because Zhu Xi had interpreted the *Mencius* in light of the *Great Learning*, and had adopted the methodology of “investigating things to attain knowledge” in interpreting Mencius and the *Four Books*, Nakai was compelled to reinterpret the meaning of “investigating things to attain knowledge” so as to enter into Zhu Xi’s world of thought. Let us see how Nakai revised the definition of “investigate things” and “attain knowledge” in the *Great Learning*.⁶⁶

“Attain knowledge” means to seek to have perspicacious wisdom so that it arrives as my own possession. As for the original spring of wisdom, it definitely lies within “me”. But, if my wisdom is not perspicacious, that means perspicacious wisdom was not my original possession. So, if my wisdom is to be perspicacious, it must have arrived from outside. Therefore, the text reads: “‘To attain’ means to ‘arrive’. Hence, the term “attain” finally has the meaning of “drawing in”. “To investigate things” means personally to walk the land, dealing with the matters, grappling with one’s toils. For example, if one intends to know the principle of sowing and harvesting, one must first undertake the work of cultivation. If one intends to learn the principle of music, one must first blow the flute or ring the bell and dance the steps back and forth. Now, if you tire out your brain, staying indoors to read books on rhythm and harmony, dreaming of the harmony of the golden and stone bells and of playing in the royal ceremonies, in the end you will never be able to do it. Learning to calculate the broker’s tallies, learning to write with brush and ink, are all cases in point. Therefore, if one intends to be filial, fraternal and trustworthy, shouldn’t one personally practice these virtues? This is the way to conduct knowing and practice together. As for learning in medication is nothing but wasting one’s intelligence to no end.

Nakai’s interpretation as described above, universal *li* (principle) can be seen in only “specific” affairs and things. Nakai, in effect, denied the ruling role of Zhu Xi’s *li* by advocating that Mencius’ term “nature” referred just to “human nature” and did not extend to the nature of things.⁶⁷ He also advocated that Mencius’ use of the term ‘nature’ did not involve any sort of distinction between an embodied nature and an original nature.⁶⁸ All of these claims amounted to a spirited critique of Zhuzi learning.

(5:1b) Was Nakai’s effort to limit of Mencius’ way to the space-time level of daily interpersonal affairs legitimate? It was probably not altogether

⁶⁵ Nakai Riken, *Daigaku zaggi* 大學雜議 in Seki Giichirô, ed., *Nihon meika shisho chûshaku zenshû*, vol.1, p. 15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, vol.1, pp. 14ff.

⁶⁷ Nakai Riken, *Môshi hogen*, pp. 242-52, and 317-19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 381-452.

legitimate. We can venture to say that Nakai was unable to grasp the various levels and nuances of Mencius' thought.

As I had argued elsewhere, Mencius never distinguished between the "human way" and the "way of nature".⁶⁹ Through the cultivation process of extending one's sensitivity, the person undergoes a self-transcendence and ultimately forms a unity with the cosmos. Man is not just social man, political man, or even biological man; man is the "whole man". Moreover, man has transcendence. Through cultivating oneself by preserving the mind and nurturing the *qi*, a person can, not only practice ethics in order to transform natural life, but also pass from a "limited" to an "unlimited" existence and enter the realm Mencius called the "same stream as Heaven above and Earth below" (7A13). Speaking of human transcendence, the person in Mencius' thought bears a portion of the cosmic. The person in Mencius' thought is a sort of multileveled, multidimensional, multifaceted existent. One lives via a continuity between the natural order and the human cultural order, a continuity between the biological and the psychological levels, a continuity between the limitless cosmic *tianming* 天命 (mandate of heaven) and the limited experiential world. The person in Mencius' thought is not a lonely, isolated being in the universe. At the highest level, man can respond to and interact with the original cosmos. This concept of the person was transmitted from early antiquity with Chinese shamanism as a common denominator. This sort of person with a transcendental element can draw upon the origin of the cosmos (Mencius' way) in undertaking inner self-transformation which sustains the naturalness of human daily life (Mencius' human way). As Mencius pointed out, "*cheng* 誠" (sincerity, authenticity) provides the motive force for such communications between the way of nature and the human way.

When Mencius spoke of the "way", he was expressing a transcendental thought genome that sprang from archaic Chinese culture and received further development with the "On Five Phases 五行篇." As Chapter One of the "On Five Phases" points out: "In the practice of virtue, the five in harmony are called 'virtue', the four in harmony are called 'goodness'. 'Goodness is of the human way; virtue is of the way of nature.'" The "human way" refers to "Benevolence, Appropriateness, Ritual Propriety, and Wisdom", with these four types of virtuous practice one can reach a sphere of harmony. The "way of nature" refers to "Benevolence, Appropriateness, Ritual Propriety, and Wisdom" reaching a sphere of harmony. Chapter Nine reads: "The Sage

⁶⁹ Cf. Huang Chun-chieh, *Mengxue sixiangshi lun*, vol.1 (Taipei: Dongda, 1991), pp. 29-68.

is of the way of nature.” This is indeed compatible with Mencius’ assertion that he who “transforms it on a grand scale is called the Sage”,⁷⁰ both texts display a tendency toward transcendental thinking. While the way for Mencius was inherent in and transformed the human mind-heart and induced the four beginnings, it was also transcendent and transformed the cosmos. From the beginning, the human way and the way of nature had an interactive relationship. In Nakai Riken’s deconstructing the transcendental way (or *li*) of the Song Confucians and interpreting Mencius’ way as the way of society, he, in effect, grasped the minor but lost the major, obscuring the genuine transcendental content of Mencius’ way, and losing the breadth, loftiness and insight of his thought.

As to the religious content of Confucius and Mencius’ thought,⁷¹ Confucius’ assertion that his way was connected by a single thread really was about studying below in order to penetrate above, and bespoke their seeking a sensitivity between the mind of nature and the mind of man. This sort of way as a conduit between nature and man was the direct ancestor to that conception in the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Yijing with Commentary*. In this light, we can maintain that Confucians from the Song down to the present endeavor to continue and remold Confucius’ original learning as their core.⁷² Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism down to contemporary Confucianism continues and remolds Confucius’ original learning as its foundation. Mencius’ way certainly had its origin in Confucius’ learning, which contained a clear sense of the unity between nature and man.⁷³ The strengths of Nakai Riken’s interpretation thus could not make up for its deficiencies.

⁷⁰ *Mencius* 7B:27.

⁷¹ Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑, “On the Religiosity of Confucianism,” (in Chinese) in *Historical Inquiry* Vol.23, no.4, June 1999, pp. 395-410.

⁷² Cf. Liu Shuxian 劉述先, “The ‘Unity of Nature and Man’ as the Implicit Meaning of ‘Way Connecting All Things’ in Confucius’ Thought: A Modern Interpretation” (in Chinese), *Bulletin of the Institute for Chinese Literature and Philosophy of Academia Sinica*, vol.10 (March 1993), pp. 1-24. See also Liu Shuxian 劉述先, “Confucius,” in Donald H. Bishop, ed., *Chinese Thought* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), pp. 14-31, “Liangxing zhi li’ yu ansheng liming,” in *Lixiang yu xianshi de jiuji* (Taipei: Taiwan Student Bookstore, 1993), pp. 211-19.

⁷³ For discussion, see Huang Chun-chieh, *Mencian Hermeneutics: A History of Interpretations in China* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), part 1, ch.2.

6. Conclusion

In the history of East Asian Confucianism, the eighteenth century was the transitional period between tradition and modernity. Cheng Yi 程頤 in the eleventh century and Zhu Xi 朱熹 in the twelfth century worked painstakingly to construct a transcendental world of *li* to indicate a fundamental metaphysical world. This conception encountered a cold heartless assault by later East Asian Confucians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Qing China (1644-1911), Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868) and Choson Korea (1392-1910). Outstanding among these critics were the early seventeenth-century Tokugawa master classicist, Itô Jinsai, the eighteenth-century Qing scholar Dai Zhen, and the eighteenth-century Nakai Riken. The anti-Zhu tide in East Asian Confucianism was called by the scholars themselves the tide of “practical learning”.⁷⁴ Methodologically, this movement represented the rise of a practical, monistic approach to replace the old *li-qi* dialectical thinking. In intellectual content, this movement represented the rise of an interest in society and political economy to replace the old story of ontology and cosmology. The eighteenth-century Confucian world was not content just to criticize Song scholarship and Zhuzi learning. The reasons for this were complicated and cannot be explained from just one angle. But, that the basic motive behind this had something to do with the fact that Zhuzi learning had become “official learning” and inescapably was regarded as the ideology of the ruling authorities. Viewed from this angle, the seventeenth-century Confucianist Itô Jinsai and eighteenth-century Dai Zhen and Nakai Riken were scholars who reflected the position of the common people outside the bastions of power. They were criticizing the Zhuzi learning of officialdom rather than the authentic thought of the twelfth-century philosopher Zhu Xi. They were standing in their respective positions in the Tokugawa feudal order or under the Qing ministers’ monopolization of interpretive authority of *li* in an historical context in which “[the powers that were] used *li* to kill peo-

⁷⁴ Interestingly, lately, in Chinese academic circles, several experts on Ming-Qing intellectual history often exaggerate the scope of the expression “practical learning” 實學, thus giving a distorted sense of that movement that should be rectified. For discussions and reflections on this problem, see Jiang Guanghui 姜廣輝, Zhan Haiyun 詹海雲, Zhang Shouan 張壽安, Liu Junlin 劉君燦 and Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰: “Ming-Qing zhixue yanjiu de xiankuang ji zhanwang zuotanhui jilu, 明清實學研究的現況及展望座談會記錄” *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu tongxun* 中國文哲研究通訊, December 1992) vol.2, no. 4, pp. 9-26.

ple.” In reflecting on this critique of Zhuzi learning, we could say that it had its historical reasons.⁷⁵

The East Asian critics of Zhuzi learning tended to present their thought by reinterpreting the *Four Books* over against Zhu’s interpretations. This fact indicates that interpreting the Confucian Classics was the motive force driving the historical development of East Asian Confucian learning. While the present study was focused on Nakai Riken’s innovative interpretation of Mencius’ learning, in connection with Itô Jinsai’s account of the “way” in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, the contemporary Japanese scholar Ishida Baigen (1685-1744) 石田梅岩 has found that the notion of “*li*” in later Confucian learning bore, not only ethical content, but also practical content relevant for market regulation. Such findings as these serve to illustrate again that the reason that Confucian learning has continued to survive throughout the twists and turns of history is that it continuously created new answers; indeed, that was the reason why Confucians throughout history put forward new interpretations of the ancient books. This ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation produced the most important phenomena of East Asian intellectual history. Viewed from this angle, Confucian classics, such as the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, form the genuine *locus classicus* of all of these interpretations because they have continued to provide authentic values and rich cultural materials worthy of perpetual rethinking.

In this light, the present study focused on Nakai Riken’s interpretation of the *Mencius*. Nakai adopted his “historical approach” in order to walk down a plain and practical path of thought in approaching and interpreting the *Mencius*. In this, he clearly drew upon the intellectual capital bequeathed by Itô Jinsai’s classical school. Nakai’s own historical path made him sensitive

⁷⁵ Regarding the relationship between Tokugawa feudalism and Zhuzi learning in Japan, see Ishida Ichirô 石田一良, “Tokugawa Feudalism and the Thought of the Zhuzi Sect,” (in Japanese), *Tohoku Dagaku Bungakubu Kenkyû Nenpo*, vol.13. no.2, pp. 72-138. Also, Abe Yoshio 阿部吉雄, Gong Nixin 龔霓馨 transl., “Influence of Chinese Confucian Thought on Japan – Distinctive Characteristics of Japanese Confucian learning,” *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly*, November 1979, Vol.8, no.6, pp. 164-77. One can begin to grasp the historical circumstances and reasons for Dai Zhen’s opposing Song Confucianism by reading Dai’s *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng*; Lao Siguang 勞思光 gives an interesting account of the historical background and reasons behind Dai Zhen’s opposition to the Song dichotomy between principle and desire in *Xinbian zhongguo zhexue shi* 新編中國哲學史 (Taipei: Sanmin Books, 1989), vol.3b, p. 876f.

to the scent of Zhu Xi's own "historicity".⁷⁶ So, he pointed out that the interpretative system Zhu had constructed for the classics in the *Collected Commentaries* had serious historical limitations, which became the rationale for his overall critique of Zhu Xi's thought.

In sections three and four, we discuss the important facets of Nakai's thought. Nakai criticized Zhu's idea of using an external *li* in "mastering" and "ordering" the mind and nature. He reconstructed Mencius' theory of mind and nature, taking the good nature as embodied and immanent. And, he emphasized that Mencius' learning of "sageliness within" lies in extending the inner goodness outwardly. This interesting reinterpretation could perhaps be developed into a viable theory of cultivation.

Nakai's effort to return Mencius' way to the "human way" was the basis of his critique of Zhu Xi's transcendent world of *li*. This was a necessary consequence of the monistic, immanent path Nakai took in forming his intellectual system. However, in using the notion of "human way" to interpret Mencius' very complex notion of the way, Nakai could not avoid the fallacy of over-simplification to the extent of casting pearls before swine. Nakai's interpretation of Mencius can be said to include the good and the bad and to bear strengths and weaknesses. In summary, he destroyed the heavenly world of Song Confucian metaphysics in order to reestablish "the way in secular world" as the basis of a better new world here and now.

⁷⁶ Regarding the interpreter's "historicity" and its analysis, see Huang Chun-chieh, *Dongya Ruxueshi de xinshiye* (Taipei: Taiwan University Press, 2004), pp. 39-72.