

## Research based on the Spread of Confucianism in Ancient Japan

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**Abstract:** China's Confucian culture has a long history, which has not only influenced the development process of the entire Chinese history, but also spread to East Asian countries, forming an East Asian Confucian cultural circle. In Japan, Confucianism has been widely studied and applied, and has been integrated into the native Japanese culture, and also became part of the Japanese national culture. Studying the spread of Confucianism in ancient Japan is helpful to understand the role of Confucianism in the formation of Japanese national character. At the same time, it can also learn from Japan's choice and transformation of Confucianism and think about how to adapt the traditional Confucianism to the development of modern Chinese society. This topic starts with the spread and development of Confucianism in Japan from the Yamato period to the Heian period, the Kamakura and Muromachi period, and the Edo period. Through multiple perspectives, it also studies the development and changes of Confucianism in the Japanese society.

Since the introduction of Confucianism into Japan, it was first respected by the noble class. Later, the nobles class applied Confucian culture to the laws, systems, and poetry of Japanese society, gradually infiltrating Confucian culture into all classes, and gradually evolved into Confucianism with Japanese characteristics. The dissemination of Confucianism in ancient Japan had a profound impact on its historical development, and has formed a unique Yamato nation that combines Han Confucianism and Japanese culture.

### 1. From the Beginning of the Yamato Period to the End of the Heian Period, Is the Introduction of Confucianism into Japan and Its Influence on Early Japanese Society

(1) The time when Confucianism was introduced to Japan, according to the first Japanese official history "Nihon Shoki" [1] written in 720, in the 15th year of Emperor Yingshen, King Baekje of North Korea sent a man who was proficient in Sinology classics named Azhiqi to Japan. Zhiqi became the prince's sinology teacher at the time. Later, A Zhiqi recommended Wang Ren. The following year Wang Ren came to Japan at the invitation of the emperor and brought 10 volumes of "The Analects" and one volume of "Thousand Characters" to teach the prince about the Confucian classics, which is the beginning of the spread of Confucianism in Japan. Due to the unknown historical data, the 16th year of Emperor Yingshen is generally considered to be 285 AD, and some scholars believe that the 16th year of Emperor Yingshen is 405 AD according to the records of North Korea's "Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms Baekje" [2]. The conclusion is that the introduction of Confucianism was in the Yamato period of Japan.

(2) The inevitability of Japan's acceptance of Confucianism. First of all, is from the perspective of social conditions, in the era of Emperor Yingshen, Japanese society was in slavery as farming society. At that time, there were no written words in Japan. People used the method of carving wood and knots to record things, and the development of social productivity was low. At that time, China was in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, and wars continued. But many Chinese and Koreans poured into Japan, bringing advanced production technology and culture, and accelerating the development of Japanese productivity. Therefore, the Japan was bound to be a belt for the obviously advanced Chinese Confucian culture. Those who are curious, and because of the introduction of Confucian culture, Japan gradually has its own writing. Secondly, from the perspective of ideological conditions, the Japanese society at that time was a society dominated by religious culture, and

people were still in the ignorance of being keen on "sacred things." There was no systematic theoretical theory, and the introduction of Confucianism just filled it up. Although the gap in the field of thought has opened up the era of Japanese civilization. Thirdly, from the perspective of foreign environments, China has produced relatively mature Confucianism from the end of the slave society, which has gradually developed and perfected afterwards, helping the rulers of later generations to establish a powerful and unified feudal country. While the strong character of the Japanese drives them to learn more making the advanced cultural ideas to prosper Japan.

(3) The Socio-political and economic reforms guided by Confucianism. Before the introduction of Confucianism to Japan, the Japan experienced two major social reforms. One was the "Ancient Reform" promoted by Prince Shotoku in the early seventh century AD, and the other was the "Dahua Reform" promoted by Emperor Kotoku in the middle of the seventh century.

The reform of the ancient dynasty was faced with the failure to conquer the North Korea. At the same time, there was the double pressure of the Suga dictatorship. Prince Shotoku implemented a series of reform measures to consolidate the centralization of power, including the establishment of the "twelve ranks" and the promulgation of "Seventeen Articles of the Constitution". Among them, the "twelve-level crown" is based on the "five constants" of Confucianism, and the crown is divided into "big virtue, small virtue, big benevolence, small benevolence, big gift, small gift, big letter, small letter, big wisdom, and small wisdom" , as well as the twelve-order" [3]. What it represents is the Confucian "benevolence, justice, etiquette, wisdom, faith". The "17 Articles of the Constitution" absorbed Buddhism and other doctrines, but also adopted a large number of Confucian doctrines. Among them, "harmony is precious", "harmony between up and down", "no loyal son, no benevolent people", etc. are all from China, the Confucian classics. It also reflects on the vigorous promotion and adoption of Confucianism in the reform of the ancient dynasty.

The Dahua reform was realized on the basis of Prince Shotoku's vigorous promotion of Confucianism and the dispatch of overseas students and scholarly monks to China for study. Under the scholarly monks and students returning from studying abroad, on June 19, 645, the Japanese imitated the Chinese dating name "Dahua". According to the political system of the Tang Dynasty, Japan carried out a series of reforms under the guidance of Confucianism, learning to imitate The establishment of political laws and regulations in the Tang Dynasty which weakened the power of aristocratic clans and established a highly centralized rule, which is in line with the orthodox political theory of Confucianism [4].

(4) The spread system of early Confucianism. When Confucianism was first introduced to the Japanese, it was mainly popular among the nobles. Doctors of the Five Classics taught Confucian classics to the princes and children of the nobles in the imperial institutions established by the court. With the return of a large number of students and scholarly monks from the Tang Dynasty, in the Nara period, which is the heyday of the Tang Dynasty in China, as the Japanese established an educational system modeled on the Tang Dynasty. Establish "Guoxue" to teach the local upper class Confucian classics. But Since then, Confucianism has been widely spread, and the "Tang Feng Culture" has become the trend of time, laying a solid foundation for the further spread and development of Confucianism in Japan.

## **2. During the Kamakura and Muromachi Eras, The Penetration and Influence of Confucianism as a Zen Vassal on Japanese Society**

(1) In the Kamakura period. Starting from the Kamakura period, while the Japanese entered a period of shogunate politics dominated by the samurai regime, and the emperor's status was nominal. During this period, the Kamakura Shogunate continued to have business and study exchanges with China, more frequently than during the Heian period. At that time, China was in the Song and Yuan dynasties, and Neo-Confucianism and Zen studies based on Er Cheng and Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism prevailed. At that time, the Japanese monks who stayed in the Song Dynasty brought back a large number of Sinology documents from China such as the Four Books and Zhu Zixue's classics. At the same time, they introduced new Buddhism from the Song Dynasty and established the various new sects. During this period, the Buddhism and Zen were prevalent, and

the Confucianism as a vassal of Buddhism and Zen was also widely spread. The Lanxi and others also proclaimed that "Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism are the same.

(2) The period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. In the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Emperor Hou Daigo of the Southern Dynasties praised the Zhuzi of Confucianism, attempting to use Zhu Zixue's three guides and five permanent principles to regain the royal power controlled by the shogunate; while Ashikaga in the Northern Dynasties adopted a large number of Confucianism in his policy program "Jianwu Shime". It can be seen that Confucianism has penetrated into the palace and has become an ideological weapon for the ruling class to consolidate its rule. During this period, the famous "five mountain monks" appeared, the Zen monks such as Qiyang Fangxiu opened a table to explain the Confucianism which has centered into the four books. At the same time, they adopted the Japanese method of reading, so that those who do not understand Sinology can also read and accelerate the Song Dynasty, as well as the popularity of Confucianism in Japan. The spread of Confucianism by the "Five Mountain Monks" also affected the doctoral officials in the Northern Dynasty, because they opened up the atmosphere of studying Confucianism in the imperial court, which was called the "Doctor Gongqing School". They also took both the ancient and new annotations into consideration and promoted the transition between old and new Confucianism.

(3) In the Muromachi era. The Muromachi period took place after the reunification of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, the samurai culture was further developed. But in order to increase the effectiveness combat of the samurai and strengthen the control of the samurai, the shogunate required the samurai in other to strengthen the training and learning process, and at the same time required the samurai to abide by certain moral codes, such as in accordance with the "righteous principle" of Zhu Zixue. , "Loyalty Festival" and "Wuyong" to promote the idea of loyalty to the emperor, even at the expense of life. Since most of the warriors were farmers and belonged to the bottom of society, the use of Confucianism is to train the warriors made by the Confucianism in other to gradually spread to the people from the upper class. During this period, Gui'an Xuanshu further improved the method of harmony training, laying the foundation for the further spread of Confucianism, and later founded the "Sanan School".

(4) The development of Confucianism from Kamakura to Muromachi. During the period from Kamakura to Muromachi, the concepts of Buddhism and Zen were more conducive to the rulers in other to suppress the desires and resistance of the people at the bottom as well maintain the authority of the royal family, which made the Buddhism and Zen culture more popular and adopted by the ruling class. Neo-Confucianism was adopted as Buddhism. The appendages of the two cultures of Zen Buddhism are also taking root, and gradually developed into a culture that is familiar to the Japanese society from the top to the bottom, from the noble officials to the general public. In the late Muromachi period, Confucianism spread more rapidly, especially the Neo-Confucianism of the Song Dynasty, Zhuzi Confucianism, which became the basic idea of feudal rule, laying the foundation for Confucianism to reach its heyday in the Edo period.

### **3. The Rise and Fall of Confucianism during the Edo Period**

In 1603 AD, Tokugawa Ieyasu established the shogunate regime centered on Edo and established the shogunate system. In order to maintain the rule, the Tokugawa shogunate took the Zhuzixue as the official school and widely promoted Confucian education, which made the Confucianism spread for hundreds of years. After that, he finally got rid of Zen and Buddhism and embarked on the road of independent development.

(1) The prosperity of Zhu Zixue in the first period.

Zhu Zixue Confucianism has been introduced to the Japanese since the Kamakura period, but the ruling class pursued as the Buddhism-led culture, which made the Zhu Zixue and other Confucianism a cultural appendage for a long time. By the Tokugawa shogunate, the Tsunami ethics was promoted in line with the feudal social class at that time. But the division is also in line with the fundamental interests of the shogunate's rule. Tokugawa Ieyasu vigorously advocated the Confucianism and listed Zhu Zixue as an official school. At a time, the Confucianism was able to

flourished, and the main representatives of this period are Fujiwara Hirawo and Lin Luoshan.

Fujiwara Hinwo was originally a monk, and later abandoned Buddhism and Confucianism after he came into contact with Confucianism. Fujiwara Xingwo advocated the new Confucianism of the Song Dynasty and also understood the old Confucianism of the Han and Tang Dynasties. He agreed with Zhu Zi's "liu ontology" and admitted that Li is a metaphysical before natural and social phenomena. At the same time, he also accepted Lu Wang's theory of the mind. Regarding the relationship between Confucianism and Japanese Shintoism, while he proposed the integration of Confucianism and Shintoism, thus opening up a unique development path for Confucianism in Japan and developing a Confucianism culture unique to Japan.

Lin Luoshan is a disciple of Fujiwara Hinwo. He inherited Zhu Zi's theory of "li" and "qi" which constitute everything. He attaches importance to the Shinto in Japan, which is so committed to the integration of Shinto and Confucian culture, and rationalizes the original Shinto culture, which not only preserves the inherent culture, but also gives Confucianism more room for development. In the teaching of Fujiwara Hirowo On the basis of this, the Japaneseization of Confucianism was further developed. Lin Luoshan's Confucianism affirmed the concept of hierarchical solidification in feudal society, maintained the rationality of feudal rule, and was reused by the Tokugawa shogunate. He was served as the four generals of the Tokugawa shogunate, and he successfully pushed Zhu Zixue to the status of official school [5].

### (2) The Yangming School in the second period

Yangming school was introduced to Japan in the Muromachi period, and Nakae Fujiki revived it during the Edo period and became the founder of the Japanese Yangming school. He agrees with the theory that "heart" is the origin of all things in Yangming's studies. At the same time, based on Yangming's theory, he advocates the practice and believes that it should be adapted according to time and position. While his main achievement is the development of the concept of "utmost filial piety" in Yangming School. He put forward the "full filial piety" in "Weng Q&A", taking "filial piety" as the body and the root of all things in the world. Fujiki's theory of "utmost filial piety" which is a transformation of Chinese Confucian filial piety culture on the basis of fusion with Japanese culture, integrating "filial piety" with Shintoism, giving "filial piety" religiousness, and establishing a metaphysical parent-child relationship between man and the universe, It is also considered that filial piety to parents is "little filial piety" and filial piety to heaven and earth is "great filial piety"[6]. Fujiki's reinterpretation of Yangming's theory of "filial piety" is that, the Japanese Confucianists have explored ways of fusion and coexistence in foreign and local cultures, which promoted the development of localization of Confucianism [7].

### (3) The ancient school in the third period

At the end of 17th century, a trend of thought that advocated returning to the ancient world and exploring the original meaning of Confucianism, the ancestor of Confucianism, appeared. This is the ancient school. The Ancient School is a school that is opposed to Zhu Zixue, it believes that Confucianism after Confucius has violated the Confucius' original intention and strives to find the true meaning of Confucianism in ancient Confucian classics. The ancient school of thought accords with the psychological characteristics of Japanese culture and the Japanese nation. Its representative figures are Ito Nenzai and Sheng Su Lai [8]. Ito Nenzai opposed Zhu Zixue's theory of "the harmony between man and nature" and emphasized on the relationship between people and the implementation of morals. Sheng Chu Lai criticized the idea of Confucianism "Taoist" coexisting with heaven and earth in Song Dynasty, and believed that the human society and nature have different laws, the period of the ancient school in the period of Shengshengzulai reached the peak of the development of Confucianism in Japan. The prevalence of the ancient school is a reflection of Japanese society's emphasis on human nature, human desires, and human relations. It is also a combination of Confucianism and Japanese people's sentiments, and an important manifestation of the localization of Confucianism in Japan [9].

#### 4. The Important Role of Confucianism in Ancient Japanese History

Since the introduction of Confucianism into Japan, it was first spread in the upper class, and then promoted the Confucianism education in the Tokugawa Shogunate to set up an academic institute, which allowed Confucian culture to penetrate into all classes of Japanese society, because the introduction of Confucianism promoted the development of Japan in the following areas:

**Moral thinking.** The root of Confucianism lies in its moral restraint. From Prince Shotoku's formulation of the Seventeen Articles of the Constitution to restrain courtiers and ministers with Confucian ideology and morality, to the formation of a Bushido spirit based on Confucian morality during the Edo period, it embodies the Confucian "benevolence and justice, the concept of "lizhixin" gradually became commoner from the upper class, and finally formed the unique moral character of Japan [10].

**Education.** In the early days of Japanese society, the Confucian education only existed among the aristocrats of hectares. In the Edo period, the Tokugawa shogunate vigorously promoted the Confucian education, that opened a wide range of academic institutes and schools, and popularized Confucianism among the people. This moves the education level of the whole people, and has promoted the improvement of overall national quality.

**Shogunate rule.** The promotion of Confucianism, especially the Zhu Zixue, has maintained the rule of the shogunate for a certain period of time, but also accelerated the demise of the shogunate in the later period.

Since the introduction of Confucianism into Japan and the formation of Japanese Confucianism, the Japanese has never completely copied the Chinese culture, but has merged and digested its local culture with that of Chinese Confucianism, and transformed the Confucianism culture with the Japanese characteristics, and has localized the Japanese Confucianism to conform to Japan's national conditions and has also played many roles in favor of social development in different historical periods.

Confucianism originated in China, and it has also formed a culture with Chinese characteristics based on Confucian culture. In the new historical period, more people pursue the western culture while forgetting the essence of the nation-Confucian culture. There is still a lot of room for Confucianism in modern society. But we need to take its essence and discard its dross. Combining modern elements with Confucianism that will surely be able to condense the soul of the Chinese nation and promote the development of modernization in our country.

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