

Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2021 Semester
The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (6)
Title: Modern History of Japanese Culture and East Asia: from the
“Kunyomi” of Chinese Books to Confucian Ritual and Etiquette

For the 6th Eurasia Foundation International Lecture in 2021 at the Chinese Culture University, we invited Professor Shih-Min Tien from the Department of Japanese Language and Literature at National Taiwan University to deliver a speech entitled “Modern History of Japanese Culture and East Asia: from the “Kunyomi” of Chinese Books to Confucian Ritual and Etiquette.” In his speech, he described the development of Confucianism and Confucian Ritual and etiquette in modern Japan from the perspective of the spreading and interaction of East Asian culture, the opposition and reconciliation of ideological culture in the process, and the role of *Wakun* [倭訓, Japanese reading of a Chinese character] in ideological practice. His speech led the teachers and students to understand the development, opposition, and reconciliation in the process of the internalization of foreign cultures in modern Japan.

The development, absorption and opposition of Confucianism and Confucian etiquette in modern Japan

Professor Tian first took the example of “the importance of harmony (以和為貴)” which was quoted from “The Analects of Confucius (論語)” and appeared in Prince Shotoku’s “17-Article Constitution” and illustrate that “harmony” is an important concept in Japanese life. Intellectuals in the Edo period understood the ideology and culture of China and the Korean Peninsula through channels such as Chinese classics published since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. From the famous Confucian Hayashi Razan (林羅山)’s “*Dō shun ten* (道春點)” and Yamazaki Ansai’s “*Katen* (嘉點),” these marking works can observe how Japanese Confucians interpreted the original Chinese texts. At that time, Confucian scholars absorbed thoughts in Ming Dynasty from different standpoints: Lin Luoshan and other Confucians were active absorbers, while Kimon school led by Yamazaki Anzhai rejected the complicated annotations of Ming Confucians and advocated reading Chu Hsi’s work directly to understand *Shushi-Gaku* (朱子學).

Although most Confucian scholars, such as scholars from Osaka *Kaitokudo* (a “*gakumonsho*” (學問所) in the Edo period), did not reject Ming Confucianism, though they chose to reject some school but support others.

Observing Japan’s Acceptance of the Culture of Ming Dynasty from Observing Funeral Rituals: The Confrontation and Reconciliation between Confucianism and Buddhism

From the tomb system of the Edo period, Professor Tian continued to introduce the Confrontation and reconciliation of Confucianism when it was introduced to Japan. The basic position of modern Japanese Confucian intellectuals was to fight against Buddhism and implement Confucian funeral rituals. To fight against the Buddhism under “the *danka* system (檀家制度, *danka seido*)” in the Edo period, Confucians expected to conduct funeral rituals in a Confucian way, adopting the etiquette culture of the Ming Dynasty, such as using Chu Hsi’s “*wên kung chia li* (文公家禮)” as a model to popularize it.

Professor Tian pointed out that the Daimyo (大名) of various places in Japan in modern times: For example, those Daimyo who had more than three *bukekani* (武家官位, meaning the court ranks of these samurai families), such as Tokugawa clan in Mito Domain, the Ikeda clan in Tottori Domain, etc., began to build large tombs and *Kuei Fu* (龜趺) monuments. We can observed that *Kuei Fu* , originating from the Tang Dynasty in China, is in the remains of Japanese tombstones. Professor Tian also shared the photos of Tokugawa Mitsukuni tombs and Chu Shunshui’s tombs that he personally investigated in depth to confirm the form of *Kuei Fu* and tombstones. However, despite that most of the Confucianists in the early modern period held a strong sense of confrontation against Buddhism, Buddhist funeral rituals were widely accepted among Japanese people after the 17th-18th centuries and accordingly Confucians also began to change their opinions. For example, Miyake Sekian (三宅石庵) adopted a eclectic method to maintain a relationship with Buddhism and practice Confucian funeral rites.

The “Kunyomi” of Chinese texts and *Wakun*: Internalization of Foreign Culture

The “Kunyomi” of Chinese texts was originally used for reading Chinese translation of Buddhist texts, but later it devolved into a style of writing and advocated the equivalent status with Chinese writing. Professor Tian quoted from Professor Nakamura Shunsaku Harusaku’s statement that the Confucianism in modern Ryukyu was mainly developed from accepting the naturalized Chinese. However, after the Satsuma Confucian Jyochiku Tomari (泊如竹) came to Ryukyu, the Japanese Confucianism based on *Wakun* became the mainstream. In addition, Yamazaki Anzhai integrated *Shushi-Gaku* and *Shinto* through *Wakun*. In the book of *Shinsosai* (神葬祭, The funeral ceremony in Shinto) ritual, when they want to use Shinto ritual instead of Buddhism ritual in funeral ceremony, they use *Wakun*, instead of Chinese terms, to pursue uniqueness.

In the end, Professor Tian concluded that modern Japan has learned Confucianism and other knowledge through the Chinese classics transmitted by sea route, and established their own thoughts on this basis. Most intellectuals adopted accommodation, absorption and reconciliation, and focused on how to balance with the Buddhist forces and achieve the implementation of Confucian funeral rituals. The *Wakun* was a method for modern Japan to transform foreign culture into its own system and internalize practice. How each country transcends opposition and pursues reconciliation in the process of receiving foreign cultures is worth to pay close attention for scholars engaged in Japanese studies and East Asian studies.

(Web link: <https://eurasia.pccu.edu.tw/index.php>)

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