

Introduction

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The purpose of this book is to open up a new field and a new way of viewing East Asian societies and histories. The old stereotype construes Asian women as victims of tradition, or Confucian patriarchy. Our premise is that to correct this simplistic picture we need to recognize that neither “woman” nor “Confucian tradition” is a uniform or timeless category. To restore both female subjectivity and historical complexity, the authors of each chapter begin by examining Asian categories and terms of analysis. They then analyze the complex constellations of constraint and opportunity shaping the lives of men and women in China, Korea, and Japan from the seventh to the nineteenth century.

At the heart of this book are women in these premodern societies, illuminated by the cultures that made them and the worlds they made. We strive, with various degrees of success, to understand the concrete processes of female subject formation and to recover textures of female everyday lives in specific historical locations. Neither rebels nor victims, these women appear as agents of negotiations who embraced certain aspects of official norms while resisting others. In other words, our goal is to situate women at center stage and then cast a spotlight on the complex constellations and trajectories of their subjectivities.

THE CENTRALITY OF GENDER

Many of these women are known by their kinship roles instead of their personal names: marriage partner, mother, daughter, widow. Others are marked by their formal and informal power: female sovereigns in early Japan, seductive musicians in China, queens and princesses of Korea, authors, teachers. Still others are fictional tropes and ideal types, flesh and blood transformed into moral exemplars: the chaste widow, the filial child, the faithful wife. Many are commoner daughters, but it is hardly surprising that those whose lives were preserved in the archives with struc-

ture and texture are women from elite families. In avoiding blanket statements about an abstract womanhood, we have taken the caution to heart that women are as divided by class, age, and geography as they are united by shared gender. Yet it is undeniable that what we term here “the Confucian discourse” envisioned a universal and undifferentiated womanhood, defined as the mutually constitutive Other of manhood.

To illuminate both the multiple locations of women and the singularity of womanhood, the contributors to this volume have adopted an array of strategies for analyzing gender. As recent scholars have used “gender” in a confusing variety of ways, we wish to clarify the terms and approaches of our inquiries. First, in focusing on gender, our goal is to return women to the center of historical analysis. In this sense “gender” implies a focus on “women.” Because of a long history of neglect, we have yet to command a full picture of even the rudimentary facts about women’s locations in history and society. How prevalent were uxorial marriages in early Japan? What books did daughters in Chosŏn Korea read? How did the cult of chastity in China change the expectations and behavior of widows?

In correcting this situation by focusing on women, we do not intend to suggest that the contours of their lives can be understood in isolation. Indeed, the second and most prevalent meaning of “gender” used in this book is “male-female relations,” on individual and institutional levels. In asking questions about the contexts of women’s lives, we see gendered relations as relations of power that were made in processes of negotiation. In this regard, we have found the state—staffed by pragmatic officials intending to centralize power and by idealistic scholars bent on civilizing society—an unusually active agent shaping terms of gender interactions. In propagating laws as well as canonical and didactic texts, the state was instrumental in naming the category “woman” and defining norms of womanhood. In emphasizing this fact, we walk a fine line between highlighting the hegemonic power of structures and emphasizing women’s agency. We hope that in our formulation of gender as a product of negotiation, we manage to avoid exaggerating oppression or romanticizing resistance.

To avoid simplification, we find it important to highlight not only the contexts but also the texts of women’s lives. In this connection we evoke a third aspect of gender important to some of our authors, that of “female subjectivities.” In using the term “subjectivity” we seek to shift analytic focus from external structures to interior motives, identity formation, and perceptions of the world, always a vexing terrain for historians.¹ We face an additional difficulty in that we need other terms than those provided by the modern Euro-American understanding of the gendered self—the dualities of self-other, discipline-freedom, mind-body, and sexual pleasure-procreation, to name a few—in discussing premodern East Asia.² We do not have the space to treat this problem in full in this volume. Suffice it to say that it is productive to begin investigation into female subjectivities by locating the female body in space and in practice—in short, by focusing on woman’s embodied self and the social processes of embodiment.

Whatever the specific usage of “gender,” we hope that the chapters in this volume will open our readers’ eyes to the marginality of women in the historical and textual traditions in premodern China, Korea, and Japan. This very marginality renders it difficult yet vital to conduct gender-focused analysis.

THE PROBLEM OF CONFUCIANISM

A major obstacle to our project of making women visible is the real and alleged power of “Confucianism” to subjugate women, resulting in their erasure from official discourses and records. And yet, however we define it, Confucianism was by no means the only ideological and cultural force that shaped the lives of East Asian women and men. This is obviously true for Korea and Japan, where imported Chinese institutions and texts were superimposed on native social structures. Even in China, the Confucian discourse had to compete with other philosophical and ethical systems with equally universalist claims, often subsumed under the rubrics “Buddhism” and “Daoism.”

On the most basic level, what “Confucianism” means is simple: premodern Korean and Japanese scholars viewed it as a cluster of ethical ideals articulated in the Chinese classics as well as the texts themselves. The composition of the classical canon, however, was subject to debate in and out of China. Interpretations of and commentaries on the classics, too, changed through time, as did political and cultural institutions modeled on them. To highlight its dynamic and word-based nature, we often use the term “Confucian discourse.” Because our primary goal is not to define the boundaries of Confucianism but to highlight its relevance for gender, we are not concerned with issues of orthodoxy except in passing. Recognizing that the meaning of being Confucian shifts with time, locale, and vantage point, our working assumption is that there is not one but many Confucianisms. All made an indelible impact on women’s lives.

Although Confucianism is such an amorphous and ahistorical concept, we opt to adopt it with caution rather than discard it. A major reason is that the term still exercises enormous rhetorical power on scholarly and popular minds. There is a long history of using “Confucianism” as a shorthand for something less amenable to a simplistic narrative: Chinese civilization, secret of Asian economic success, or obstacle to modernization.³ The historian Lionel Jensen has shown that the Latinized label “Confucianism” and probably even the name “Confucius” itself had no commonly recognized Chinese counterparts. They were manufactured by Jesuit missionaries in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China, hence imparting coherence to highly complex native systems of thoughts and practice.⁴ The Jesuits’ positive assessments of Chinese culture notwithstanding, the making of Confucianism into a symbol and Confucius into an icon distorts by simplification. For recent examples of similar distortions one only has to look to the scholarly and journalistic treatises expounding the contributions of Confucianism to the Asian economic miracle in the early 1990s. We were spared only when the bubble burst.⁵

Even more powerful than the Jesuits' vision of sagely philosopher kings is the modern nationalistic image of Confucianism as ossified tradition. The rise of nationalism created an evil twin to the earlier benign image, both equally totalizing. The multiplicities and contradictions within the Confucian tradition were elided; Confucianism became a stand-in for whatever undesirable baggage seemed to impede progress, be it authoritarianism or feudalism.⁶ That Confucianism had to be vilified in modern East Asia is in part because the modern nation is an artificial community that is extremely difficult to conceive. In twentieth-century Korea, Japan, and China, this arduous process and its attendant state-building enterprise were facilitated by the identification of two enemies: tradition and colonialism. From this perspective, the "failure" of Confucianism was in fact highly productive. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that without Confucianism there would be no modern national subject.

To Euro-American and Asian critics alike, the failure of Confucianism was manifested most blatantly in its oppression of women. Confucianism became synonymous with patriarchy, and "victim" became the universal name for East Asian women. In investigating the complicated relationships between Confucianism and women before the nineteenth century, we are performing a delicate balancing act. We find the singular term "Confucianism" simplistic but recognize its rhetorical power to shape perceptions and realities. We object to the nationalist formulation of woman-as-victim, for it denies historical women their agency and precludes explorations of their subjectivities. But we do not overlook the hierarchical structures in political, familial, and textual realms that perpetuated male dominance. We have to first deconstruct before constructing an alternative vision, yet our deconstructive and constructive goals are sometimes at loggerheads. For heuristic purposes, we continue to use the term "Confucianism" even as we acknowledge its limitations and artificiality. The authors of each chapter strive to specify the historical, cultural, and linguistic parameters of the term as they use it.

In sum, returning women to the center stage of history transforms not only our image of the victimized women but also our portraits of Confucian pasts. For this reason, we employ *Woman and Confucianism* as our twin analytic foci, a coupling reflected in the title of the book. A gendered and comparative analysis provides a convincing way to dispel the immutability of Confucianism. Our woman-centered gaze, in turn, exposes both the power and the limitations of the Confucian persuasion.

NEGOTIATING THE SHIFTING MEANINGS OF CONFUCIANISMS

As our point of departure is to write against the prevailing tendency to view Confucianism and *Woman* as uniform across time and space, we seek to present multiple viewpoints and analytic perspectives in this book without imposing a unifying vision. The contributors adopt working definitions of Confucianism in ways

that make the most sense in light of their academic traditions, historical materials, and personal convictions. Some view “Confucianism” as a discursive process in order to stress its contested and contingent nature. Others focus on the variety of Confucian institutional structures that most directly impinged on people’s lives and behavior. The most salient examples of these structures are kinship and kingship, more commonly represented in premodern East Asia as family and state. Analogous realms bound by a metaphorical relationship, kinship and kingship provided the concrete contexts in which such Confucian virtues as filiality and loyalty were to be realized. By examining such diverse texts as primers, edicts, canonization lists, and private writings, the contributors illuminate the multiple forms that kinship and kingship could take and the myriad historical meanings of so-called Confucian virtues.

The label “Confucian” proves to be most problematic to historians of Japan, where the influence of the Confucian discourse was most limited in scope and impact. Sekiguchi Hiroko sees limited utility in the term “Confucianism,” referring specifically to the “patriarchal family paradigm” embedded in the Chinese bureaucratic structures and law codes introduced to Japan from the fifth to eighth centuries. Focusing on the realm of kingship in the eighth century instead of law and society, Joan Piggott analyzes the impact of the Chinese “male script” of monarchy, or the advancing consensus that the occupant of the throne should be male at the later eighth-century Nara court. Hesitating to label this male script “Confucian”—she notes that no term can be readily found in her texts that refers specifically to what is now considered Confucianism—she speaks of advancing acculturation of “the classical discourse of Chinese civilization.” Sugano Noriko, in turn, uses “Confucian ethics” only once to refer to the virtue of filial piety promoted by the Tokugawa shogunate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Martha Tocco situates her study of Tokugawa women’s education in the intellectual context of the official sponsorship of Neo-Confucian thought but revises the conventional view in showing that many Confucian scholars in Tokugawa Japan were champions of women’s learning.

Both Sugano and Tocco suggest that the Tokugawa shogunate adopted certain tenets of Neo-Confucian thought as its ruling ideology and sought to promulgate such virtues as filiality among the commoners. Only in this circumscribed sense might Tokugawa Japan be dubbed “Confucian” but with important caveats: national learning (*kokugaku*) rivaled Neo-Confucian learning at the shogun’s court, and the larger society remained largely untouched by rigidly patriarchal and patrilineal paradigms. The concept of Confucianism is thus of marginal utility to all four Japan specialists who contributed to this book. Ironically, this fact makes the inclusion of Japan in our comparative framework all the more essential. Allowing us an outsider’s perspective, Japan exposes the rhetorical and geographic limits of the universalist claims and self-image of the Confucian discourse.

Scholars of Korea are eager to distinguish between “Chinese” and “Confucian,” but they find the latter a more prevalent and visible force in Korean history. In her

chapter on the twelfth-century Korean scholar Kim Pusik, Lee Hai-soon treats Confucianism as a complex intellectual movement comprising different schools whose practitioners were embroiled in political struggles at court. Martina Deuchler speaks of a pervasive process of “Confucian transformation” of society initiated by Chosŏn legislators in the fourteenth century. For elite women, the most salient element of Confucianism was the introduction of the patrilineal family paradigm.

Yet “Confucianism” in Korean eyes was quite different from how it was viewed by the Japanese or Chinese. Elite men of the Chosŏn era viewed Confucianism as a universal system of truth available to all civilized people regardless of geography, and they often claimed to be more faithful transmitters of Confucian orthodoxy than were the Chinese themselves. After the fall of the Ming dynasty to the Manchus in 1644, Korean scholars considered themselves the sole guardians of Confucian civilization.⁷ Chosŏn women, in turn, believed that the relevance of Confucian culture transcended gender boundaries and that they too embodied Confucian virtues. As JaHyun Kim Haboush shows, it was this conviction that allowed the maligned Queen Inhyŏn (1667–1701) to claim moral autonomy and power in the face of adversities.

Our comparative perspective points to a paradox: in the eyes of Japanese and Korean statesmen who introduced selective Chinese elements of rulership to strengthen their own positions, the meaning of Confucianism was at once circumscribed and diffuse. When scholars in Korea and Japan spoke of the way of China, they had in mind a complex of elements, of which “Confucianism” was but one component not easily separated from others. Once we shift from a China-centered view of the region to one that takes the periphery as its focus, “Confucianism” does not seem so immutable or monolithic.

Scholars of China are less inclined to treat Confucianism in a transnational and comparative context. Yet even in regard to China, the status and utility of the term “Confucianism” are open to question. Zang Jian echoes the prevalent view of modern Chinese historiography in construing Confucianism as an orthodoxy that oppressed women, but she argues for a dynamic process through which popular mentalities influenced Confucian normative structures. Suzanne Cahill, shying away from a rigid bifurcation of a Confucian “big tradition” and the “small traditions” of Daoist and folk religions prevalent in previous scholarship, analyzes how all these elements came to bear on the bodily practices of Tang women. Du Fangqin and Susan Mann have no trouble identifying the virtue of wifely fidelity as a key Confucian value. They emphasize the instability of its meaning, however, by documenting the range of conflicting behaviors that came to be subsumed under the virtue.

In short, our strategy is to dispel the monolithic category of Confucianism by placing it in specific historical and cultural locations. In so doing, we demonstrate its power in the realms of social and textual practice. Although we offer no coherent view of Confucianism, all the contributors agree that Confucian institutions

and practices pose a challenge to certain conventions of Western thought. For example, the modern Western dichotomy between “private” and “public” spheres has no meaning in a Confucian discourse. The boundaries between kinship and kingship in all Confucianized societies were blurred: the inner and the outer interpenetrated, and social bodies merged with the body politic. And yet an important presupposition of the discourse is the separation of official (C: *gong*; K: *kong*; J: *ko*) from unofficial (C: *si*; K: *sa*; J: *shi*). In seventh- and eighth-century Japan, for example, courtier-scholars quoted Chinese texts to admonish officials to separate official duties from their personal or private affairs. In prescription, the official was preeminent.

In many contemporary English accounts, this official-unofficial distinction, more circumscribed in implication, is rendered the equivalent of the public-private distinction in the modern Western sense. Adding to the confusion is the facile equation of the domestic realm with the private, a view now common in scholarly and popular discourses. In her efforts to develop a female-centered reading strategy, JaHyun Kim Haboush has discussed the public-private distinction as alternatively referring to spheres of activity, signifier of morality, and social spaces. Its very theoretical flexibility allows women to conduct negotiations with forces of domination. This issue of interconnected spheres is taken up in individual chapters. Suffice it to say here that we reject the misleading image of Confucian women as cloistered beings who had no access to public spheres, regardless of prescriptive texts urging such isolation. If the meaning of Confucianism cannot be fixed, neither can the location of women be frozen in a space that exists outside of history. Both are enlivened only as we fix our analytic gaze on the processes of negotiation between the two.

DEFINING *RU*: CONFUCIAN DISCOURSES IN CHINA

It is easier to say what Confucianism is not than what it is. One commonly held view is that the epoch spanning the Han (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) and Tang (618–907) dynasties constituted a “first great age of Confucianism.”⁸ It witnessed the codification of fundamental texts often termed “Confucian classics” and the structures of imperial state government those classics underpinned. The texts and structures elaborated ideals associated with Confucius’s own age as well as precedents from Han and post-Han imperial governance such as the official ritual program, school and exam systems designed to reproduce officialdom, patronage of scholarly literary and historical projects, and expanding technical expertise from the fields of provincial administration, criminal law, calendrical science, *yin-yang* theory, and astrology. All can be said to constitute the substance of official Confucian learning.

Although accurate to an extent, the idea of a Han-to-Tang synthesis presents an image of Chinese Confucian culture that is too monolithic. The Chinese term for “Confucian,” *Ru*, was at once more specific and diffuse. In the formative Han times, *Ru* could denote the school of Confucius, a classicist, a government official,

or simply an adherent of the way of being human (*ren*) according to the five relations.⁹ The Han dynasty can be said to be Confucian to the extent that *Ru* masters were recruited to serve in government, where they applied precepts associated with the Master and his followers to everyday problems of administrative rule. But *Ru* thought and its canon of five classics—the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of History*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Odes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*—remained diverse and volatile, and their interpretation was subject to constant debate.¹⁰

While various official mandates canonized different clusters of classics and their commentaries, over time Chinese scholar-officials themselves fashioned complicated intellectual stances that defied the facile label “Confucian.” One telling example was that of the scholar Yan Zhitui (531–91). In his famous *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* (*Yanshi jiaxun*), Yan emphasized strict child rearing and education of heirs in the canonical classics and official histories. The objective was office holding, which required sobriety, sincerity, fulfillment of duties, and the sacrifice of self.¹¹ At the same time, however, Yan emphasized the saving power of the Buddha. For Yan, learning and living according to the ideals of the classics and the precepts of Buddhism were both desirable, which is why one biographer of Yan has characterized him as a “Buddho-Confucian.”¹² Yan’s work and his broad intellectual outlook struck a sympathetic chord among Japanese courtiers in Nara two centuries later.

Although the *Ru* or “Confucian” discourse in China underwent significant shifts through the centuries, by Tang times broad agreement on its general substance had emerged. It comprised a body of classical texts and scholarship as sources of political and moral authority; ideal practices such as ritual, righteousness, and filial piety—including gender hierarchy—prescribed for all levels of social hierarchy; a comingling of state and family; the alliance of state and scholars in ruling the realm; and the cosmic notion that virtuous rule by the Son of Heaven linked heaven, man, and earth.¹³ All were prominent elements adopted by societies on China’s periphery for their own “civilizing” projects. What resulted in varying locales—the degree and nature of acculturation—differs significantly.

CONFUCIANIZATION AS A CIVILIZING PROCESS

If we shift from a China-centered to a multicentered regional perspective, the Confucian discourse can appear in a different light. Therefore, we now turn to survey the transmission of elements of the Confucian discourse among China, Korea, and Japan, with a focus on implications for women in various social and historical locations. To do so we find it productive to speak of a “Confucianizing process” whereby canonical books, didactic texts, norms of behavior, and paradigms of familial organization crossed geographic and social boundaries over a *longue durée*. Active promotion by reform-minded state builders and officials often provided the political and institutional impetus. But the “Confucianization” of society was first and foremost a cultural process. In the eyes of many promoters, Confucianization was

a civilizing process that promised to humanize social mores and practices by transforming morality. Of course, it had a political facet as well: it gave power to monarchs, courts, and associated elites.

Norbert Elias's classic on the history of manners provides insights for our use of the concept of a civilizing process.¹⁴ First of all, it is useful to think of a two-step process involving external or institutional promotion followed by internalization (acculturation) on the individual level. In Europe as in Asia, the civilizing process—the diffusion of courtly culture—was unleashed in periods of political centralization to create a new political subject. The promulgation of law codes and didactic texts from above was swift and relatively easy to identify, but the process of individual internalization at various levels of society certainly took centuries and is less amenable to historical detection. To a large extent, all of the contributors seek to analyze the realm of institutional and textual practices to gain entry into the more elusive realm of broader gender relations and female subjectivities. Negotiating the space between structures of domination and human agency, we show how the civilizing process could empower certain women at the same time that it diminished their inheritance rights or choice of marital partners.

In mapping the civilizing processes in China, Korea, and Japan, the chapters in this book do not offer comprehensive coverage of premodern history in the China Sea sphere. They are grouped into four parts according to themes instead of chronology and cluster around three periods: seventh to tenth centuries; twelfth to thirteenth centuries; sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. We have chosen these periods because we want to situate women in times of change while avoiding presentation of an image of an immobile and reified tradition. Especially in China and Korea, these are times when Confucian paradigms made inroads into society and produced significant changes in the contexts of women's lives, in large part because of state promotion. We present women as agents who actively remade tradition and society through their actions, as evinced by their embodiment of virtues as well as their roles as rulers, teachers, and authors of didactic texts. Nonetheless, there is no denying that women generally did not initiate the legislative and bureaucratic changes in the political domain.

Korea and the Confucian Civilizing Process

Traffic in scribes, books, and ideas was brisk and multidirectional in the northeastern inland and China Sea sphere from the late centuries B.C.E. and throughout premodern history. It reached new heights during the seventh and eighth centuries, giving birth to what we can call the "East Asian region." On the continent the establishment of the Sui (581–619) and Tang (618–907) dynasties reversed a century-long process of disunity. Centralizing polities were also formed on the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago. Significantly, all were outward-looking in political as in cultural matters. The volume of traffic in the China Sea sphere grew dramatically: not only scribes but also students, craftsmen, monks, and merchants

traversed seas and mountains. The result was a geographic region in which the political entities shared a degree of compatibility in written language, institutions, law, religions, and aesthetics. Confucian texts, along with Buddhist sutras, gave elites a common vocabulary that transcended ethnic and national boundaries. It is important to note, however, that as one of the most cosmopolitan premodern regions, East Asia was anything but monolithic in worldviews and tastes. In due time, as travelers found their way to India and beyond, consciousness of the world beyond East Asia expanded as well.

Korean scribes and monks played a key role in fostering the cosmopolitan identities of East Asia. The civilizing process on the Korean peninsula began with a confluence of politics and culture: the early Korean state emerged in contradistinction to the outposts that the Chinese established in what would become Korean territory, yet under the influence of the Chinese concept of a bureaucratic state. Although the exact dates of their beginnings are in dispute, by the fourth century the three peninsular states of Koguryŏ, Silla, and Paekche vied to appropriate aspects of Chinese political, intellectual, and religious systems they deemed useful. In the ensuing centuries, when a unified “Korean” identity had yet to be formed and China itself was in disarray, the three states maintained multidirectional traffic in scribes, books, and artifacts among themselves as well as with Chinese and Japanese polities. Finally in the seventh century, Silla integrated the peninsula into one kingdom and negotiated a peaceful albeit ambiguous relationship with Tang China.

The Silla state adopted certain laws based on the Tang code and established such Chinese-style institutions as the Confucian temple at the royal university in the capital. But classical Chinese discourse did not predominate; at the same time craftsmen were sent to Japan and Buddhist clergy went on pilgrimages to India. The civilizing process also led to multilayered interactions in the realms of kinship and kingship in Silla. The rigidity of the native status society characterized by its bone-rank system retained its hold, obstructing the advance of gender hierarchy. Furthermore, an individual’s status continued to be determined bilaterally, taking into account the status of both father and mother, instead of patrilineally. Although political loyalty and filiality, the twin linchpins of Confucian ethics, were introduced to Korea, the former virtue received greater emphasis on the peninsula than in China.

Kingship in Sillan Korea was the site of contestations between Chinese and native discourses, between ideology and practice, and between class and gender. Although the Confucian ideal of benevolent rulership was introduced, succession was determined not by the Chinese patrilineal principle but by nonlinear descent. Even as a demarcation of the official-male and domestic-female spheres slowly advanced, gender considerations remained secondary to those of class and status in kingly succession. Therefore, two female rulers ascended the throne, Queen Sŏndŏk (r. 632–47) and Queen Chindŏk (r. 647–54), because they were of the highest status, that known as the holy bone rank. Notably, however, they were the last representatives of that status, and after the latter’s death the throne was assumed

by a male ruler of the next highest bone rank. But because still another female sovereign, Queen Chinsǒng (r. 887–97), ruled in the waning years of the Silla state, we may surmise that as late as the ninth century gender was merely one of the elements for consideration in the transfer of power; it never constituted the unconditional grounds for exclusion.

The complicated ways in which Chinese and native discourses interacted in the domains of kinship and kingship persisted in Koryŏ Korea (918–1392). Although kingship continued to be a locus of competing ideologies and practices, Confucian appurtenances pertaining to the official sphere began to take sturdier root in the tenth century with the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, the civil service examination, and the bureaucracy. In the twelfth-century *Record of the Three Kingdoms* (Samguk sagi), the earliest extant Confucian historiography, we find convincing textual evidence that Korean scholars had begun to internalize a Confucian worldview. At the center of its evaluative scheme, for example, was the binary of the civilized and the barbarous. The *Record* nonetheless exhibits different degrees of conviction concerning this worldview as it moves from the official to the unofficial sphere.

The civilizing process during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) has been extensively discussed elsewhere; briefly, the Confucianizing process—conceived and launched by state officials—aimed at transforming society and state in accordance with a Neo-Confucian moral vision.¹⁵ As such, it evolved along a different trajectory than did earlier efforts. The domestic sphere was now seen to be just as crucial as the public sphere as the target of civilizing influence. The establishment of patrilineal descent groups and the ascendancy of such virtues as filiality and wifely loyalty indicate that kinship as much as kingship became the locus of attention. The scholarly consensus is that the sixteenth century witnessed the internalization of this moral vision in the political sphere, whereas the seventeenth century saw associated structures fashioned for the social and domestic spheres. Divorce and remarriage of women all but disappeared, and daughters' inheritance, which had been equal to that of their brothers, shrank. Although this took place mostly in the more visible strata—educated and elite families—nonelite segments of the population were also steadily drawn into the orbit of Confucian civility.

In discussing the process of the Confucian civilizing of Korea, it is tempting to chart, if only for heuristic purposes, its progression through different spheres, classes, and genders, but one should remember that this was by no means a linear process. Each sphere displayed its own pattern of negotiation between Chinese and native discourses and between ideology and practice. Furthermore, negotiations in any one sphere were not made in isolation but in interaction with those in other spheres. The result is a collage wrought of sedimentary layers that defies linear narratives of progression or change.

The well-known story of the filial daughter Sim Ch'ŏng, who threw herself into the sea so that her blind father could see again, illustrates the complicated negotiations whereby the Confucian virtue of filiality blended with a native sentiment

that viewed daughters as important members of the family. One may argue that the popularity of this story in many genres in the eighteenth century testifies to the ascendancy of filiality, the Confucian virtue associated with kinship, in all sectors of Korean society. But curiously the emblem of this virtue is represented by a daughter instead of a son, a fact that contravenes the basic tenets of Confucian patriarchy and patrilineality while harking back to the native kinship structure in which daughters were highly valued.¹⁶ Coincidentally, the filial daughter did not drown but was rescued by the Dragon King of Buddhist *Lotus Sutra* fame. Happily, Sim Ch'ong subsequently became an empress of China and Mr. Sim was so overjoyed by the voice of his daughter that he regained his eyesight.

The Japan-China Dialectic: The Civilizing Process in Japan

On the Japanese islands, the diffusion of courtly culture, including Buddhist, Daoist, Legalist, and Confucian elements, took place in a dynamic environment, and the results were as complicated as in Korea. By the Nara period (710–84), a mélange of continental structures and customs had reached Japan. The literary scholar David Pollack has characterized the comingling of Japanese meanings and Chinese forms over time as a Japan-China (Wakan) dialectic.¹⁷ While previous historiography has tended to see the eighth century in relatively static terms—as a time of constant borrowing and emulating things Chinese—the reality is more nuanced.

At least three stages in the dialectic can be identified: one early in the century, when Chinese-style law codes were first promulgated; another datable to the 730s, when new texts and know-how significantly expanded knowledge of Tang ways in Nara; and a third beginning in the 750s, characterized by dynamic emulation and institutionalization of Tang ways in government and at court. The latter stage continued into Heian (794–1185) times, when the court was moved to the new capital at Heiankyō, present-day Kyoto.

During the first stage in the early 700s, elite literacy among the Nara courtiers and provincial elites grew, as did familiarity with Chinese classics, called “illuminating classics” (*myōkyō*) in the Taihō Ritsuryō Code of 701. In that text the chapter concerning education of officials provided for operation of a royal university where study of a long series of nine of the classics was mandated: the *Book of Rites*, the *Zuo Commentary*, the *Book of Odes*, the *Rites of Zhou*, the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of History*, the *Analects*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety*.¹⁸ Meanwhile, from the late seventh century onward writing preserved on wooden documents (*mokkan*) evidences intense study of Chinese dictionaries and encyclopedias by elites in the capital and in the provinces.¹⁹ In 704 Chinese scholarship was expanded by the return of an embassy from Tang China with a large trove of Chinese primers, dictionaries, and medical works.²⁰ The poet Yamanoue Okura was a member of that embassy, and his familiarity with Sui and Tang texts made him the leading China scholar of his generation. Use of *man'yōgana*—Chinese characters used to represent Japanese sounds—in eighth-century histories and

poetry anthologies evidences increasing facility in Chinese on the part of Nara elites.²¹

In emulation of Chinese Sons of Heaven, Nara's own Heavenly Sovereigns (*tennō*) took patronage of scholarship very seriously. In an edict of 721 the female monarch Genshō (r. 715–24) proclaimed the study of medicine, divination, astronomy, and *yin-yang* geomancy critical for governance. She exhorted her scholar-officials, both civilian and military, to devote themselves to virtues prescribed by the illuminating classics: they were to serve the commonweal (*kō*) loyally (*chū*), all the while shunning self-interest (*watakushi*). Accepting a fundamental premise from the *Analects* and *Mencius* that virtuous service must be nurtured by the ruler's remuneration, the *tennō* ordered the granting of rewards to her premier classicists, administrators, litterateurs, accountants, yin-yang specialists, physicians, musicians, and military strategists.²²

It was in 735 that the Buddhist monk Gembō and the scholar-official Kibi Makibi returned from study in Tang China with great numbers of Chinese texts. Their arrival marked the beginning of the second stage in the transmission of Chinese texts and growing comprehension concerning practical application. While Gembō reportedly brought back five thousand mostly Buddhist manuscripts, Kibi returned from a prolonged stay of nineteen years with an array of materials concerning such governmental matters as calendar making, music, ritual, and history. In addition to an iron-measuring apparatus, musical instruments, and military technology such as bows and arrows, he presented the sitting monarch Shōmu Tennō (r. 724–49) with the recently compiled compendium of Tang court ritual known as the *Tang Code of Rituals of the Kaiyuan Era*.²³ Based on three classics on ritual, the code outlined one hundred fifty rites and became a handbook for court ceremonies in Nara. Another influential text probably introduced by Kibi and much admired by courtiers was the Chinese Buddhō-Confucian scholar Yan Zhitui's *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*, which Kibi himself would later imitate in his *Collected Family Instructions* for his heirs.²⁴

Recognizing that Kibi possessed rare expertise concerning the state of education in contemporary Tang China, Shōmu Tennō sent him to the royal university to update the curriculum. Kibi's reformed curriculum focused on five of the illuminating classics, three official histories, law, accounting, music, composition, and calligraphy.²⁵ Whereas the classics presented students with the ideal, the histories presented them with narratives of actual rulership, ideal and otherwise. Later Kibi moved on to the household of Shōmu's crown princess, Abe. At this point Nara elite women were reading and writing Chinese; calligraphy by Shōmu's queen consort, Kōmyō, Princess Abe's mother, is still extant, as is a letter-writing handbook she used.²⁶ Moreover, an inventory of newly copied texts produced by the queen's private scriptorium lists 126 Buddhist texts, termed "inner texts" (*naiten*), and 43 non-Buddhist texts, termed "outer texts" (*gaiten*).²⁷ Division of newly imported knowledge of the day into these two categories suggests a perceived distinction between an interior (personal) Buddhist realm and an official (public) realm where

learning from the “illuminating” classics held sway. Also notable is the preponderance of Buddhist texts prepared by the scriptorium.

The 750s ushered in the third stage in the Japan–China dialectic, as deeper acculturation of Confucian values and political circumstances led to institutionalization of Tang ways at the Nara court.²⁸ During each decade from 752 until 779, at least two embassies regularly left for China. Production of both the *Manyōshū* Japanese verse anthology and the *Fond Recollections of Poetry* (Kaifūsō), an anthology of Chinese poetry written by Japanese courtiers, reflected the court’s embrace of the Sinic notion that royal patronage of literary arts facilitated virtuous government. Verses and headnotes in the anthologies demonstrate how Nara courtiers looked back to both the sixth-century Chinese anthology *Selections of Refined Literature* (Wenxuan) and the early Tang court poetry for inspiration. It is no surprise that the *Fond Recollections* provides our earliest extant evidence that the Chinese concept of “Heavenly” universal monarchy legitimized by the Mandate of Heaven and signified by the use of characters such as *tei* (C: *di*) and *kō* (C: *huang*) had been in vogue at later seventh-century courts where Chinese verse was first composed in Japan.²⁹ And that late-eighth-century pedants kept a close eye on continental developments is evidenced by the fact that in 769 the curriculum at the royal university was once again adjusted to reflect ongoing developments in Tang education: five classics and five histories were then made the basis of the program.³⁰ About this same time, the Nara royal residence (*dairi*) came to be a venue for royal banquets, also following Tang practice.³¹ Meanwhile, Queen Dowager Kōmyō and her daughter, who was on the verge of retiring as *temō*, may well have been dressing according to Tang fashion, as seen in the full-figured images of Tang beauties adorning folding screens from Shōmu’s household collection (Figure I.1).

How did official enthusiasm for Tang ways affect individual courtiers’ lives? Acculturation of prescriptions from the classics, but with a syncretist bent, is evidenced in the mid-eighth-century biography of Fujiwara Fuhito’s son and Queen Kōmyō’s brother, Fujiwara Muchimaro (680–737). Consider this extract:

He [Muchimaro] mourned his mother when he was young—with tears of blood he destroyed his health, he refused to eat even rice gruel and threatened to waste away. . . . As he grew older . . . [h]e did not take a single step without propriety, and he accepted nothing in which there was no honor. He preferred remaining calm and kept himself distant from noise and commotion. . . . He made loyalty and faithfulness his principles and always made humanity and honor his precepts. . . . He was pure and clean, upright and honest in all respects.³²

That the minister Muchimaro is depicted here cultivating filiality, propriety, sincerity, scholarship, sobriety, and loyalty shows how virtues from the classics were being idealized at the midcentury Nara court. But note that Muchimaro mourned his mother rather than the father he probably did not know well (he had doubtless been raised uxorilocally, according to current practice, at his mother’s home).³³



Figure 1.1. Tang Lady on a Folding Screen in Shōmu Tennō's Private Collection. Courtesy of the Shōsō-in Treasure House, Nara, Japan.

Muchimaro's biography also records emerging scholarly specialization. We hear therein about experts in *Ru* (Confucian) texts, elegant writing, divination, study of directional taboos, *yin-yang*, calendrical arts, and theurgy. And although Muchimaro was steeped in the illuminating classics, his tastes were eclectic and he particularly favored Buddhist texts:

He studied the different theories of scholars and the three philosophies [of Confucius, Laozi, and Buddha]. He rated the teachings of Buddha highest and was also partial to the teachings of immortality. He respected those who knew the way and revered the virtuous. He gave alms to the poor and had pity for the lonely. Every year in the summer, in the third month, he invited ten learned monks to lecture on the *Lotus Sutra* and thus learned its inner teachings.³⁴