The United States copyright law (Title 17 of the US Code) governs the making of copies of copyrighted material. A person making a copy in violation of the law is liable for any copyright infringement. Copying includes electronic distribution of the reserve materials by the user. The user should assume that any works in the reserve items are copyrighted.

INTRODUCTION TO
ORIENTAL
CIVILIZATIONS

Wm. Theodore de Bary, editor

Sources of
Japanese Tradition

Compiled by
Ryusaku Tsunoda
Wm. Theodore de Bary
Donald Keene

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK
from overwhelming the country, despite the surface appearance. Japan has always been a country where the people are honest. As long as a few teachings were carefully observed and we worked in accordance with the Will of Heaven and earth, the country would be well off without any special instruction. Nevertheless, Chinese doctrines were introduced and corrupted men’s hearts. Even though these teachings resembled those of China itself, they were of the kind which heard in the morning are forgotten by evening. Our country in ancient times was not like that. It obeyed the laws of Heaven and earth. The emperor was the sun and moon and the subjects the stars. If the subjects as stars protect the sun and moon, they will not hide it as is now the case. Just as the sun, moon, and stars have always been in Heaven, so our imperial sun and moon, and the stars his vassals, have existed without change from ancient days, and have ruled the world fairly. However, some knives appeared, and as a result the emperor is diminished in power, and his subjects too have fallen off. The Age of the Gods is where we may gain a knowledge of this. To discover it, we should carefully examine the words and thoughts in the ancient poetry, and thereby see clearly into the oldest writings.

MOTOORI NORINAGA

The True Tradition of the Sun Goddess

This excerpt is from Motoori’s Precious Comb-box (Tama kushige), the contents of which are meant to “comb” out the snarls of intellectual confusion. In it he upholds the traditional account of the divine creation in all its unembellished simplicity while rejecting the rationalistic cosmogony of the Chinese. The Sun Goddess is a universal deity as well as a national one, but she has shown special favor to the Japanese and guides them to a special destiny.

[From Motoori Norinaga Zenki, VI, 3-5]

The True Way is one and the same, in every country and throughout heaven and earth. This Way, however, has been correctly transmitted only in our Imperial Land. Its transmission in all foreign countries was lost long ago in early antiquity, and many and varied ways have been expounded, each country representing its own way as the Right Way. But the ways of foreign countries are no more the original Right Way

than end-branches of a tree are the same as its root. They may have resemblances here and there to the Right Way, but because the original truth has been corrupted with the passage of time, they can scarcely be likened to the original Right Way. Let me state briefly what that one original Way is. One must understand, first of all, the universal principle of the world. The principle is that Heaven and earth, all the gods and all phenomena, were brought into existence by the creative spirits of two deities—Takami-musubi and Kami-musubi. The birth of all humankind in all ages and the existence of all things and all matter have been the result of that creative spirit. It was the original creativity of these two august deities which caused the deities Izanagi and Izanami to create the land, all kinds of phenomena, and numerous gods and goddesses at the beginning of the Divine Age. This spirit of creativity [musubi, lit., “union”] is a miraculously divine act the reason for which is beyond the comprehension of the human intellect.

But in the foreign countries where the Right Way has not been transmitted this act of divine creativity is not known. Men there have tried to explain the principle of Heaven and earth and all phenomena by such theories as the yin and yang, the hexagrams of the Book of Changes, and the Five Elements. But all of these are fallacious theories stemming from the assumptions of the human intellect and they in no wise represent the true principle.

Izanagi, in deep sorrow at the passing of his goddess, journeyed after her to the land of death. Upon his return to the upper world he bathed himself at Anagawara in Tachibana Bay in Tsukushi in order to purify himself of the pollution of the land of death, and while thus cleansing himself, he gave birth to the Heaven-Shining Goddess who by the explicit command of her father-God, came to rule the Heavenly Plain for all time to come. This Heaven-Shining Goddess is none other than the sun in heaven which today casts its gracious light over the world. Then, an Imperial Prince of the Heaven-Shining Goddess was sent down from heaven to the middle kingdom of Ashihara. In the Goddess’ mandate to the Prince at that time it was stated that his dynasty should be coeval with Heaven and earth. It is this mandate which is the very origin and basis of the Way. Thus, all the principles of the world and the way of human-kind are represented in the different stages of the Divine Age. Those who seek to know the Right Way must therefore pay careful attention to the
stages of the Divine Age and learn the truths of existence. These aspects of the various stages are embodied in the ancient traditions of the Divine Age. No one knows with whom these ancient traditions began, but they were handed down orally from the very earliest times and they refer to the accounts which have since been recorded in the _Kojiki_ and the _Nihonshoki_. The accounts recorded in these two scriptures are clear and explicit and present no cause for doubt. Those who have interpreted these scriptures in a later age have contrived oracular formulae and have expounded theories which have no real basis. Some have become addicts of foreign doctrines and have no faith in the wonders of the Divine Age. Unable to understand that the truths of the world are contained in the evolution of the Divine Age, they fail to ascertain the true meaning of our ancient tradition. As they base their judgment on the strength of foreign beliefs, they always interpret at their own discretion and twist to their own liking anything they encounter which may not be in accord with their alien teachings. Thus, they say that the High Heavenly Plain refers to the Imperial Capital and not to Heaven, and that the Sun Goddess herself was not a goddess nor the sun shining in the heavens but an earthly person and the forebear of the nation. These are arbitrary interpretations purposely contrived to flatter foreign ideologies. In this way the ancient tradition is made to appear narrow and petty, by depriving it of its comprehensive and primal character. This is counter to the meaning of the scriptures.

Heaven and earth are one; there is no barrier between them. The High Heavenly Plain is the high heavenly plain which covers all the countries of the world, and the Sun Goddess is the goddess who reigns in that heaven. Thus, she is without a peer in the whole universe, casting her light to the very ends of heaven and earth and for all time. There is not a single country in the world which does not receive her beneficent illuminations, and no country can exist even for a day or an hour bereft of her grace. This goddess is the splendor of all splendors. However, foreign countries, having lost the ancient tradition of the Divine Age, do not know the meaning of revering this goddess. Only through the speculations of the human intelligence have they come to call the sun and the moon the spirit of yang and yin. In China and other countries the “Heavenly Emperor” is worshiped as the supreme divinity. In other countries there are other objects of reverence, each according to its own way, but their teachings are based, some on the logic of inference, and some on arbitrary personal opinions. At any rate, they are merely man-made designations and the “Heavenly Ruler” or the “Heavenly Way” have no real existence at all. That foreign countries revere such non-existent beings and remain unaware of the grace of the Sun Goddess is a matter of profound regret. However, because of the special dispensation of our Imperial Land, the ancient tradition of the Divine Age has been correctly and clearly transmitted in our country, telling us of the genesis of the great goddess and the reason for her adoration. The “special dispensation of our Imperial Land” means that ours is the native land of the Heaven-Shining Goddess who casts her light over all countries in the four seas. Thus our country is the source and fountainhead of all other countries, and in all matters it excels all the others. It would be impossible to list all the products in which our country excels, but foremost among them is rice, which sustains the life of man, for whom there is no product more important. Our country’s rice has no peer in foreign countries from which fact it may be seen why our other products are also superior. Those who were born in this country have long been accustomed to our rice and take it for granted, unaware of its excellence. They can enjoy such excellent rice morning and night to their heart’s content because they have been fortunate enough to be born in this country. This is a matter for which they should give thanks to our shining deities, but to my great dismay they seem to be unmindful of it.

Our country’s Imperial Line, which casts its light over this world, represents the descendants of the Sky-Shining Goddess. And in accordance with that Goddess’ mandate of reigning “forever and ever, coeval with Heaven and earth,” the Imperial Line is destined to rule the nation for eons until the end of time and as long as the universe exists. That is the very basis of our Way. That our history has not deviated from the instructions of the divine mandate bears testimony to the infallibility of our ancient tradition. It can also be seen why foreign countries cannot match ours and what is meant by the special dispensation of our country. Foreign countries expound their own ways, each as if its way alone were true. But their dynastic lines, basic to their existence, do not continue; they change frequently and are quite corrupt. Thus one can surmise that in everything they say there are falsehoods and that there is no basis in fact for them.
Wonder

This passage explains the inadequacy of human reason to comprehend the wondrous manifestations of the power of the gods, and mocks at the Confucian pretension to have found a rational answer to every problem. It is taken from the Arrowroot (Kazakana), so entitled because this plant creeps humbly along the ground but yields a pretty blossom and a nutritious starch, which, when it ferments, produces a stimulating liquor. Motoori suggests that his ideas, simple and unpretentious though they may be, are nevertheless food and stimulus for thought. This dialogue was written in answer to an attack on the Shinto revival by the Confucianist, Ichikawa Tatsumaro (d. 1795).

[From Motoori Norinaga Zenshū, V, 459–62]

Objection: You are obstinate in insisting that the Sun Goddess is the sun in heaven. If this is so, perpetual darkness must have reigned everywhere before her birth. The sun must have been in heaven since the beginning of the universe [before the birth of the Goddess].

Motoori: First of all, I cannot understand why you say that I am obstinate. That the Sun Goddess is the sun in heaven is clear from the records of the Kojiki and the Nihongi. If it is so beyond any doubt, is not the person who raises an objection the one who is obstinate? This Sun Goddess casts her light to the very extremities of the universe, but in the beginning it was in our Imperial Land that she made her appearance, and as the sovereign of the Imperial Line, that is, of the Imperial Land, she has reigned supreme over the Four Seas until now. When this Goddess hid herself in a cave in heaven, closing its doors, darkness fell over the countries of the world. You ask why darkness did not reign everywhere before her birth, a question a child might well ask. It seems childish indeed when a question which might spring from the doubts of a child is asked with such insistence by you. But this very point proves that the ancient happenings of the Divine Age are facts and not fabrications. Some say that the records are the fabrications of later sovereigns, but who would fabricate such shallow sounding, incredible things? This is a point you should reflect upon seriously.

The acts of the gods cannot be measured by ordinary human reasoning. Man's intellect, however wise, has its limits. It is small, and what is beyond its confines it cannot know. The acts of the gods are straightforward. That they appear to be shallow and untrue is due to the limitation of what man can know. To the human mind these acts appear to be remote, inaccessible, and difficult of comprehension and belief. Chinese teachings, on the other hand, were established within the reach of human intelligence; thus, to the mind of the listener, they are familiar and intimate and easy of comprehension and belief. The Chinese, because they believe that the wisdom of the Sage [Confucius] was capable of comprehending all the truths of the universe and of its phenomena, pretend to the wisdom of the Sage and insist, despite their small and limited minds, that they know what their minds are really incapable of knowing. But at the same time they refuse to believe in the inscrutability of the truth, for this, they conclude, is irrational. This sounds clever, but on the contrary, it betrays the pettiness of their intelligence. If my objector would rid himself of such a habit and reflect seriously, such a doubt as he has just expressed would disappear of itself.

It will be recalled that when Izanagi made his way to the nether region, he carried a light because of the darkness there, but while he lived in the actual world, he did not. The nether world is dark because it has to be dark; the actual world is clear because it has to be clear. Thus, there was light in the actual world before the birth of the Sun Goddess, although the reason why it is so cannot be fathomed. In the commentaries on the Nihongi there are references to luminous human beings of the days of creation who cast light about them, but these references were derived from the Buddhist scriptures. There is also mention of a deity of fiery light, but this was an evil deity, and his case cannot be taken as a typical one. There are otherwise no traditions about deities of light, and thus we have no way of knowing what light there was for illumination. But presumably there was light for reasons beyond the reach of human intelligence. Why then did darkness prevail when the Sun Goddess hid herself behind the door of the rocky cave? It was because it had been determined that with the birth of the Sun Goddess the whole space of the universe should come within her illumination, and that henceforth there would be no light without her illumination. This is the same sort of inscrutable truth as the case of the descent of the Imperial Grandchild from Heaven after which communication between Heaven and earth was completely severed. There are many other strange and inscrutable happenings in the Divine Age, which should be accepted in the same way. The people of antiquity never attempted to reason out the acts of the
take on human form—are these not the strangest of all strange things? Thus, the universe and all things therein are without a single exception strange and wondrous when examined carefully. Even the Sage would be incapable of explaining these phenomena. Thus, one must acknowledge that human intelligence is limited and puny while the acts of the gods are imitable and wondrous. But it is indeed amusing that there are people who respect and believe in this Sage as one who had illuminated every truth of the universe and its phenomena, when in fact he explained only those things within the boundaries of his own intelligence.

The beginnings of such a vastly wondrous universe and all its phenomena must be even more wonderful. The Chinese explain it in terms of yin and yang, but they have failed to explain why yin and yang operate in such a manner—which only adds to the wonder of the beginnings of the universe. Or one might say that the universe had no beginning, just as it will have no end; but if things existed which had no beginning, it would be even more strange and wondrous. If my objector would reflect upon the above things, his doubts would disappear of themselves. If his doubts are still insoluble, I shall cite examples nearer to him. Mice and martens can see in darkness as well as in broad daylight. By what manner of light do they see? There are also birds which see things well at night but cannot see them in daylight. Such things cannot be explained by the usual reasoning. The objector has said that there was no reason for light to exist in the Divine Age, but can he say that there was a reason for such light not to exist? What is your answer? Even in the case of lowly birds and animals there is a reason beyond reason. Is there any need to say more about our imperial forebears at the beginning of the universe?

The Error of Rationalism

From Kusubana in Motoori Norinaga Zenshū, V, 463-66

Objection: The scholar [Motoori] treats this country as if it were different from other countries.

Motoori: The objector also says at the end of the book that I want “to put our country outside the universe.” I cannot understand what he means, but I surmise from what he says before and after that he is...
criticizing me for my statement that the Sun Goddess, who is the sun in heaven, was born in our country.

I shall not reiterate here the details of the theory that the Sun Goddess is the sun in heaven and that she was born in our land. But because of the absence of the correct transmission of this fact in foreign lands, men there do not know about the genesis of the sun and the moon. They had a theory [in China] that the sun and the moon were the eyes of P'an Ku, which is a remnant of the true ancient tradition, but in China, where everyone is addicted to sophistry, such an interpretation was regarded as fantastic, and it was discarded. Instead, the sun and the moon were declared to be, on pure personal conjecture, the spirits of yin and yang. The theory of P'an Ku's eyes is an instance of the transmission to and modification in a foreign country of the tradition that the Sun Goddess was born of the ablation of Izanagi's eyes. It is only a fragmentary survival, but it is superior to any conjectural theory.

Leaving aside for the moment the question as to which is superior, let us first make a distinction between the Chinese and the Japanese views. From the Chinese point of view, the Japanese view is wrong, and from the Japanese point of view, the Chinese view is wrong. But the objector advances only the Chinese view and attempts to universalize it, even denying the antiquity of our Imperial Land. Is this not prejudiced and arbitrary? To this he might reply that the universe is one, that there is no distinction between a Chinese and Japanese point of view, and that narrow partiality lies in attempting to make such distinctions. However, the objector, in advancing only the Chinese view and casting doubt on the antiquity of our Imperial Land, himself makes such a distinction and shows partiality to China. . . . Even if there were no distinctions among the countries, it would still be proper for the various countries of the world, each with its own traditions and its point of view, to maintain their views according to their own traditions. Our Imperial Land in particular is superior to the rest of the world in its possession of the correct transmission of the ancient Way, which is that of the great Goddess who casts her light all over the world. It is treasonable malice to urge that we discard that transmission in favor of a senseless foreign view which, moreover, insists that our ancient transmission is a fantasy and a fabrication.

Then again, his assertion that I represent the sun as something different

from the sun of other countries is a ridiculous statement. How can the sun be different in other countries if I say that the Sun Goddess was born in our country and shines over all other countries? . . . Again, he says that the gods in Heaven regard all things equally and bestow their blessings impartially on them all. That is quite so, and yet our Imperial Land is the land where the Sky-Shining Goddess was born and where her descendants reign supreme; thus, it is superior to all other countries and cannot be regarded as the same.

Objection: The Sage, Confucius, has been looked up to as Heaven itself by tens of millions of people.

Motoori: This fact demonstrates that the Chinese, dynasty after dynasty, have been deceived by the Sage, who really does not deserve such credit. If adoration by the many is the mark of superiority, then it must be said that Shinran, the founder of the Ikkō Sect, is superior to the Sage, for the present-day followers of the Ikkō Sect revere their founder far more deeply than Confucians adore Confucius. . . .

Sages are superior to other people only in their cleverness. The fact is that they were all impostors. Among them the least blameworthy was Confucius. He was respectful of the Chou dynasty, for he was born in the Chou. That he deplored the irregularities of feudal lords is a thing deserving of praise. But Mencius, whom the Confucianists revere as a sage in the same class with Confucius, was quite different. While professing the kingly way, he encouraged revolt wherever he went. He was no less evil a person than T'ang and Wu.¹

The Fact of Evil

A fundamental error of Confucianism and Buddhism, according to Motoori, is their attempt to transcend evil, death, and human sorrow by subtle rationalization. These are basic facts of human existence, he says, which must be faced in all their stark reality.

[From Tama Kusihge in Motoori Norinaga Zen' shū, VI, 9-11]

All things in life—great and small, their very existence in the universe, even man himself and his actions—are due to the spirits of the gods and their disposition of things. In general, there are various kinds of gods—

¹ According to the Confucian Book of Documents T'ang and Wu were founders of the Shang and Chou dynasties, who asserted that the rulers they deposed had lost the Mandate of Heaven by their misconduct.
noble, mean, good, bad, right, and wrong. So it is that things in life are not always lucky and good; they are mixed with the bad and the unfortunate. Internecine wars break out occasionally and events not in the interest of the world or of mankind take place. Not infrequently, good or bad fortune befalls a man contrary to the principles of justice. Such things are the acts of the evil deities. The evil deities are those who do all manner of evil, moved by the spirit of the deity Magatsumi who was born of the pollution of the land of death, of which the God Izanagi had cleansed himself. When such evil deities flourish and are unchecked, there are times when even the protective powers of the shining deities prove inadequate. This has been true since the Divine Age.

Why is it that life does not consist solely of the good and the right, and that the evil and the wrong are necessarily a part of it? Here again there is a basic reason, fixed in the Divine Age and recorded in the Kojiki and the Nihongi. It is, however, a long story, difficult to relate here in detail. But a word or two should be said about the pollution of the land of death. The land of death is situated beneath the ground at the bottom of the earth. Thus, it is also called the "baseland" or the "netherland." It is an extremely dirty and evil land, where the dead go. In the beginning, Izanami, after her death, made her way there and partook of a cooked substance of the land called yomotohegaw, which caused her to be defiled. Because of the pollution, she could never afterwards return to the upper world and she soon became the deity of evil and wickedness. Since it was this pollution which brought forth Magatsumi, it is well to bear in mind that pollution should be scrupulously avoided in life.

Now in life, everyone, noble or base, good or bad, must go to this land of death at the expiration of his life. This is indeed a sorrowful thing. It may seem to be too flat a statement and devoid of any logical basis, but it stems from traditions held since the Divine Age, traditions containing wonderful truths which defy comprehension by the ordinary mind. In foreign countries many doctrines have been contrived to explain the reason for man's life and death, but these are either mere human speculations or else contrivances cleverly made to appeal to human credulity. They sound plausible but are, in fact, fabrications. Man-made explanations in general seem plausible enough, unlike truths transmitted from ancient times which sound shallow and illogical. But human intelligence has its limits and there are many things it cannot fathom. Thus it is that man, not knowing that these shallow and ludicrous sounding traditions actually contain wondrous and profound truths, continues to doubt them and at the same time believes in plausible-seeming fabrications. This is tantamount to believing in one's own mind rather than in facts, which is indeed ludicrous.

Upon his death man must leave everything behind—his wife and children, relatives and friends, house and property—and depart forever from the world he has known. He must of necessity go to that foul land of death, a fact which makes death the most sorrowful of all events. Some foreign doctrines, however, teach that death should not be regarded as profoundly sorrowful, while others assert that one's actions and attitude of mind in this life can modify the situation after death. So comprehensive and detailed are these explanations that people have been deluded into thinking they are true. Once faith is established in these beliefs, grief over death is regarded as a superstition. Those who hold them profess to be ashamed of being concerned about death, and they try not to be superstitious or emotional about it. Some write deathbed poems to express their sense of supreme enlightenment. These are all gross deceptions contrary to human sentiment and fundamental truths. Not to be happy over happy events, not to be saddened by sorrowful events, not to show surprise at astonishing events—in a word, to consider it proper not to be moved by whatever happens—are all foreign types of deception and falsehood. They are contrary to human nature and extremely repugnant to me. Death in particular is and should be a sorrowful event. Even the deity Izanagi who had created the land and all things thereon, and who had first shown the way of life in this world, waspt sorrowfully like a little child when death overtook his wife and, longing for her, followed her even to the land of death. That is an expression of true human nature and sentiment. The truth requires that man too must act likewise.

In antiquity, before the confusion caused by the introduction of alien doctrines, man was honest. He did not indulge in the sophistication of inventing various and pointless theories about where he would go after death. He simply believed in the truth that at death he would go to the
land of death, and death was cause for him to weep in sorrow. Now this may have no bearing on government, but it helps in understanding the relative truth of our Imperial Way and that of foreign lands.

In foreign lands where it is not known that the occurrence of evil and wicked things in life is the result of the acts of evil deities, attempts have been made to explain man's fortunes—good, bad, or undeserved—in terms of the doctrine of causality and retribution [Buddhism]. Then again, they have dismissed the question of man's destiny, by saying that it is Heaven's mandate or Heaven's way [Confucianism]. The doctrine of causality and retribution, as stated above, was invented for expediency's sake and does not merit serious consideration. The doctrine of Heaven's mandate, or Heaven's way, was nothing more than an excuse made in ancient China by men like T'ang and Wu to justify, where no cause for justification existed, the treacherous overthrow of their sovereigns and the seizure of their domains. If that was Heaven's mandate or Heaven's way, then there should have been no irregularities at all in connection with it. But actually there were many irregularities. Why?

**Good and Evil in the Tale of Genji**

Before Motoori became involved in the Neo-Shinto movement, he had devoted himself to the study of Japanese literature, the interpretation of which provided the basis for much of his later thought. The next selections are from his *Tama no Oguashi*, a study of Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*. The novel he viewed in a surprisingly "modern" light: it is a record of human experience as we find it, not necessarily as we should wish it to be. It is just such a realistic appreciation of the emotional life of man that makes the *Genji* one of the greatest expressions of the Japanese spirit and provides the key to all that is true and best in the Japanese national life.

[From Motoori Norinaga Zenshû, VII, 472-88]

There have been many interpretations over the years of the purpose of this tale. But all of these interpretations have been based not on a consideration of the nature of the novel itself but rather on the novel as seen from the point of view of Confucian and Buddhist works, and thus they do not represent the true purpose of the author. To seize upon an occasional similarity in sentiment or a chance correspondence in ideas with Confucian and Buddhist works, and proceed to generalize about

4 That is, men of virtue such as Po I and Shu Ch'i protested against this usurpation.

the nature of the tale as a whole, is unwarranted. The general appeal of this tale is very different from that of such didactic works. [p. 472]
Buddhism. However, if examined closely it will be noted that there are many points of difference, as, for example, in the statement about being or not being in harmony with human sentiment. The Tale presents even good and evil in gentle and calm terms unlike the intense, compelling, dialectical manner of Confucian writings.

Since novels have as their object the teaching of the meaning of the nature of human existence, there are in their plots many points contrary to Confucian and Buddhist teaching. This is because among the varied feelings of man’s reaction to things—whether good, bad, right, or wrong—there are feelings contrary to reason, however improper they may be. Man’s feelings do not always follow the dictates of his mind. They arise in man in spite of himself and are difficult to control. In the instance of Prince Genji, his interest in and rendezvous with Utsusemi, Oborozukiyō, and the Consort Fujitsubo are acts of extraordinary iniquity and immorality according to the Confucian and Buddhist points of view. It would be difficult to call Prince Genji a good man, however numerous his other good qualities. But the Tale does not dwell on his iniquitous and immoral acts, but rather recites over and over again his profound awareness of the sorrow of existence, and represents him as a good man who combines in himself all good things in man . . .

For all that, the Tale does not regard Genji’s misdeeds as good. The evil nature of his acts is obvious and need not be restated here. Besides, there is a type of writing which has as its purpose the consideration of such evils—in fact, there are quite a few such writings—and an objective story therefore need not be used for such a purpose. The novel is rather like the Buddhist Way which teaches man to attain enlightenment without deviating from the rightful way, nor like the Confucian Way which teaches man how to govern the country or to regulate one’s home or one’s conduct. It is simply a tale of human life which leaves aside and does not profess to take up at all the question of good and bad, and which dwells only upon the goodness of those who are aware of the sorrow of human existence. The purpose of the Tale of Genji may be likened to the man who, loving the lotus flower, must collect and store muddy and foul water in order to plant and cultivate the flower. The impure mud of illicit love affairs described in the Tale is there not for the purpose of being admired but for the purpose of nurturing the flower of the awareness of the sorrow of human existence. Prince Genji’s conduct is like the lotus flower which is happy and fragrant but which has its roots in filthy muddy water. But the Tale does not dwell on the impurity of the water; it dwells only on those who are sympathetically kind and who are aware of the sorrow of human existence, and it holds these feelings to be the basis of the good man. [pp. 486-88]

Love and Poetry

In this piece from an early work, Sekiū shishaku-gen (freely: Observations from Long Years of Apprenticeship to Poetry), Motoori acclaims Japanese poetry for its spontaneous expression of the deepest human emotions and justifies its defiance of Confucian canons of emotional restraint. Characteristically, Motoori recognized the worth of any poetry, early or late, which satisfied this criterion, whereas his mentor Kamo Mabuchi had held that in all poetry after the Manyōshū the Japanese spirit had been corrupted by Chinese influence.

[From Motoori Norinaga Zensha, VI, 524-29]

Question: Why are there so many love poems in the world?

Answer: The oldest love poems are found in the Kojiki and the Nihongi, but the dynastic anthologies are particularly conspicuous for the great number of love poems which they contain. In the Manyōshū there are sections . . . devoted entirely to love poems . . . Even in the Chinese Book of Odes love songs are prominent. Why is this so? It is because love, more than any other emotion, stirs the human heart deeply and demands an outlet in poetry. It is to love poems that we must look for lines which are profoundly expressive of human emotion.

Question: Generally speaking, man seems to be constantly concerned, not so much with love but rather with personal success and the acquisition of wealth, in which he appears to be completely and unreasonably absorbed. Why is it that there are no poems expressive of these sentiments?

Answer: There is a distinction between emotion and passion. All the varied feelings of the human heart are emotions, but those among them which seek for something in one way or another are passions. These two are inseparable, passions being in general a kind of emotion. Only such feelings as sympathy for others, sadness, sorrow, and regret are specifically called emotions. But as far as poetry is concerned, it comes only from emotion. This is because emotion is more sensitive to things and more deeply compassionate. Passion is absorbed only in the acquisition of things; it does not move one deeply or intimately. Thus, it has no capacity for tears at the sight of flowers or the song of birds. The desire to acquire
wealth is an example of passion. It is so alien to the awareness of the
sorrow of existence that there can be no outpouring of poetry from it.
Although love has its origin in passion, it is a deep emotion which no
living thing can avoid. And as man is most highly capable of under-
standing the meaning of the sorrow of existence, it is he who is most
deeply moved—sometimes unbearably—by the sentiment of love. Outside
of love where there is awareness of the sorrow of existence, there is poetry.
And whereas it became the practice in later times to suppress emotion—
for emotion was regarded as less profound than passion, a sign of a faint
heart, and therefore a shameful thing—poetry alone retained the spirit
of antiquity and continued to express truthfully and without adornment
the real sentiments of the human heart. Nor has poetry felt constrained
to apologize for femininity or faintheartedness. In later times poets, in
order to enhance the charm of poetry, have emphasized awareness of the
sorrow of existence and have turned against themes of passion. Passion
is not a fit subject for poetry. Thus, poems such as those in praise of
wine found in the third volume of the Manyōshū and so common in
Chinese poetry are unappealing, if not odious. They evoke no affection
and hold no attraction, because passion is regarded as tainted and not
conducive to fine sentiment. Why is it that in other countries [meaning
China] the feeling of emotion is regarded as something shameful while
base passion is regarded as something admirable?

Question: In the Chinese work, the Book of Rites, it is stated that
love is a cardinal passion of man. Conjugal sentiment is deep, for it is
the feeling of husband for wife and wife for husband, and this is as it
should be. But love in poetry is not always confined to love between
man and wife. A man in the privacy of his own room yearns for the
woman who is not acceptable to his parents; another, in the intimacy of
the bedchamber, gives his love to a woman betrothed to another. Such
conduct is licentious and wicked; yet it is regarded as an exquisite
example of love. Why?

Answer: It has been stated above that the human heart is susceptible
to love—no one can avoid it. Once involved in and disturbed by it, the
wise and foolish alike frequently behave illogically in spite of themselves,
and they end by losing control of the country, and ruin their bodies
and their reputations. That has been the case in numberless instances

*It is characteristic of Confucian teaching, which is addressed primarily to the ruling
class, that it is most concerned with the political consequences of moral failings.

in the past and it is so in the present. And this occurs despite the fact
that everyone fully realizes that such behavior is evil and that one must
guard against becoming wildly infatuated. But not all men are sages. Not
only in love but also in their daily thought and conduct the good does
not always prevail; in fact, the bad often does. Love, of all the things
in life, is most difficult to suppress in spite of every effort to control it.
And man, even with the realization that conduct contrary to the dictates
of his own mind is evil, is helpless to control it; of this there are numerous
instances. Within the heart, unnoticed by others, there may be a fancy
for someone else even though outwardly one appears quite sober and
admonishes others to beware of love. If one searches the bottom of one's
heart it is impossible to find love there, especially the type of love
forbidden by man. And try as one might to suppress it, there will be
only melancholy and bewilderment in one's heart. As love is thus un-
reasonable, the love poems which come forth on such occasions are
especially touching. It is also natural that there should be many love poems
which suggest impropriety and licentiousness. Be that as it may, poetry
follows the principle of the sorrow of existence and attempts to express
without adornment the bad as well as the good. Its aim is not to select
and arrange for the heart that which is good or bad. To advise against
and check evil is the duty of those who govern the country and teach
the people. While unloveliness should be strongly cautioned against, it
is not the responsibility of poetry to teach such discipline. The aim of
poetry is different: it aims to give expression to an awareness of the
poignancy of human life and should not be judged on any other basis.
This is not to say that poetry applauds evil conduct or implies that it is
good. It only avers that poems, as a medium for the expression of
emotion, are admirable. All forms of literature including the novel should
be looked upon and appreciated in this light and an attempt made to
grasp the spirit of their purpose. For further reference I have dwelt upon
this point separately and at greater length in my study of the Tale of
Genji, which includes quotations from every chapter and explanatory
notes. From this tale one can understand the spirit of poetry.

Question: Chinese poetry and other forms of Chinese literature are
rarely devoted to accounts of love, but our literature abounds in them,
including many instances of licentious behavior involving the high and
the low alike. Yet, no one condemns this as evil. Is it because there is a
taste for the frivolous and the voluptuous in our national character?
**Answer:** Man's predilection for love is the same now as it has been in the past, and it is the same here as it is elsewhere. An examination of Chinese historical accounts indicates that that country has had more than its share of licentious affairs. The Chinese, however, customarily subject all things to long, tedious moralistic judgments. In particular, love affairs have been judged by would-be scholars as something contemptible and despicable. Chinese poetry, likewise, has been subjected to this same national tendency; it has a taste only for the heroic, manly spirit and speaks not of the effeminate sentiments and sinful aspects of love, which it regards as shameful. This aspect of Chinese poetry is only its edited, ornamented, and outward appearance and not the true revelation of the human heart. But in a later age readers of such poetry have accepted it without serious study as expressive of the true situation. It is ridiculous to believe on this basis that the people of that country are less susceptible to the temptations of love than the people of other countries.

In general, our countrymen are generous and not particularly discerning or critical. They have not engaged in painstaking and persistent disputations on the good or the bad in men. Instead they have transmitted in speech and in writing things as they were without adornment. This is particularly true of our poetry and novels, which have as their aim the expression of a sensitivity to human existence; they are calm, straightforward revelations of the varied feelings of men in love.

Again, our national histories written on Chinese models show no special distinction from their Chinese prototypes. It is erroneous to ignore these national histories and to fail to discern what is so clearly written in them, just as in their Chinese prototypes; or to adjudge the Japanese solely on the basis of the poetry and novels, as being especially susceptible to the temptations of love. Even the Wei chih, a Chinese history which may not be wholly reliable on all matters, says that the Japanese are not sexually licentious. Not only in love but in all other things as well there have been many scoundrels in China. The Chinese persistently warn against evil; yet there are many evil men there because the country is bad. In our country, on the other hand, man's conduct has neither been excessively praised nor excessively decried; it has been dealt with calmly and straightforwardly. Thus, we do not make much of evil men in our country. And this is due to the fact that our country is the land of the gods.

**Question:** Monks should never indulge in love affairs; yet poetry does not censure them for it. In fact, there are many love poems by monks in the dynastic anthologies, and they continue to write them freely even today. Why?

**Answer:** Everyone knows very well that the Buddha warned sternly against licentious passions and that it is a matter which monks must scrupulously observe. Even today involvement in love is considered highly deplorable. However, the determination of the morality of such acts should be left to those who belong to the various orders. Poetry is a different thing. It attempts neither to trespass on the teachings of Confucius and Buddha nor to pass moral judgments. Its aim is merely to express a sensitivity to human existence, and its method is to give expression to the overflowing sentiments of the heart. As for monks who have forsaken the world and have entered an order, it is proper that they abide strictly by the teachings of the order, and that they do not conduct themselves licentiously even to the slightest degree. This is particularly true of their outward behavior, which they must maintain with utmost firmness. But the human sentiment of monks does not differ from that of laymen simply because they have become monks; for monks are neither all reincarnations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, nor can they, short of achieving enlightenment, rid themselves completely of the defilement of worldly life. The sentiment of love is apt to linger in their hearts—but this is as it should be. It is nothing shameful or worthy of reproach. They may even lose their minds over love and commit errors they should not commit, but such are common occurrences in everyday life. Buddha emphasized the commandment in this respect because it is a general weakness and one which is apt to lead people astray. For the people to believe that monks look like Buddha, and for the monks themselves to pretend that they look like Buddha, is a grave sin. I shall use a parable about a holy man in order to explain what psychology. The holy man, seeing the autumnal leaves at the peak of their glory, thought them beautiful, but meeting an attractive woman on the road, he passed by without casting a glance in her direction. Think of his behavior on these two occasions. The tinted autumnal leaves are no less a thing of charm of this world than the beautiful woman, and thus the holy man should not have given his attention to them. But such an attraction is momentary, unlike a woman's charm which has the special capacity of
captivating the human heart and of obstructing the attainment of salvation in the life hereafter. Thus the monk may admire the leaves but should not so much as cast a glance in the direction of the woman. His behavior, therefore, was correct, but to say that it was sincere and came from the bottom of his heart would be a gross deceit. If tinted leaves have charm which is limited and does not stir the human heart as deeply as a woman's personal charm, which is unlimited and beguiling to the human heart, it stands to reason that the human heart which admires the limited charm of the tinted leaves cannot help but admire the unlimited charms of a woman. It is as if a hundred ounces of gold were desirable but not a thousand. That is simply illogical. If a beautiful woman does not stir his heart even slightly, he is indeed a Buddha; otherwise, he is inferior in emotional capacity to the bird and the insect and may even be likened to the rock and the tree, which are devoid of feelings. Since a monk does not have a wife and must constantly discipline the passions which strain and distract his mind, it follows that his love poems are more expressive of feelings than those of the laity. There is an ancient anecdote which says that an abbot of Shiga temple was once permitted to hold the hand of a certain royal concubine while composing a poem called "Tamahabaki" [broom corn]. This is a most touching incident and one in keeping with a monk's feelings. To give vent in poetry to the unruly thoughts, long pent up in one's heart, is in accord with the spirit of "laying open one's heart" and of "confession," is it not? At any rate, as long as poetry is poetry, it needs no regulation.

HIRATA ATSUTANE

If Motoori Norinaga is to be credited with having made of the National Learning a subject worthy of a great scholar's attention, and thereby lent the largely inarticulate Shinto religion the authority of a canon of sacred writing, it remained for Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) to assert the supremacy of Shinto over all other religions and branches of learning. A curious blend of real learning and an often irrational bigotry produced in Hirata an ultranationalistic type of scholarship which was to exert a powerful emotional effect on the Japanese.

Little is known of Hirata's early years. He ran away from his home in the north of Japan at the age of nineteen, and made his way to Edo, where for several years he eked out a hand-to-mouth existence with menial jobs. In 1801, at the age of twenty-five, he became interested in National Learning, a few months too late to meet Motoori, who died earlier in the same year. To Motoori's respect for the Japanese classics Hirata brought a contempt and hatred for Buddhism and Confucianism which extended at times to all things foreign. Motoori had sought to prove that there was a place for Shinto; Hirata now insisted that there was room for nothing else, but he extended the boundaries of Shinto to embrace almost all other forms of knowledge.

One of the most unusual aspects of Hirata's doctrines was the place held in it by Western learning and ideas. Although Hirata was at pains to revile the nations of the West whenever the necessity arose of proving that Japan was uniquely blessed, he also occasionally expressed a grudging admiration for Western science and even for Western theology. He himself was a practicing physician, and studied Dutch medical books in Japanese translation. He was fascinated by what he knew of Western astronomy, partially at least because of its relation to the Shinto cosmogony. Thus he welcomed the Copernican theory, saying that it confirmed ancient Japanese traditions which exalt the importance of the sun.

Most curiously, Hirata borrowed at times from Christian theological works. Such books had been banned in Japan for almost two hundred years, but Hirata managed to secure copies of at least three written in Chinese by Catholic missionaries in Peking. In one early (but never published) essay he very slightly adapted the arguments advanced by the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci in support of Christianity against Confucianism in such a way that they became arguments for the supremacy of Shinto. It was an amazing instance of his determination to strengthen Shinto by all possible means.

It is debatable how much of Christianity remained in Hirata's theology as it finally evolved. The importance of a Creator God (in this case Takami-musubi) seems to partake of Christian influence, as does Hirata's insistence on the certainty of an agreeable afterworld for those who merit it, unlike the gloomy realm of pollution which Motoori saw as the final destination of all men. Hirata also borrowed from Confucianism, Taoism, and even Buddhism (which he so detested), when additional ammunition was needed in his battle for Shinto.

Hirata's zeal at times was so great as to transgress the bounds of