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## Kumazawa Banzan's Ideas Regarding the "Great Way" and "Shinto"

Researchers have focused on Kumazawa Banzan's practical theory of moral cultivation and rationalistic statecraft, but have not deeply discussed his theory of religion, which proposed the restoration of Shinto. This is due to the fact that researchers see Kumazawa's thought as a far-fetched syncretism of Shinto and Confucianism. Hence, their assessments are poles apart: "Kumazawa's Shinto is nothing but Confucianism in the end" or "his Confucianism is not the original but Japanized."

Essentialist framings like "is Kumazawa's thought Confucianism or Shinto?" should be avoided. In this paper, noting that Kumazawa often expresses Shinto as *daidō*, I assert that he offers a universalistic argument which is based on the Confucian classics and relativizes Confucianism itself, as well as that it is a sort of theory of religion which can be compared with Western theories about natural religion. I hold that Kumazawa argues for the restoration of Shinto as a result of his exploration as to how to put a universalistic theory of the religious into practice in the form of a specific religious system tailored to the situations of the concrete epoch and region in early modern Japan.

KEYWORDS: Confucian Shinto—Kumazawa Banzan—natural religion—the Way (*dō*)—three-teachings theory

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THIS PAPER deciphers, using his concept of the “Great Way” (*daidō* 大道), the writings of so-called “Yangming Confucianist” Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691) regarding Shintō 神道 (“The Way of the Gods”). I discuss how an intellectual from Japan’s early modern period, at a time when the concept of “religion” had not yet been imported from the West, articulated East Asian religious traditions, or religion-like things in human society.

According to Miyazaki Michio 宮崎道生, Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1600–1648) and Kumazawa Banzan share a “concept of a universal Shinto common to the entire world” and both hold that there is a “‘Shinto of Japan’ that is particular in contrast to [this] universal” (MIYAZAKI 1990, 211). Rather than just describing the historical facts of Shinto being taught in accordance with Japan’s climate, Confucianism in accordance with that of China (Tōdo 唐土), and Buddhism in accordance with that of India (Tenjiku 天竺), Kumazawa asserted, despite being a Confucianist, that the “forms” (*hō* 法) which should be sought in contemporary Japan were not Confucian but Shinto. Miyazaki identifies this as a distinctive characteristic of Kumazawa’s Shinto thought. However, he offers the following final assessment: “Kumazawa is unable to completely escape the constraints of the word *shendao* 神道 [Jp. *shintō*] found in Confucius’s theory of ancestral spirits [*The Analects*] and the *Book of Changes*’ passages on the *guan* 觀 hexagram, and in the end does not go out of the realm of Confucianist Shinto” (MIYAZAKI 1990, 237).

There are more than a few similar views that assume the existence of some sort of pure “Confucianism” or “Shinto” and offer assessments based on Kumazawa’s distance from them. Bitō Masahide 尾藤正英 also argues that Banzan’s “Shinto” is in essence “the universal ‘Way’ [*dō* 道]/Great Way, and concretely it is nothing more than something identical to the ‘Way of the saints’ [*seidō* 聖道], in other words, the Way of Confucianism” (BITŌ 1961, 221). Itō Tasaburō 伊東多三郎, approvingly noting that “the Japanism [*nihonshugi* 日本主義] tendency in his thought” was ahead of its era, states that while “generally Confucianists’ theories of the unity of Shinto and Confucianism are essentially thought structures in which Confucianism occupies a central position . . . Banzan’s theory of Confucianism and Shinto left this kind of intellectual current behind and jumped to a view that placed Shinto at the center” (ITŌ 1976, 40). However, in all of these cases we find an assessment that takes a dubious essentialism as a premise: that the countable single entities of Shinto and Confucianism have existed through

time in a fixed way. This makes it impossible to discuss Banzan's significance in religious history.

It was in this context that Minamoto Ryōen 源了圓 asserted that Banzan was discussing a “universal ‘Shinto of heaven and earth’ [*tenchi no shintō* 天地の神道] that runs through Confucianism and Shinto” and that it had a “statecraft orientation” (*keiseiteki seikaku* 経世の性格). Minamoto also argues that in Banzan's case, engaging in benevolent governance in accordance with time, place, position, people's moods, and changes in the times itself is “Shinto,” and that he “did not hold that Confucian teachings were absolute but that the monarch's practice of benevolent governance had the highest meaning” (MINAMOTO 1980, 494). This is an important point that avoids an unproductive “Shinto or Confucianism” discussion and delves into the kind of horizon upon which Banzan himself discussed these.

Why did Banzan have to venture to call “benevolent governance” “Shinto”? In short, it was because he discussed the essence of religious traditions from a statecraft theory perspective, and arrived at a kind of religious theory, originating in Confucian rituals and music (*reigaku* 礼楽) theory, that discussed the kind of religious institutions that should be established. Below I will concretely examine how Banzan discussed the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto, as well as the “Shinto” that should be realized in the future.

### *Banzan's Idea of Shinto in Daigaku Wakumon*

In Kumazawa Banzan's *Daigaku wakumon* 大学或問 (A Discussion of Public Questions in the Light of the Great Learning), he discusses the measures necessary to make “benevolent governance” a reality, including what we could call “religious policy.” In Item 17, entitled “On the Revival of Shinto,” he rejects what is called Shinto in society today. He says it is nothing more than embellishments of the laws of hereditary Shinto priest families and rules regarding the mindsets of Shinto professionals made into scriptures. Banzan also states that even the *Nihongi* 日本紀, which normal “Shinto” holds to be the foremost scripture, only discusses the surface of the principle (*ri* 理), namely, yin and yang and the supreme polarity (*taikyoku* 大極), and that only the “three sacred treasures [*jingi* 神器]” can be said to be Japan's scripture. Like the *Book of Changes'* hexagrams (symbols like “☰” that combine yin and yang solid and broken lines), the three sacred treasures express with three forms the heart-mind's wisdom, benevolence, and courage, in other words, they are symbols that were used to communicate in the distant past, when writing did not exist, the “Way,” which here refers to the *Doctrine of the Mean's* (Ch. *Zhongyong* 中庸; Jp. *Chūyō*) three virtues (*san tattoku* 三達徳) (*Daigaku wakumon*, 475). Banzan continues as follows:

In order to interpret the three sacred treasures, it is most appropriate to rely on the *Doctrine of the Mean*. China's saints [*seijin* 聖人] and Japan's divine people [*shinjin* 神人] are the same in terms of virtue. Their Way is not two. Therefore, the three sacred treasures and that which is preached by Confucian scripture match like tallies. Those who rule the whole country with the mandate of heaven are divine masters. No matter the era, the virtuous acts of those who are masters of the world—making clear the virtues of wisdom, benevolence, and bravery, as well as ruling the world in accordance with the time, place, position [*ji* 時, *sho* 処, *i* 位], as well as people's nature and changes in the times—are Shinto, and texts that record the traces of this are surely Shinto scriptures. The reign of Amaterasu (*tenshōkō* 天照皇) was virtuous rule. Describing now this virtuous rule and making Japan a virtuous country is the revival of Shinto. That which is called Shinto in society is only part of Shinto, not all of it. The Way is the natural Shinto of heaven and earth. The Way of the saints of China and the Way of this country's divine people are both the Shinto of heaven and earth. (*Daigaku wakumon*, 475)

Amaterasu, a “master of the world” and “divine person” who ruled ancient Japan is said to be as excellent a ruler as the saints of China. Insofar as the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the three sacred treasures are “texts” and “symbols” with which these individuals explained universal “virtue” and the “Way,” their meanings, of course, are in accordance with each other and commentaries on them would all be the same if done by people who know the Way. In this way, Banzan's “Shinto” is different from the Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto that exist concretely in history and it is made abstract to a universal degree: the “Shinto of heaven and earth.” This basically means nothing more than benevolent governance and virtuous rule, and is not something that can be presented in advance with tenets like “act this way” or “be this way.” Its nature is such that measures or institutions can only be recognized as having been Shinto after they have turned Japan into a “civilized country” via “virtuous rule.” Holding that this was realized in ancient Japan, Banzan seeks the “revival” of it from the rulers of the time.

The premise of Banzan's assertion is a confidence that in all people of the world the ethics articulated by Confucianism are found as inherent principle (*ri*). Due to the universality of this “principle,” “saints” or “divine people” can perceive and preach the Way anywhere. While it goes without saying that generally in Neo-Confucianism the ethical worldview of heaven and human beings sharing the same principle (*tenjin ichiri* 天人一理) serves as a major premise, Banzan does not stop at just saying that the teachings of the single religious tradition of Confucianism are universally valid. The universal essence found in nature and humans just happened to be articulated in China, which had fortunate climatic conditions and became civilized at an early stage. While undeni-

ably basing his ideas on an ethics that comes from Confucianism, in the end he relativizes the Confucianism that actually exists in China and Japan. We must investigate how Banzan himself articulated Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism, which people now normally understand as separate “religions.”

### *The Great Way and the Small Ways*

In *Shūgi washo* 集義和書, *Shūgi gaisho* 集義外書, and his other major works, Banzan uses the concepts of “Way” and “forms” to distinguish between the essential nature and concrete historical forms of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto.

Forms are not even the same among the saints of China. They change with the ages. Even if one tries to apply such forms to Japan, it would be difficult to implement many things. The Way is the “three bonds and five constants” [*sankō gojō* 三綱五常]. The “three bonds” correspond to heaven, earth, and people, and the “five constants” to the “five elements” [*gogyō* 五行]. Even when there was no word for virtue and no teachings of the saints, this Way was already being carried out. Even when humans did not live, it was carried out by heaven and earth, and even when heaven and earth were not separate, it was carried out by the Great Void [*taikyo* 太虛]. Even if [in the future] humans cease to exist and heaven and earth returns to nothingness, the Way will not extinguish. How could it—even just a little—simply because it is a later time?

(*Shūgi gaisho*, 227)

Here, the Way of the “three bonds and five constants” runs throughout heaven, earth, and people and is held to be the principle that exists without beginning or end. On the other hand, forms are relative institutions and products of civilization that are both bound by the concrete conditions of time, place, and position and have been created by outstanding figures of the past (such as saints and divine people). He explains these as follows.

The saints create forms in accordance with time, place, and position so that things will go well. Therefore, forms exist alongside the Way in their era. While these are called forms of the saints, if the time passes and people’s situations change, they can be difficult to use. When carrying out forms that do not match the era in a forced fashion, the Way is impeded. Much of that which is held to be and carried out as the Way by scholars of today are forms. If it is not what is best for time, place, and position, it is not the Way. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 227)

The concrete forms generally known as Confucianism are just the forms of ancient China. Banzan states that existing forms were established amid a time, place, and position that were entirely different, and discusses how to reestablish in his time positive forms that can be seen as the Way.

Banzan calling these forms “Shinto” and not Confucianism is related to him often calling the Way the “Great Way.” While normally Confucianists discuss the “Way” within the scope of Confucianism, Banzan sometimes argues even that he is not a Confucianist. He does so while pointing to his own academic background, actual experience in political matters, and his critique of the current state of Confucianists in Japanese society.

He first describes the Great Way in the context of a critique of Confucianists’ factionalism. From Banzan’s perspective, the “vulgar hearts” of scholars who, claiming that they are true Confucianists, compete over who can do extraordinary things and try to make a name for themselves by criticizing other scholars are impediments to the Way being carried out in the world. The problem with these people who strictly observe forms (*kakuhōsha* 格法者) was not simply that they were mistaken about how to practice the Way. He states, “scholars of today attached to forms do not know benevolence and justice [*jingi* 仁義], have robust emotions as vulgar people competing with others and pursuing interests, and, engaging in Confucian-like acts, using forms, and discussing scripture commentaries and interpretations just because this is in accordance with their inclinations, think that they are people of the Way.” In this way, Banzan holds that they are egotistical people who go against the Way, carrying out their studies based on their inborn abilities and tastes and in fact only following the vulgar emotions of the self (*Shūgi gaisho*, 228). Never mind those who just uncritically believe in the words of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and practice formulaically—he says this is only theater that imitates form. Forms are entirely human-made, and even if their creator is a saint or wise man of the ancient past, the moment that they fail to be in accordance with time, place, and position, this no longer conforms to the Way and is no different from the likes of Buddhist transmigration thought, which Banzan held to be fictitious expedient means.

Banzan thought that people should engage in academic study only for the purposes of cultivating the self and keeping order in one’s family in the private realm and of creating an ideal society together by ruling the country and bringing peace to the world in the public realm. Therefore, since the Way of the saints is the ethics of the five relationships [*gorin* 五倫], it is the Way that should be learned by people of all social statuses (rulers, nobles, state ministers and state officials, warriors, and commoners), and it would be better if the likes of “Confucianists,” who make academic instruction their living, did not exist (*Shūgi washo*, 23). Also, “If it is learning it should be called learning, and if it is the Way it should be called the Way. It is harmful to give them names such as ‘the Confucian Way’ [*judō* 儒道] and ‘Heart-Mind Learning’ [*shingaku* 心学]” (*Shūgi washo*, 213). Elsewhere he states, “The Confucian way is the name of [the Way] in a time of declined virtue. The Great Way does not originally have a name.”

In this way, Banzan held that adopting the name “Confucianism” and becoming attached to distinctive etiquette (Ch. *li* 礼; Jp. *rei*) and doctrines is a cause of falling into a “small way” or “sectarian learning” (*ichiryū no gaku* 一流の学) that competes with Buddhism and the like. If people just follow their preferences and form factions, then even if they study Confucianism and call themselves Confucianists, they are no different than Buddhism’s various groups. If one wants to be universal, then it is appropriate to call it simply the Great Way.

Furthermore, Banzan also critiqued the various schools within Confucianism if they were factionalist. Regarding Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism, he states the following.

Those who study Zhu Xi Confucianism now are satisfied with anything, regardless of content, if they are said to be the words of Zhu Xi, just like the tendency in the Nichiren sect and elsewhere to believe Nichiren. Therefore, the sacred classics are hidden due to commentaries, and the method of cultivating the heart-mind [*shinpō* 心法] becomes distant due to exegesis of the classics. [Such mistaken errors of] Zhu Xi Confucianists actually made Zhu Zi a criminal who obstructs the teachings of the saints. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 267)

When one forgets the practice of “making use of what one has learned” (*juyō kufu* 受用工夫) and is attached to form, no matter how faithful one is to Zhu Xi’s words, one is no longer a student of the teachings of the saints. Uncritically believing in something is always the same, even if the object of belief is Nichiren. Banzan criticizes Yangming Confucianists, stating that they are “mistaken about humanity, excessively simplify teachings, and are similar to other heretical teachings of enlightenment. Those who study this increase this harm” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 267). The “other heretical teachings of enlightenment” probably refers to Zen Buddhism.

Here we find types of religious traditions that Banzan articulated as different from the Great Way. One was uncritical, obstinate belief, like that of Nichiren sect believers, and another was the pursuit of one’s own mental peace in an asocial fashion, like Zen priests. Banzan asserts that they do not lead to the construction of an ideal society and are therefore not the Great Way. On the one hand, as a result of his unrelenting investigation of the essential nature of Confucianism by comparing with other traditions not its doctrinal content but its societal function, he criticizes the studies and learning of Confucianists in society as not being true, original Confucianism; on the other hand, he declares that his own study and learning is not the Confucianism spoken of by people in society.

Also, Banzan, describing his own academic background in detail, states that in the end he arrived at a method of not relying on Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming and directly approaching classical texts. This immediacy vis-a-vis the Way itself

and classical texts is something that distinguishes Banzan's academic approach. Relying on his own heart-mind that is originally one with "heaven," along with Confucius, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming, he seeks the Great Way that was sought by the emperors Yao 堯 and Shun 舜.

Banzan, boldly relativizing the words of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, of course appeared arrogant and heretical to his contemporary Confucianists. To criticisms from such scholars who say "your study of the Way is close to the Way of Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 莊子; claiming that forms are different from the Way itself, it is not based on the etiquette and teachings of Confucianism" (*Shūgi gaisho*, 328). Banzan responds with the criticism that present-day Zhu Xi Confucianism and Yangming Confucianism do not aim to "rule the country and bring peace to the world," and fall into sectarian study.

The likes of Yangming Confucianism and Zhu Xi Confucianism's people who strictly observe forms are just sectarian schools. Even if they end up having more followers in the future than at present, this is only because they have gathered people fit for their school. This is like how the Zen sect and Precept [sect] priests exist in society, and these are not teachings that rule the country and bring peace to the world. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 328)

His "Like how the Zen sect and Precept sect priests exist in society" refers to stopping at forming groups based on the times, with acceptance depending on the latest trends and individual tastes. This way of being means that Yangming Confucianism and Zhu Xi Confucianism do not conform to time, place, and position, and that they do not have the viability to move the country or the world. I want to highlight that Banzan, going beyond a Confucianism/Buddhism framework, articulates teachings based on whether they function as "teachings that rule the country and bring peace to the world."

Here, Banzan's "Great Way" discourse is connected to Daoism by a critic. There is no doubt that this discourse was based on the Daoists' "When the Great Way declined, benevolence and righteousness came to be preached," a criticism of Confucianists that points to a "Great Way" / "Great Togetherness" (*daidō* 大同) utopia that existed before various academic factions emerged and fought with each other.

A long time ago Zhuang Zhou 莊周 [c. 369 BC–c. 286 BC] criticized Confucius. This is because he was trying to protect the Great Way. Those in the world who said that they believe in Confucius were [actually] not on the path of Confucius. While advocating Confucianism, they were immersed just in criticizing each other. Zhuang Zhou thus rejected Confucius along with them, wanting to make the Great Way clear. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 193)



This is an assessment in which Banzan overlays himself with Zhuang Zhou. He was proud that he was going beyond the framework of normal Confucianism and discussing a “great” way that encompassed Daoism.<sup>1</sup>

From the above, Banzan’s concept of the “Great Way” that exists in distinction to “sectarian study” and “small ways” has surely become clear. With a half century having passed since the establishment of the shogunate and society having stabilized, Banzan thought it was a good opportunity to make the “Way” a reality. It was for this very reason that he thought that becoming a *kakuhōsha* and alienating oneself from ordinary people after having gone through the effort to learn Confucianism was to lose sight of why one did so in the first place. If one truly wants to realize the Great Way, then rulers must establish forms that, conforming to time, place, and position, can be accepted by all people and include the various “small ways.” Banzan, who took pride in having acquired the essence of the “Way of the saints” through his unique academic stance of “understanding the general idea based on an extreme view [*kyōken* 狂見]” (*Shūgi washo*, 78), had to leave behind the label of “Confucian” in protest against the Confucianists in general.

### *The “Great Way” of the “Great Togetherness”*

There were also people who, pointing out that people who follow Confucian etiquette naturally had begun to appear in Japan, sincerely wondered if this was an opportunity to spread proper etiquette. While agreeing (“this is truly what I wish for”), he replied that the conditions of the times did not yet allow for this on the grounds that such people “only interact with a few people and thus do not know the feelings of the numberless people in the mundane world.” Thinking that such people did not understand the true meaning of Confucian etiquette as forms, Banzan went back to the legendary sacred emperors to explain the process by which etiquette was created.

According to Banzan, in the era of Fuxi 伏羲, “study/learning” (*gaku* 学) arose, and then in the time of Shennong 神農, techniques to nourish the people

1. Banzan understands Laozi’s *wuwei* 無為 as not a lack of etiquette but as having the same meaning as Confucianism’s “self-restraint and conforming to etiquette” (*kokki fukurei* 克己復礼) (*Shūgi washo*, 180). Taki Yasuhide 瀧康秀 says Banzan, who equates the “golden mean” (Jp. *chū* 中) and *wuwei* and frequently uses the expression “helping the Creator’s work” (*zōka no kō o tasukeru* 造化の功を助ける) was influenced by *Yanzhai kouyi* 鷹齋口義 (Jp. *Kensai kōgi*; by the Southern Song’s Lin Xiyi 林希逸; 1193–1271). Taki notes that one of the characteristics of the “heart-mind studies” of the latter is seeing “the Creator” (*zōka* 造化) as ultimate *wuwei*, as well as holding that if humans give up their selfishness the “heart-mind can embody the functioning of the ‘natural principle’ and ‘the Creator,’ which actively generates and nurture all phenomena” (TAKI 1998, 78).

(“agriculture and medical arts”) were invented. However, “etiquette and laws” (*reigi* 礼儀, *hatto* 法度) did not yet exist. While during the time of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黄帝), rites, music implements, and writing appeared, there were still no detailed rules such as the dates and periods for coming of age, marriage, funerals, and ancestral rites. During the time of the five emperors (*gotei* 五帝), a general framework for etiquette and laws came into place, but they were still “simple and easy to carry out.” Etiquette at the time “encouraged people to do good through moral influence while not going against their feelings, and rules were created because people [who had thereby been made ethical] wanted them” (*Shūgi washo*, 93). They were not coercions or prohibitions pushed down from above. However, after going through the Xia 夏 and the Shang 商 and reaching the Zhou, civilization spread, and goods, food, and drink were no longer lacking. The world became peaceful and people had more leeway in their daily lives. It was at this point that for the first time many “etiquette-based temperances” and dates and periods for rites were established in detail out of concern that “people’s moods” would flood over and flow into luxurious splendor.

This development of etiquette in stages was all carried out in accordance with “time, place, and position,” and it is not the case that the lack of “etiquette and laws” meant that the knowledge of Fuxi and Shennong was inferior to that of the Duke of Zhou (Zhougong 周公) and Confucius. If they had been born in each other’s eras, then they would have handled etiquette as each other did. Because etiquette is established by the saints of each era in accordance with their times, each of their formulations of etiquette were correct in their respective limited situations. Therefore, for Banzan, Confucian etiquette is not something that should just be practiced by following exactly what is written in the classics, or by simplistically putting it into forms that can be practiced. The etiquette written in the Confucian classics is nothing more than the traces of the saints who sought etiquette that was in accordance with their time, and it is necessary to determine what etiquette from history is applicable to the time, place, and position of contemporary Japan.

Banzan described (*Shūgi washo*, 93) the Japan in which he lived as follows: while “the plethora of goods and people living luxuriously exceeds that of the richness at the height of the Zhou,” the “people’s heart-minds not becoming ethical through etiquette is similar to that of the era of Fuxi.” While the people during this time did not need etiquette, being “simple, honest and kind with little desire and no spirit of pursuing interests,” people today have “much desire and a deeply rooted spirit of pursuing interests, and these habits are not just ones accumulated over the course of ten or one hundred years but are firmly rooted and deeply impregnated.” Therefore, if something is done all of a sudden that goes against their desire to benefit themselves then “the Way will not be real-

ized.” Therefore, Banzan said that people should do things in stages and wait for the general public to desire etiquette, like “guiding a young child.”

The vulgar people of the past five or six hundred years are like five- or six-year-old children. First, with the policy of creating schools, open up the knowledge that distinguishes between good and evil and promote the appropriateness of knowing shame so that people will act appropriately. One should wait for an outstanding ruler to appear after this has accumulated for dozens or even hundreds of years, and then have etiquette be created. (*Shūgi washo*, 94)

Even if at present there are people who desire Confucian etiquette, there are only one or two people of outstanding talent among one hundred or so young children. If teachers educate at the level of these talented individuals, then they will take pride in being better than others, and while they will extend their abilities and knowledge, they will lose sincerity (*sei* 誠). Also, the majority of young children who cannot keep up will undoubtedly develop a dislike for learning itself.

Banzan encourages enthusiastic scholars who try to shoulder the Way to reflect if they want to practice unsuitable etiquette due to their vulgar emotions (*Shūgi washo*, 95). If one is going to become conceited by engaging in academic study and go astray from the human way, then it is better to not study and live in accordance with one’s inborn wisdom (*ryōchi* 良知). If one implements forms that are estranged from the people, then society will see Confucianists as “only a school of Chinese-style scholars,” and, just as Precept sect priests maintain the precepts and Zen priests engage in *zazen* 坐禪, this becomes “an isolated path of learning separate from the general public” (*Shūgi washo*, 95). As a result, the Way will not be carried out in the world. One should not tailor things to scholars but to the masses.

The saints enjoy themselves with mundane people. The people of Lu 魯 engaged in competitive hunting, and Confucius did so as well. To do things with the masses is the Great Way. When one should do good, one does good with the masses. When the time has not come, one behaves foolishly with the masses. Therefore, scholars do not leave behind the mundane. The Way is not separate from the masses. When it is time to carry out the Way after moral influence has fully spread, then one does so along with the world as a whole. During such times the masses do good as is recommended and no one goes against it. (*Shūgi washo*, 96)

In other words, Banzan saw the alienation of scholars from the masses (“the people of the mundane world”) as the biggest problem for the realization of the Way. He did not think that people would follow Confucianism when they are persuaded to reject Buddhism on logical grounds. Using this method it would probably be difficult to edify people even on an individual level, never

mind bring about change in society as a whole (including the masses/mundane world)—this would require a completely different process than scholars studying the classics and acquiring an understanding of the “human way.”

Here, Banzan emphasizes that his “Great Way” includes the nuance of the “Great Togetherness.” Asked why—despite the “Way” being, of course, originally “Great”—he calls it the “Great Way,” Banzan answers as follows.

The Way ordinarily spoken of is a small way. Therefore, the name the “Great Way” is necessary. The “Great Way” is the “Great Togetherness.” One should proceed with mundane people and not go out by oneself. One should act with the masses and not be different by oneself. If other people do something evil, just do not do it oneself. One should not censure or criticize others’ acts. If there is good to be done, then one should do it oneself, and not make others do so. It is similar to how an army general moves with his troops and is not too far ahead of them just because of his strength and braveness. Sometimes, when one sees signs that the masses can follow, one takes the lead. Even if one has the ability to do something on one’s own, one does not do things that are hard for the majority of people to follow. It surely goes without saying that the Way ordinarily studied in society is a small way. *(Shūgi washo, 88)*

Banzan says that etiquette is a device for improving the manners and customs of the general public, and should be carefully established from this kind of perspective as planned over dozens or a hundred years, and that Japanese people of his time should learn from the etiquette of emperors Yao and Shun, two saints that existed in history.

The rule of Yao and Shun should eternally be taken as a teacher and taken as a norm by other countries [in addition to China]. While etiquette was not yet found therein, it did exist in an undefined form. Rulers were very sincere and prudent and the world was therefore naturally at peace. The good of being simple was comparable to consummate virtue, and by realizing the mean and harmony, heaven and earth operated properly and all things developed healthily. . . . Even if it is the etiquette of the Three Dynasties [*sandai* 三代], that which does not match the moods of the people of the world, the times, and abilities should not be used. Even tens of thousands of years later, and even in the other country of Japan, the rule of Yao and Shun should be carried on and taken as a teacher. *(Shūgi washo, 280)*

While normally in Confucianism the etiquette of the Zhou is considered ideal, Banzan holds that since it is not appropriate for Japan’s climate, there is a need to follow the simple etiquette of emperors Yao and Shun. Also, in response to an interlocuter who says that it is probably impossible to return things to the simplicity of their time unless almost all of civilization is done away with, Banzan answers as follows.

In *wuwei* 無為 [Jp. *mui*], there is true *wuwei* and *wuwei* only in form. Ruling based on the time and not disliking the familiar is *wuwei*. Even if one wants to bring back the simplicity of ancient times immediately, this cannot be done. If people with power force this, then there will be much harm. While great wars in the world arise due to ostentatious winning and straightforwardness being lost, trying to make things thrifty and simple again is worse than just leaving ostentation and falsity as is and will actually make disturbances worse. Regardless of whether things are complicated or simple on the surface, if sincerity of the heart-mind is established and the world comes to respect sincerity, the essence of ancient *wuwei* and simplicity can be obtained. There is no harm in taking time to restore customs bit by bit. (*Shūgi washo*, 281)

“True” *wuwei* is to establish sincerity of the heart-mind while not removing the empty words and insincerity of familiar customs in a forced way. Instead of simple etiquette that is the traces of the rule of emperors Yao and Shun, one should imitate their presentation of the “essence of etiquette” in a “simple” form.

The importance of this simplicity is the result of natural human feeling and therefore is not limited to Confucianism. Regarding the flourishing and decline of Buddhism's various sects, Banzan states the following:

People tend to rely on things that are simple. Since there are no teachings as simple as the Ikkō sect, many people take refuge in it [the Ikkō sect]. The Pure Land and Nichiren sects also imitated the simplicity of the Ikkō and spread very widely. As things have become more civilized in recent years, fewer and fewer people believe in teachings regarding hell, the land of bliss, and so on. This will become more and more the case. The Zen sect teaches simply without difficult things, emphasizes enlightenment, and does not focus that much on hell after death. This fits the era of civilization. However, Zen today, wanting foolish men and women to come to it, preaches teachings that have been made to seem mystical. This is for its own benefit, and goes against what was transmitted by the patriarchs. If it stops doing so then it will flourish more and more and other sects will lose. (*Shūgi washo*, 330)

Based on his insight into the human society in front of him, Banzan asserted that it is important for the Way of the saints to be “simple” so that it can be accepted by the masses and carried out as the Great Togetherness. We could say that Banzan also is trying to imitate the simplicity of the Ikkō sect.

#### *From the “Great Way” to “Shinto”*

While Banzan had in the past aimed to engage in the three-year practice of mourning found in Confucian etiquette, upon reflection he says that this was based on his own vulgar desire of seeking fame. Emphasizing that to make the Great Way flourish one must not leave behind the “masses” or the “mundane,”

he uses the expression, originally from Laozi, of “dimming the light and mingling with the dust” (Ch. *heguang tongjen* 和光同塵; Jp. *wakō dōjin*):

Even if those who aim to realize the Great Way know that they should engage in mourning [for three years]; if this is something that the people of their time cannot do, then they should dim their light and mingle with the dust, and, looking at things as if tens of thousands of years is a single day [that is, from a long term perspective], do things naturally without contrivance, start a business and present something that successors will take over, and proceed along with the masses. One should not seek fame for oneself. Those who do things that the masses cannot are not teachers of the world. This is just getting caught up in forms and becoming a single school. If one leaves behind the mundane world, one will never be able to give rise to the Way. (*Shūgi washō*, 83)

Banzan probably developed this view while being involved in the center of Okayama domain politics and experiencing friction with retainers critical of Confucianism.<sup>2</sup> Also, in *Shūgi gaishō* (332–36), he recognizes the importance of the existence of Buddhist funerals because they are simple (“While Buddhists are uncivilized heretics, they are in some ways suited for Japan’s climate and times”; *Shūgi gaishō*, 332). He even approves of cremation, which normal Confucianists abhorred on the grounds that it was lacking in benevolence and filial piety. It is now a “custom of the general public,” and it would be impossible in this society to have commoners practice the mourning rites found in *Zhuzi jiali* 朱子家礼 (Jp. *Shushi karei*; The Family Rituals of Zhu Xi) due to their high cost. Therefore, “if they have momentum that matches the present time and place and it would be difficult for us to go against the world’s current, it is fine to carry out Buddhist funerals” (*Shūgi gaishō*, 336).

Today, even if genius or wise rulers appear, it would be impossible to have everyone all the way down to commoners carry out the Confucian rituals of *Zhuzi jiali*. Commoners do not have enough food, clothing, and shelter to live, and cannot keep wind and rain out of their houses. The situation is one in which farmers only have enough assets for farming and merchants only enough for business, and barely enough at that—how could they have the leeway to do funeral etiquette? (*Shūgi gaishō*, 337)

He even says, “When the Way declines and there are many foolish people, thankfully there are forms of Buddhism. Funerary and other rites can be carried out in a simple and brief way. This is also the will of heaven” (*Shūgi gaishō*, 338).

2. Confucianism had not yet spread in seventeenth century warrior society, and it tended to be met with repulsion and mockery (WATANABE 2016). Retainers criticized the Confucianism-inclined Okayama Domain Lord Ikeda Mitsumasa 池田光政 (1609–1682) and people plotted to drive out Banzan, who had been given an important post as a Confucianist.

However, Banzan is only rejecting Confucianism and approving of Buddhism for its simplicity with regard to funeral rites at the time. The etiquette for the ideal society that should be aimed for as a one-hundred-year plan is not Confucianism or Buddhism but “Shinto.”

To “friends in learning” (*gakuyū* 学友) who say that if people gradually become wiser and stop believing in Buddhism “one hundred years from now Confucianism will rise and the world will be at great peace” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 330), Banzan partially affirms this idea, stating that while in theory this is true and in the past he thought so as well, “Looking at the mountains, ponds, grass, trees, people’s moods, and the conditions of the times in light of Japan’s recent climate, rituals and teachings do not spread or last long if they do not have the good of simplicity. Therefore Buddhism, which is simple and fits Japan’s climate, will probably continue into the future” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 330). Banzan is also asked, “If Buddhists are getting along despite not being benevolent just because of their simplicity, if the saints’ way of benevolent governance was simple, how victorious would it be? If so, if the Way of the saints is finally realized, then undoubtedly the forms of the Western lands’ barbarians [that is, Buddhism] would perish.” However, he is pessimistic, stating, “Scholars that do simple good and are fit for the climate will probably not appear” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 330). Confucianists in general are far “from simple good,” and he laments that when he advocates the Great Way, it is censured as being “Daoism and heretical” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 330). Even so, out of his sense of responsibility (“if my words do not remain when disorder arrives after Confucian forms have been carried out by the book, the Way will be almost lost”), he concludes as follows: “In Japan today, if it is not very simple in comparison to the etiquette forms of the Zhou to the extent that it is mistakenly seen as Daoism, then it cannot not be widely used in the world and carried out by future generations” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 330). In other words, he thought that there was a need for new forms that consisted of both the ethical nature of Confucianism and the simplicity of Buddhism and Daoism. Banzan called this “Shinto.”

My wish is as follows: that people bring back the Shinto of ancient times, establish sincerity, do not lean towards Chinese forms, do not follow Buddhism’s forms, and, using simple good, carry out the Great Way that is easy to know and easy to follow. However, scholars today do not know that they themselves are holding the Confucian way down while saying that they will make it flourish, as well as helping Buddhism while saying that they will beat it back. Buddhists’ lack of benevolence and Confucianists being stuck in principles are the same in that they ignore Shinto. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 331)

By advocating the rebirth of Japan’s “ancient Shinto” that was simple to the same degree as the rule of emperors Yao and Shun, one can work to realize the original Way without being dragged down by Buddhists, who do not aspire for



an ethical society, and Confucianists, who are preoccupied with the arguments and have lost sincerity. After stating, “There is the Great Way that reveals the noble virtue of the ages of the gods that has remained in subsequent generations, investigates the laws of the Dynastic period, considers in detail people’s present moods and the situation of the times, and helps the universe nurture all phenomena” (*Shūgi gaisho*, 331), he explains how “etiquette and laws” should be:

It is said that the Way is like a large road. It should be something that the masses also [in addition to scholars] can rely on. The five teachings and ten kinds of correctness [*goten jūgi* 五典十義] of the five relationships are this. The ethical essence of an illiterate person is sometimes superior to scholars because their nature is received from heaven. Etiquette is that which ornaments and assists this. It should be carried out with the masses while considering time, place, and position. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 331)

Banzan’s idea was the creation of simple etiquette like the one that existed in ancient times which enabled people to extend their inborn ethical natures without academic study and could be carried out even by poor commoners. This yet-to-be-realized “coming etiquette,” which combines the ethics of Confucianism with the simplicity of Buddhism, is the etiquette of “Shinto.” While at first glance it appears that Banzan is speaking of a rebirth of Shinto as it existed in the ancient past, in fact, driven by a utopian passion, he is discussing a Shinto that is to come in the future. This is neither the Shinto commonly spoken of by the general public, Confucianism, nor Buddhism. He renders Confucianism abstract to the extent that we could call it a social theory. Banzan, isolated among Confucianists for this reason, used the word “Shinto” to express the future forms that he conceived of based on this theory.

Banzan chose the name “Shinto” after calculating that it would have certain effects. Responding affirmatively to the words of a Buddhist priest who rejects even attachment to joining the Buddhist order on the grounds that it is attachment, Banzan states the following:

While I study the Way of the saints, I am not attached to Confucianism and also know the dubiousness of learning geared towards the masses. I also know the wastefulness of Zhu Xi Confucianism, Yangming Confucianism, and so on. There are no learnings that should be adopted in their entirety. The Shinto of heaven and earth [that is inherent in the natural world] is the Great Way. In our country, there is Shinto, which is based on Japan’s climate. While it is said that the Great Way has no name, since it is the way of our country, if one is forced to choose a name, one should choose Shinto. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 271)

When naming the nameless way, Banzan is able to rhetorically connect a universal “Way of the saints” and Japan’s particular “Shinto of the future” that is restricted by Japan’s climate. He does so by using the match between the com-



pound *shintō* (Ch. *shendao*; “mysterious way”) found in *The Book of Changes* and the compound used to refer to Japan’s native teachings and practice system related to the gods. Banzan’s argument is quite convenient in that it is easy to accept for those who are repelled by the foreign Confucianism (it takes into account favoritism for one’s country with the phrase “since it is the way of our country”), as well as for conservative people who dislike the new. Furthermore, the term *shintō* also has the merit of being something that can connect with commoners who do not have anything to do with book-based learning. As shown by the poem “If just the heart-mind is in accordance with the way of sincerity, then the gods will protect without prayer” (*kokoro dani makoto no michi ni kananaba, inorazu totemo kami ya mamoran* 心だにまことの道にかないなば、祈らずとも神や守らん), a discourse had spread on a general level that made prayer to the gods and buddhas rational and ethical by placing the gods within the heart-mind. For this reason, he is able to include everyone from those who simply seek worldly benefits through ritual practice related to shrines to those who have the capability to learn about higher-level moral doctrines. It appears that Banzan thought that the intellectuals incorporated into part of the Shinto that covered the entirety of society are not estranged and isolated from the “mundane world” or “masses,” as was the case with Confucianists who emphasized formal forms.

Also, writing a Confucian interpretation onto the so-called “three deities’ oracles” (*sanja takusen* 三社託宣) and holding that the three divine implements, which were already connected with the three virtues in Shinto teachings from the middle ages, are Japan’s only divine scripture, Banzan actively tried to incorporate the simple resources possessed by the Shinto tradition. He lays out this posture in *Shintō taigi* 神道大義 (The Gist of Shinto). Therein, the important points of the “Way of humans” and the “Way of the rulers” are explained plainly and concisely. For example, Shinto takes “honesty as the body, kindness and respect as the heart-mind, and just doing what should be done [*buji* 無事] as practice.” This “kindness and respect” is “without giving mind to it, naturally present regardless of whether one studies or not” (*Shintō taigi*, 11). Or, since Japan and China “have the same human nature and the common Way,” “those versed in Shinto have clearly acquired the method of cultivating the heart-mind and are equipped with political teachings [*seikyō* 政教], even if they do not use Confucianism. How could there be a need for the heretical Buddhism? [Shinto is] simple, self-evident, and fully-equipped and thus complete” (*Shintō taigi*, 14). In this way, he emphasizes that anyone can put into practice the Way without studying Confucian classics.

“Simplicity” and “Nature”

As previously described, in the end, Banzan’s “rebirth of Shinto” means the creation of “simple forms” fit for the Japan of his time. While simplifying the rituals found in *Zhuzi jiali* to be implementable was something that everyone aiming to put Confucian etiquette into practice did to some extent, Banzan was advocating creating something new. Asked if simplicity (*ikan* 易簡) and abbreviated standards (*ryakugi* 略儀) for rituals and etiquette are similar, he responds as follows.

They are quite different. The teachings of the saints have a simple good and do not present abbreviated standards [*ryakugi*] [for rituals and etiquette]. When abbreviated standards are taught to people, etiquette dies. When etiquette dies, extravagance arises. In times of extravagance, things used are ornamented and deeds become complicated. When things are complicated, falsity arises. When things are excessively ornamented, abbreviated standards are carried out more and more.

(*Shūgi washo*, 305)

For example, if the colors and design of a lower-class samurai’s ceremonial clothes (*eboshi* 烏帽子, *hitatare* 直垂, and so on) are established, one can carry out rituals with one set of them, and a situation will not emerge in which people will acquire multiple ones and compete over looks. However, at some point the *hitatare* coat and *hakama* 袴 skirt were abbreviated into the combined jacket and skirt called a *kamishimo* 袴, and since this is nothing more than the abbreviation of standards bit by bit, a limitless number of types emerge and costs mount. It is a situation in which “due to abbreviated standards people become lavish and their etiquette disappears, and things become glitzy and complicated” (*Shūgi washo*, 306). Since this is troublesome and costs are considerable, even honest people must commit falsehoods when trying to be in accordance with the ways of the lavish world. In order to avoid a chain reaction of people amplifying each other’s desire to consume while seeking to be different in their possessions and behavior, from the beginning, a simple and moderate model should be established after calculating its effects.

When doing so, since the ethics for the five relationships is inherent even in those who are illiterate and “etiquette decorates and assists this,” when creating etiquette one aims for people to stay close to the natural foundation that is called the “essence of etiquette” (*rei no moto* 礼の本) (*Shūgi washo*, 312). Banzan thought that “simplicity” was inevitable in both the natural world and human nature, as well as basis and effectiveness.

When etiquette is simple and in accordance with time, place, and position, there is harmony and it is easy to carry out. Heaven governs based on it being known easily (*i* 易). Earth nurtures phenomena based on it being brief (*kan* 簡). Heaven and earth’s hierarchical positioning is nature’s etiquette. The good

of simplicity is harmony. When [the etiquette of humans] is easy, it is easy for the people to know, and when it is brief it is easy to follow. When it is easy to know the people have an affinity for it. When it is easy to follow it is effective. Just as the moon and sun alternately shine and the seasons never cease to change, this is the nature of the eternal, unending heavenly way. This is the essence of etiquette and music. (Shūgi washo, 245)

In other words, when Banzan speaks of “simplicity,” he is referring not only to having a limited number of things so that the masses can easily put them into practice, and refraining from forcing through policies that go against people’s customs. He is also referring to being in accordance with the natural principle of heaven and earth by being moderate and appropriate so that the original effects of etiquette can be acquired.

Emperors Yao and Shun were the first to discover the method of cultivating the heart-mind found in *The Book of Changes*, and named it the “mean” [chū 中]. In other words, even with regard to keeping peace, ruling a country, and running a family, there is no method of cultivating the heart-mind or way besides the mean. The heavenly principle [tenri 天理] being un-arisen in oneself is called the mean, and the heavenly principle having arisen in oneself is called harmony [wa 和]. Cultivating oneself, keeping order in one’s family, ruling the country, and bringing peace to the world is already-arisen harmony. This is the same as the mean. Things acquiring the highest good of the heavenly principle and being the simplest and briefest is the mean, in other words, harmony.

(Shūgi washo, 34)

The mean is in accordance with the natural principle of heaven and earth. However, the mean is not a concrete norm. It is proof that one’s actions to obtain the “result” of cultivating oneself, keeping order in one’s family, ruling the country, and keeping peace under heaven—in other words, the acquisition of “harmony”—were in accordance with the heavenly principle. The mean state is originally balanced simplicity. The etiquette of the Zhou was complicated because it was made in accordance with the needs of the times. In other words, its complicatedness was a necessary evil. Banzan enthusiastically praises and takes as an ideal the “ancient time of supreme rule based on supreme virtue,” when, without anything like doctrinal study or the way of politics, things were governed by a naturally-arising “essence of etiquette,” a “Shinto” in which “heaven and earth were a book, phenomena were characters, and spring, summer, winter, and fall pass and the moon and sun alternatively shine” (Shūgi gaisho, 429).

The mind of benevolence arising based on spring naturally arriving is the same natural phenomenon as people of the same mind coming together, the same sounds resonating together, water flowing to damp places, and fire moving

to dry places. Why would there be a need to use words? Since later people became foolish and could not make heaven and earth their teacher, symbol-based teachings were created. The symbols created in Japan are the three divine sacred treasures. The symbols created in China are the eight trigrams. In latter times it is harder and harder to instruct even with the symbolic. Therefore, books were created. (*Shūgi gaisho*, 429)

In the past, “people, in accordance with the operation of nature that is based on the heavenly principle, worked or rested without volition intervening. This was *wuwei*.” In this way, there was natural harmony with heaven and earth. However, after this natural harmony is lost, harmony has to be restored with *wuwei* (“simple,” “mean”) governance in accordance with time, position, and place (“It is said that things were at peace, despite the ruler’s natural governance—not forced in accordance with time and place—and the world and country being pure all having been *wuwei*”; *Shūgi washo*, 177). For this reason, symbols and books have been created in accordance with the various eras.

Under a worldview that holds harmony with the generating and nurturing heaven and earth to be human happiness as well as the responsibility of humans, Banzan, relying on his reason and experience, discusses a universal essence of nature and humans, and, based on this, searches for institutions and forms of etiquette that are rational and without excess or lack. This was Banzan’s Shinto of the future. While ancient saints were extraordinary and excellent figures, the teachings and etiquette established by them do not have absolute orthodoxy. The natural principles of heaven/earth should be used as norms.

Banzan’s theory relativizes the writings in scripture as nothing more than the footprints of saints, departs from existing religious organizations and a traditional scriptural interpretive framework, and rationalistically seeks out the essence and realization of the Way. It differs from a “unity of the three teachings” (*sankyō itchi* 三教一致) discourse like the one that had gone along approvingly with the coexistence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto since the middle ages. It was a landmark theory comparable to the appearance of the theory of natural religion in the West. However, because at first glance it appears similar to the familiar modern discourse that understands these three entities as “religions,” its importance in Japanese religious history has been overlooked. Of course, one of the causes of this is that Banzan not only articulates the ethics which he presents as natural principles using Confucian terms (such as the five constant virtues), but he also calls these ethics “Shinto,” adorning them in continuity with tradition.

The theory of natural religion in the West was formed by freethinkers who maintained a distance from the Church. While opposing traditional doctrines, they often inherited Christian premises. Even so, in the sense that they removed or looked down on irrational elements like miracles and revelation, and discussed via reason-based verification a universal essence shared by ancient reli-

gions and non-Christian contemporary religions as well as the form of an ideal religion that should be brought back (or realized in the future), they were at a new stage that was different than the theology that had existed before them. In the same way, while it is certainly true that Banzan's ideas regarding the "Great Way" came out of Confucianism, he worked to reinterpret the three teachings based on reason and conscience (which were linked to the natural order) and lay a foundation for ethics in this mortal life using the essence shared by the three teachings. We can see it as a religious theory that arose out of the context of negotiations between the three (four) teachings in East Asia.

### *Conclusion*

Above we have considered Banzan's Shinto theory while focusing on his idea of the "Great Way." It is notable as a religious theory for its focus on rulers, who edify the masses, creating "forms" that the masses put into practice. This was premised on a kind of natural religion theory that saw all of the historical three (four) teachings as sharing a common essence, namely, an ethics for this world with a cosmological significance. Banzan held that all forms are created by rulers trying to realize an ethical society via the rebuilding of societal institutions. He also explains the origins of the teachings and rituals of Shinto and Buddhism while patterning them after the origins of the teachings and rituals of Confucianism. He holds that outstanding figures of the past each established institutions in accordance with their time and climate based on their insight into heaven and earth as well as human nature.

In other words, for Banzan, religious traditions were devices for edification that work on the human subconscious in a non-linguistic fashion in order to realize universal ethics in society, and were something that should be discussed from the perspective of the institutions of rituals and music.<sup>3</sup> While based on the moods and customs of the masses, it does not let them be as is, but aims for gradual change in accordance with the spread of virtue ("Politics should be carried out in accordance with the moods and customs of small people [that is, people of inferior character]. If one tries to carry out sudden changes, goes against people's moods, and makes them suffer, the Great Way will be unable to be realized"; *Shūgi washo*, 199). He explains this method as "like loving a young child and playing along with them" (*Shūgi giron kikigaki*, 68). An ancient person with the virtues of sharpness, sagacity, and bravery became the creator of forms and the outstanding ability to create the new (*shin* 神) in the heart-minds of the saints, anticipating the future, created things that would satisfy their various

3. I discuss Banzan's theory of religion that is based on Confucian "etiquette and music" theory in ISEKI (2015a).

demands. The intellect in their heart-minds cultivated ancient morality and created rules of etiquette, music, and models of conduct that fit the present, and taught the six classical arts, poetry, and history, thereby bringing [the people] to goodness (*Shūgi giron kikigaki*, 68).

While the creator epistemologically stands outside of the forms that they create, they act as if they are inside it with the people. This dual consciousness could be criticized as political trickery to win the people's hearts. However, adopting a view of the masses based on *The Analects* ("People cannot be made to know the Way but become good citizens in accordance with the Way by the moral influence of the ruler"), he states that

it is actually harmful to try to make all commoners know the Way with the likes of preaching like Buddhist priests. The moral influence of virtue-based rule is not like that. Influencing only a few is not very effective. It is not purposefully hiding [the Way] and refraining from informing them about it. While if everyone in the world knows the Way, ruling and edification is easy, but they cannot be made to know it. (*Rongo shōkai*, 112)

We could see this as a methodology that arose from directly facing the difficulty of preaching and convincing a group of each individual reason for things. If one does not face this difficulty and tries to apply the communication methods of fortunate intellectuals with wealth and time to society as a whole, the poor and busy masses will be made to think that it is impossible to practice the Way and they will be estranged from it. The end result will be the self-satisfaction of a handful of intellectuals acquiring fame. From Banzan's perspective, this is not a problem of the masses being unable to learn but with intellectuals who teach improperly.

This religious theory of Banzan is, of course, not discussing that which is called "religion" today from a neutral perspective. While keenly insightful into one part of what is called "religion" today, it has a pronounced bias, taking the unity of politics and religion as a premise. However, we could also say that it offers much to contribute to the present-day task of reconsidering the Western concept of religion. Rather than using the concept of religion from Western modernity as a standard from which to assess this, we need to carefully go through how he articulated this in a different historical context.

However, Banzan cannot, therefore, be immediately called a representative theorist of religion in early modern Japan. He offered a comparative theory of religion or theory of the essence of religion out of his interest in constructing an ethical society. For the time being I want to call it a statecraft theory of religion. Insofar as I am aware, a similar theoretical premise was shared by not only Confucianists but also Shintoists and Buddhists as one of the common fields for

intellectuals from the early modern times onwards to discuss religion.<sup>4</sup> While Banzan called Shinto the concrete form that should be adopted when realizing a universal Way in Japan, the statecraft theory of religion should be considered an important background to the “Shinto” that would be reconstructed through the early modern and modern periods: Shinto’s approach in differentiating itself from other religions by calling itself the Great Way found in the Meiji period and later is surely related to this kind of theory of the universal and the particular.<sup>5</sup> There are many related topics that should be researched. For example, this should include how this view of religion—or, rather, view of “teachings” (*kyō* 教) or the “ways”—that focuses on making people ethical, and societal unity led to, through negotiations with the understanding of religion imported during the Meiji period, the view that Shinto is not a religion, as well as the Japanese-style separation of religion and politics.<sup>6</sup>

(Translated by Dylan Luers Toda)

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4. Regarding ideas about Shinto that were influenced by Banzan, see ISEKI (2011; 2015b).

5. For example, Endō Jun 遠藤潤 shares the following assertion of a Shinto priest recorded in Tokoyo Nagatane’s 常世長胤 (1832–1886) *Shinkyō soshiki monogatari* 神教組織物語 (Shinto Organization Tales): “Shinto is the Great Way that rules the whole nation, and is not religion.” We could say that this was the reaction of someone, who saw Shinto as the “Great Way,” against “Shinto” being held to exist in a way comparable to the various Buddhist schools (*shūmon* 宗門). Banzan referred to these as “small ways.” See ENDŌ (2004, 176).

6. When Meiji period intellectuals discussed the relationship between politics and religion using the concept of “religion” (*shūkyō* 宗教) imported from the West, the Confucian view of religion, which up until then had been discussed using the term “teaching” (*kyō*), exerted a strong influence on a basic level, and led to the formation of the Meiji Emperor-system state. Regarding this, see WATANABE (2016).



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