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Religion and the State: The Influence of the Tokugawa on Religious Life, Thought, and Institutions

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Abstract

This paper describes the influence of the Tokugawa government on religious life in Japan. It focuses on the religious traditions of Buddhism, Shintoism, and Neo-Confucianism and how the state used these religions to their advantage. The Tokugawa had strict control over all aspects of Japanese life including religion and this paper explores that.

Keywords

religion, tokugawa, japan

Disciplines

Asian History | Buddhist Studies | History of Religion | History of Religions of Eastern Origins | Political History

Comments

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Religion and the State: The Influence of the Tokugawa on Religious Life, Thought,
and Institutions

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History 325: Tokugawa Japan

Professor Lowy

24 April 2017

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work
and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

The Tokugawa period in Japan began in 1600 and lasted until 1868, and was an era of peace throughout the realm. Before this time, Japan had experienced years of warfare between the different provinces, with various daimyo, or lords, fighting for power and precedence over the others. This period of protracted warfare came to an end with the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, when Tokugawa Ieyasu cemented his power over the country, later being officially declared shogun. Ieyasu and his successive heirs would establish peace in Japan and maintain it for over two hundred years. They took many measures to ensure that they would stay in power and that their country would be free of strife. The Tokugawa asserted their control in almost every aspect of the lives of their citizens, including their religion. They worked to quell religious strife and used religion to legitimize their rule. Before the Tokugawa period many Buddhist sects had been militant and took up arms against the government, which was a practice the Tokugawa did not want to happen again.¹ In addition to Buddhism, there were two other religious traditions that the Tokugawa used to their advantage: Shinto and Neo-Confucianism. This paper will first examine the laws and regulations that the Tokugawa implemented to control Buddhism as well as other popular religious teachings. Then, there will be an analysis of the how the Tokugawa imposed Confucianism on the population in order to establish a moral teaching that would eliminate threats to their rule. The Tokugawa exerted a large influence over religious schools of thought and institutions in order to ensure peace. Buddhism and other popular religious teachings were used as an arm of the government and were highly controlled and legislated, while

¹ Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), accessed February 20, 2017, 226. http://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=281997&site=eds-live&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_187.

Confucianism, combined with Shinto, was used as a justification for the social system that the Tokugawa implemented and as a means to impose certain morals on the populace.

There has been much written about religion in the Tokugawa period, but it tends to be a general overview, focusing on the different sects or a particular religious teacher. Most sources touch upon how the Tokugawa legislated and controlled various religious institutions but there has not been an in-depth exploration of the many ways in which the Tokugawa used religion for control and legitimacy. For example, *A History of Japanese Religion* by Kazuo Kasahara, an academic specializing in religion, gives a broad overview of religion during the Tokugawa period. It goes into specific details about all the Buddhist sects during the Tokugawa period and mentions how the Tokugawa regulated the sects but does not consider how this control was beneficial to the Tokugawa or why they desired to have this level of control. In addition, most that has been written has been either a broad overview of religion during the Tokugawa period or an exploration of a very specific subject, such as the article “The Purple Robe Incident and the Formation of the Early Modern Sōtō Zen,” by Duncan Williams, an academic who specializes in Japanese studies. This article does more of an in-depth analysis of the Tokugawa’s role in religious life, but it focuses on only one sect within Buddhism. This paper seeks to broadly examine the most popular religions and how the Tokugawa influenced them, instead of looking at only one religion or sect.

One way that the Tokugawa influenced religion in order to control the population and crush religious strife, using Buddhism as its mechanism, was by making every person register with a Buddhist sect. In this way, the Buddhist monks became government officials, aiding the Tokugawa in their efforts to monitor the populace. The Tokugawa ordered every household to identify with a Buddhist temple. This was done in part to eradicate Christianity, a religious

tradition that the Tokugawa felt resembled the militant Buddhist sects of the past and was a threat to the peace of the nation.² The use of the Buddhist temples in this way was not done out of any particular faithfulness or loyalty to them on the part of the Tokugawa, but simply as a way of suppressing Christianity and honoring the ways of their predecessors and their nation's heritage.³ It was also a way to ensure the loyalty of the people and the temples. These registries were gathered every year and people were often required to walk on Christian images in order to prove they were not Christians.⁴ They would be taken by household and report what sect and temple the family belonged to. An example of one of these registries from Niremata Village in Mino Province from 1804, cites the family as having belonged to the Higashi Hongani sect. It also provides information on each member of the household as well as how many bushels of rice the household had.⁵ While the registries were a tool for controlling the religious life of the people by making them identify with a Buddhist sect, it was also a way for the Tokugawa to monitor other aspects of the lives of their citizens. Buddhist monks who compiled these registries were acting as officials of the government, not only making sure that people belonged to an approved religious sect but also that they were making their contributions to the well-being of the nation by growing rice that would feed the people. These registries were a primary means of control that the Tokugawa instituted behind the veil of having a concern for religious life.

In addition to controlling the general populace through religion, the shogun also attempted to control the emperor, the imperial family, and court. An event known as the "purple

² Joseph M Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*, 1st ed. (Princeton, N. J: University press, 1987), 301.

³ Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 1st ed. (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963), 260.

⁴ Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life During the Age of the Shoguns* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 213.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

robe incident” was emblematic of this control. The “purple robe incident” occurred in 1627 when the shogun took away the ranks, titles, and purple robes of seventy Rinzai Zen, fifty Jodo, and thirty-four Sōtō Zen monks. The robes and other titles were awarded by the emperor and the imperial household.⁶ The purple robes marked the monks as fully recognized clerics and allowed them to become heads of temples. In this position, they could wield power and if they were not someone who agreed with the Tokugawa’s policies or were not approved of by the Tokugawa, they could use their power to disrupt the peace and order the Tokugawa had achieved. The militant Buddhist sects that exerted much power and control in the past threatened previous rulers and the Tokugawa wanted to make sure this did not occur under their rule. By monitoring who got the purple robes and which monks got to be in charge of temples, they were able to do this. It was one way the Tokugawa could directly control the inner workings of Buddhist institutions and make sure the monks and clerics of the highest standings were ones they approved of and ones that would behave in accordance with the wishes of the Tokugawa. They would support the Tokugawa instead of undermining them like previous Buddhist institutions had.

Stripping the imperial family of the power to award purple robes not only enabled the Tokugawa to control and limit the power of Buddhist institutions, but was also a way to take some power away from the imperial family and court and to cement Tokugawa authority over them. Since the robes had been imperially awarded before the shogun took control over them, it was a way for the shogun to show that he had the ultimate authority and that the actions of the imperial household were always subject to censure from the shogun. The shogun decided to strip

⁶Duncan Williams, "The Purple Robe Incident and the Formation of the Early Modern Sōtō Zen Institution," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 1 (March 2009): 34, accessed February 22, 2017. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=43662884&scope=site>.

the imperial household of this power because they had already issued directives to limit the ability of the emperor to distribute robes and these directives were being ignored.⁷ The Tokugawa felt that the emperor was issuing the robes too freely and not making sure the clerics were actually qualified and deserved to be awarded a robe. The emperor at the time, Gomizuno-o, was so embarrassed by this incident and the further loss of imperial power that he abdicated his throne to his daughter, who would become Empress Meisho.⁸ In this way the shogun used religious institutions to further limit the power of the imperial household, which could potentially be a threat to his power and legitimacy.

The “purple robe incident” is one example of how the shogun used his influence to control the Buddhist sects, but there are many more. The Tokugawa worked to organize the structure and hierarchy of Buddhist temples and clerical ranks.⁹ In this way the Tokugawa took power away from the Buddhist sects and made it so that temple matters were under their control instead of under the control of each individual sect. The regulations regarding organizational structure established a head and branch system with the head having complete authority and being responsible for the actions of its branches.¹⁰ This system was called the Hommatsu, and it connected temples of the same sect together in a hierarchical system, a system that was easy for the government to control and manage. The shogun made it the responsibility of the head temple to investigate branch temples under the shogun’s authority.¹¹ The head temple had complete authority over the branch temples and since the head temple acted under the authority of the bakufu, the bakufu had direct control over institutional matters of each temple and sect rather

⁷ Williams, “The Purple Robe Incident and the Formation of the Early Modern Sōtō Zen Institution,” 34.

⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Kasahara, *A History of Japanese Religion*, 336.

¹¹ Ibid., 340.

than letting them decide for themselves.¹² The head and branch system was very important to Tokugawa policy. In regulations that the government issued, it was stressed that “relationships between the main temple and the branch temple must not be violated.”¹³ In this way, the head and branch system that the Tokugawa established allowed them to control all the Buddhist sects and to monitor what happened within the sects and make sure the sects were complying with Tokugawa policy.

In addition to establishing the head and branch system, the Tokugawa also passed many laws directed towards Buddhism and the various Buddhist sects. One example of this is the bakufu’s involvement in the Sōtō Zen Buddhist sect. There was a controversy within the sect over Dharma succession. Some felt that when one became head of a temple they should abandon their Dharma lineage that they had gotten from their master and adopt the one of their new temple. This was common practice in the Sōtō Zen school but many advocated for a change in this practice, this debate heating up so much that they had to appeal to the bakufu in order to resolve it. The bakufu sided with those who argued for reform to the Dharma succession process.¹⁴ In this way, the Tokugawa was directly involved and making legal decisions that affected Buddhist sects. The shogun inserted himself into Buddhist matters in order to exert control over Buddhist temples and make sure the temples were subdued and in compliance with Tokugawa policy and not a threat to them like they had been to previous rulers.

¹² Williams, "The Purple Robe Incident and the Formation of the Early Modern Sōtō Zen Institution," 30.

¹³ “Regulations for Temples in Different Domains,” 1665, in *Sources of Japanese History, Volume One*, by David John Lu, 215, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 215.

¹⁴ Micheal Mohr, “Zen Buddhism During the Tokugawa Period: The Challenge to go Beyond Sectarian Consciousness,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21, no. 4 (1994): 359, accessed February 8, 2017. <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/2548>.

Other legislation that the Tokugawa instituted in regards to the Sōtō Zen sect was that a cleric had to complete thirty years of clerical training before they could become a temple abbot, a cleric had to complete twenty years of clerical training before serving as a training retreat head, and temples were not allowed to let monks and nuns who were expelled from other temples reside in their temples.¹⁵ The majority of these laws were directed towards the choosing of authority figures within the temple hierarchy. The Tokugawa were very concerned with who was in charge of temple matters because they did not want temple heads encouraging violence and disrupting the peace like they had previously. They also regulated what temples could preach, emphasizing that they must understand the “basic doctrines or rituals of a given sect” and that they could not “preach strange doctrines.”¹⁶ This was another way for the Tokugawa to monitor what activities were occurring within Buddhist temples to make sure they were not preaching anything that would be a threat to Tokugawa peace.

The Tokugawa influenced religion by passing laws directed towards the Buddhist sects, but they also influenced it by relegating certain tasks to Buddhism, the most important one being funerary duties. The Tokugawa even regulated funeral services, directing the temples to be frugal when conducting funeral and memorial services.¹⁷ It was a major source of income for the temples and it was unusual for a temple not to offer funeral services and not to rely on income from families that had to register with them for funerary practices.¹⁸ These funerals were viewed as important by the Japanese people because they allowed the deceased to pass from death into paradise. If this did not occur, the person was excluded from paradise and would come back to

¹⁵ Williams, "The Purple Robe Incident and the Formation of the Early Modern Sōtō Zen Institution," 31.

¹⁶ "Regulations for Temples in Different Domains," 215.

¹⁷ Kasahara, *A History of Japanese Religion*, 337-338.

¹⁸ Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 21.

haunt the living. The ceremony included giving the person a Buddhist name and inscribing it on a memorial tablet that was to be worshiped by the family and placed on their altar.¹⁹ These funeral services were an important part of Japanese religious life and this practice was relegated to Buddhist temples by the Tokugawa, making it so that the Tokugawa directly influenced the religious life of the people. They did this by regulating the funerary practices of the temples.

The Tokugawa also influenced and caused the growth of certain temples and shrines by putting their stamp on them. Tokugawa Ieyasu had been enshrined as the “Great Incarnation Shining over the East,” with a mausoleum and grand shrine at Nikko honoring him. There were also many other smaller shrines and temples that deified Tokugawa Ieyasu throughout the country. In addition to this, Ieyasu established many family temples and shrines. This practice was copied by many of the daimyo at their compounds in Edo. They would build a shrine in honor of the ancestor who founded their domain, often attracting many commoners from Edo to their compound to worship and see the shrine.²⁰ This was often part of the pilgrimage process that was a common practice among the people of Edo. A foreigner, Sir Rutherford Alcock, remarked that while it did not seem that the Japanese had any “reverential or serious religious convictions,” they were “very much addicted to pilgrimages.”²¹ In this way, the government directly influenced the religious life of the people. The Tokugawa and the daimyo made shrines and temples that, in essence, deified their ancestors. It made them inherently religious and in

¹⁹H. Byron Earhart, *Religion in The Japanese Experience*, 1st ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1997), 61-63.

²⁰Gerald Groemer and Matsunosuke Nishiyama, *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600-1868*, Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, accessed February 4, 2017, 78-79. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/gettysburg/reader.action?ppg=1&docID=10015609&tm=1486519657158>.

²¹Rutherford Alcock, “Excerpts from Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon*, volume 2, on the Religious Views of the Japanese,” 1863, in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life During the Age of the Shoguns*, by Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 218-219.

effect claimed that they were divinely appointed rulers and worthy of being worshipped by the people and being added to their cannon of gods. The Tokugawa were directly influencing the religious practices of the people, making the shrines dedicated to Ieyasu part of the people's pilgrimages and their religious life. The Tokugawa were like gods, to be worshipped and respected by the people. This was yet another way the Tokugawa maintained peace and reinforced their right to rule.

Another example of the Tokugawa putting their stamp of approval on specific shrines and religious institutions is that of Sensoji temple. Tokugawa Ieyasu chose the Sensoji temple to protect his family. At the Battle of Sekigahara, he used a prayer ritual involving the deities of the Asakusa Kannon that were housed in Sensoji in order to gain their protective powers to help him become victorious at the Battle of Sekigahara.²² He designated Sensoji the shogunal prayer temple and as a result of this, Sensoji made many changes so that they could become a temple worthy of the shogun's approval. They removed all the married monks and split the temple up into junior and senior groups. They also emphasized the importance of the Asakusa Kannon, which was a gold statue of a Buddhist deity that was enshrined at Sensoji.²³ These changes and the designation of Sensoji as a shogunal prayer hall elevated the status of the temple and made it more popular among the commoner population. Sensoji was located just outside of Edo and it became a part of Edo culture and was a common stop on the pilgrimages that the commoners enjoyed taking. Alcock remarked that pilgrimages to the "thirty-three Quanquon [Kannon] temples," including Sensoji was a popular pursuit among the people of Edo as well as the people

²² Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan*, 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

of Japan in general.²⁴ The commoners as well as the daimyo would worship daily at Sensoji. It was so popular that the temple was able to be supported financially just by donations of worshippers rather than from funerary patrons, which was common of virtually every other Buddhist temple.²⁵ In 1625, Sensoji ceased to be the shogunal prayer hall because the bakufu established an eastern center of Tendai Buddhism in contrast to the western Tendai center that served the imperial family.²⁶ However, the mark that the Tokugawa left on Sensoji enabled it to stay a popular religious and cultural center even after they were no longer directly associated with the temple.

In addition to Buddhism, the Tokugawa also interacted with many other popular religious teachings of the period. Just as Buddhist monks essentially became government officials and spies for the government, so did the gannin. The gannin were a type of religious performers and itinerant preachers, whose performance consisted mostly of ritual dance.²⁷ They were very popular in Edo, often distributing talismans and amulets to parishioners.²⁸ The gannin ran flophouses in disreputable sections of Edo. They let anyone stay who could pay the required fee and children were free. These flophouses usually housed about eight hundred to nine hundred people. Each person was given one mat to sleep on.²⁹ The Tokugawa made sure to regulate the flophouses and other practices of the gannin as well as all mendicant orders in general. They were limited to certain locations, were banned from setting up signs and iconography on the

²⁴ Alcock, "Excerpts from Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon*, volume 2, on the Religious Views of the Japanese," 219.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁶ Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan*, 13.

²⁷ Gerald Groemer, "A Short History of the Gannin: Popular Religious Performers in Tokugawa Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27, no. 1/2 (2000): 43, accessed February 8, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30233640>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53-55.

street, and making rented houses look like temples. In this way, the Tokugawa regulated what types of religious messages were being spread. In addition, the Tokugawa had the gannin that worked in the flophouses spy for them, keeping track of the people that entered and left the city. They would report when unsavory elements came into or exited the city, earning renown for being spies.³⁰

The Tokugawa regulated itinerant preachers and religious performers like the gannin, but they also supported certain popular preachers whose messages aligned with the values of the Tokugawa and the values they hoped to impress upon the general population in order to maintain peace and order. Many preachers, such as Hosoi Heishû, received financial support from the Tokugawa so that they could spread their message throughout the country.³¹ In the case of Hosoi Heishû, his message included an appeal to “think about the examples set by our superiors.”³² He told his listeners that they all had “three noble masters. The highest is the emperor, the next is the shogun and the third and closest to us is the lord of this province.”³³ He helped popularize the values that the Tokugawa wanted to instill in the people. Foremost among these values were an obedience to one’s superiors, such as the shogun and the daimyo. This obedience kept the realm at peace, which was why the shogun supported efforts to spread the message of the importance of this obedience.

The teachings of Hosoi Heishû were in alignment with many Confucian principles and Confucianism was what the Tokugawa utilized as a justification for the social structure they

³⁰ Ibid., 56-58.

³¹ Vaporis, *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life During the Age of the Shoguns*, 202.

³² Heishû Hosoi, “Excerpts from a Sermon Given by Hosoi Heishû (1783),” 1783, in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life During the Age of the Shoguns*, by Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 204.

³³ Ibid.

established. Confucianism was not a religion in the traditional sense of the word, but it was a system of morality and a school of religious thought. More specifically, the Tokugawa adopted the Shushi school of Confucianism.³⁴ It encouraged learning and established a standard ethical teaching. It stressed discipline and subordination to one's rulers.³⁵ Confucianism can be seen as a way of viewing the world. This view emphasized the importance of loyalty, filiality, obligation, duty, harmony, and diligence.³⁶ It spoke in terms of the five relationships: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend.³⁷ These relationships were very important, especially that of the ruler and his subject. It was felt that this emphasis on proper behavior made the ruled easier to rule and made the rulers more benevolent.³⁸ There was to be cooperation between the ruler and the ruled and there were obligations on both sides to maintain the relationship. This way of thinking fit perfectly with the Tokugawa's ideals and values. The Tokugawa could not "allow disorder in the relations between ruler and subject, and between those who are above and those who are below."³⁹ The Tokugawa needed to stress obedience and loyalty to one's superiors in order to maintain peace. If the ruled were obedient to their superiors, they would not rise up and threaten the social order that the Tokugawa had established.

The Tokugawa also used Confucianism as a justification for their strict stratification of society. Confucianism and its doctrines were used to show how this stratification was right, proper, and moral. Hayashi Razan, who was an advisor to Tokugawa Ieyasu, established

³⁴ Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 260.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

³⁶ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 191.

³⁷ Razan Hayashi, "Natural Order and Social Order," in *Sources of Japanese History, Volume One*, by David John Lu, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 236.

³⁸ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 191.

³⁹ Hayashi, "Natural Order and Social Order," 236.

Confucianism as the official moral doctrine and he justified the separation of social classes in his writings. He wrote that “the separation into four classes of samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants, like the five relationships, is part of the principles of heaven and is the Way which was taught by the Sage (Confucius).”⁴⁰ When Razan talked about the Way, he meant the “Way of Confucianism, and it is not the so-called alien doctrine. The alien doctrine is Buddhism.”⁴¹ The social stratification was just as integral to Confucian teachings as was the five relationships that taught loyalty and respect to one’s rulers. Razan, as an advisor to Tokugawa Ieyasu, influenced the official doctrine of the government, using Confucianism because it was able to justify their stratification of society and to stress the most important value that kept the country at peace, that of subordination and obedience to one’s superiors. In addition, there was an emphasis on Confucianism being an indigenous school of thinking, despite the fact that it had a large Chinese influence.⁴² Foreign influence was being suppressed during the Tokugawa period and Japanese nationalism and originality were being promoted by the state. Foreigners were a threat to peace and had the potential to bring dangerous ideas with them. Buddhism had also been a threat to the state which is why Razan made a point to denounce Buddhism as alien and not Japanese.

Another popular religious teaching that fell under the umbrella of Confucianism was Shingaku. Shingaku began with the teachings of Ishida Baigan in 1729. It mostly appealed to the city classes and it had a great influence on Tokugawa morality. Its influence spread widely, so much so that the house laws of the domains were often written by Shingaku priests, espousing

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Razan Hayashi, “On the Unity of Shinto and Confucianism,” in *Sources of Japanese History, Volume One*, by David John Lu, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 237.

⁴² Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*, 226.

Shingaku ideals.⁴³ Learning was very important in the Shingaku tradition, as was study and scholarship.⁴⁴ Baigan stressed learning as a way to investigate human nature, reach enlightenment, and learn from that enlightenment. One investigated human nature through personal experience and reflection. It was important to know one's heart and to do good works and acts in order to know one's heart. One needed to eliminate their selfish desires in order to know their true heart and make sure it was not clouded by selfish desires.⁴⁵ He also believed that the merchant should not be seen as inferior to anyone else, developing "the Way of the townsman," similar to bushido and "the way of the warrior."⁴⁶ The merchants that subscribed to Shingaku were taught to be frugal and avoid unjust profit. Not taking a profit and being honest were most important.⁴⁷ A man named Teshima Toan further developed Baigan's Shingaku, establishing many reading and study groups. These groups were supervised by a certified master who tested the spiritual advancement of his students. They were simple meetings and the masters were not paid and usually refused to accept gifts or other forms of payment, which was in accordance with Shingaku's instructions for merchants to be frugal and diligent.⁴⁸

Shingaku to grew and flourished since it espoused ideas that were agreeable to the Tokugawa. The merchants were the lowest class of society and making them more moral and more like an ideal Tokugawa citizen was something the Tokugawa could support. The teachings of Shingaku were much like the other official teachings of the Tokugawa state, which was why it grew so much during the Edo period. In much the same way that bushido provided a life philosophy for the samurai class that the Tokugawa approved of, Shingaku did so for the

⁴³ Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 1985), 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁶ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 221.

⁴⁷ Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 161.

⁴⁸ Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 222.

merchant class. It was especially important for the merchant class since in the eyes of society, they needed moral guidance the most. They were the lowest class and did things for profit, which was considered wrong in the Confucian moral code. Shingaku's stress on frugality and not taking unjust profits helped the merchants conform to societal norms and Tokugawa moral code.

While Confucianism was the official moral doctrine of the Tokugawa state, it was more of a school of thought than an actual religion. To add a religious element, Confucianism turned to Shinto. Shinto was weak in the Tokugawa period but it centered around the imperial court and family, rooting the origins of Japan and its emperor in mythology.⁴⁹ Shinto was centered on the worship of various deities and was important in Japan since it was considered its only indigenous religion, one that was completely and uniquely Japanese in origin. The relationship between Shinto and Confucianism was beneficial to both parties. Confucian scholars liked to distance themselves from Buddhism, believing they were more intellectual. At the same time, though, they felt the need to deepen their religious sentiments and Shinto was a perfect way to do this. Shinto also could benefit from some philosophical depth to their teaching, and Confucianism provided that.⁵⁰ The leading advocate of the "unity of Shinto and Confucianism," was the shogun's advisor, Hayashi Razan.⁵¹ He advocated this as a way to combat the militant Buddhism that had flourished throughout the country before the Tokugawa period. Buddhism was useful for aiding the government in monitoring the population, but it was dangerous when it did too much moral and religious teaching. Razan taught that the "rise of Buddhism made the people abandon the Way of the King and Shinto."⁵² Buddhism could be a threat to the Tokugawa regime, advocating dangerous ideas, which was why Razan and the Tokugawa government sought to

⁴⁹ Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, 53.

⁵⁰ Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 267.

⁵¹ Hayashi, "On the Unity of Shinto and Confucianism," 236.

⁵² Ibid.

balance it with ideas they could firmly control, these of Shinto and Confucianism. Razan believed that the “Way of the King transforms itself into Shinto and Shinto transforms itself into the Way,” the Way being the “Way of Confucianism.”⁵³ Shinto and Confucianism were combined in the eyes of Razan, and he worked to promote that view. It was the view that was most in line with the Tokugawa state and the view that best helped them promote peace and maintain order.

The Tokugawa had a tight grip on the populace. It needed to have this much control in order to maintain the peace that they had finally achieved in a land marked by many years of warfare. Religion had often been a threat to political powers in the past and the Tokugawa made sure that it would not be a threat to their power. Christianity was virtually eliminated, a religion the Tokugawa felt threatened by since it had no control over it and the higher power in Christianity was God and the pope, not the Japanese government. Buddhist monks and institutions were officially rendered arms of the government, maintaining registry records and keeping the populace loyal and productive. In addition to Buddhism, Tokugawa established firm control over other religious and moral teachings by establishing Confucianism, in partnership with Shinto, as the official doctrine of the state. Through this the Tokugawa could make sure to impress certain values upon the population that would make them easier to rule. The seclusion policy and the alternate attendance system that the Tokugawa instituted are usually credited with being the main mechanisms of control but religion deserves more credit. The Tokugawa’s control over religion helped keep the populace under control, eliminated threats to their rule, and provided legitimacy. Religion touched the lives of all Japanese people, unlike alternate attendance and the seclusion policy, making it a very effective means of controlling the majority

⁵³ Hayashi, “On the Unity of Shinto and Confucianism,” 237.

of the population. The Tokugawa had such firm control over the populace that they changed and influenced the religious life of the Japanese people.

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