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Introduction: Tansō's Mission

“Don't abandon either the sharp or the dull; the drill and the hammer cannot be used one apart from the other.”¹ These words are the motto of Hirose Tansō's (1782–1856) private Confucian academy, Kangien. This motto encapsulates Tansō's educational philosophy, that each man, no matter what his talent, has a contribution to make to society, each in his own way, each interacting with the other. The sharpness of the drill enables it to bore holes, but the drill is of no use without the mallet to drive things into the hole. Conversely, the bluntness of the mallet enables it to drive nails and sink posts, but this ability is useless without the sharp drill to open the way.

Based on this attitude of interaction, harmony, and relative egalitarianism among men of talent, Hirose Tansō built Kangien, an educational academy that was perhaps the largest, most well-attended private school in the late Tokugawa (1600–1868) period. Nestled in the serene Kyushu countryside,² Kangien under Tansō's administration played a role in educating some 3,000 young men—two Buddhist nuns are the only women listed on the entrance registers—from sixty-four of the then total sixty-eight domains of Japan during Tansō's lifetime.³ Tansō's students as a whole defy any set pattern. These students emerged from such disparate areas of society as Buddhist and Shinto priests, doctors, rich merchants, farmers, and *samurai*. Upon leaving Kangien, they went on to equally disparate careers as Buddhist and Shinto priests, Confucian scholars, doctors of Chinese and Dutch medicine, officials in national, regional, and local government, military men, businessmen, scientists, artists, and educators.

Tansō's mission as an educator was to nurture men of talent, molding them into true statesmen whose service would ultimately be of benefit to the country. Firm in his conviction that the problems he and others faced in contemporary society would be solved by setting right the moral priorities of the people, Tansō established an educational program at Kangien based on the twin pillars of rules and curriculum as a means to the goal of moral self-cultivation. He believed such an educational program would, by its very nature, accomplish social reform.

Reverence or awe for the Way of Heaven was the philosophical construct that supported Tansō's educational program. Tansō described Heaven as the supreme being, the progenitor and nurturer of all things. Man's every deed is accomplished by means of interaction with Heaven and through assistance from Heaven. Indeed, Heaven issues to each individual a two-fold mandate or moral duty. This mandate dictates first, each person's rank or role in society, and second, his work or occupation within that role. Rooted in the belief that the fundamental goodness of man is an extension of the basic order of the universe, Tansō's aim was to cultivate character by imparting to his students an attitude of reverence for Heaven in all that they said and did.

For Tansō, the term *reverence* described a mystical attitude that acknowledges the existence of an objective, inspirational authority, or Heaven, higher than the individual. Such an attitude of reverence manifests in a person's constant vigilance over his behavior, even in the darkest recesses of the house. Each person chooses whether to accept certain established social conventions, thereby showing respect for Heaven, or to ignore these conventions, thereby showing scorn for Heaven. The person who chooses to abide by the Way of Heaven experiences reverence both internally, in an attitude of devotion, and externally, in a demeanor of righteousness. These two aspects of reverence, devotion and righteousness, are inseparable as though they were two sides of the same coin.

Tansō's philosophical concept of reverence was cultivated in the practical actions of day-to-day behavior. Cultivating an attitude of reverence for Heaven, or moral self-cultivation, included two components, character development and academic development. Character development was accomplished by strict adherence

to school regulations. Students' behavior was to be monitored, at least in theory, as closely as the students' academic testing exercises. All students who had been at Kangien longer than twenty days were required to take daily responsibility for a certain work duty that contributed to the smooth running of the school. These jobs included top ranking positions that were earned by academic excellence, such as assistant administrator and registrar. Middle level positions were assigned based on the talent and temperament of the student, and these included positions such as librarian, physician, and night sentries. The lowest ranking positions of cleaning, sweeping and food service, were jobs that the least experienced students or those being punished fulfilled. This work requirement, combined with attention to other detailed and exacting school rules, was an integral part of each student's course of study.

In addition, students at Kangien engaged in a systematic study of a Confucian educational curriculum with concomitant, rigorous testing exercises. As students progressed through the various levels of the curriculum, the work required of them became gradiently more difficult. Students proved mastery of the academic material required at each level by excellence on various types of regularly scheduled exercises that were matched in difficulty to each academic level. Most of the students completed little more than the first half of this extremely challenging and complex curriculum. Indeed, those who actually completed the entire curriculum were held in special distinction.

Although Tansō took pride in his students who were able to complete the entire curriculum, he did not bemoan those who were unable to complete the curriculum. He encouraged a sort of academic specialization for two reasons. First, he saw no use in everybody's having the same single body of knowledge. People coming together with different bodies of knowledge were more useful than those coming together with the same body of knowledge. Second, he recognized that all people have different talents, interests, and levels of ability. Accordingly, Tansō encouraged each student to study according to his own nature. Those particularly talented at books and learning were encouraged to complete the Kangien curriculum and prepare for careers as teachers, the highest calling, in Tansō's opinion. However, those less talented

in book learning were urged to indulge their interests and offer their talents otherwise—to the priesthood, to medicine, to government, etc.—all of which would ultimately be of benefit to the country.

The daily activities at Kangien—curriculum, rules, and work—were not an end in and of themselves, but merely a means to the goal of moral self-cultivation. Indeed, book learning alone cannot complete moral education. Moral education is fulfilled only by practical application of learning to daily life. Therefore, training men of talent to acquire knowledge, to be attentive to rules, and to be responsible in work prepares these men to contribute to the society in which they live. Practical learning (Ch. *shih-hsüeh*; J. *jitsugaku*), or “. . . learning that is close to men's everyday lives,”⁴ then, was the ultimate goal of Tansō's educational program. Tansō was a man of practical learning (J. *jitsugakusha*). Tansō's philosophical world view and his practical world converge in the microcosmic world created at Kangien. This convergence is a window through which we can glimpse the confluence of institutional development, philosophical trends, and social structure—three important components of late Tokugawa society. This confluence, then, is the essence of this study of Hirose Tansō.

To understand Tansō and Kangien, it is necessary to situate him in his historical continuum. Tansō, the philosopher, a self-proclaimed eclectic, has antecedents in earlier Japanese Neo-Confucian philosophers, as well as those of Ming (1368–1644) and Sung (960–1279) dynasty China. Tansō, the educator, distinctive for his specific pedagogical emphases and curricular choices, is an illustrative example of an important trend in scholarship during his time. Unlike his contemporaries who, by their attraction to things Western considered themselves to be on the cutting edge of modernity, Tansō was among those who delved back into the rich, variegated Confucian heritage to which he was heir, and established the twin pillars of education and statecraft as supports for his educational program at Kangien.

Most would say that the microcosmic society that Tansō created at Kangien failed simply because it offered few practical solutions for the problems of his time. These naysayers would shunt Tansō aside, and focus instead on Tansō's contemporaries—those statesmen and educators who played an active role in Japan's

burst into modernity. This is a shortsighted valuation. Indeed, the very values that Tansō stressed—study, hard work, frugality, promotion based on merit—were, in many ways, responsible for the relative ease with which Japan emerged from hundreds of years of self-imposed isolation to become a powerful modern nation. Tansō's educational focus in a time of historical transition helped lay the groundwork for the changes to come.

Little work has been done on Hirose Tansō in English aside from the chapter in Richard Rubinger's *Private Academies of Tokugawa Japan*. General studies of Tansō in Japanese are discussed below. Nakajima Ichisaburō's *Kyōsei Hirose Tansō no kenkyū*, written in 1935, was the first comprehensive study of Tansō's life, journals, schools, and students. Part of Nakajima's focus was on the relationship of Tansō's educational system to that of the Meiji. Furukawa Tesshi's *Hirose Tansō*, published in 1972, is an excellent account of Tansō's life and school. Furukawa focused on Tansō's Neo-Confucian philosophy as well as his poetry. Inoue Yoshimi, who began writing on Tansō's educational development and methodology in 1975, published *Hirose Tansō* in 1987, an excellent comprehensive study of Tansō's life, philosophy, and educational development.

Other scholars have studied Tansō largely from the perspective of the development of his school, its administration, educational content, and methodology. Inoue Yoshimi's excellent study, *Hirose Tansō*, mentioned above, also falls into this category. Kudō Toyohiko's *Hirose Tansō, Hirose Kyokusō*, published in 1978, traces the educational methodology and content as well as the poetry of both brothers. Sekiyama Kunihirō, Richard Rubinger, Takano Kiyoshi, Suzuki Hiroo, and Umihara Tōru have written on Tansō's educational development or on Kangien as a private academy.

Matsumoto Sannosuke, Kinugasa Yasuki, Kojima Yasunori, and Furukawa Tesshi are among the scholars who have studied the eclectic Neo-Confucian philosophical content of Tansō. Kudō Toyohiko has studied the Taoist tendencies in Tansō's thought.

Matsushita Tadashi, Kawamura Keikichi, Nakamura Yukihiro, Ōta Seikyū and Donald Keene have studied Tansō's poetry. Tansō considered poetry to be the best means of expressing human emotions. He regarded human emotions as an essential part of life, and included both composing and studying poetry as part

of his educational curriculum. A study of Tansō's poems and the way in which he used poetry to express emotional sentiment would provide balance for and insight into a man who otherwise appears to be a stern and rigid educator. However, that is a topic for future study. This study is limited to Tansō's philosophical and practical educational goals.

NOTES

1. *Surudokimo nibukimo tomoni sutegatashi kiri to tsuchi to ni tsukahiwakenaba.*

2. Kangien was located in present-day Hita city of Ōita prefecture. Part of the school compound stands today as a museum. The Kangien library is housed in its original boxes in the Hita public library. Tansō's original school records and manuscripts are stored on the family property near the Kangien museum.

3. Kangien continued to function as a private academy after Tansō's death in 1856. Tansō's head student, Hirose Seison (1819–1884), administered the school from 1856 to 1861 until Tansō's younger brother and adoptive son, Hirose Ringai (1836–1874), was old enough to take charge. Hirose Ringai administered the school until 1871. Kangien and many such private schools ceased to function along traditional lines in the early Meiji period (1868–1912) when the central government took over the business of education by mandating the creation of local public schools and compulsory education.

4. As defined by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), a statesman and educator more interested in Western scientific learning than Chinese Confucian learning. On the topic of aspects of practical learning in Japan, see de Bary, *Principle and Practicality*, especially "Introduction," pp. 1–36. On Fukuzawa Yukichi, see Kiyooka, Eiichi, *Fukuzawa Yukichi on Education*, especially "Learning" pp. ix–x, and "Questions on Moral Education," pp. 149–163.