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Cover illustration: Portrait of Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 by Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿, *Golden Chamber Monthly* 1.2 (February 1929)
Chinese Confucianism has created many sages as political and ethical models. Confucians in China, Japan and Korea rated Chinese sages differently according to their own changing political and intellectual agendas. Though praised by Confucius as one of the two perfect ancient sages in the *Lun-yü* (Analects), Wu T'ai-po became a neglected figure in Chinese historiography and Confucianism. Only a few ancient Chinese works, such as the *Lun-yü* and *Shib chi* (Records of the Grand Historian), contain brief references to him as a crown prince of the Chou clan who found refuge among barbarians in southern China to enable his father to fulfill his wish and appoint another son, who was prepared to rebel against the Yin dynasty, as his successor. Chinese Confucian scholars seldom mentioned him in their writings. In place of T'ai-po, Po and Shu Ch'i were usually remembered for their unfailing loyalty, and Yao and Shun were praised for lordly self-abnegation.

Interestingly enough, T'ai-po has drawn more attention in Japan than in China in traditional scholarship. Whether T'ai-po was the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family or merely an ancient Chinese sage became a point of controversy among Japanese intellectuals of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868). In the seventeenth century in particular, three major intellectual schools—the Hayashi school, the Kimon school, and the Mito school actively participated in an intellectual discussion regarding this issue. This paper examines the controversy surrounding T'ai-po among early Tokugawa scholars and discusses its political and intellectual significance through a textual analysis of Tokugawa writings about him. It aims to deepen our understanding of issues related to national and cultural identity, the relationship between scholarship and politics, the adaptation of Chinese Confucianism to Japanese socio-political realities, and the vitality and creativity of thought and culture in the early Tokugawa period.

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1 The family name of T'ai-po was in fact not Wu but Chi. Regarded as the ancestor of the Wu regime in southern China, however, he is referred to as Wu T'ai-po in many Chinese sources.
2 This is recorded in *Lun-yü T'ai-po ti pa* [T'ai-po in chapter 8 of the *Lun-yü*] and *Shib chi Wu T'ai-po shib-chia* [The Wu T'ai-po family in the *Shib chi*].
Medieval Japanese also created a myth about the Ch'in official, Hsü Fu 徐福 in Japan. Some believed that Hsü Fu and his people settled in Japan to spread Chinese culture, whereas others speculated that Hsü Fu was somehow related to the Japanese imperial family.


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**Figure 1**

*Fuj iwara Seika, the first Tokugawa scholar to advocate the T'ai-po legend*

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**Wu T'ai-po as the Imperial Ancestor**

According to Chinese sources, the Japanese themselves created the myth that T'ai-po was their ancestor. Beginning with the *Chin shu* 晋書 (History of the Chin dynasty), a number of Chinese historical writings recorded that Japanese envoys and sojourners claimed themselves to be the descendants of T'ai-po. The Japanese created this myth to show their respect for Chinese culture and to establish for Japan a respectable place in the Chinese cultural order. Chinese sources reiterated this view to reinforce this China-centered ideology.

This was, however, not a popular idea in Japan before the Tokugawa and definitely did not represent the official position of the Japanese authorities. Prior to the Tokugawa, the main advocate of the T'ai-po legend was the famous Zen monk Chūgan Engetsu 中岩円月 (1300–75), who traced the ancestry of the Japanese imperial family to T'ai-po in his *Nibongi* 日本記 (General History of Japan, 1341). Attacked severely by courtiers, his book was banned and destroyed by the central court government. Two courtiers launched an assault on this idea in their writings from a Shinto perspective, Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 (1293–1354) in his *jinnōshōōki* 神皇正統記 (Records of the Legitimate Succession of the Divine Sovereigns, rev. 1343) and Ichijō Kanera 一条兼良 (1402–81) in his *Nihon sboki sanso* 日本書記 纂疏 (Commentary on the *Nibon sboki*), emphasizing that Japan was a divine nation and the Japanese were descended from Shinto deities.4

The T'ai-po legend gained some support among gozan 五山 (the Five-Mountain Zen monastic system) Buddhist monks and the discussion of T'ai-po became full-fledged in the seven-teeth century when Confucian scholars were drawn into the contestation over the sage. This controversy has important implications for an understanding of the conflict of ideas and political agendas among different Confucian and historiographical schools and of the problem of political and cultural identity.

Most advocates of the idea that T'ai-po was indeed the imperial ancestor were Confucians associated with the Fujiwara-Hayashi lineage of the Chu Hsi 朱熹 school. Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窪 (1561–1619) was the first Tokugawa scholar to support the T'ai-po legend. Influenced by gozan scholarship, Seika based his arguments on Chinese texts and history. First, he cited certain Chinese sources which referred to Japan as *Chi-shib kuo* 姬氏国. He interpreted this term as “the nation of Chi” and argued that since Chi 姬 was the family name of T'ai-po, Japan must have been the land of T'ai-po’s descendants. Second, the *Lun-yü* 論語 praised T'ai-po for exercising self-abnegation three times (*san-jang* 三讓) and the Ise Shrine, the most important Shinto shrine dedicated to the imperial family, contained the words *san-jang* (J.*san-jo*) in its epigraph.
Seika saw this as evidence that T'ai-po was the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family, stating:

Japan is called the land of the gentlemen .... It is also called the nation of Chi [Chi-shih kuo] and is believed to be the land of T'ai-po's descendants. The Ise Shrine has the word san-jō[three-fold self-abnegation] in its epigraph [to remind the people that] T'ai-po exercised self-abnegation three times.\(^3\)

The Three Regalia (sanjōgi 三神品) represent the three [Confucian] virtues of wisdom, benevolence and bravery. The surname of T'ai-po was Chi and therefore Japan is called “the nation of Chi.” Chūgan Engetsu of the East Hill Monastery (東山寺) wrote the Nihongi based on the above-mentioned arguments. The book was banned by the court and was burned.\(^5\)

Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657), a disciple of Seika, further developed Seika’s ideas and became the champion of the T’ai-po legend in the Tokugawa period. Razan was an influential figure in early Tokugawa politics and thought and thus his support made the T’ai-po legend a matter of concern in the Confucian circle. He believed that the Japanese were affiliated with Wu 興 and Yüeh 越, two Southern states in China’s Warring States era (403–222 BC), and that with the fall of the Wu and Yüeh their people had fled to Japan:

The Wu and Yüeh were geographically close to our country. Even a small boat could sail between [Wu and Yüeh and Japan]. We are not sure whether our imperial family was descended from T’ai-po or Shao Kang 少康 [a Hsia 夏 king, the legendary founder of Yüeh]. If I speculate that the imperial family originated in T’ai-po or Shao Kang, I will definitely be condemned like Engetsu.\(^6\)

Identifying many correspondences between the Shinto tradition and the T’ai-po legend, Razan tried to rationalize Shinto myths and explain them in historical terms:

The Zen monk Engetsu, of the East Hill Monastery, built the Myōkōin 妙喜院 where he undertook to compile the Nihongi. Because the court disapproved of it, his work was cast into the fire. Engetsu’s idea, as far as I can gather, was to cite a number of historical records indicating that the Japanese were descended from T’ai-po. T’ai-po escaped to the land of the barbarians, cut his hair, tattooed his body, and lived with snakes and dragons. His descendants migrated into Tsukushi 筑紫 in Kyushu. Ancient Japanese worshipped T’ai-po as a deity. This corresponds to [the Shinto legend that] the imperial grandson descended to the summit of Takachiho 高千穂 in Hyūga 日向 in Kyushu.\(^7\)

Razan then pointed out that the imperial grandson, like T’ai-po, subdued the barbarians who lived with snakes and dragons. He used various pieces of “material evidence” to support the T’ai-po legend, such as the “san-jō” epigraph in the Ise Shrine and ancient Chinese scripts found in an old tomb. Moreover, he argued that the Three Regalia were of continental rather than

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\(^{5}\) Hayashi Razan, Razan bunshū (Collected essays of Hayashi Razan), kan 卷 25, in Nihon zuihitsu taisei, 3rd series (1977), vol.11, p.41.

\(^{6}\) Ibid., p.40.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., p.40.
divine origin, because objects similar to the Three Regalia could be found in China in the time of T'ai-po. In other words, they were brought to Japan by the descendants of T'ai-po instead of from the deities in heaven, as suggested by Shinto.

Razan, writing in a private capacity, even challenged the official and Shinto views about the imperial grandson and Emperor Jinmu. He speculated that both were T'ai-po's descendants who fought all the way from Kyushu to other parts of Japan subduing local chiefs. In his explanation, many Shinto deities were demythologized and were interpreted as being merely ancient tribal leaders. Razan asked:

If the imperial grandson was the son of the Heavenly Gods, how can you explain his descent onto a remote hill in the Western region, instead of onto the rich soil of the central province? ... Why would Jinmu have had to overcome such difficulties [on his expedition to the East] if he possessed divine powers in war?8

Hence, he concluded, the Japanese imperial family were descendants of T'ai-po. Although the lineage of T'ai-po disappeared in China following the collapse of the Wu state, it continued to flourish in Japan as the Japanese imperial family. And since the Japanese imperial family enjoyed an unbroken lineage, he averred, the T'ai-po line would last forever in Japan:

The Wu prince and his descendants, having already held sway for a hundred generations in succession, will continue their reign for ten thousand generations to come. Is this not glorious? The once-powerful Wu may have been overcome [in China] by the Yüeh state, but their reign in our country is coeval with heaven and earth.9

It should be noticed that Razan was not always consistent in his advocacy of the T'ai-po legend. In his official capacity, he did not accept the legend and even criticized it.10 No evidence of his personal views can be found in his Honcho tsūgan (The Comprehensive Mirror of Japan), the Tokugawa official history compiled by Razan and his son Hayashi Gahō (1618–80).

Some modern scholars (such as Kusaka Hiroshi 日下寛, Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎, Noguchi Takehiko 野口武彦 and Hori Isao 塙勇雄) have explained that the Hayashi adopted official historical views based on the Nibon shoki (Chronicle of Japan, 720) and Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters, 712) and avoided expressing their personal views when compiling the official history.11 They found support for their arguments in Gahō, who, in the afterword of the first half of the Honcho tsūgan, stated that the book was based on Japanese historical records and did not adopt foreign legends such as those concerning T'ai-po or Shao Kang.

Others (such as Kurita Hiroshi 栗田寛, 1835–99, and Kimura Seiji 木村正経, 1827–1913) believe that Hayashi père et fils at first included the T'ai-po legend in the Honcho tsūgan and later replaced it with the Shinto myth under pressure from the bakufu.

Razan's son, Gahō, and his grandson, Hōkō 鳳岡 (1644–1732), as well
as many students of the Hayashi school, also placed credibility in the T'ai-po legend, although few contributed new ideas.

Kinoshita Jun’an 木下順庵 (1621–98), a Confucian scholar of the Fujiwara school, supported the T’ai-po legend in Japan. In his *Taihaku ron* 泰伯論 (Discourse on T’ai-po), he held that T’ai-po’s descendants came to ancient Japan and that T’ai-po served as a political model for the Japanese.

Muro Kyusō 室鳩巢 (1658–1734), a student of Jun’an, advocated the T’ai-po legend implicitly. In a personal letter, he praised the fact that many ancient sages went to foreign lands to cultivate the aliens without disrupting the local customs:

> In the past, ancient [Chinese] sages disseminated the way [to foreign lands]. T’ai-po grew his hair and tattooed his body in order to cultivate the southern barbarians. Chi Tzu 篠子 [a Shang prince] drew up the Eight Articles for the ruling of Korea. They follow foreign customs at the same time as implementing their policies to rule.14

Kyusō did not state explicitly that T’ai-po and his descendants went to Japan, but since he employed the legend of Chi Tzu in Korea, it was natural that readers would associate T’ai-po with Japan.

Hori Keizan 堀景山 (1688–1757), the grandson of Seika’s disciple Hori Kyōan 堀杏庵 (1585–1642), associated T’ai-po with Amaterasu 天照 (大神) (the Sun Goddess said to be the primordial ancestor of the Japanese), believing that T’ai-po brought higher civilization to Japan:

> It is said that although Amaterasu is taken to be a female, this divinity should actually be Wu T’ai-po. I support this idea. T’ai-po lived in the Yin [Shang] period and Yin Chinese believed in gods and ghosts. Due to Yin Chinese influence, Japanese also worship gods. Many things in Japan have “wu” 貔 (J. go or kure) in their names, such as *gotake* 向竹 [Japanese bamboo] and *gofuku* 貔服 [Japanese textiles]. All this evidence supports the [above-mentioned] saying.15

It is hard to understand why the Fujiwara-Hayashi lineage of the Chu Hsi school produced so many believers in the T’ai-po legend in Japan. They were specialists in Chinese learning and held the Chinese classics and official records in high regard. However, such attitudes did not make them immune to nationalist feeling. I would contend that they employed the T’ai-po legend in order to give Japan a more important position in the Chinese cultural order. Thus, because the Japanese were believed to be the descendants of a Chinese sage, Japan had inherited and developed the way of the sages. The advocacy of the T’ai-po legend also represented an attempt by various scholars and writers to provide a more rational and moral explanation for the origins of the Japanese imperial family in place of the Shinto myths. Although they kept this belief to themselves and only hinted at it in their private writings, they nonetheless soon became the targets of attack from their intellectual and political competitors.

A number of Tokugawa Confucians who were outside the Fujiwara-Hayashi lineage also lent support to the T’ai-po legend in Japan. Wang Yang-
ming scholars such as Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–48) and Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢藩山 (1619–91), for example, expressed their strong belief in this legend. Banzan held that T’ai-po was the founder of the Japanese imperial house, and accordingly lauded him for introducing Confucian morality, agriculture, industry, hunting, mining and fishery to ancient Japan. Like Razan, Banzan believed that T’ai-po landed on the shores of Hyūga Prefecture in Kyushu. He even speculated that T’ai-po was Amaterasu and his descendant was the emperor Jinmu. To Banzan, T’ai-po was the original founder of the Japanese imperial family and, by extension, the nation’s civilization. He extolled the fact that the influence of T’ai-po had survived from the ancient past to the commencement of warrior rule in the twelfth century. Rokumon Mochizuki 猪見重知 (1697–1769), a kogaku (ancient learning) scholar who studied under Hattori Nankaku 志尾南谷 (1683–1759), believed that T’ai-po and his people came to Japan in ancient times to disseminate the way of the sages. Hence, we can surmise from these disparate efforts that the issue of how to find an accommodation with Chinese Confucianism without compromising Japanese identity was one of common concern among Tokugawa Confucians from different intellectual schools. The Hayashi school produced a large number of advocates of the T’ai-po legend, but it did not monopolize the discussions surrounding it.

### T’ai-po as a Chinese Sage

In the discourse regarding T’ai-po in Tokugawa Japan, the majority of scholars only saw T’ai-po as an ancient Chinese sage and did not accept that he had anything to do with the Japanese imperial family. The Hayashi school was attacked by its competitors in Neo-Confucianism and historiography, including the Kimon school and the Mito school, for endorsing the T’ai-po legend in Japan.

Yamazaki Ansai 山崎元斎 (1618–82) and his Kimon school praised the political virtue of T’ai-po, but rejected the legend of his relationship with the Japanese imperial house. Ansai launched the most comprehensive criticism of the legend in his Taihakuron 泰伯論 (Discourse on T’ai-po) from both textual and historical perspectives. First, he cited the Shib-cbi to prove that T’ai-po had no children and was succeeded by his younger brother. Hence, the Japanese could not have been T’ai-po’s descendants. Secondly, he used various Chinese and Japanese sources to demonstrate that T’ai-po and his brother were the ancestors of the Wu regime in Southern China. With the demise of that regime, some Wu people fled to Japan and became the Matsuno 松野 clan, a powerful family in Kyushu. Since the Matsuno was not a noble family, the Japanese imperial family did not therefore have any affinity with the descendants of T’ai-po. Thirdly, he gave the term Chi-shib ku a different interpretation, declaring that this name had been coined not because the Japanese imperial family carried the surname of Chi, but because the Sun Goddess and many ancient rulers in Japan were female. Chi or hime
in Japanese meant “women” and thus the name Chi-shi kuo should be translated as “the kingdom of female rulers.”  

In other writings, Ansai argued that the San-jang epigraph could not be used as evidence to support the T’ai-po legend, because none of the Shinto classics mentioned it. He also questioned the credibility of Chinese sources in which the ancient Japanese claimed themselves to be T’ai-po’s descendants. He said:

Ancient Japanese travelled to China and came to know Chinese books. Therefore, they fabricated the legend [about T’ai-po in Japan]. We should not believe this kind of claim without question. 

Ansai compared the T’ai-po legend in which a Chinese prince became a Japanese emperor to the Shingon 真言 Buddhist version of bonji sui jaku 本地垂迹, or the manifestation of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the form of Shinto deities, criticizing them for being too far-fetched to believe. He condemned the advocates of the T’ai-po legend as defiers of both the Chinese sages and Shinto deities.

Although Ansai and his Kimon school rejected the T’ai-po legend in Japan, they respected T’ai-po as a political paragon of absolute loyalty (in particular for his refusal to revolt against the Yin) and filial piety (for giving up the right to succeed the throne in order to fulfill his father’s wish). While Confucius regarded T’ai-po and King Wen 文王 as the only two perfect moral models, the Kimon school rated T’ai-po higher than King Wen.

The Mito school criticized the historiography of the Hayashi school on the basis of their reliance on Shinto and Japanese official histories. While the disagreement between the Hayashi and the Kimon school remained essentially an intellectual argument, the Mito school turned this debate into a political issue.

Andô Tameakira 安藤為章 (1659–1716), a Mito scholar, recorded that the Hayashi were obliged to drop the T’ai-po legend from their Honchô tsûgan due to the opposition of Tokugawa Mitsukuni 徳川光圀 (1628–1700), lord of the Mito domain. Mitsukuni insisted that the official history should follow the Nibon sboki and Kojiki and rejected the T’ai-po legend because it demeaned the Japanese imperial family by questioning its divine origin, which by implication would have turned Japan into a subordinate of China:

If we accept the T’ai-po legend, then our divine nation [Japan] will become a subordinate of the foreign land [China] forever. This book [Honchô tsûgan] will bring humiliation to our country for thousands of years.

Mito scholars also respected T’ai-po as a Chinese sage. Like Ansai, Mitsukuni was an admirer of T’ai-po. In particular, he identified with the ideal of self-abnegation in T’ai-po. His pen name, Bairi 梅里, was borrowed from the tomb site of T’ai-po. In his private capacity, he was more open to accepting the place of the T’ai-po legend in Japan.

Besides the Mito school, a number of Tokugawa historians also attacked the T’ai-po legend from a historical perspective. In his Ishô Nibonden 異称日本伝 (Private Edition of Japanese History, 1668), Matsushita Kenrin

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21 In Ono Köketsu, Hyakusô tsuyu [Dew of the hundred plants], in Nibon zuibitsu taikei, series 3, vol. 11, p. 42.

22 Ibid., p. 38.


24 Andô Tameakira, Nenzan uchigiki [Records of hearsay by Nenzan], in Hyakusô tsuyu, pp. 39–40. The same story was also told in Tachihara Suiken’s 立原翠軒 Seizan ibun [Hearings of Seizan] and Komiyama Fûken’s 小宮山楓軒 Mito Gikô nenbu [The chronicle of Gikô of the Mito domain].


26 A Tokugawa work, Tôgen iji [Things about Tôgen], states: “Bairi [Ch. Mei Li] is the name of the tomb-site of T’ai-po. His Excellency [Mitsukuni] admired T’ai-po and took Bairi as his [pen] name.” Quoted in Hori Isao, Hayashi Razan, p. 372.

27 Ibid.
松下見林 (1637–1703) emphasized that the Japanese were the descendants of the Sun Goddess and thus had a much longer history than T’ai-po. However, he did not deny that some Wu people might have migrated to Japan after the fall of their regime in China:

My country has existed since the beginning of heaven and earth, and it was named 大日本豊沢津洲 As descendants of the grandson of the Sun Goddess, our imperial family enjoys an unbroken lineage. The Wu only began with T’ai-po who lived thousands of years [after the beginning of Japan]. How could we be the descendants of T’ai-po? ... Japan had no connection with Wu before Fu Ch’a扶差 [the last Wu king]. According to our national histories and writings, many aliens admired our culture and entered our country to become officials and subjects ... . The Matsuno were one such example. The Shinsen shojiroku 新撰姓氏錄 (New Edition of the Name of Clans, 815) records that the Matsuno traced their origins to Fu Ch’a. This was the beginning of the Wu people’s advent in Japan.28

Kenrin pointed out that the similarities in languages and customs between the Wu and ancient Japan were coincidental. He argued that a number of customs thought to be derived from the Wu actually originated in Japan. According to him:

Some people who do not understand the origins of things and do not check the sources have said: “The Wu people cut their hair and tattooed their bodies. It is also our custom to cut the hair. We wear gofuku [Chinese textiles] and speak goon [the ancient Chinese sound system used in the Yangtze River region during the Six Dynasties]. Obviously we are the descendants of T’ai-po.” What a far-fetched idea this is! They even make the big mistake of taking the custom among officials of dyeing teeth as a form of tattoo. Our nation only started dyeing men’s teeth with iron in the time of Emperor Toba,落日 (r.1107–23), as recorded in the Keimein sōjoki 恵明院僧正記 (Records of Keimeiin).29

Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725) believed that the descendants of T’ai-po might have come to establish their regional regimes in ancient Japan, but rejected the conjecture that T’ai-po was the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family. In the preface of his Koshitsu 古史通 (Understanding Ancient History), Hakuseki stated:

Today we can no longer trace when it was that our imperial family established its regime in this land [Japan]. Some people, harbouring evil intentions, cite Chinese sources to argue that our nation originated with Shao Kang and that the ancestors of the imperial family were the descendants of T’ai-po.30

However, he did not completely deny the credibility of the Chin-shu and other Chinese records. The Chin-shu records that enviols from the some thirty states in ancient Japan claimed themselves to be the descendants of T’ai-po and that they tattooed their faces and bodies. Hence, Hakuseki did not rule out the possibility that some of these thirty-odd nations in ancient Japan might have been ruled by the descendants of T’ai-po who migrated to Japan after the fall of the Wu regime in southern China:
We do not know the origins of the self-styled "kings" of the thirty or so states [in Japan] which communicated with Han 漢 and Wei 魏 [China]. Of these states, we cannot rule out the possibility that some might have been the descendants of Shao Kang or T'ai-po.\(^{31}\)

He then concluded that since all these small states were conquered by Jinmu, the alleged first Japanese emperor, the Japanese imperial family were not related to Chinese immigrants.

Ise Sadatake 伊勢貞丈 (also Ansei 安斎, 1715–84), a historian and a bakufu retainer, also criticized the T'ai-po legend in his Ansei zuibitsu 安斎随筆 (Miscellaneous Writings of Ise Ansei). He observed:

It is said that Hsü Fu, a Ch’ in official, came to Japan with the Shang-shu 尚書 [Book of Antiquity]. This was recorded in the foreign nation [China], but not in our official historical records, and therefore we should not believe it. Recently, Confucians in our nation have evinced [undue] respect for that foreign nation and refer to it as the Central Kingdom [中國] and call Japan a barbaric nation. They are disloyal people who look down on Japanese traditions, believing that stories about Wu T’ai-po and Hsü Fu are historically true.\(^ {32}\)

Sadatake believed that Japanese historical records were more reliable than Chinese sources regarding Japanese history and condemned the T’ai-po legend as treasonable. He remarked:

Chinese records [about Japan] must be verified by Japanese sources. We cannot rely on them unless they are also recorded in our Nihon sboki and Kojiki. Recently some Japanese Confucians have belittled Japan by calling themselves “barbarians,” and praised China by calling it “the Central Kingdom.” They are unfaithful traitors of Japan. Having the heart of traitors, they attribute the imperial ancestry to Wu T’ai-po. This idea is far-fetched and unfounded, but has stimulated many writings.\(^ {33}\)

There were many other Tokugawa critics of the T’ai-po legend in Japan. Most of them merely repeated the arguments of Ansai, Kenrin, Hakuseki and Sadatake.\(^ {34}\) They rejected the legend either because of their Shinto beliefs or as a result of historical analysis.

The discussion of T’ai-po died down gradually after the seventeenth century. This was mainly because all arguments, both pro and con, had been put forward by early Tokugawa intellectuals on the basis of the limited Chinese and Japanese sources available concerning T’ai-po. It was difficult to contribute anything new to the discussion. In addition, the T’ai-po legend no longer carried much weight. It lost its support not because the arguments for the legend were less convincing than the counter-arguments, but mainly due to the changing political and intellectual climate after the mid-Tokugawa as the established forms of Neo-Confucian thought became more rigid and orthodox. Since the T’ai-po legend contained ideas which could be interpreted as disrespect for the imperial family and the nation, its advocates were silenced. The rise of national sentiment and cultural pride in Tokugawa thought and culture also made this legend less acceptable.

\(^{31}\) Arai Hakuseki, Kositā wakumon [Questions regarding the Kositā], in ibid., p.291.\(^{32}\) Ise Sadatake, Ansei zuibitsu (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1929), vol.1, p.243.\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 401.\(^ {34}\) These Tokugawa critics and their works include Ono Kōketsu 小野高潔, Taibaku jofukuban [An analysis of T'ai-po and Hsū Fu]; Hatta Chiki 八田知紀, Taibakuron [Discussion on T'ai-po]; Maruyama Katsudō 丸山活堂, Taibakuron (1722); Yuasa Jōzan 湯浅常山 (1708–81, kogaku scholar), Nenzan uchibiki [Hearings of Nenzan]; Terajima Ryōan 寺島良安, Wakun sanzai zukai [Illustrated encyclopedia of all things Japanese], chapter 81); Shirai Shin 白井宗因, Jinja keimō [An introduction to Shinto shrines]; Kanzawa Toko 神沢杜口 (1710–95), Okinagusa [Writings of an old man]; and Seio 聖応 (? – 1787), Kōchu zuibitsu [The prose works of Kochōan].
In the Tokugawa period, for example, places claiming some Hsū Fu legacy could be found over the whole of Japan except for Hokkaido. See Yamamoto Noritsuna, *Nihon ni ikiru Jofuku no denshō [The Hsū Fu legacy in Japan]* (Tokyo: Kankōsha, 1979).


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**The Intellectual Significance of the T'ai-po Debate in Tokugawa Japan**

Basically, Tokugawa intellectuals had no major problem with the idea that Chinese sages and historical figures came to Japan in ancient times. Besides T’ai-po, many Tokugawa intellectuals and commoners believed that Hsū Fu and Yang Kui-fei 楊貴妃 came to Japan. The majority did not endorse the T’ai-po legend because it challenged beliefs in the divine origin of the imperial family. Unlike the supporters of the Hsū Fu or Yang Kui-fei myths, however, no one in Japan fabricated evidence from tombs, sites, and texts to support the T’ai-po legend.

The seventeenth century was brimming with intellectual vitality and creativity. Various schools of learning, ideas, art and religion blossomed, influencing and competing with one another. The T’ai-po legend became an intellectual battleground. Seen superficially, whether the Japanese were descendants of T’ai-po was a topic of disagreement between the Hayashi school and the anti-Hayashi camp which consisted of the Kimon school, the Mito school and some historians in the early Tokugawa period. On a profounder level, advocates and critics of the T’ai-po legend in Japan represented conflicting attitudes toward the relationship between Chinese and Japanese traditions.

What was the nature of the debate? The disagreement was not between Sinophiles and nativists. Both advocates and critics were pro-Japan. They merely used different ways to glorify their country. The former did it by accepting a Chinese-sage origin, while the latter upheld the Shinto myth. Scholars from these two camps all respected the virtues of T’ai-po, only disagreeing over the identity of T’ai-po: whether he was the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family or just an ancient Chinese sage.

Nor was the debate simply between Neo-Confucians and Shintoists. Razan was by no means anti-Shinto. He was in fact a Shinto ideologue who wanted to fuse Shinto with Confucianism, and his belief in the T’ai-po legend should be understood in this context. The fusion he envisaged is well reflected in the following statement:

> My country is spiritual and pure, and it is a place of divinity … Gentlemen live here. Our customs are unsophisticated. T’ai-po came. The son of Shao Kang also arrived and did not return.

To conclude, in my opinion, this debate reflects the larger issue that Chinese Confucian doctrines did not always fit with the Tokugawa system. Tokugawa intellectuals were in a dilemma as to whether to choose a Chinese Confucian sage or a Shinto deity as the originator of their history and world order. Advocates of the T’ai-po legend attempted to accommodate Chinese Confucianism within the Japanese tradition, whereas critics of the legend upheld Japanese political orthodoxy and cultural integrity in the face of unwanted Chinese influence.

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