CHAPTER 4

Strange Thoughts

A Confluence of Intellectual Heterodoxies

The wackier the better, just so long as one
isn't the same as everybody else.
—Hiraga Gennai (1728–1779)

The second half of the eighteenth century was beset by a sense of decline, an "autumn," as Takahashi Hiromi phrases it.[1] In part, such sentiments crystallized around the perceived disintegration of political authority. The shogun, Tokugawa Ieharu (1737–1786), was a tragicomic figure popularly viewed, according to one Dutch observer, as "a lazy, lustful, stupid man."[2] Described by Timon Screech as one who slept late, ate much, and accomplished little, Ieharu was a laughing stock throughout his rule. The reign began in 1760 with the worst of portents—a major fire that destroyed much of Edo, and later witnessed natural disasters, famines, and a culture of excess that weakened the *bakufu* and incited civil unrest. At this time, Chief Councilor Matsudaira Sadanobu reported widespread public convictions that the *bakufu* had succumbed to corruption, lost the ability to rule, and was close to collapse.[3]

The same era, however, also witnessed a flurry of cultural activity by an abundance of exceptional scholars. This dichotomy between sociopolitical weakening and cultural energy framed and nourished unprecedented intellectual innovation. Less interested in doctrinal consistency than in making sense of human experience, by this time both samurai and commoner thinkers were picking and choosing from a variety of disparate, even antagonistic

intellectual traditions. The aesthetic strangeness being developed and popularized by first- and second-generation *bunjin,* therefore, paralleled an array of emergent heterodoxies. Lending intellectual validation to aesthetic and behavioral strangeness, collectively they generated a cultural milieu favorably disposed to *ki* and *kyō,* the aesthetics of eccentricity that would become ubiquitous by century's end.

This chapter discusses an assortment of intellectual credos that fortified individual agency. After problematizing Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism as a true orthodoxy in the Tokugawa period, it introduces Confucianism's "mad" side—its doctrinal defense of *kyō.* We then revisit the Daoist roots of the *ki* aesthetic via its synergy with the Wang Yangming School (Yōmeigaku or Ōyōmeigaku) and National Learning (Kokugaku). Each of these traditions proved useful to eccentric thinkers like Hattori Somon (1724–1769) and Shidōken (1680?–1765), whose respective heresies advanced new ontological interpretations. The propagation of such thinkers suggests that a diverse and dynamic intellectual culture was becoming increasingly tolerant of strange people with strange thoughts. It was within this milieu that *kijin* maneuvered to find their place.

Neo-Confucianism: A Reassessment

Maruyama Masao has argued that within the classical Confucian canon the term "heterodoxy" (*itan*) describes mistaken thinking, broadly construed, or thoughts oppositional to the Way. The fact that *itan* had always existed and, as Confucius and Mencius observed, ran rampant through society, Maruyama avers, naturally validated ideological enforcement of orthodoxy (*seitō*): the Way.[4] In early modern Japan this notion was reinforced by even those scholars who challenged Zhu Xi thought. Ancient Learning thinker Itō Jinsai noted that *itan* consisted of all that violated the original Way of the sages and that self-regulation was necessary to suppress it. When Song period Confucians began studying Buddhism and Daoism, he continued, their thought became *itan.* Jinsai's contemporary Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) also attacked heterodoxy, attributing its recent proliferation to declining interest in the sages' teachings. But, he warned, simply attacking it was futile, for *itan* would yield to the proper Way only if people devoted themselves to righteousness. Ogyū Sorai's philological studies demonstrating how language differed from later and contemporary usages also exposed misinterpretations and inconsistencies in Neo-Confucian writings. Sorai

found many instances of heterodoxy within the *Analects* and the *Kongzi jiayu* (Confucius' words at home), acknowledging that it fostered treacherous or rebellious thoughts and thereby defied the Way. But, like Jinsai, his philological work also concluded that *itan* characterized the myriad Confucians whose writings were based on Zhu Xi.[5]

This succession of damaging challenges eroded the legitimacy of Zhu Xi-ism's alleged orthodoxy within academic spheres, Maruyama maintains. But its position was never threatened within public and official spheres. Official initiatives like the Prohibition of Heterodox Studies (*Kansei igaku no kin,* 1790) continually reinforced sharp distinctions between the Confucian classics and *itan* works by, for example, Ogyū Sorai. Nonetheless, from the mid-eighteenth century Sorai's teachings (Soraigaku) and their historicist approach to understanding the world had became pillars of learning. Buttressing the popularity of *kanshi* and Chinese aesthetics, as well as the nativist backlash against Chinese studies, its near universal applicability rendered it a common denominator for members of disparate schools who were challenging inherited social knowledge.[6] But as Meiji philosopher Nishi Amane's (1829–1897) autobiography reveals, although Sorai's writings had become a cornerstone of early modern thought, they continued to be perceived as heterodoxical. At age twenty Nishi fell ill and was confined to his bed. During his convalescence, he writes, he felt that it would be disrespectful to read Zhu Xi while lying down but permissible to read a heretical work, and so he read Ogyū Sorai's *Rongo.*[7] This confession reveals a gap in Tokugawa thought between the normative as prescribed and the normative as practiced.

Like the bulk of postwar scholarship, Maruyama's writings make sense of Tokugawa intellectual history through a pair of binaries: one between Neo-Confucian "orthodoxy" (Zhu Xi-ism) and the various "heterodoxies," and one between Neo-Confucianism and modernity. Consequently, Neo-Confucianism has been reviled, first as an intolerant and oppressive ideology, and second as antithetical to the promise of modernization. Subsequent scholarship has qualified these assertions and refined our use of the terms orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In doing so it has also corrected the view that the crystallization of intellectual strangeness (heterodoxy) emerged simply as a reaction to an oppressive orthodoxy. While acknowledging the importance of Maruyama's work, for instance, Wm. T. DeBary has pointed out that Zhu Xi-ism engendered a dynamic intellectual milieu that embraced rationalism, humanism, ethnocentrism, and historical-mindedness, all of which

moved Tokugawa thought in the direction of modernity.[8] Tetsuo Najita has also refined the Maruyama thesis, arguing that Tokugawa society did not necessarily subscribe to orthodoxy as an a priori set of structures, but rather used it to explain extant beliefs. It was, he contends, a philosophy useful to Japanese thinkers for its ability to make sense of practical and political realities.[9] Ancient Learning, including Soraigaku, moved closer to these realities by elevating the tangible influences of time and place over Zhu Xi's rigid devotion to Principle (*ri*) and material force (*ki*). Rather than changing the intellectual character of its time, Neo-Confucian thinkers "provided scriptural and classical authority to what the Japanese already believed to be good and true."[10]

Kurozumi Makoto levels a more damaging attack on Maruyama, arguing that Neo-Confucianism played a critical role in Japan's modernization. Not only did it never amount to a true orthodoxy, Kurozumi contends, it actually engendered important strands of heterodox thought—Ancient Learning and Kokugaku in particular—which did demonstrate modern-like principles.[11] Most heterodox pioneers, in fact, were Zhu Xi scholars who found no contradiction or antagonism between it and other philosophies. Arguing against Maruyama's attempt to identify and codify differences between the various philosophical traditions, Kurozumi posits that Zhu Xi Confucianism was not static and inflexible but rather underwent its process of modernization in conjunction with Ancient Learning and other intellectual movements. It did not experience gradual erosion over the course of the Tokugawa period, but neither did it ever constitute an absolute orthodoxy. Rather, it was slowly accepted as an ideological feature of the social mainstream due to its gradual opening to and convergence with Western learning and Kokugaku.[12] Zhu Xi-ism remained an ideological overlay, however, never infiltrating to the level of ceremony, ritual, or social practice. It was largely through its ability to integrate with and exist syncretically with other doctrines by providing them with certain "theories, concepts, and ethics," that Neo-Confucianism was able to promote itself and infiltrate public consciousness.[13]

Neo-Confucianism's adaptations to *kinsei* life are also manifest in its gradual acceptance of individual differences. By the mid-eighteenth century, several generations of Ancient Learning thinkers had formulated arguments favoring differentiation and pluralism in human nature. Herman Ooms, looking for the roots of an intellectual discourse on metaphysical difference within human nature, makes several important points. One is that the particularism of human nature had been recognized and debated as a

philosophical issue from the seventeenth century. Ancient Learning scholars challenged the universality of original nature (*honzen no sei*) and human nature (*jinsei*) by shifting their attention to the distinctiveness of human character, ultimately finding metaphysical justification for articulations of difference between humans. In direct opposition to the universalism underlying Zhu Xi Confucianism's prioritization of original nature and human nature, Kumazawa Banzan, Yamaga Sokō, Itō Jinsai, and Ogyū Sorai all recognized an altogether separate endowment as more representative of human character—namely, pluralism. Banzan stressed the importance of preserving differences between people; Jinsai and Sokō both explained that, although individuals share Heaven as a common origin, after birth this commonality is nullified by their individual destinies. Moreover, by celebrating rather than bemoaning humanity's diversity, their conclusion that pluralism was a necessary and desirable reality of human society gradually eroded the viability of universalism.[14]

This positive appraisal of particularism in Tokugawa thought was consistent with the rational universalism endorsed by Zhu Xi. Human differentiation was not a philosophically subversive proposition; it was emblematic of Neo-Confucianism's tolerance for metaphysical strangeness. Charlotte Furth points out that Chinese cosmology does not categorically sanction abnormal phenomena but rather recognizes them as part of the heavenly Way. Regularity and irregularity are distinguishable within the Confucian Way, and the appearance of the latter affirms rather than subverts the former. "While patterns are seen as temporal processes, regularities are probabilities, not absolutes, and the 'strange' as a unique event, like snow in summer, will—as the philosopher Zhu Xi put it in the Song Dynasty—occasionally intrude in the scene without undermining the intelligibility of the whole."[15] Although by the seventeenth century Ancient Learning thinkers questioned whether strange phenomena were being accurately represented by traditional Confucian cosmology, their skepticism was directed toward the capacities of human understanding, not the cosmology itself.[16] Metaphysical strangeness continued to be accepted as a part of the cosmological pattern rather than rejected as aberrant or wicked. In the end, therefore, it was the rationalizing effects of Neo-Confucianism that had boomeranged to subvert the orthodox ideology of universalism and the importance it attached to civic responsibility and obedience.

These arguments invalidate the assumption of top-down oppression that has guided scholarship influenced by modernization theories. They also problematize modernist views of eccentricity (heterodoxy) as political

dissent against an oppressive orthodoxy. Japanese and Western scholarship on the aesthetics of eccentricity in the Tokugawa period—represented most notably by Tsuji Nobuo's *Kisō no keifu* (Genealogies of eccentrics, 1968) and John Rosenfield's three-volume *Extraordinary Persons: Works by Eccentric, Nonconformist Japanese Artists of the Early Modern Era (1580–1868) in the Collection of Kimiko and John Powers* (1998)—have established a narrative claiming that *ki* constituted a revolt against a formidable, monolithic Neo-Confucian structure that had inhibited self-determination and self-expression. Viewed from above, the ascendance of strangeness would indeed appear a threatening and destabilizing political movement, but within coteries devoted to the cultivation and enjoyment of *haikai, waka, nanga,* and *sencha,* fascination with strangeness was more of a negotiation (or positioning) for apolitical space. The crystallization of intellectual eccentricity, likewise, cannot be explained entirely as a reaction against the oppressive nature of intellectual "orthodoxy." While it is true that *kijin* gravitated toward alternative philosophies of various forms, historical documents reveal no evidence that either discursive eccentricity or *kijin* themselves acknowledged any decisive binary dividing heterodoxy and orthodoxy. To note that Neo-Confucianism was not necessarily hostile or doctrinally intolerant toward alternate philosophies, and that it even fueled inquiry into Ancient Learning, Kokugaku, Wang Yangming, and Daoism, therefore, invites revised explanations for the mid-eighteenth century's budding culture of strangeness. Further, it recasts the cultural field as a negotiated space formed more from the diverse interests of its residents than by any pervasive ideology. Zhu Xi-ism's coexistence within a constellation of doctrinally compelling alternatives was aided by its recognition of the social value of strangeness, and particularly of madness (*kyō*).

A Genealogy of *Kyō* in the Confucian Tradition

Kyōjin or *kyōsha* (mad person)[17] were universally recognized terms—certainly more familiar in print culture than the term *kijin*—and played an increasingly important role in literary currents during the second half of the eighteenth century. This was a time when, stirred by increasing interest in Wang Yangming and Daoist thought, certain irreverent writers employed an aesthetic of madness to generate edgy, comic, and emotionally expressive literature (*kyōsha no bun,* or *kyōbun*). The writings of Hiraga Gennai and Ōta Nanpo, for example, combined slang and popular colloquialisms

with lowbrow topics to produce comic, irreverent social critiques. *Kyōbun* brought to prose the satirical spirit of comic Nō farce (*kyōgen*) and comic *tanka* (*kyōka*).[18]

Kyō was not only a recognized literary trope, it was commonly associated with eccentricity, and thus seen as a willful expression of resistance. This has obscured the fact that, from Confucius through Wang Yangming, Confucian thinkers consistently expressed guarded admiration for the mad persons of their time. Just as Zhuangzi aligned strangeness with Heaven, so Confucian writers have taken a positive, though qualified, position on the deviant individual. Thus, as *ki* is the aesthetic term advanced by Daoism, *kyō* is that under which the Confucian discourse has advanced its own perspective.

The discourse on *kyō* exists within the context of human character, potential, and proximity to the ideal Middle Way of the Confucian gentleman. For Confucius and his interpreters, those who occupy the extreme margins are closer to the Middle Way than those masses that occupy no particular position at all. One such extreme is *kyō;* the other is *ken* 狷 or *kan* 簡—being fastidious, self-contained, and aloof from politics and material pursuits. The respective talents and ambitions of *kyō* and *ken/kan* are not intrinsically subversive; they merely lack the regulation and guidance to be constructive. The extremism of deviance, then, is a wasted resource for which the Confucian answer is regulation. Confucius has the following to say on the matter: "If you cannot manage to find a person of perfectly balanced conduct to associate with, I suppose you must settle for the wild [*kyō*] or the fastidious [*ken*]. In their pursuit of the Way, the wild plunge right in, while the fastidious are always careful not to get their hands dirty" (*Analects* 13:20).[19] Here Confucius asserts that those overcome by either impetuousness or caution are preferable to those lacking such qualities. Even a gentleman who follows the Middle Way is easily corrupted by the world's disorder, but the wild and fastidious follow their own principles with the ambition of gentlemen. While they cannot conform to the orderliness of society and are consequently relegated to its margins, their intentions nonetheless support a potentiality for virtue.

A passage in the *Mencius* extends this sentiment, introducing a graded view of human worth based on actual and potential proximity to the Middle Way. The gentleman is closest, followed, again, by the wild and fastidious. Mencius lays out the rationale of this hierarchy in VII:B:37, cited here, which refers to and elaborates on passage 5:22 in the *Analects.*

> Wang Chang asked, saying, "Confucius, when he was in Chan, said: 'Let me return [to Lu]. The scholars of my school are wild [*kyō*], but fastidious [*ken*]. They are for advancing and seizing their object, but cannot forget their early ways.' Why did Confucius, when he was in Chan, think of the wild scholars of Lu?"
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> Mencius replied, "Confucius, not getting men pursuing the true medium to whom he might communicate his instructions, determined to take the wild and the fastidious. The wild would advance to seize their object; the fastidious would keep themselves from certain things. It is not to be thought that Confucius did not wish to get men pursuing the true medium, but being unable to assure himself of finding such, he therefore thought of the next class."
>
> "I venture to ask what sort of men they were who could be styled 'The wild?'"
>
> "Such," replied Mencius, "as Ch'in Chang, Tsang Hsi, and Mu Pei, were those whom Confucius styled 'wild.'"
>
> "Why were they styled 'wild?'"
>
> The reply was, "Their aim led them to talk magniloquently, saying 'The ancients!' 'The ancients!' But their actions, where we fairly compare them with their words, did not correspond with them.
>
> "When he [Confucius] found also that he could not get such as were thus wild, he wanted to get scholars who would consider anything impure as beneath them. Those were the fastidious—a class next to the former."

The wild and fastidious are at the extremes, furthest from the Middle, but their ambition carries within it a potentiality lacking among a third group. This third and final grade consists of the common lot, the "good careful people of the villages," whom Mencius calls "the thieves of virtue." "Confucius said, 'I hate a semblance which is not the reality. . . . I hate your good careful men of the villages, lest they be confounded with the truly virtuous.'"[20] Extending Confucius' hopeful view of the wild and fastidious and elaborating on precisely what separates them from the common lot, Mencius here redeems madness and clarifies the dependent relationship between the deviant identity and the Way.

Zhu Xi (1130–1200) also takes up this discourse on the wild and fastidious, expanding on Mencius' graded view of human virtue. In his *Zhuzi sishu youlei,* a commentary on the Four Books, he suggests that although the wild and fastidious are distinct from and inferior to the sage, they at least

complete their endeavors thoroughly, either achieving their ambitions or withdrawing to maintain their integrity. This conscientiousness allows them to be regulated by the sage and, potentially, to return to the middle course.[21] Adherence to regulation has been central all along. Confucius had spoken of his desire to provide guidance for the mad persons of Lu, implying a potentiality lacking among others to recover the Middle Way. Those treading this middle course, Zhu Xi had concurred, are rare because they have the motivation of the wild but behave more cautiously; they also possess integrity or the capacity for self-regulation so as to avoid becoming overly detached.[22] As Brooks has noted, "as long as they are sincere, the [wild] are not only tolerable, they are educable."[23]

As noted in Chapter 2, Wang Yangming was far from silent on the matter of *kyō,* and his followers in China and Japan made important contributions to the eclectic opposition against Neo-Confucianism and its support of moderation and self-regulation. Wang's declaration, "There is *kyō* within me. Don't run and hide from my words," and his successor Wang Longxi's (1498–1583) assertion that "[t]he path to sagehood lies in the hands of *kyōsha,*" encapsulated the views held by the progressive faction of Wang Yangming that positioned *kyōjin* closest to the way of the sages.[24] It also maintained that *kyō* and *kyōjin* are unfettered by internal conflict and are therefore more advanced, progressive, and socially useful. Represented by an irascible group of *kyōsha* such as Wang Longxi and Li Zuowu, this faction defended human freedoms and gender equality by derailing tradition and ethical doctrine. Li Zuowu especially, Okada writes, "took up a madman's heresy" in that he "raised the standard of antiestablishmentarianism . . . , remonstrated and rebuked the government officials of the day, grew terrible in his anger at the society of that time, [and] performed many outrageous acts without regard to what others would think or say."[25]

While Wang, Li, and others of this school held *kyōsha* to be the most sagely of beings and *kyō* to be a doorway to sagehood, mainstream Tokugawa thought denied any relation between *kyō* and correctness. Yet Wang's declaration that "[t]he path to sagehood lies in the hands of *kyōsha*" exemplified the sorts of sentiments that inspired Edo period heterodox thinkers like Kinryū Keiyū, who penned the preface for *Hōsa kyōshaden* (Biographies of Nagoya madmen, 1778).[26] Though *Hōsa kyōshaden* contains little direct reference to Wang's thought or writings, the work signals an affirmation of such values as direct action and self-reflection. "For those who perceived dangers in defying Confucian ethics," Nakano notes, "deploying Wang

Yangming thought was a most effective means of doing so. Its internalization of the Way gave precedence to the individual's interiority, constituting an implicit affirmation of the autonomous self."[27] Such ideas proved inspirational to literati disillusioned with the limitations of Zhu Xi-ism. Hattori Somon, discussed at length below, switched his allegiance from the Sorai School to Wang Yangming, referring to himself specifically as a *kyōsha. Bunjin* like Akutagawa Tankyū (1710–1785) and Ike no Taiga, along with others labeled as *kijin,* also subscribed to the principles of Wang Yangming thought. The annals of Confucian doctrine, therefore, lent no shortage of intellectual support for an aesthetics of madness. The esteem it had long received among progressive Chinese thinkers disposed their Japanese counterparts to take it up with relative peace of mind.[28]

Heterodoxical Convergence: Daoism, Wang Yangming, and Kokugaku

Confucianism's qualified endorsement of eccentric identities dovetailed with that of other philosophical traditions. As we have seen, Daoist archetypes inspired and supported identities of difference in myriad ways within premodern Chinese and Japanese aesthetics. The irreverence exhibited by prototypical eccentrics like the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Tao Qian personified Laozi's and Zhuangzi's association of Heaven with detached, carefree living. Subsequently, a Daoist inspiration for *ippin* painting, already discussed, became prevalent from the mid-Tang dynasty. This spontaneous, transcendental artistic style was repeatedly rediscovered and rearticulated through the Ming period,when it was integrated into literati painting and subsequently emulated by Edo period artists.[29]

Daoist aesthetics were familiar and inspirational resources for seventeenth-century Japanese writers, as well. As Peipei Qiu has shown, the Teimon, Danrin, and Shōmon Schools of *haikai* all found philosophical inspiration in the *Zhuangzi* as well as in later Chinese interpretations of that text. It was largely in an effort to legitimize itself, Qiu notes, that *haikai* looked to a text that had long occupied a position of authority for generations of Chinese literati. Seventeenth-century *haikai,* then, "was not the creation of an oppositional culture that attempted . . . to invert the social and literary hierarchy, but rather a commoner culture that existed largely within and sometimes became indistinguishable from the cultural orthodoxy."[30] Any serious *bunjin* had studied the text and was able to recognize

and use Zhuangzian references and iconography to add an iconoclastic loftiness to their painting, prose, and poetry. Examples abound. Poetry produced by Bashō, Baisaō, and other leaders of *bunjin* culture includes clear references to Zhuangzi; *Kinsei kijinden* collaborator Rikunyo (1734–1801) used Zhuangzi's words to describe Taiga as a recluse; and the monk Daiten (1719–1801) quotes Zhuangzi in his description of Itō Jakuchū.[31]

As eighteenth-century scholars interested in reading beyond the Neo-Confucian canon found Daoist texts readily available, Daoism became regularly invoked as more thinkers attempted to reconcile these two traditions. Ogyū Sorai's philological work charged that Zhu Xi Confucianism was actually based on Daoist terms that it had misinterpreted in its commentaries on the classics. The characters *ri* (Principle) and *ki* (material force), Sorai asserts, were first used by the Daoists.[32] Sorai's students Hattori Nankaku (1683–1759) and Dazai Shundai (1680–1747) studied and wrote on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi,* further contributing to their popularity. Sorai also must have found Daoist irrationalism personally attractive, for his self-reference as "a madman who spent twenty days of the month groaning and the other ten laughing" is couched in characteristically Zhuangzian language.[33] Scholars also would have found that Daoism's articulation of a Way that was morally good and that resided in the forces of nature had clear parallels with the Neo-Confucian view of the cosmos as composed of morally good Principle (*ri*). Though the Neo-Confucian tenet of *kei* (seriousness and reverence for the purpose of reconnecting with *ri*) calls for purposive action as opposed to the Daoist precept of nonaction, both philosophies advocate self-cultivation as a means of reconnecting with moral beneficence residing in the natural world.

Daoist naturalism was also closely aligned with the rituals and myths Japan had claimed as foundational to its native philosophical beliefs. Within Daoist texts, Nativist scholars found literary precedent and philosophical support for the merits of Japan's uncontrived, spontaneous Ancient Way (*kodō*). Kamo no Mabuchi, who became something of an eccentric recluse late in life, regarded the *Laozi* as the only "correct work" produced by China, noting "numerous points of agreement between Laozi and our own ancient thought."[34] Mabuchi understood the Daoist Way as a social model that he envisioned as ascendant in ancient Japan. Daoist texts also articulated Mabuchi's own view of how the world had subsequently come to be held hostage by the contrivances of human intentionality. What was attractive to Mabuchi was the nonmoral, nonpurposive approach to living that both Laozi and Zhuangzi had used in their respective attacks on

Confucianism, views that became the basis of the Nativist argument against Neo-Confucianism.[35]

In theory and in practice, therefore, early modern thinkers would find Daoism to exhibit ontological parallels with Neo-Confucianism, as well as to share naturalist proclivities with Kokugaku. As such, it is no surprise that Daoist thought was plainly visible in the interstices of Neo-Confucian doctrine and that it came to hold an enduring attraction as an alternative philosophical resource.

Wang Yangming was equally influential in guiding and lending philosophical justification for eccentric self-making. Because it was neither institutionalized nor institutionally endorsed, scholars did not claim it as a primary philosophical affiliation. In fact, the nation's most prestigious academy and its archetype of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, the Shōheikō, did not include Wang Yangming in its curriculum until 1838.[36] Yet Wang Yangming's advocacy of human intuition, action, and agency made it inspirational to generations of thinkers. His unification of thought and action was standard learning for all samurai. Writes Najita: "virtually every samurai, regardless of ultimate intellectual identification . . . went through an 'Ōyōmei [Wang Yangming] phase' and incorporated its message."[37] But it was also a philosophy of the masses. Early Wang Yangming proponents Nakae Tōju (1608–1648) and his student Kumazawa Banzan (1619–1691) became cultural heroes among commoners for expressing political disillusionment and resisting sociopolitical injustice. Its endorsement of intuition and individual action, particularly, validated a philosophical and behavioral diversity that placed the normative and the strange on an equal footing.

Wang Yangming was particularly well suited as a complement to Kokugaku. The experientialist approach of Hirata Atsutane's (1776–1843) school of Kokugaku resembled his activism and subjectivity. Hirata would find common ground with Wang Yangming by taking Kokugaku in the direction of action and intuition that enabled a unified intellectual foundation for political activism.[38] Like Wang's thought, Kokugaku also provided commoners with intellectual opportunities and venues of apolitical empowerment. Kokugaku thinkers who articulated connections between aesthetics and an apolitical national tradition made aesthetics a means for the disempowered masses to conceptualize the state and to view themselves as actors within that tradition. In other words, by learning classical art and literature, commoners could recover a sense of involvement in the nation and its cultural traditions.[39] Kokugaku's popularization of *waka,* for example, led to

the formation of more commoner-centered literary salons and study groups, many of which welcomed the participation of women.

In the context of early modern Japanese thought, then, the mental and emotional emancipation validated by Daoism's principles of *ki* and *wu-wei* (effortless action), classical Confucianism's and Wang Yangming's advancement of *kyō,* and Kokugaku's pursuit of the uncontrived, instinctive sentiments of Japan's Ancient Way corresponded with the experimentations in art already discussed. Their mutual reinforcement enabled innovative thinkers to advance new interpretations of social knowledge.

Strange Thought in Practice: Somon and Shidōken

Intellectual histories of early modern Japan have focused on the work of professional scholars, those who either received posts from *bakufu* and domainal authorities or who subsisted on revenue from teaching. This focus on the themes and individuals that charted the course of the intellectual mainstream has codified an intellectual trajectory—proceeding roughly from Zhu Xi-ism, to Ancient Learning, to historicism, to Kokugaku—propelled largely by individuals from the samurai class. Modern historiography's tendency to recover early Tokugawa intellectual history by drawing connections between the work of a core group of professional scholars does not deny the existence or historical validity of more heretical voices, but neither has it adequately recognized the latter's contributions to the field. For, while the *bakufu* endeavored to stave off intellectual liberalization through prohibitions and censorship, even indiscreet eccentric thinkers like Hattori Somon and Fukai Shidōken encountered little difficulty in inhabiting new discursive spaces.

The brash Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746) was an exception. Tetsuo Najita's study of Nakamoto and the Kaitokudō, a private academy for merchants in Osaka, examines class-consciousness and theoretical efforts to justify individual action within everyday commoner practice. For expounding historicist and dangerously heterodox theories, in 1730 the young Nakamoto was expelled from the Kaitokudō and his writings destroyed. Nakamoto had taken Neo-Confucian humanism several steps beyond its mandate of moral cultivation via the "investigations of things" (*kakubutsu*) and quiet self-reflection (*mokuza chōshin*). Echoing Sorai, he argued that virtue and ethics could not be learned from either history or historical texts. Individuals must learn to embody morality for its own sake. Only the experience of living

measures moral virtue, Nakamoto asserted, and one seeking virtue need do no more than to practice discretion, care, filiality, humility, honesty, reverence, and responsibility in one's social interactions and relationships.

This form of moral self-cultivation need not be modeled after traditional practice or the pages of ancient texts, Nakamoto continued, but simply after what one knows intuitively to be reasonable and right. Further, ancient texts offer no more than "practical guidelines" for moral behavior and must be stricken from education to allow for personal reflection on virtue. Metaphysical and eschatological questions bring us no closer to the moral common sense required of social beings and so must also be eliminated from the study of ethics. Self-cultivation consists, first, in practical reflection on what is good and necessary and then in putting that into practice. Second, it requires the development of innate talents through the pursuit of an art. Enjoying artistic pursuits puts morality into practice, providing a channel to actualize the individual's innate virtue. Nakamoto, therefore, denied that moral truth resides either in Neo-Confucianism's various cosmological elements—*ten* (Heaven), *ri, ki*—or within the words of the sages as transmitted through the Confucian classics. Rather, he locates the source of moral virtue within individuals. As Najita notes, this proposition challenges social knowledge by locating the origin of virtue within rather than outside the individual.[40] Nakamoto's validation of individual intuition completed through action, clearly, had borrowed liberally from Wang Yangming thought.

Although Nakamoto's expulsion from the Kaitokudō in 1730 indicates that the mores of commoner society were as yet intolerant of his degree of intellectual eccentricity, his scholarship encapsulates the very sort of secular humanism that the academy was to embrace for the remainder of the eighteenth century. Under the leadership of Goi Ranju (1697–1762) the academy formulated and perpetuated an epistemological view of the commoner individual as adept at conceptualizing the "truth" of the world and making rational choices about how to organize and maneuver within it.[41] This secular celebration of individual agency and self-determinism better suited the interests of commoners seeking autonomy and advancement within the Tokugawa order. To this extent, Ranju, the figure guiding the academy's intellectual course during the mid-eighteenth century, owed a clear debt to Nakamoto. He supported an empirical, pragmatic approach to knowledge and, like Nakamoto, constructed a heterodox epistemology around practical concerns deriving from everyday experience.[42]

Najita concludes that intellectual eccentricity from the mid-eighteenth century was far from a tangential subculture. It was fostered by some of the period's most lucid and ambitious thinkers, who anticipated sociopolitical themes that were, a century later, to flourish and energize the political dissent that would catalyze the Restoration. As early as the mid-eighteenth century, Najita posits, active political dissent was much more prevalent than historians have acknowledged.[43] Intellectual eccentrics disgusted with the political system and willing to risk punishment by openly expressing contrary views were so widespread, in fact, that Najita estimates that 30 to 40 percent of aristocrats who traveled to Edo chose to remain there in order to become independent scholars. This emergent class of classless scholars, physicians, and *bunjin* voluntarily disinherited from official service "romanticized their freedom as entering the world of eccentric play and dreams, which meant leaving the universe of bureaucratic rule . . . custom and accumulated habit."[44]

This mass divergence from intellectual orthodoxy had been informed in part by the philological discoveries of Ancient Learning scholarship, Sorai's in particular. His historicism created new intellectual space by unlocking methodological and interpretive approaches to Confucian texts, authorizing an array of radical challenges to orthodoxy. New historical and philosophical inquiry carried in various directions Sorai's assertions about the necessity of placing the words and deeds of the ancients in proper historical perspective. They shared a common conclusion, however: that contemporary Buddhist and Confucian practices were flawed, the political state that sanctioned them was flawed, and social knowledge generally was flawed. The shock waves triggered by this reassessment of Neo-Confucian knowledge produced a generation of outspoken offspring. Hattori Somon can be included among these.

Because Somon suffered neither persecution nor societal backlash, less is known of him than of Nakamoto or contemporaries like Andō Shōeki (1703–1762) and Yamagata Daini (1725–1767), who were treated as heretics for extending Sorai's criticisms into the political arena.[45] The fact that his startlingly heretical writings were more philosophical and less political made him less noticeable to authorities and afforded him a comparatively uncontroversial life. Scant biographical information leaves much about him unknown. Although only a single biography (Tōjō Kindai's *Sentetsu sōdan gohen* [Stories of ancient philosophers, final volume], 1829) attempts an extensive examination of Somon's life, it is partially complemented by records of his social interactions and intellectual collaborations. Despite his

obscurity today, Somon's inclusion in the first edition of *Heian jinbutsushi* (1768) is ample evidence of his notoriety in Kyoto during his own life.

Somon was from Kyoto's Nishijin district, where his family operated a weaving and textile business, the industry for which that area was known. He was beset by illness throughout his life. As a teenager he inherited the family business, but his weak constitution rendered him unable to give commercial affairs the attention they required. Years earlier he had already decided to entrust the family business to others, devote himself to study, and make his mark in the world as a Confucian scholar. Academia in Kyoto remained comparatively conservative during Somon's childhood. Whereas Soraigaku had won over intellectual circles in Edo in the 1710s, in Kyoto few studied it seriously until after Sorai's death (1728). It was not until the late 1730s that it penetrated Kyoto's academic echelons, a movement to which Somon initially contributed.[46] When he took over the Kanjizaidō private academy at age twenty-five, he complemented his lectures on orthodox Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism with material on Soraigaku. Not all were quick to accept Soraigaku uncritically, however. The Kogidō academy, founded by the Ancient Learning scholar Itō Jinsai in 1662 and headed by his heir Itō Tōgai (1670–1738), included Soraigaku in its curriculum but did not highlight it. Perhaps consequently, a core group of Kogidō graduates formed a scholarly vanguard in Kyoto that rejected Sorai. This small anti-Sorai clique included the Chinese studies scholar Akutagawa Tankyū (1710–1785); Takeda Bairyū (1716–1766); Kimura Hōrai (1716–1766), who had studied under Sorai as a child; and Yoshino Kain (1699–1770).[47] Although there is no evidence that Somon attended the Kogidō, his associations with this cohort caused his devotion to Soraigaku to wane.

For over two decades Somon remained the master of Kanjizaidō and a pillar of the city's Confucian establishment, but his recurring illness forced him to spend increasing periods of time studying alone indoors. He developed interests in Buddhism and Daoism, which he gradually promoted alongside Confucianism. His semireclusive lifestyle further connected him to the sort of withdrawal associated with Buddhists and Daoists. Invoking China's iconic recluses, Tōjō's *Sentetsu sōdan gohen* describes Somon as one who hid in the mountains, immersed in fortune-telling and plucking his one-stringed koto.[48] Though an obvious misrepresentation of his actual life, the comparison surely gratified Somon, who actively cultivated this image by shaving his head and taking the sobriquets Master of the Three Teachings (*Sankyō shujin*) and Madman of the Mountains (*Sanjin kyōsha*).[49]

Somon was no mountain recluse, of course. He not only operated his own academy, he attended *kyōka* gatherings, published *kyōka* collections, and was otherwise active within a society of like-minded *bunjin.* In addition to the associates already listed, his literary collaborators included Chinese studies scholars Nagata Kanga (1738–1792), Emura Hokkai (1713–1788), and the omnipresent monk Rikunyo.[50] It was precisely his rejection of reclusion that reoriented him philosophically. His turn against Soraigaku, then, resulted from several influences: exposure to Tominaga Nakamoto's writings, discussions with Tankyū about Chinese literature, and his discovery of the radical left wing of Wang Yangming thought. First, Somon admitted that the analysis of Chinese writings in Tominaga Nakamoto's *Shutsujō kōgo* (Emerging from meditation, 1745) had influenced him deeply.[51] In a series of Sorai-esque assertions, Nakamoto had concluded that subjectivity and personal opinion are products of historical context. For this reason words had become incrementally detached from their original semantics. Given that Mahayana Buddhism was not based on Siddhārtha Gautama's original teachings, it could not be considered authentic.[52] Nakamoto then transferred this critique to Confucianism and Daoism, denouncing their applicability to modern life and advocating his Way of Sincerity (*makoto no michi*) as a modern moral.

Somon did not share Nakamoto's fiery disposition, but, Nakano asserts, he was the most conspicuous proponent of the latter's mission.[53] He extended Nakamoto's position by asserting that the Buddha's death forced his disciples to preserve and transmit textually ideas that the master had passed on orally. It was they who developed and codified Buddhism by selecting, embellishing, and perfecting his teachings within a set of scriptures. Concepts like predestination, original awakening, and bodhisattvas, Somon wrote, all appeared afterward as core features of Mahayana. Because what is called Buddhism was constructed five centuries after the Buddha's death, Somon reasoned, it carried little credibility.[54]

Song and Ming period colloquial literature exerted a second influence on Somon. Through discussions with Tankyū, he saw how literature produced as commercial entertainment rather than for explicitly didactic purposes enabled a smooth, secularized blending of disparate philosophical values. Whereas thinkers like Li Zhi and Ogyū Sorai had agreed that the virtues of literature should be separated from the virtues of Confucianism and Buddhism, authors like Wang Shi-zhen (1526–1590) had long produced popular literature that unified the moral philosophies of both endeavors.[55]

Such literature offered Somon a concrete model of how to integrate the philological study of sutras, history, and moral virtue.

Wang Yangming, finally, particularly the radical "left wing" (*sayoku*) branch as advanced by Li Zhi, provided Somon with a paradigm that bridged doctrine and practice. All teachings about the Way—whether the Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist Way—were implicitly limiting in their dualistic thinking about correct and incorrect. Somon wished to eliminate these boundaries dividing rights and wrongs, benefits and detriments. He found it problematic to assert that right and wrong existed. Yet because scholarly discussions are based on right and wrong, a scholar that rejects them on a personal level must allow them as topics for debate. Somon's admiration for the sort of unrestrained action and emotion validated by Wang Yangming is also apparent in his *kyōka* collection *Gika saitanshū* (Collection of playful New Year's verses, 1763). Here, his literary collaborators Kinryū Keiyū and the Jōdō monk Daiga Kyōkan (Daiga the Mad but Perfunctory, 1709–1782) are depicted as madmen whose words and deeds evoke the radical left-wing proponent Li Zhi.

By the mid-1760s, Somon must have felt that he had misspent his time in conventional thought, for his writings confess a need to discard all restraints and express his true convictions. Now that he had mastered the three teachings, he felt himself to be a true *kyōsha* who could publicly reveal that the core of his beliefs derived from left-wing Wang Yangming thought.[56] It was at this time that he wrote his two primary works: *Sekirara* (Naked truth; published posthumously in 1785), in which he takes up Nakamoto's question of whether Mahayana should be considered true Buddhism, and *Nensairoku* (A record of clarity, 1769), a condemnation of Soraigaku. In both he examines from various angles the advantages and disadvantages of the unification of the three teachings.[57]

Sekirara asserts that contemporary Buddhist practices—studying the sutras, meditation, and oral transmission of knowledge from master to disciple—all aimed at grasping the incomprehensible as comprehensible truths. People are caught in concepts like the five stages of existence and the cycle of life and death, he lamented, but intellectualizing of this sort obstructs true understanding. Even the promise of enlightenment itself becomes a distraction. Enlightenment is not such a wondrous thing, Somon writes, "it emits less light than a firefly's buttocks. It does not bestow supernatural abilities like the shape-shifting powers of foxes and *tanuki;* it simply makes one free of delusions and obsessions. Treasures of gold and silver come

to appear worthless, and beautiful women become no more appealing than rocks and trees."[58] Somon directed his attack on Buddhism at the external only, its teachings and pretenses rather than its essential ontology. It was the Buddhist monks that were fakes and the Mahayana sutras that were fabricated. The essence of the interior aspects of Buddhism, he felt, was about forgetting good and bad, existence and nonexistence. This was a return to the individual spiritual side left unadulterated by institutionalized Buddhism.

As Somon cautioned his readers against becoming enslaved by institutionalized religion, he also believed that orthodox thought should not be used to justify state policy. His critique of Confucianism in *Nensairoku,* therefore, paralleled his critique of Buddhism. The contradictions evident in the *Analects,* he felt, exposed discrepancies in Confucius' teachings that disqualified it as a trustworthy text. The Five Books and other Confucian classics he likewise considered to be soulless remnants of the ancient sages, lacking historical relevance and misguiding modern readers. For this reason, those who used Confucianism to camouflage political ambition were the greatest violators of Confucian ideals. Emperor Wu Wang (d. 1043 B.C.E.) and the Zhou kings were not saints, and the revered minister Li Si (280–208 B.C.E.), who had burnt piles of books and persecuted Confucian scholars, should be viewed as a great sinner.[59] "The Way is not something to be incinerated . . . and yet Confucian histories have constructed Li Si as a saint," Somon writes. "This makes the Confucian classics untrustworthy and ahistorical."[60]

Clearly, Ogyū Sorai's historicism—his deployment of philological evidence to deny newer interpretations of ancient language—was a doorway for Nakamoto and Somon. Both took Sorai's findings into the context of commoner life and combined them with Wang Yangming's celebration of human intuition and action. And although Somon was a revisionist who recognized that contemporary thought was rife with anachronisms, he escaped the persecution suffered by Tominaga and others by avoiding accusations of being anti-Confucian, anti-Buddhist, or anti-*bakufu.*

As a public figure, Fukai Shidōken (1680?–1765) shared nothing with Somon. And while the two embody dissimilar models of intellectual eccentricity, as thinkers they emerged from and responded to identical theoretical problems. Shidōken became a Shingon monk at age twelve and studied at several temples, where he grew increasingly impatient with the philosophical restrictions imposed by institutional Buddhism. In 1716 he set up a dais

at Asakusa Kannon temple in Edo and for the next half-century supported himself as a street orator, preacher, and storyteller. He harangued onlookers about the fallacies of the three teachings and lectured on China's and Japan's ancient philosophical traditions. He was particularly famous for banging a phallus-shaped stick on a table as he delivered his sharp critiques (Fig. 4.1). By the 1750s Shidōken had acquired considerable notoriety. His "mad sermons" (*kyōkō*) were advertised in several publications; his portraits were circulated as well. Shidōken's fame, Nakano claims, rivaled that of Ichikawa Danjūrō II as the most recognized attraction around Edo, and in 1763 he was finally immortalized as the model and namesake for Hiraga Gennai's satirical *Fūryū Shidōken-den* (The modern life of Shidōken).[61]

Shidōken's preface to his tract *Motonashigusa* (Rootless weeds, 1748) explains the purpose of his lectures as penetrating the truth of the three teachings, which "for the ignorant is just tall tales and a source of merriment, but for the wise expounds the Law and the Way."[62] Advancing a

FIGURE 4.1 Shidōken. Katsushika Hokusai, *Kijin hyakunin isshu.* Tokyo Gakugei University Library.

non-dualist ontology evocative of Zen and Daoist thought, he continues by explaining the creation of Heaven and Earth in terms of sexual intercourse. After a titillating description of the union of male and female genitalia, he argues that sexual union was the process through which Creation originated. It is for this reason, he observes, that the character for Heaven (天) is written with the two ideographs for couple (二人).[63]

Shidōken rejected allegiance to all schools of institutionalized thought on the ground that none spoke to human experience. It is believed that the Law originated with the Buddha and Confucius, he asserts in *Motonashigusa,* but these teachings cannot fathom the *kokoro* (heart/mind). In fact, Buddhism refutes the *kokoro,* he lamented; the Tendai master Myōraku Daishi advocates making the *kokoro* the direct origin of things;[64] Shingon explains the need for purifying the *kokoro* through self-cultivation; and Confucianism calls moderation the highest virtue. None of these know the true essence of human nature, which changes along with everything else in nature. With these essentializing statements, Shidōken reduced a spectrum of disparate teachings to their fundamental principles and judged them on their applicability to human experience.

Further advancing his non-dualistic approach to living in *Kashōana monogatari bendan* (On tales of laughable orifices, 1761), Shidōken elaborates on his unified, nonsectarian view of the three teachings. Using paradoxical language to clarify the limitations of faith in a singular philosophy, he reduces metaphysics to the physicality of genitalia:

> Following one path will cause one to lose one's way and fall into a hole. . . . Over-reliance on expedients (*hōben*) creates a hole, but discarding expedients causes the hole to widen. Likewise, when one becomes ensnared by the emptiness of the Way one discards humanity. . . . Within the Way humanity is concealed, and within humanity the Way is concealed. . . . Truly, love is the beginning of feeling, lust is the source of compassion, the vagina is the root of formlessness, and in the center is the eight-leafed lotus blossom whose whiteness is the womb of diversity. Such is non-dual Mahayanic reality (*funi makamon*).[65]

Neither Buddhist expedients nor the Daoist Way are sufficient measures to evade the pitfalls of human experience, he avers. Overreliance on one is as deficient as nonreliance and ultimately leads to the same end. Rather, it is natural human emotion, and lust particularly, that nourishes the

diversity of individual needs. Shidōken encapsulates these sentiments in the following verse:

kōkō no	the rigors of
shugyō wo mite	religious training
hate ireba	in the end
nakanaka moto no	return one to
bonpu narikeri	original mediocrity[66]

Shidōken's celebration of emotion (lust) over doctrine responded to the prevalent perception that the political and metaphysical worlds had plunged into decline. It was also representative of the conclusions drawn by a cohort of contemporary ideologues who were reinterpreting Neo-Confucian metaphysics to explain the relativity and plurality of human experience. It is significant, not only that this cohort was permitted to publicize counter-ideological ideas, but that it was publicly lauded for doing so. Clearly, a piecemeal, unsystematic integration of ideas drawn from Wang Yangming, Daoism, and Kokugaku resonated with people's experiences more closely than the standard moralistic dogma being taught at Confucian academies. Emotion was one point of resonance, and continuing attraction to these heterodoxies indicated a growing need to justify it philosophically. The so-called cult of *qing* (emotion) previously discussed as a literary trope celebrated emotion for transporting the subject to a liminal reality. Emotion infused the worldly with otherworldliness by imbuing reality with fiction and fantasy.[67] For a growing number of Japanese thinkers as well, it functioned as a strategy of detachment from systemic oppression, as a vehicle of transcendence that enabled self-expression and agency, those potentialities perceived as muted by a "cult of reason."

Wang Yangming, Daoism, and Kokugaku not only shared an affinity for emotion but also collectively endorsed individual agency and, by extension, the diversity that nurtured eccentricity. The distillation of emotion from these disparate teachings, therefore, was also a distillation of strangeness. From the intellectual milieu of the mid-eighteenth century, both emotion and eccentricity thus emerged as related self-making potentialities, a progressive phenomenon that Maruyama has called the "discovery of man." It is within this context, he writes, that for the first time "man began to be conscious of his autonomy . . . [and able to live] freely according to his own will and ideas."[68] The experiences of Nakamoto, Somon, and Shidōken

indicate that correlations between intellectual freedom and emotional freedom were indeed expanding the boundaries of human action.

Their experiences also illustrate that intellectual and aesthetic strangeness stimulated and informed each other. Nakamoto, Somon, Shidōken, as well as rebels like Yamagata Daini, Andō Shōeki, and Hiraga Gennai, all were reinventing knowledge at precisely the time that Hakuin, Ike no Taiga, Itō Jakuchū, and Soga Shōhaku were reinventing art. Nor is the sudden emergence of *ki* at this moment coincidental. As classical Confucianism and Wang Yangming lent doctrinal support for *kyō* as a potentiality that drew the individual closer to Heaven, they also invoked the intuitive spontaneity extolled in *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi.* Following the Kyōhō period (1716–1736), references to and studies of these Daoist texts became more ubiquitous, bringing the idea of *ki* as defined by Zhuangzi alongside that of *kyō.* Nakano holds that what the former had called *kyō* the latter were calling *ki,* and that the two became united in public discourse.[69] *Kyō* indeed permeated the biographical discourse on *ki. Kinsei kijinden,* for example, includes entries for the mad monk (*kyōsō*) Dankai, Bashō's crazed (*kyōsu*) student Hirose Izen, and the madwoman (*kyōjo*) Fumihiroge.

Ultimately, the philosophical legitimacy carried by both *ki* and *kyō* proved critical to embedding strangeness within late eighteenth-century life. Supported by favorable views of difference within the three teachings, the designations *kyōsha* and *kijin* grew more sanctified. Their migration from intellectual and aesthetic circles to print and popular culture would be advanced largely by biography, the subject of Chapter 5.