Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691) Encyclopedia Article

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Kumazawa Banzan (1619–1691)

Kumazawa Banzan, a Japanese Confucianist of the Wang Yangming school, was born in Kyoto and died at Koga, Shimoda prefecture. Both he and his father were masterless samurai. Deciding to become a scholar, Kumazawa went to Nakae Tōju (1608–1648); in 1642 Nakae taught him the doctrine of Wang Yangming (in Japanese, Ōyōmei)—"innate knowledge" and cultivation of the mind. Kumazawa entered the service of Lord Ikeda Mitsumasa of Okayama, but his ideas, contrasting with the officially established doctrine, Zhu Xi neo-Confucianism, aroused suspicion. However, his character and practical ability were recognized, and Ikeda put him in charge of the fief. For seven years (1649–1656) he successfully brought forth administrative reforms that transformed Okayama into a model fief. Paramount among his accomplishments was his role in organizing the Okayama college. Yet the extreme nature of these reforms, even in monasteries, angered many. Moreover, there were rebellious samurai among his pupils. He decided to retire to the studious life of a teacher in Kyoto, but slander of his teaching forced him to move in 1667; he did pass eight quiet years (1679–1687) at Yadasan near Kōriyama. On the official request of the Tokugawa government, he presented a plan of reform (possibly in his *Daigaku wakumon*). Thereupon his enemies, especially Hayashi, the defender of Zhu Xi Confucianism, succeeded in having him confined at Koga.

Kumazawa is typical of the early Tokugawa nonconformists, who were beset by adversities that multiplied with success. His politico-economic ideas, which were indeed very bold for his times, were the real reason for his difficulties. They are expressed in *Daigaku wakumon* (Some questions concerning the great learning), which is not a commentary on the Confucian classic "The Great Learning" but rather a tract on many subjects concerning how to rule the realm according to the Confucian precept of *jinsei*, or "benevolent rule." Both his unconventional proposals and his pragmatic attitude toward doctrine are striking.

See Also

Chinese Philosophy; Hayashi Razan; Japanese Philosophy; Nakae Tōju; Wang Yang-Ming; Zhu Xi (Chu Hsi).

Bibliography

For a guide to primary sources, see the bibliography to the Japanese Philosophy entry. See also M. Fisher, "Kumazawa B., His Life and Ideas," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 2nd series, 16 (1938): 221–259; 259–356. W. T. de Bary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 384–392.