

A Confucian Family and Japanese Modernization: The Descendants of the Koga Family in Early 20th-Century Japan

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Abstract: This research note discusses how Confucian scholars, who had a considerable influence on Japanese thought and education during the first half of the 19th century, were able to survive the Meiji Restoration in Japan—a period that forced Confucian scholars to adapt to extreme changes and the structural problem presented by the Japanese social welfare system at the beginning of the 20th century. This study focuses on the paths taken by the descendants of the Koga family—which was once a prestigious family with strong ties to *Shoheiko*, the center of Confucian education in early modern Japan—during the Meiji and Taisho periods. The history of the Koga family is recorded in the documents of Kusama Yasoo, who discovered a contemporary descendant of the Koga family and subsequently supported him. These records demonstrate that the rise of Western natural science following the Meiji period reduced the demand for Confucian studies. Consequently, the descendants of Confucian scholars in Japan were forced into lives of hardship without social welfare support in the early 20th century. Despite their achievements and influence as Confucian scholars in the early modern period, the Koga family was one of several shogunate vassal families that came to be poorly regarded by later generations. The social conditions that their descendants had to endure during the Meiji and Taisho periods were a major factor that resulted in the Koga family becoming a “forgotten” Confucian family.

Keywords: *Confucianist, Koga Seiri, Koga Kinichiro, social welfare, lower class, Kusama Yasoo*

1. Introduction

Up until the 19th century, Confucianism was one of the most widespread systems of thought in East Asia. Indeed, it had a strong influence for a considerable period of time on not only China, the birthplace of Confucianism, but also Korea and Japan. In Japan, it became the foundation for almost all academic and social thought in the 17th through 19th centuries, during which time the maritime prohibition system restricted exchanges with the West and the import of Western thought. In contrast to China and Korea, where Confucianism directly influenced real politics, Confucianism in Japan had no direct influence on politics. This detachment from politics allowed for a freer and more independent development of Confucianism in Japan. Confucian scholars in early modern Japan did not perform bureaucratic functions like their Chinese counterparts. However, Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism were popularized and accepted in the public sphere during the early modern period. This free and uninhibited development of Confucianism in early modern

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Japan is cited as an example of the intellectual activity of the Japanese people.

During this period, Shoheizaka Academy (*Shoheizaka gakumonjo*), also known as *Shoheiko*, was the preeminent institution of learning in Japan. This school was the only Confucian school under the direct control of the shogunate in modern Japan and functioned as an educational institution for Hatamoto and shogunate officials. Shibano Ritsuzan, Bito Jishu, and Okada Kansen — collectively known as the “Three Kansei Doctors” (*Kansei no san hakase*) — were among the most prominent educators at the school. Confucianism was so widespread and influential during the Edo period (1603–1867) that several students of the *Shoheiko* rose to the rank of shogunate vassal by the end of the Edo period. However, following the Meiji Restoration, Japan rapidly modernized and Westernized, and by the end of the Meiji period, Confucianism had lost much of its social and intellectual culture.¹

This study aims to elucidate the trajectory of early modern Confucian scholars and their families in modernizing Japan, with a particular focus on members of the Koga family, who served on the faculty of *Shoheiko* for three generations. The Koga family included Koga Seiri (1750–1817), Toan (1788–1847), and Kinichiro (1816–1884), and all three were Confucian scholars who held leading positions at *Shoheiko*. Among them, Seiri was likely the most prominent scholar, and after Okada Kansen retired, he replaced Okada as one of the “Three ‘Kansei Doctors.’” Seiri was initially a Confucian scholar in the Saga clan. However, in 1796, he was promoted by the shogunate to the position of Confucian scholar at *Shoheiko* in Edo. Seiri’s third son, Toan, had a son named Kinichiro. Kinichiro also became one of the most prominent scholars of the late 19th century, serving as president of the *Bansho shirabesho*, which was established by the shogunate in 1865 (Onodera 2006, 95–105) and became what is now the University of Tokyo.

The Koga family was distinctive within the *Shoheiko*, exerting indirect influence over the central government. In addition, to the Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) family, who were deeply involved in the founding of the school, the Koga family was the only other family with three consecutive generations of descendants selected to serve at *Shoheiko*. Moreover, they hired teachers based on merit, not family background. Additionally, multiple Koga family disciples became shogunate officials who were actively engaged in the politics of the central government (Nara 2010, 71). Although *Shoheiko* itself was a simple Confucian institution, in the late Edo period, a significant number of its students who passed the academic examination subsequently became ministers of the shogunate and held important positions, such as the magistrates of Nagasaki and Uraga. Notable examples include Tanabe Taichi, Nakamura Masanao, and Kurimoto Kon. These Koga family disciples played active roles in the tumultuous political scene at the end of the Edo period, suggesting that the Koga family’s thoughts and policies exerted an indirect influence on politics.

There have been advancements in research on the Koga family in recent years,² and it is now clear that Kinichiro was one of the few intellectuals familiar with Western studies in the 19th century. Furthermore, from an early stage, he preached the importance of opening Japan to outside influences and establishing peaceful and friendly relationships with foreign countries (Onodera 2006, 139–168). Even after the Meiji Restoration, Kinichiro was repeatedly approached by the

1 However, as evidenced by the inclusion of moral philosophy in the Imperial Rescript on Education, Confucianism as a moral and didactic discipline is said to have partially served as the ideological foundation of modern education. It did not completely disappear from the thinking of Japanese intellectuals or the people but instead functioned as a broad ideological framework.

2 For studies related to this research note, see the following references. For Koga Seiri and Toan, see (Umezawa 2008). For Koga Kinichiro, see (Onodera 2006). For vassals and Shoheiko, see (Makabe 2007; Nara 2010).

Ministry of Education about working for the ministry (Onodera 2006, 242), suggesting that he was a considerably skilled scholar with a positive reputation. Nevertheless, the contemporary public is largely unaware of the three generations of the Koga family. In their respective works, Makabe Jin and Onodera Ryuta have provided a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of scholarship and intellectual thought during the Tokugawa period. Makabe has lauded the scholarship and ideas of the three generations of the Koga family, characterizing them as “the forgotten masters of Confucianism” (Makabe 2007, 7). This is because the contemporary public is largely unaware of the three generations of the Koga family despite their notable works. In recent years, as Koga Toan is mentioned in a high school textbook of the General History course (*Rekishii sogo*) (Kibata et al. 2023), in addition to Koga Seiri, people have become more aware of the Koga family than in the past. Nevertheless, the Koga family is still less well known than Bito Jishu and Hayashi Razan, who were also teachers at *Shoheiko*.

At this juncture, the question arises as to why the Koga family was “forgotten” by the public for so long. One possible explanation is that the Tokugawa regime, under which the Koga family served, was defeated in the Meiji Restoration and removed from the political center. However, Bito and other Confucianists also faced similar difficulties yet have been better remembered, and therefore, it cannot be said that being on the losing side of the Meiji Restoration was the only reason for being “forgotten.” In addition, although it is not well known, there was a movement to honor the Koga family after the Meiji Restoration. Seiri and Kinichiro were bestowed with titles from the Taisho to the Showa periods. Despite impressive achievements and being honored at various events following their deaths, they have still been “forgotten.” Onodera posits that this is because many shogunate officials were destined to “sink into the sea of oblivion” if their descendants did not publish biographies after their deaths (Onodera 2006, iii). However, studies by Onodera and others on the Koga disciples were the focus of analysis until the Meiji Restoration period. As a result, the activities of subsequent Koga family members in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have rarely been discussed.

This research note primarily uses historical documents from after the Meiji Restoration and reconsiders why this prestigious family sank into the “sea of oblivion,” as Onodera states. However, the objective of this research note is not to reassess the evaluation of the Koga family in early modern intellectual history, nor to underscore the methodological significance of elucidating the trajectory of intellectual lineages within the discipline. The failure of the Koga family to leave a significant mark on later generations is believed to be largely related to the path the family took after that. As will be discussed in detail in this research note, various misfortunes befell the prestigious Koga family, and the weak prewar social welfare system led to the family’s dispersal. Then, in 1927, Kinichiro’s grandson, Koga Shin, was found in a Tokyo slum. The fact that the subsequent trajectory of the Koga family, despite its significant presence in the late early modern period, was not necessarily prosperous or smooth reflects the subtle distortions brought about by Japan’s modernization process. This research note aims to present the history of a small yet significant Confucian lineage that was forgotten in the course of modernization.

Shin was discovered by a man named Kusama Yasoo, who was conducting a research project in the slums of Tokyo when he encountered him. Kusama was a pioneer in the study of the urban poor during the Taisho and Showa periods (Yasuoka 1998). His research led him to deeply explore the lower strata of society; he conducted research for many years and left many records of the underclass in prewar Japan. Even Kusama, who collected many stories of misery and poverty through his work, was struck by the hardships of the descendants of the Koga family. In one of his speeches tracing the hardships of the Koga family, he described them as “unlucky in every way” (Kusama 1917). The following three sections clarify the difficult paths taken by the Koga family

after the Meiji period, thereafter it will become clear why they sank into oblivion.³

2. The Koga Family After the Meiji Restoration

(1) The Deaths of Kinichiro and Ei

The advent of the Meiji Restoration did not immediately cause Koga Kinichiro to be excluded as a scholar from the new era of the Meiji government; however, he attempted to distance himself from the political center. Even after the Meiji Restoration, he was repeatedly requested to be promoted by the new government, demonstrating that although he belonged to the side opposed to the Meiji government, his abilities were highly regarded, and he was in demand as a scholar. However, Kinichiro would not easily compromise his beliefs, as he was loyal to Tokugawa; therefore, he was unwilling to serve the Meiji government (Kusama 1929; Onodera 2006, 242).

According to Kinichiro's "*Senko toan fukun gyoshoku*," Koga Toan, Kinichiro's father, disliked scholars who sought fame and approached those in authority (Umezawa 2008, 155–177). As a scholar, Toan prided himself on his righteousness and honesty and taught his son Kinichiro to maintain the family traditions, saying, "I have never approached the authorities," and "You also should uphold our family traditions, which are honorable and innocent, as a scholar" (Umezawa 2008, 174). Therefore, until the end of his life, Toan kept his distance from politics, never assuming a central position within the political world. It is likely that Kinichiro inherited this sincere attitude as a "scholar" from his father, Toan. His father's teachings influenced Kinichiro to refuse an offer of a political appointment from the new government. After the Meiji Restoration, Kinichiro moved to Shizuoka and lived in retirement with his family; however, in approximately 1874, he moved to Asakusa (The Note 1903, 60).

Because he had no son to serve as his successor, Kinichiro had his student marry his daughter and then appointed his son-in-law the family heir (The Note 1903, 59). The son-in-law's name was Fukazawa (Koga) Ei. Fukazawa Ei had actually first married Kinichiro's eldest daughter, Koto (Makabe 2007, 24; Kusama 1929, 77). However, Koto passed away soon after the marriage, and he then married Tsuru, the daughter Kinichiro had with his concubine, and had five sons and two daughters with Tsuru. Their eldest son was Shutaro, the second son was Shin, the third son was Kiyoshi, the fourth was Tai, and the fifth was Ken. The eldest daughter was Masa, and the second was Riki (Makabe 2007, 24; Onodera 2006). Shutaro and Masa died prematurely, and Tai was adopted by another family at an early age; therefore, only four children remained in the Koga family (The Note 1903, 59–60). Shin was born in 1874 at a Koga family member's house in Mukai Yanagihara, Asakusa-ku, Tokyo, and Shin lived with Kinichiro until his death in October 1884. Kinichiro seems to have adored his grandson and the apparent heir of the Koga family (Onodera 2006, 281–282).

3 The main historical documents used in this research note are as follows: (1) Jusha Suteba Ibun (Notes of the Confucianist Dumping Ground, The Note), (2) *Otsuka Senju Boshō Hozonkai Hokokusho* (The Report of the Society for the Preservation of Otsuka Senju Boshō, The Report), (3) *Meimon no Koei Hin ni Naku* (The Descendants of a Prestigious Family Crying over Poverty). (4) *Kaso Shakaiso Mandan* (Ramblings About the Underclasses). Sources (3) and (4) were written by Kusama, and sources one and two were written and published at the time when the preservation project for *Otsuka Senju Boshō* was beginning to be promoted. They describe the situation of the families buried in the cemetery and the process of maintaining the graves. Although the name of the reporter in source one is anonymous, it is generally consistent with the contents of two, three, and four, and can be considered reliable. Bibliographic information of these records is in the references.

The family's difficulties began after Kinichiro's death, after which Ei took over as head of the Koga family. Ei was a former student of Kinichiro and a brilliant Confucian scholar; however, after the Meiji Restoration, it became difficult for him to make use of his talents as a Confucianist. Consequently, he joined the General Staff Headquarters as a military officer (*Dajokan Nisshi* 1875). In 1887, while he was in his 40s, Ei died from an illness, and the following year, Kinichiro's wife also died (Makabe 2007, 24; Kusama 1929, 77). Therefore, in the few years from 1884 to 1888, three elders of the Koga family passed away. In 1887, the same year that Ei died, Ken was born. Tsuru, the mother of Ken and Shin, became a widow with three children, including an infant. Her oldest son Shin was only 11–12 years old, therefore, following the successive deaths of her elders, Tsuru was the only adult and had to carry the burden of the prestigious Koga family on her shoulders.

Following the passing of these three Koga elders, the Koga family faced a financial crisis. According to Kusama, since Ei had been a military man, the remaining family members normally would have been eligible to receive military pensions (*Gunjin onkyu*). However, because of the short duration of Ei's military service, the family could not receive pensions (Kusama 1929, 77). Since Japan in the mid-Meiji period did not have a social system that allowed women with children to work and earn a minimum income, it was unrealistic for Tsuru to work and earn a wage.

A failed attempt to publish a collection of Toan's writings also contributed to the financial difficulties of the Koga family. This publication project was initiated after Kinichiro's death. It was led by his disciples with the aim of publishing the Chinese classics left by Toan and spreading his ideas to the people of Japan (Onodera 2006, 286–288). However, the project ran out of funds during the planning phase. Moreover, because the number of people reading Chinese classics declined rapidly during the Meiji period, there was little expectation that it would sell. The project was halted halfway through due to these changing circumstances, and the Koga family was left with a debt of 510 yen (Onodera 2006, 286–288).

Kawada Tsuyoshi, one of Kinichiro's disciples, was concerned about this failure and devised a method for offsetting its negative consequences. He decided to donate the Koga family's many books to the Imperial Household Agency (*Kunaisho*) in exchange for receiving a royalty payment (The Note 1903, 60). The Koga family was known for having a large number of books at their residence to the extent that it was once called "*Mankanro*," meaning "the house with tons of books." The core team of this project consisted of Kawada and Sera Taichi, Nakamura Masanao, Nishi Amane, Tsuda Mamichi, and other former students of *Shoheiko* who became prominent thinkers during the Meiji period (Onodera 2006, 288–289). In 1889, the collection of books that had been inherited by three generations of the Koga family—that is, Seiri, Toan, and Kinichiro—was donated to the Imperial Household Agency. As a result of the donation of thousands of books, Tsuru received a lump sum of 2,000 yen to be used for immediate living expenses under Kawada's supervision (The Note 1903, 60).

(2) Shin's Departure and the Separation of the Family

Although they had a large sum of money to live on for the time being, the Koga family subsequently lost their home in Ushigome, Tokyo, because the landlord was unwilling to allow them to live there without a male head of the family (The Note 1903, 61). Tsuru, Shin, and Ken were forced to move into Sera's residence (The Note 1903, 61). However, Tsuru felt restricted by Kawada and Sera's control over the family finances, and therefore, she left and moved to Ichigaya around 1891 (The Note 1903, 61). Subsequently, Tsuru tried several times to start a business and asked Sera to give her the remaining funds to finance the business. Sera eventually gave her the remaining funds, and therefore, within 20 years of Kinichiro's death, most of the funds had been exhausted

(The Note 1903, 61). In an interview, Tsuru reflected that this financial failure and the downfall of her family were her responsibility. She stated, “All this happened because of my unworthiness” (The Note 1903, 60). Moreover, because Riki and Kiyoshi died prematurely during this period, only Tsuru, Shin, and Ken were left as heirs of the Koga family.

Although Tsuru blamed herself, her unplanned and impoverished lifestyle was also influenced by her eldest son, Shin. Even after the Koga family moved out, Sera attempted to nurture Shin to become a reliable head and heir to the family. Sera asked Hidaka Seijitsu, who was also a disciple of Kinichiro and was involved in land reclamation projects after the Meiji period, to assist Shin in the projects and to educate him (The Note 1903, 61). Within a year, however, Shin was removed from Hidaka’s care and soon returned to Tsuru and Ken (The Note 1903, 61). Afterward, Shin frequented fair vendors and even sold candy at the fair; however, the money he earned was quickly spent or stolen. Shin was completely unable to support his family financially (The Note 1903, 62). Shin left his family again around 1900 after a rift developed between him and Tsuru (The Note 1903, 62).

Shin was assumed to have had a mild mental illness. A reporter with the magazine *The Koseki*, who wrote an article titled “Jusha Suteba Ibun (Notes of the Confucianist Dumping Ground),” summarized Shin, whom he interviewed directly, as “rude” and “idiotic” (The Note 1903, 69-61). He was also surprised by the family’s impoverishment, saying, “They are so financially impoverished that it is hard to believe that they were once a prestigious family” (The Note 1903, 58). Kusama does not use words such as “idiotic;” however, he does describe Shin as a “completely unreliable firstborn son with a mental illness” (Kusama 1917, 78–79). In Japan during the early 20th century, there was no appropriate word to describe such people, and they were simply dismissed as “lunatics” or the like. In an effort to compensate for his unreliable older brother, Ken was forced to serve as the financial backbone of the family. In 1898, at the age of 12, Ken left his mother and went to work as an apprentice at Sakaeya, a sake shop in Ikenohata (Kusama 1917, 79; The Note 1903, 62). However, Ken was worried about his mother and returned after completing his 13-year apprenticeship in 1911 (Kusama 1917, 79; The Note 1903, 62). While living with his mother, he made a new start and managed to open his own liquor store with his wife and children (Ichimura 1912). However, after many years of hardship, Tsuru developed a mental disorder and was admitted to a hospital in Nezu. Ken struggled to raise money to pay for the expenses. Furthermore, due to the limited success of his business, he supported his family by working as a banker and a dealer of used paper (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* 1915/9/20; Kusama 1917, 79).

3. A Glimmer of Hope and a Turning Point for the Koga Family

(1) The Project of *Otsuka Senju Boshō* Preservation

As mentioned above, the Koga family was very much at a standstill following the death of Kinichiro; however, several events brought the family’s difficulties to the public’s attention. One such development was a project to maintain the gravesites of Confucian scholars that began in the early modern period. This project was initiated by the Preservation Society of *Otsuka Senju Boshō* graveyard with the aim of honoring the Confucian scholars buried there. The graves of Koga family members Muro Kyuso, Kinoshita Junan, Shibano Ritsuzan, Bito Jishu, and Okada Kansan were located in *Otsuka Senju Boshō*. They had fallen into disrepair and were further devastated after the Meiji Restoration (*The Report* 1917, 3–4). This collection of graves was also commonly known as “*Jusha suteba* (Confucianist Dumping Ground)” (*The Report* 1917, 1).

Toyama Masakazu and Shimada Koson, who were faculty members at Imperial University, were the first to attempt to revitalize the devastated cemetery (*The Report* 1917, 4). The project

was initiated around 1897 but was abandoned after their deaths. Hamao Arata, who inherited their legacy, resumed work on the project in 1901 upon organizing the Preservation Society with Inoue Tetsujiro, Sera Taichi, and 11 others as secretaries (*The Report* 1917, 4–5). The project began in 1902 and succeeded in raising a large sum of donations from influential people in various fields, including royalty payments from the Imperial Household Agency (*Gokashikin*) (*The Report* 1917, 6–7, 29–38).

To obtain permission from the family to maintain the cemetery, the Preservation Society initiated an official investigation to determine where the family lived (The Note 1903, 58–59). They immediately succeeded in contacting the Koga family members through Sera. In contrast to the willing attitudes of most other family members descended from Confucian scholars, Tsuru and Shin were reluctant to fulfill the Preservation Society's request to hand over their ancestors' graves to strangers. They refused, stating, "There is no reason why our ancestors' graves should be taken care of by someone else" (The Note 1903, 58–59).

(2) Receiving the Title and Ken's First Contact with Kusama

Similar to the management of the cemetery, the title of "*Jushii*" was conferred upon Koga Seiri by the government in accordance with the Taisho great ceremony called *Taisho taiten* in November 1915, following Emperor Taisho's accession to the throne. Seiri was given the title of "*Jushii*," and according to a book edited by Kono Masayoshi, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Tokugawa Yorinobu, and others were given the title of "*Shosammi*" at this time (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1927/12/28; Kono 1916). Kusama Yasoo, who was at that time a member of the Imperial Public Order Society (*Teikoku kodokai*) and a newspaper reporter, was responsible for locating the descendants of Koga Seiri and conferring the rank certificate of "*Jushii*" on them. Since the Koga family had been wandering Tokyo since 1910, Kusama had to search all over Tokyo. He eventually found them in a slum in Kita-Shinagawa (Kusama 1929, 71). After Kusama finally found their house, he documented the Koga family's situation as follows:

Their partitioned tenement house had a small front, and there was also a small nameplate behind the eaves which seemed to have no protection from rain or even dew, that stated "Koga Ken." Well, I felt a crushing pain in my chest and was almost moved to tears of sympathy at the thought that this was the shabby house I was looking for and that this was the humble dwelling where the descendants of the fifth generation of Koga Seiri *Sensei*, to whom the title of "*Jushii*" was given, had settled. (Kusama 1929, 76–77)

Kusama also notes that the rent for the house was approximately 3.60 yen (Kusama 1929, 71). According to the available data, the average rent cost of lower-class living in Tokyo in the early 1910s was approximately 2.3 yen (Nakagawa 1985, 65). Therefore, they appear to have lived in a dwelling that was slightly better than those inhabited by the general lower classes. However, the average cost of housing for industrial workers in the late 1910s was estimated to be approximately 6 to 9 yen (Nakagawa 1985, 100–103), meaning that the Koga family lived in a house with a rent half that of the house of an average industrial worker. It is not surprising that Kusama described the house as "humble."

Next, Kusama managed to meet Ken, who was working as a freight clerk at a company for paper-making materials. The man, whom Kusama described as "a light-skinned, modest, gentle person," explained to him the history of the Koga family's decline (Kusama 1917, 77). Then, after recounting the deaths of Ei and his grandmother, the family's subsequent financial difficulties, and

the disappearance of Shin, Ken concluded his speech with the following words, as if he were about to burst into tears (Kusama 1917, 79):

Although this family of only four has managed to live, the god of poverty that has attached itself to us does not seem to go away easily and we are just trying to survive the day, not knowing when our family will be prosperous again. (Kusama 1917, 79)

After this sorrowful interview, Kusama finally handed over the title certificate of Koga Seiri to Ken. At that time, Kusama had learned that Shin, who was supposed to be the head of the family, was missing (Kusama 1929, 72). Shin had returned home occasionally in the past, but because Ken and Tsuru had been moving from house to house, Shin could no longer find their home, and he had finally disappeared. Kusama published an article titled “*Meimon no Koei Hin ni Naku* (The Descendants of a Prestigious Family Crying over Poverty)” about his meeting with Ken and reported the history of the Koga family after the Meiji Restoration, which he had heard from Ken (Kusama 1917).

Due to Kusama’s efforts, the Koga family was able to attend the special title ceremony at the *Otsuka Senju Bosho* graveyard near the end of 1916 (Kusama 1917, 75–76; *The Report* 1917, 18). It is assumed that Ken, who had come of age, agreed to the construction on behalf of Shin, who had been reluctant to agree to the project. A descendant of Bito Jishu was also present at the ceremony. According to an article reporting on the ceremony, Bito’s descendants also experienced hardships after the restoration. It is evident that Confucian families, in general, had been facing various disadvantages since the modern era (Kusama 1917, 75–76).

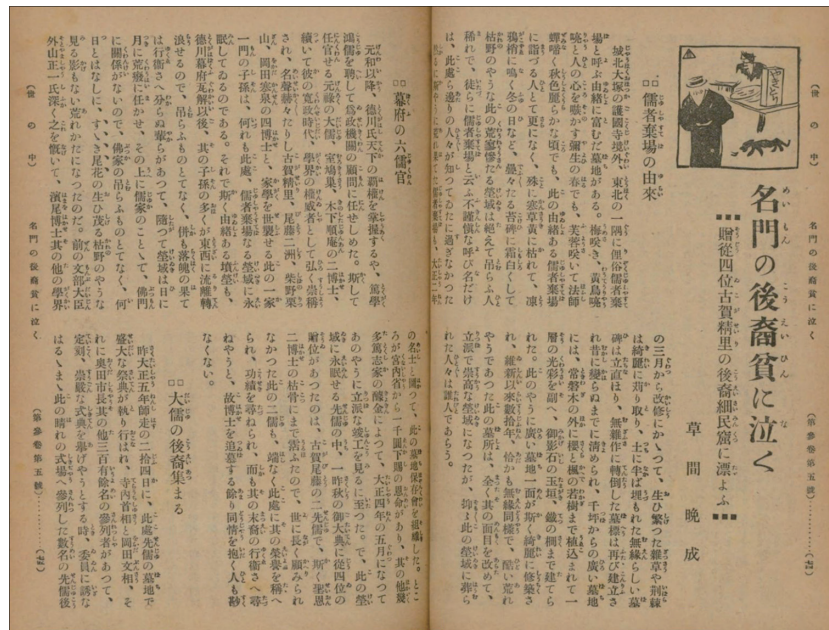
Nevertheless, it is clear that the Koga family’s hardships were extraordinary, as they lost three of their elders in a short period of time and became further impoverished financially. For this once distinguished family, which had struggled to survive the Meiji era in the face of extreme hardship, honoring their ancestors by rearranging the cemetery and bestowing a title in a grand ceremony must have been a beacon of hope. Kusama wrote that Bito and Koga, who attended the completion ceremony, seemed delighted and excited at the prospect of a revival of the family (Kusama 1917, 76).

It is assumed that the background conditions that enabled this revival were generated by the larger social trends of the Meiji period—a time when people began to reevaluate Confucianism and the Confucian scholars of the Edo period who had fallen into decline. The project was completed in December 1916, and the report was submitted in 1917 (*The Report* 1917, 15–18).



墓ノ生先庵同賀古

Photograph 1. Cemetery of the Koga Family in *Otsuka Senju Bosho* (*The Report* 1917)



Photograph 2. The Article Written by Kusama (Kusama 1917, Vol. 3-5)

4. From Reunion to Re-separation

(1) The Discovery of Shin in a Slum

Approximately 12 years after the ceremony, in December 1927, the Koga family experienced

another turning point. On December 23, Shin, who had left home and gone missing, was found by Kusama living as a “beggar.” He found Shin in a crematorium in Sunamachi, Outer Katsushika, Tokyo. Kusama first met Shin while working on a vagrancy survey commissioned by the Tokyo City Social Affairs Bureau (*Tokyoshi shakai kyoku*) (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1927/12/28; Kusama 1929, 71). This investigation was initiated by the City of Tokyo as part of its social relief program to investigate the current situation of child abuse and vagrancy. A large-scale survey of the lower classes was conducted mainly by Kusama, which led to the discovery of Shin wandering in a crematorium (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1927/12/28). Shin was staying at a simple boarding house (*Kichinyado*) in Fukagawa Tomikawacho, where the city’s poor paid daily for lodging. Kusama described the events as follows:

I asked for each beggar’s name and address one after the other. The sixth was an old, gray-haired man. He looked neat and did not resemble a beggar at all. I asked him his name, but he just bowed his head a few times and didn’t answer. After a while, he finally said, “My name is Koga Shin.” It rang a bell when I heard it. I knew exactly who he was. There had been an incident in 1915 when Koga Seiri was given the rank of “*Jushii*,” and his successor could not be found. Therefore, the rank note had to be kept at the Tokyo Prefecture Government for some time.... And I said, “You are a samurai from Tokyo prefecture, aren’t you?” Shin replied, “Yes, I am.” Then I asked him if he was born at 1-1 Asakusa Mukai Yanagihara. Shin looked up at me in surprise. (Kusama 1929, 71)

This story of Koga Shin—the descendant of the prestigious Koga family who became a “beggar” and was placed under the protection of the Tokyo City Social Affairs Bureau (*Tokyoshi shakai kyoku*) while staying in a boarding house—was reported widely in the newspapers. One of them reported the incident under the headline “Descendant of Koga Seiri, who has fallen into beggary, was found at Sunamachi Crematorium.” The article contained the following text:

In a survey of beggars with children launched last month by the Tokyo City Social Affairs Bureau, Koga Shin—the grandson of Koga Sakei (Kinichiro), a Confucian scholar at the end of the Edo period and head of the Koga family, who had fallen into beggary—was found by chance by chief researcher Kusama Yasoo. Here is the discouraging, sad story of a prestigious family who are meeting for the first time in 30 years. (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1927/12/28)

According to these newspaper articles, Shin had become mentally deranged due to a “brain disease” and had been missing since leaving home about ten years earlier. Kusama answered a newspaper reporter’s question, stating, “It’s pathetic because they are the scions of a prestigious family. His younger brother is now working as a carpenter to support their mother, and we are working hard to rebuild the Koga family and try to somehow preserve it” (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1927/12/28).

According to Kusama, the rescue of the Koga family, including Shin, was carried out as follows. After finding Shin at the crematorium, Kusama first attempted to reunite Ken and Tsuru with Shin (Kusama 1929, 72–73). However, because over ten years had passed since Kusama had last seen Ken, it was difficult to find Ken’s address. Moreover, Tokyo City was still recovering from the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and the small tenement houses in Kita Shinagawa where the Koga family had once lived had been turned into roads (Kusama 1929, 73). Kusama himself stated that finding Ken and his family in the expansive city of Tokyo was “like trying to catch a cloud” (Kusama 1929, 73). Nevertheless, Kusama used his years of experience and his personal network

to search for Ken's family among the small apartments and shantytowns of the prefecture (Kusama 1929, 73).

He eventually found the house of the Koga family, where Ken, his wife and children, and Tsuru were living; it was located near Nitta Jinja Shrine in Yaguchimura Village (Kusama 1929, 73). After the cemetery maintenance ceremony, Ken became the first student of the Vocational Training Association (*Shokugyo hodokai*), which was founded in 1922. There, he learned carpentry and worked first as an apprentice and then as a structural engineer (Kusama 1929, 73). According to Kusama, Ken seemed extremely dexterous; it had only taken him two to three years to master the skills necessary to be an independent carpenter. When Kusama found him in December 1927, Ken was working as an independent carpenter on the construction of the Kandabashi Bridge.

Kusama went to see Ken and reported that Shin, who had been missing, had been found in a slum. After confirming the intentions of Ken and Shin, it was decided that Ken would take custody of Shin (Kusama 1929, 72–74). Tsuru was surprised that Shin was found alive; she had assumed that her son was dead (Kusama 1929, 74). With the help of Kusama, Shin managed to reunite with his mother and younger brother. Then, Kusama presented Seiri's rank certificate to Shin, who was supposed to be the head of the family (Kusama 1929, 74). Thanks to the discovery, the family was able to make a fresh start with Ken as the foundation of the family. The newspaper *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* reported on their reunion:

When Mr. Kusama visited the Koga family and told them of the whereabouts of their elder brother, Shin, who had been missing for 30 years, Ken and his elderly mother were so pleased that they thought it was a dream and immediately offered to take Shin in. Shin had been a vagabond for many years and was now suffering from mental illness. So, they asked Kusama to take care of him, including clothing him. Mr. Kusama took care of everything, and within a few days, as soon as he was ready, Kusama picked up Shin and handed him over to his family. The family celebrated the New Year together for the first time in 30 years. (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1927/12/28)



Picture 3. *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* (1927/2/28)

(2) Ken's Death and the Second Family Separation

However, this joy was fleeting. In February 1928, after the arrival of the New Year, another tragedy struck the family: the death of Ken. Kusama does not give a detailed account of his death; however, the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* report provides a rough description (*Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* 1928/11/10).⁴

In November 1928, when the Showa Grand Ceremony (*Showa taiten*) was being held, the government decided to posthumously bestow the Taisho titles upon Kinichiro and Seiri. In response, Kusama tried to contact the Koga family for the first time in approximately 11 months. However, Kusama learned that the Koga family disciples had once again disbanded. According to a relative of Koga who came to Kusama to break the news, only three weeks after Shin was found and the family had reunited, Ken contracted typhoid fever and died on February 25, 1928 (Kusama 1929, 74–75). Kusama, who had worked hard to save the family and had harbored hopes of reviving it since he had found Shin last year, was “devastated” when he heard the sudden news of Ken’s death (Kusama 1929, 75). Kusama’s mind had “gone blank.”

The disease that took his life, typhoid fever, seems to have been brought on by their years of poverty and the poor conditions of their cramped tenement house. Typhoid fever is a systemic disease caused by the typhoid bacillus and is transmitted through the feces of infected persons. In 1929, the number of registered cases in Tokyo was 4,159, of which 845 were reported to have died (*Metropolitan Police Department Statistics* No. 38, 1929). According to this figure, the mortality rate of typhoid fever at that time can be estimated to have been approximately 20%. Ken’s death was undoubtedly due to the poverty and toil that he endured while living for many years in a slum with poor sanitation and inadequate medical care. Another factor may have been that the Koga family had no adults other than Ken to make a living, and therefore, he could not afford to take time off.

Then, Kusama was once again faced with the question of how to save the family. His first step was to collect donations from the public by publishing an article about the Koga family’s misfortune in the newspaper (Kusama 1929, 75). As a result, he succeeded in collecting 230 yen in sympathy donations and received an offer to take in and care for Tsuru. The arrangement, however, did not work out, and she was placed in a facility for the elderly called the *Tokyo yoroin* (Kusama 1929, 75). However, the fact that Tsuru, a descendant of a once prestigious family, was in such an institution was a disgrace and had to be concealed; therefore, she ostensibly lived in Kusama’s home (Kusama 1929, 76).

Therefore, the rank certificate for Kinichiro was kept by Hiratsuka Hiroyoshi, the governor of Tokyo at the time (Kusama, 1929, 76). In addition, one of Ken’s children was sent to a temple, another was adopted by a relative, and one child was sent, together with her mother, to live with her mother’s relative in Koshigaya, Saitama (Kusama 1929, 75).

While Ken’s mother and his wife and children were able to find a new place to live, his older brother, Shin, had a harder time deciding where to stay. At first, Kusama considered sending Shin to Tokyo’s Matsuzawa Hospital for the Mentally Ill (Kusama 1929, 75). Matsuzawa Hospital was a pioneering public psychiatric hospital, predating the Tokyo Epileptic Hospital (*Tokyo tenkyoin*) that was established in 1879. In the 1920s, it was the only facility in Japan that housed mentally ill patients.

By 1928, a system for admitting the mentally ill to asylums at public expense had been established under the Mental Institutions Act (*Seishin byoinho*) and Administrative Enforcement

4 However, the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* articles, including the one above, are not entirely reliable because there are many mistakes in people’s names, such as using “Nao” for Ken. It also partially contradicts Kusama’s description.

Act (*Gyosei shikkoho*). Kusama attempted to use this system to have Shin committed to a mental hospital and ensure his well-being later in life. However, although Shin was very unreliable, it was difficult to convince people he was a mental patient. Kusama determined that the police would not admit him, and he gave up on the idea (Kusama 1929, 75). At that time, the only other treatment options for the mentally ill were privately funded hospitalization and confinement or private home confinement (*Shitaku kanchi*). For the Koga family, however, these options were no more practical than trying to admit Shin to a publicly funded hospital.

Thus, Shin could neither receive protection as a mentally ill person nor live with his family; he had no choice but to live as a vagrant again. First, Kusama arranged for Shin to become a balloon vendor according to his wishes (Kusama 1929, 75). Kusama went to an inn called Yoshinoya in the Fukagawa Tomikawa slum, where Shin used to stay, and asked the owner to help Shin earn a meager living as a balloon vendor. Kusama said, “He is a failed descendant of the once respectable Koga family. I feel so sorry that this happened, and I don’t know if he will be able to recover, but I want you to take care of him at any rate, please” (Kusama 1929, 75). Shin was then transferred by Kusama to the Yoshinoya owner. Thus, on March 25, 1928, the family was separated again.

At that time, the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* reported on the Koga family’s situation. The article stated that Shin was selling rubber balloons near the Fukagawa inn and that he had been living this lifestyle for over six months following the family’s separation (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* 1928/11/10). However, according to Kusama, Shin went out of business in June 1929, and again began to live as a beggar, wandering around the crematorium area (Kusama 1929, 75). In 1929, Shin was already in his mid-fifties, and his mother, Tsuru, was in her seventies. Considering their age and the history of their lives, it is unsurprising that they reached the end of their lives without any significant change.

5. Conclusion

In his address to the Association of Civilizations (*Bummei kyokai*) and the Study Group of Current Affairs (*Jikyoku kenkyukai*), Kusama outlined the challenges faced by the Koga family and described his own struggles, concluding that the Koga family’s difficulties stemmed from their misperception of the post-Meiji Restoration environment. However, this assertion lacks evidence. If he had wished, Kinichiro could have approached the Meiji government and served as a government scholar and would have remained a prestigious scholar. The fact that he refused the government’s repeated requests was not due to a “misperception of the times” but rather was motivated by scholarly conviction. It was also an attempt to adhere to his father’s teaching that he should keep his distance from authority. The Koga family did not alter their own beliefs to align with the prevailing attitudes of the era; rather, they remained independent scholars to the end. While history does not allow for any “what-ifs,” it is possible that if Kinichiro had been slightly more accommodating of power during his lifetime, then the Koga family might have been recognized as a prestigious family immediately following the Meiji Restoration. Moreover, a biography of the family would have been written immediately after Kinichiro’s death.

However, while Kinichiro himself did not face any fatal challenges, the path of his descendants was exceedingly difficult. It is relatively easy to imagine that Confucianism and Confucianists would not have flourished in modern Japan, which rapidly modernized after the Meiji Restoration. Even so, the path taken by the descendants of the Koga family seems to have been particularly difficult. The family suffered many tragedies: the deaths of Kinichiro and Ei, the subsequent financial difficulties, Shin’s departure, Tsuru’s illness, Ken’s death shortly after the family’s reunion, and a final breakup. It was such an unimaginable story of suffering that

even Kusama, who had seen many stories of poverty and misfortune, lamented it. Their story of misfortune seems closer to fiction than reality, and in view of these facts about the Koga family, it is not just that the descendants of the Koga family did not write their biographies—rather, it would be more accurate to say that the descendants of the Koga family were never in a condition to be able to write the biographies of their ancestors. If the circumstances of their descendants had been much more comfortable, a biography of the family might well have been written after Kinichiro's death, and they might not have become “the forgotten masters of Confucianism.”

Of course, this is not to say that others did not offer a helping hand to maintain and revive these families. As previously stated, it was the former students of Sera and Kawada who financed the lives of the remaining family following Ei's death. Furthermore, following the departure of the Koga family, Kusama, who empathized with the fact that a distinguished family was residing in the slums, aided the family in their revitalization and worked assiduously to guarantee the family's livelihood following Ken's demise. Nevertheless, these efforts were insufficient to save the Koga family. This failure was not due to any lack of strength on the part of Kusama, Sera, or others. Rather, it was because relief for the poor had not been institutionalized in the form of a social welfare system. Instead, it was supported by individual dedication, which was still limited in scope. The circumstances of later generations of the family transformed the Koga family into the “forgotten masters of Confucianism.”

Japan in the early 20th century did in fact have elements of a social welfare system; however, just as the laws and regulations did not allow Shin to be admitted to a mental hospital, even if some relief systems did exist, they were ill-equipped to provide relief to a wide range of people. In this context, it is reasonable to posit that a significant number of individuals experienced challenges similar to those experienced by the Koga family. In fact, though they were extremely unlucky, the Koga family was fortunate in that they were still a “once prestigious family” that attracted sympathy and assistance from others. In the background, there were numerous individuals who lived their lives unidentified and were compelled to sell their children as if they were victims of human trafficking.⁵ Subsequently, they disappeared into obscurity without receiving any form of assistance.

Later, throughout the Showa period, the child protection and vagrancy relief system were gradually expanded. This was, in part, due to Kusama's efforts when he served as Director of the Tokyo City Social Affairs Bureau and later as Director of the Tokyo City Juvenile Probation Bureau. Despite Kusama's determination to “save the Koga family at all costs,” he was unable to do so. He must have felt regret over this and may have devoted himself to the expansion of the poverty relief system to alleviate his regrets. With this hopeful reflection, I conclude my discussion.

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⁵ For studies related to trafficking women and children of lower classes, see (Terazawa 2022).

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