Chapter Six

Yoshida Shōin and Wei Yuan

Sakuma Shōzan’s *Seiken roku* carries an introduction by Katsu Kaishū (1823–99) which argues as follows. After it was completed, the *Seiken roku* was stored at the bottom of a bamboo basket when Shōzan, after meeting with misfortune, was thrown in jail. (Shōzan was arrested for his alleged connections with the activities of Yoshida Shōin; the latter was apprehended for trying to stow away on an American ship in 1854 after the arrival of Commodore Perry’s warships). Shōzan’s son Kaku (or Kakujirō) was also implicated, but he managed to preserve the manuscript even during his peregrinations and in times of great danger. During that time he carried the text with him and showed it to Kaishū, asking for help in getting it published. Kaishū’s younger sister was Shōzan’s legal wife; as Kaishū put it in his preface, he ‘was related to the esteemed Shōzan by marriage.’ Through this link, Kaishū supplied the necessary funds, and in the early Meiji era it was first published.

In this preface, Kaishū praises Shōzan as a pioneer in ‘calling for enlightenment and progress,’ but, when he stripped away the formalities, he offered this criticism of Shōzan: ‘His learning was broad, and he did have a fair number of views of his own. However, his boasting often caused problems.’ Perhaps because they were in-laws, Kaishū felt he ought to speak of Shōzan with reservation, but one can clearly see a tendency toward bragging and exaggeration in Shōzan’s words about *Shengwu ji* and *Haiguo tuzhi*.

Shōin assiduously studied the works of Wei Yuan. While he referred to Japan’s more prominent analysts of coastal defense of the time as mimics of Wei Yuan, he also severely cross-examined Wei Yuan’s work.

In his 1850 work *Seiyū nikki* (Diary of a Journey to the West) (in *Yoshida Shōin zenshū* [Collected Works of Yoshida Shōin; hereafter, *YSZ*]), a diary account of a trip to Kyūshū, Shōin noted that, on the fifteenth day of the ninth month of that year, he traveled to Hirado to visit Hayama Sanai, a local Confucian teacher, and borrowed from him the *Seibu ki furoku* (*Shengwu ji* with Appendices) in four stringbound volumes (*YSZ*, 9:36). This edition of Wei’s work was a Japanese woodblock reprint. I own a copy of it, but it does not give
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the name of the reprinter. Because it is a woodblock printed edition, there are no Japanese reading punctuation inserted into the text. It would seem that Shōin’s first contact with the Shengwu ji was the appendix portion of this reprint edition. For, from that day forward, he spent practically every single day covetously reading the Seibu ki furoku and copying out excerpts.

Shōin’s diary entry for the sixteenth, the day after he borrowed Seibu ki furoku from Hayama, reads in part as follow: ‘I returned to Hayama’s and read the Shengwu ji.’ On the seventeenth as well, he wrote: ‘I went to Hayama’s and read the Seibu ki furoku,’ and he copied out by hand the sentences from the text, ‘its marvelous words,’ that were of interest to him. On the eighteenth he was again reading the same work and excerpting its ‘marvelous words,’ and on the nineteenth he was doing the same (YSZ, 9:36–39).

From the 21st, he borrowed the Ahen ibun (Reports on Opium), compiled by Shionoya Tōin, and was meticulously copying out its book list and excerpting from it as well (YSZ, 9:39–41). It would seem that he had taken a brief respite from his reading and copying from the Seibu ki furoku, but on the 24th and 25th he was again reading and excerpting as well from the Shengwu ji (YSZ, 9:42–44). From the 26th, Shōin borrowed the second part of the Keisei bunpen shō (Selections from the Huangchao jingshi wenbian) (a Japanese reprint edition to be discussed below) and began copying out its lists of books and excerpting it as well (YSZ, 9:44–45). For the 28th, he noted in his diary: ‘I have finished reading the seven stringbound volumes of the Ahen ibun’ (YSZ, 9:47). The Ahen ibun was circulated in manuscript, and I have yet to see a copy, but from Shōin’s detailed table of contents and excerpts one can get a general picture of the work.2

When Shōin finished reading the Ahen ibun, he returned once again to Seibu ki furoku, as his diary reads for the twelfth day of the tenth month of 1850: ‘I read the Shengwu ji at Hayama’s’ (YSZ, 9:55). On the same day, he noted: ‘I asked if Master Issai had copied out any excerpts, and Gaiken [Hayama’s style] responded that he knew of none, but that [Issai] left numerous stickers and the like inserted into the margins of every book he read, and with the various slips placed here and there he indicated important points in the text. I thus learned a great deal in examining Gaiken’s books’ (YSZ, 9:55–56). We thus learn that Satō Issai (1772–1859), Confucian official for the Tokugawa Shogunate and teacher at the Shōheizaka gakumonjo, the official academy of the Tokugawa regime, carefully read the Shengwu ji, making interlinear notations and inserting slips of paper along the way.

On this day he borrowed the Sentetsu sōdan (Collection of Biographical Notes on Wise Men of the Past)b and began copying out excerpts from it. While in Nagasaki during this same trip, Shōin also had occasion to borrow two works by Takano Chōei (1804–50), Yume monogatari (Story of a Dream) and In’yū roku (Record of Hiding Gloom) which concerned the Opium War, as well as the Haiguo wenjian lu (Record of Things Seen and Heard Among the Maritime