



The Philosophy of Qi: The Record of Great Doubts (Translations from the Asian Classics)

Kaibara Ekken

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Kaibara Ekken (1630-1714) was a prominent Japanese scholar who spread Neo-Confucian ideas and moral teachings throughout Japan. He was also known as the "Aristotle of Japan" for his studies of the natural world. Of his many writings, *The Record of Great Doubts* is the culmination of a lifetime of seeking a unified view of humans and nature. The text represents one of the central reflections in East Asian thought on the significance of *qi ch'i*, the material force coursing through all life, and is available here for the first time in English with a comprehensive introduction situating Ekken within the currents of his time and within the larger debates of Neo-Confucianism in East Asia.

The Record of Great Doubts emphasizes the role of *qi* in achieving a life of engagement with other humans, with the larger society, and with nature as a whole. Rather than encourage transcendental escapism or quietism, Ekken articulates a philosophy of material force as a basis of living a life of commitment to the world. In this spirit, moral cultivation is not an isolated or a self-centered preoccupation, but an activity that occurs within the dynamic forces of nature and amid the rigorous demands of society. In this context, a vitalism of *qi* is an emergent force, not only providing the philosophical grounding for this vibrant interaction but also giving a basis for an investigation of the natural world that plumbs the principle within things. Ekken thus aimed to articulate a creative and dynamic milieu for moral education, political harmony, social coherence, and agricultural sustainability.

The Record of Great Doubts embodies Ekken's profound commitment to Confucian ideas and practices as a method for establishing an integrative ethical vision, one he hoped would guide Japan through a new period of peace and stability. A major philosophical treatise in the Japanese Neo-Confucian tradition, *The Record of Great Doubts* illuminates a crucial chapter in East Asian intellectual history.

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