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Eddy Dufourmont

► **To cite this version:**

Eddy Dufourmont. The Great Learning in modern Japan (1868-present): an ideological weapon for conservatism . Anne Cheng; Damien Morier-Genoud. Uses and Abuses of the Great Learning (China, Korea, Japan), Collège de France - Institut des hautes études chinoises, 2016, 9782857570745. hal-01522294

**HAL Id: hal-01522294**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01522294>**

Submitted on 19 May 2017

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THE *GREAT LEARNING* IN MODERN JAPAN (1868–PRESENT):  
AN IDEOLOGICAL WEAPON FOR CONSERVATISM

Eddy DUFOURMONT

**Introduction**

The *Great Learning* was once widely diffused in Japanese society thanks to the dominant position of Confucianism in the Edo Period (1603–1868). However, after 1850, the radical changes that gave birth to modern Japan led to doubts about the position of Confucianism in the new society. Little work has been dedicated to an understanding of the evolution of Confucianism in present times.<sup>1</sup> The fate of the *Great Learning* in modern-day Japan is thus a good case study to understand the fate of Confucianism and, more largely speaking, to understand how a classic and its interpretations evolve in the context of modernity. In fact, as we would like to show here, Confucianism and the *Great Learning* played an important role in Japan for two reasons, linked to the meaning of modernity itself:

- Modern times have seen the formation of the nation state and the apparition of discourses whose objective is the definition of national identity. In this perspective, it was crucial after 1850 to rethink Japan's position towards China and Confucianism, which came from China.

- Confucianism aimed to express the political ideal of a society, as well as being the norm for individual daily life, and human society was supposed to reflect the order of Nature. Modern times have witnessed growing secularization, and the relationship between state and religion has been brought into question. Secularization has given birth to debates in which Confucianism has been directly concerned: one concerning the relationship between religion and state, and another in which Confucianism is defined as being

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Smith, *Confucianism in Modern Japan: A Study of Conservatism in Japanese Intellectual History*, Tokyo, Hokuseidō Press, 1973; Margaret Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan: The Decline and Transformation of the Kangaku Juku*, Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 2003; Kojima Tsuyoshi, *Kindai Nihon no Yōmei gaku* (Wang Yangming studies in modern Japan), Tokyo, Kōdansha, 2006; Ogyū Shigehiro, *Kindai, Ajia, Yōmeigaku* (The modern era, Asia and Wang Yangming studies), Tokyo, Perikansha, 2008.

either a religion or philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Of course, modern times have largely seen Confucianism being reinvented as a homogenous entity.

The *Great Learning* has been read by various categories of people in modern times, but a common attitude can be described by the two aforementioned points: all interpretations of the classic have tried to find a place for it in the discourse on national identity, as a part of Japanese "tradition" or as a Chinese text; and they have all tried to use the *Great Learning* in order to consider Confucianism in terms of religion or philosophy. An ideological objective is obvious in all such cases. Of course, questions like the understanding of particular terms, and the debate between Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) concerning the *Great Learning*, have been integrated into such interpretations.

To discuss these interpretations, we will proceed in three steps: the formation of official ideology in the Meiji period, the interpretations of Pan-Asianists in the pre-war period, and those of sinologists in the pre-war and post-war periods.

### I. The *Great Learning* and the Elaboration of Family-centered Imperial Ideology: the Meiji Period

#### 1. *Attacks on the Great Learning and Confucianism*

The *Great Learning*, as most of the Confucian canon, became the target of rejection during the first years of the Meiji period (1868–1912). Indeed, thinkers who have been nourished with European thought and who promoted the modernization of society and state, criticized Confucianism as being backward and feudal, a heritage from China and a past that Japan should forget. The first of them was Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897). He denied the possibility expressed in the *Great Learning* that ruling others and cultivating oneself was the same thing. For him, the interpretation of the text had been wrong because, while cultivation of the individual is clearly expressed, no method can be found to explain how to govern people. And Nishi believed that a ruler was by nature immoral.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Yamaguchi Teruomi, *Meiji kokka to shukyō* (The Meiji state and religions), Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 1999; Numata Tetsu, *Motoda Nagazane to Meiji kokka hoshushugi to jukyō teki risōshugi* (Motoda Nagazane and the Meiji state: Meiji conservatism and Confucian idealism), Tokyo, Yoshikawa bunko, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Nishi Amane, *Hyakuichi shinron* (101 new theories), in Ōkubo Toshiaki (ed.), *Nishi Amane zenshū* (The complete works of Nishi Amane), Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1960, p. 238.

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Another good example of these thinkers is Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901), who is well-known for having asserted that Japan should “enter Europe and leave Asia” (*datsua nyūō* 脱亜入欧). He completely eliminated Confucianism from the teaching in his private school. Fukuzawa was especially interested in promoting an autonomous individual and, for this aim, the *Great Learning* was an important text to target. He severely criticized the *Great Learning of Women* (*Onna daigaku* 女大学), a version of the *Great Learning* made for women during the Edo period, saying that it educated women in a backward way. And, to attack the *Great Learning*, he used the schema individual-family-country appearing in the text in a completely different way, by including the notion of independence (*dokuritsu* 独立):

Thanks to this knowledge, warriors, peasants, craftsmen and merchants will accomplish fully the part belonging to them, and they will manage their own affairs. Thus each individual, each family and each nation will have the means of their independence.<sup>4</sup>

Fukuzawa was not the only one to attack Confucianism in order to free individuals from family and state. Many examples can be found among the thinkers of the Movement for the liberties and rights of the people (*Jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動, 1874–1884), who claimed freedom in education. The government precisely chose Confucianism as its ideology to counterattack them.<sup>5</sup> One of them was Nakae Chōmin 中江兆民 (1847–1901). As Yamada Hiroo has shown, Nakae adopted a particular strategy in his translation into classical Chinese of Rousseau’s *Social Contract*: in this text, Rousseau makes a clear difference between the family and the state, arguing that love exists in the first but not in the second. Translating such a text denying the organic link between family and state, while the government was formulating ideology claiming the opposite, was clearly a political choice for Nakae.

In fact, Nakae first introduced a note concerning Rousseau’s rejection of the similarity between family and state, writing that in the past there had been kings who provided love to the people, such as Yao, Shun, Marcus-Aurelius and Louis XVI. But, in the final version of his translation, he elimi-

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<sup>4</sup> Sekiguchi Sumiko, *Kokumin dōtoku to jendā: Fukuzawa Yukichi, Inoue Tetsujirō, Watsuji Tetsujirō* (National morals and gender. Fukuzawa Yukichi, Inoue Tetsujirō, Watsuji Tetsujirō), Tokyo, Tōkyō daigaku shuppankai, 2008, p. 11, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Fang Guangrui, “Meiji no kyōiku ni okeru jugaku dōtokukan: Shūshin kyōkasho wo chūshin ni” (Confucian views on morals in Meiji education: a focus on the morals handbook), *Kotoba to bunka*, n° 11, March 2010, p. 35–50.

nated this note, which was in contradiction with Rousseau's affirmation. Even if this hesitation shows that his feelings towards monarchy were not radical, Nakae obviously understood the political meaning of translating such an assertion.<sup>6</sup> Despite his interest in Chinese thought, Nakae was very critical of Confucian morality, as his caricature of the family shows.<sup>7</sup>

Thinkers like Fukuzawa and Nakae were active during the first half of the Meiji period, during which Confucianism faced a quick and radical decline: the Shōhei gakkō 昌平学校 closed and Confucian teaching became limited to some private schools (*juku* 塾). The *Great Learning* featured in the basic teaching provided in these schools, along with *Mengzi* and the *Analects*; for example, in the *juku* of Ikeda Sōan 池田草庵 (1813–1878) and Inukai Shōsō 犬養尚早 (1816–1893). However, the existence of these *juku* was transitory and many of them disappeared with the death of their owners and the development of national education.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The Birth of Imperial Ideology and the Reappraisal of the Great Learning

However, Confucianism did not disappear; on the contrary, it came back in the form of official ideology. Motoda Nagazane 元田永孚 (1818–1891), instructor of the emperor, was the leader of the Confucian lobby at court and used all of his influence to oblige the government to make Confucianism the country's official doctrine. The main political leaders were far from sharing his views but felt Confucianism could be useful to counterattack the Movement for the liberties and rights of the people. Official ideology was then elaborated through negotiations between Inoue Kowashi 井上毅 (1844–1895) and Motoda.

This ideology finally gave a special place to Confucianism and the *Great Learning* because the government wanted to promote a discourse defining the nation as a family-state (*kazoku kokka* 家族国家), in which the emperor was the head of the family. Such Confucian values as filial piety (*kō* 孝) and loyalty (*chū* 忠) became core notions of this ideology, expressed especially in the Imperial Rescript on Education (*kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語), with which all Japanese grew up with until 1945. Until 1880, manuals for moral

<sup>6</sup> Yamada Hiroo, *Nakae Chōmin hon'yaku no shisō* (The thought of translation of Nakae Chōmin), Tokyo, Keiō gijuku daigaku shuppankai, 2009, p. 53-54.

<sup>7</sup> Eddy Dufourmont, "Un discours sur les femmes, au croisement des pensées chinoise et européenne: Nakae Chōmin et Nakamura Masanao," in Emmanuel Lozerand and Christophe Galan (eds.), *La Famille japonaise moderne (1868-1926): Discours et débats*, Arles, PACTE, 2011, p. 411-420.

<sup>8</sup> Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan*, op. cit.

behaviour were in priority translated from European ones. After that, those based on Confucianism became equally abundant.

However, despite the efforts of Motoda Nagazane, the Confucian aspect of filial piety and loyalty remained somewhat relative. As Christian Galan has shown, ideology insisted less upon sacrifices made by children; rather, parents were asked to provide a kind of “parental piety” in which they were supposed to fulfil numerous obligations towards their children.<sup>9</sup> As far as we know, such sacrifices did not exist in Confucianism. After Motoda’s death, despite filial piety and loyalty still being emphasized in the official discourse, the Minister of Education Mori Arinori 森有礼 (1847–1889) relegated Confucianism once again to an insignificant position at all levels of school education.<sup>10</sup>

Nishimura Shigeki 西村茂樹 (1828–1902) elaborated a moral textbook, published by the Ministry of Education in 1880. It was made up of a list of quotations or stories from Confucian, Japanese and European classics or religious texts. The Confucian Classics quoted were mainly *Mengzi* 孟子, the *Analects* 論語 and the *Zhongyong* 中庸. The *Great Learning* was scarcely quoted at all.<sup>11</sup> The same can be said of other moral textbooks of this time. Some did not even mention the *Great Learning* at all.<sup>12</sup>

It was during the second half of the Meiji period that some people tried to promote Confucianism. Among them was Shibusawa Eiichi 渋沢栄一 (1840–1931), the most important businessman of pre-war Japan and a great promoter of Confucianism (he contributed to the foundation of Shibunkai 斯文会, the Confucian Society). Shibusawa is a good example for us to understand the evolution of the text between the Edo and Meiji periods.

During his youth he studied the *Great Learning* as part of his classical education, but gave up all Confucian learning as a young adult and turned his efforts to Europe. Years later, he came back to Confucian studies and followed the teachings of Mishima Chūshū 三島中州 (1830–1919). However, he had a completely free and individual interpretation of texts such as

<sup>9</sup> Christian Galan, “L’image de la famille dans les manuels de morale japonais entre 1870 à 1918,” in Emmanuel Lozerand and Christian Galan (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 147-165.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Duke, *The History of Modern Japanese Education: Constructing the National School System, 1872-1890*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2009, p. 349.

<sup>11</sup> Nishimura Shigeki, “Shōgaku shūshin kun” (Principles of moral education at primary school, 1880), in Kaigo Tokiomi (ed.), *Nihon kyōkasho taikai kindaihen*, vol. 2, 1962, p. 5-37.

<sup>12</sup> We have examined the other twenty-two textbooks collected in volumes 2 and 3 of *Nihon kyōkasho taikai kindaihen*, which are all from the Meiji period, except for the last two, dating from 1941. It should be noted that after 1885, textbooks no longer had direct quotations from the Classics, but were based on stories nearly exclusively from Japanese and, much more seldom, from European texts.

the *Great Learning*. For him, contrary to Nishi Amane, the *Great Learning* was a political text, whereas the *Zhongyong* was a philosophical one. He thought this because, according to him, self-cultivation appeared last in the text, whereas the priority was given to government. This is why he paid a lot more attention to the *Analects*, the only text having useful teachings for daily life. He wrote: "The teachings of Kongzi that I adopt are not based on the *Great Learning* and the *Zhongyong*, but on the *Analects* [...] I believe that if we live according to the teachings of the *Analects*, we can strengthen our spirit and 'put our house in order,' living without making serious mistakes."<sup>13</sup> As this sentence suggests, Shibusawa was, like Fukuzawa, impregnated with the message of the *Great Learning*, but had his own personal interpretation. After him, other people such as the Pan-Asianists also developed their own interpretations of the *Great Learning*, but in a very different direction.

## II. The *Great Learning* in the Context of Imperialism: The Case of the Pan-Asianists

### 1. *The Great Learning as a Manifestation of "Chinese spirit:" Ōkawa Shūmei*

If during the Meiji period some thinkers were opponents of the government and interested in Chinese thought at the same time, the promoters of democracy over the following years increasingly distanced themselves from Confucianism, and based their thoughts on liberalism or Marxism. More than ever, Confucianism was the hostage of official ideology, and its importance in this ideology even increased thanks to the growing influence of Marxism, as illustrated by the creation in 1919 of the Shibunkai by politicians and businessmen.

That is why new interpretations of the *Great Learning* can be found among the Pan-Asianists. After 1910, Asianism (*ajiashugi* アジア主義) developed among young students and it had a direct and strong influence on the subsequent development of Japanese politics in the 1930's and 1940's. The common point of Pan-Asianists was to claim solidarity between Japan and Asian countries and to reform Japanese politics. This supposed a rethinking of Japanese identity and its relationship with Chinese thought. Two men offer examples of the use of the *Great Learning* in such a perspective.

<sup>13</sup> Shibusawa Eiichi *denki shiryō* (Documents for a bibliography of Shibusawa Eiichi). Tokyo, Shibusawa Eiichi shiryō kankōkai, 1955-1971, vol. 41, p. 382. Cited from Claude Hamon, *Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931), bâtisseur du capitalisme japonais*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2007, p. 135-139.

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The first of them is the most famous Pan-Asianist, Ōkawa Shūmei 大川周明 (1883–1954). Ōkawa Shūmei is better known for his support of the Indian movement for independence but he also wrote on China and the *Great Learning*. Indeed, since he wanted to promote Japan as Asia's leader, it was important for him to compare Japan with other Asian nations, and compare Asia with Europe and America. For him, ideas which were supposed to have come from Europe already existed in Japanese thought: in "Nihon seishin kenkyū", he claimed for example that the thought of Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) was equivalent to Christianity, Satō Nobufuchi 佐藤信淵 (1769–1850) to Marxism, Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691) and Yokoi Shōnan 横井沼南 (1809–1869) to Plato.<sup>14</sup>

Ōkawa chose the *Great Learning* because for him this text expressed the best of "Chinese spirit" (*Shina seishin* 支那精神),<sup>15</sup> and was useful for underlining the contrast with "Japanese spirit" (*Nihon seishin* 日本精神). Why did Ōkawa consider that "Chinese spirit" was expressed in the *Great Learning*? This was because for him, Confucianism, contrary to the official ideology of imperial Japan, promoted a purely authoritative message in which political leaders were responsible for the people's virtue.<sup>16</sup> That is why he chose Zhu Xi's version of the *Great Learning* and used the phrase "renovate the people" (*shinmin* 新民) and not Wang Yangming's version ("be familiar with the people" *shinmin* 親民).<sup>17</sup> For him, moral education was intended for the leader, so as to dominate the people, not serve it.<sup>18</sup> He considered the people to be like a "baby" to be "brought up."<sup>19</sup>

Ōkawa did not avoid contradictions: he wanted to set the imperial regime against authoritative Confucian China, while at the same time taking Zhu Xi's Confucianism as a model. This is partly because for him it was important to be able to criticize individualism as being European. In such a perspective, official ideology based on the family was very positive in his eyes. He highly admired the schematic representation "individual-family-

<sup>14</sup> See Ōkawa Shūmei, "Nihon seishin kenkyū" (Research on Japanese spirit), in *Ōkawa Shūmei zenshū*, Tokyo, Iwasaki shoten, 1962, vol. 1, p. 108-325.

<sup>15</sup> Ōkawa Shūmei, "Chūyō shinchū" (New commentary of *Zhongyong*), in *Ōkawa Shūmei zenshū*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ōkawa Shūmei, "Daigaku no konpon seishin" (The fundamental spirit of the *Great Learning*), in *Ōkawa Shūmei zenshū*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 40, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Ōkawa Shūmei, "Chūyō shinchū," *op. cit.*, p. 46.



country” found in the *Great Learning*, refusing to see it as giving preference to the individual, but on the contrary priority to the state.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. *The Great Learning and the Renovation of Official Ideology: Yasuoka Masahiro*

Another Pan-Asianist, Yasuoka Masahiro 安岡正篤 (1898–1983), attached much more importance to the *Great Learning*, albeit in a different direction. Yasuoka was very similar to Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988): he took the anti-Confucian movement of May 4<sup>th</sup> 1919 as a starting point, but defended Confucianism instead of criticizing it, so as to make it the basis of a “spiritual awakening” for Asia. At the same time, he wanted to rethink Confucianism as “indoctrination of the people” (教化, Chinese *jiaohua*, Japanese: *kyōka*), in order to renew official ideology.

In both cases, the goal of Yasuoka was to combat the decadence he believed to be inherent to modern civilization, whose centre was Europe, and whose characteristics were ideology, materialism, rationalism, speed, selfishness, abstraction, etc. Yasuoka was not different from conservatives in Europe at the time.<sup>21</sup> His way of thinking was binary, dividing the world into “West” and “East,” considering the first as being rational, efficient and capitalist, whereas the latter was quite the opposite. He grouped together Chinese, Indian and Japanese thought into an “Oriental philosophy” (*tōyō tetsugaku* 東洋哲学) in which Wang Yangming’s Confucianism was the core.

Yasuoka’s objective was to give mankind the key for peace of mind (*anritsu* 安立), and found this in the passage of the *Great Learning* which says:

The point where to rest being known, a calm unperturbedness may be attained to. To that calmness there will succeed a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end.<sup>22</sup>

知止而後有定、定而後能靜、靜而後能安、安而後能慮、慮而後能得

<sup>20</sup> Ōkawa Shūmei, “Daigaku no konpon seishin,” *op. cit.*, p. 81-82.

<sup>21</sup> He can be called “anti-Enlightenment” as Zeev Sternhell has defined it; see Zeev Sternhell, *Les Anti-Lumières*, Paris, Fayard, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> James Legge (tr.), *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1960, p. 356-357.

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It was not by chance that Yasuoka chose Wang Yangming<sup>23</sup> to express spiritualism against this “decadent” tendency: he wanted to promote personal moral effort based on Confucianism, and Wang’s moral subjectivism was the best reference possible. Moreover, he was writing at a time when personalism (*jinkakushugi* 人格主義) was very popular in Japan, and was inspired by Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1872–1934) to promote democratic rights, as well as social rights among workers and women. Yasuoka was also against this liberal trend that Yasuoka felt the need to insist on an inner dimension to promote conservative values. From a social and moral perspective, Wang Yangming’s version of the *Great Learning* played a crucial role in Yasuoka’s thought and was the main Confucian text used.<sup>24</sup> From the beginning, Yasuoka qualified the thought of Wang Yangming as personalism,<sup>25</sup> even if the concept of “moral person” (*jinkaku*) cannot be found. For Yasuoka, the Confucianism of Wang Yangming and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) was a theory of knowledge, and the reason that it was a Learning of the heart-and-mind (心學, *xinxue/shingaku*) was that it was the best way to avoid abstraction and remain close to reality.<sup>26</sup> Yasuoka was a spiritualist because he considered the moral person as the result of cognitive action. That is why he wrote that “real life exists necessarily inside oneself.”<sup>27</sup> The person was the agent of cognitive action because Yasuoka thought that the multiple perceptions of the body implied a spiritualization by the spirit, in order to keep the individual master of himself. For Yasuoka, the individual’s contact with reality was therefore primarily an inner fight to maintain autonomy against the outside world, not to be dominated by objects, but rather to control them by welcoming them into the mind.

<sup>23</sup> Yasuoka referred also to Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193); Yasuoka Masahiro, “Shin kyōka no konpon mondai” (The fundamental question of the indoctrination of the *Nihonjin oyobi nihonjin*, n° 39, January 1924, p. 7; “Shinnen to jishin” (New year renewal), *Shi to tomo*, n° 348, February 1979, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū* (Research on Wang Yangming), Tokyo, Meitoku, 1924, p. 228–257. See also “Jukyō kaishaku” (Interpretation of Confucianism), *Tōyō kenkyū*, n° 16, June 1924, p. 2–6; *Nihon seikyō no konpon mondai: Kokutai genron* (The fundamental question of religion and politics in Japan: Principles of national essence), *Shinshū*, 1927, p. 7; “Chūyō wo yomu” (Reading the *Zhongyong*), *Tōyō shisō kenkyū*, 1940, p. 7; “Daigaku shinkō (yon)” (Rethinking the *Great Learning*, 4), Kansai University, 1940, p. 2, January 1959, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

This is how Yasuoka interpreted the expression “investigation of things” found in the *Great Learning* (格物, *gewulkakubutsu*) as being a form of “enhancement” (*hatten* 発展). For him, “love of oneself” meant “self-control” (*kokki* 克己)<sup>29</sup> and “freedom” (*jiyū* 自由), the “control” (律, 治) of the “self” (自) by “oneself” (*jiritsu jichi* 自律自治). The moral dimension was thus immediate, and this is why Yasuoka enthusiastically embraced Wang Yangming’s “unity of thought and action” (知行合一, *zhixing heyi chikō gōitsu*).

Yasuoka also attached great importance to the most famous sentence of the *Great Learning*, which says that to put order into the country one needs to order the family, to order the family one needs to cultivate oneself, and that the investigation of things is necessary for the rectification of one’s heart<sup>30</sup>. Yasuoka’s personalist interpretation of the *Great Learning* naturally led him to consider that Zhu Xi was wrong to replace “love” 親 with “renovation” 新. For Yasuoka, this betrayed the real meaning of the *Great Learning*, since relations between individuals, inside the family, the state and the world should be based on the heart, in an organic and not mechanical way, from the inside and not from the outside.<sup>31</sup>

This idea was the core of his theory of *jiaohua*. Yasuoka was extremely conservative on social and political aspects, and believed that the values expressed in the *Great Learning* were a model that all people in a dominant position should follow: no feminist revolution would happen if a man truly respected his wife and dedicated his efforts to the family; no proletarian revolution would happen if businessmen respected their workers; and no revolution would endanger the imperial throne if bureaucrats and political men held the people’s happiness as their main goal. In the last case, Yasuoka called this ideal democracy (*minponshugi* 民主主義) or the Kingly Way (*ōdō* 王道). The unity of action and knowledge meant for him daily respect of austere values such as temperance and work, for men and women, old and young alike.<sup>32</sup>

Yasuoka tried in many ways to put his theories into practice during the war and after. First of all, he created a private school to educate the future

<sup>29</sup> Masahiro, *Ō Yōmei kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238-239.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240 *sqq.*

<sup>32</sup> See Eddy Dufourmont, “Être vers la vie et ‘éducation du peuple’: Yasuoka Masahiro et les bases idéologiques de la politique sociale du Japon du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Ebisu*, n° 40-41, automne 2008-été 2009, p. 91-101. *Minponshugi* has a different meaning of the word *minshugi* 民主主義 used in the modern era to signify democracy. *Minshushugi* implies sovereignty of the people while *minponshugi* just emphasizes the people as the goal of politics.

elites of Japan. The school was first called the Great Learning Boarding School (*Daigakuryō* 大学寮), before later being known as the Golden Pheasant Academy (*Kinkeigakuin* 金鷄学院). With the graduates from his school, Yasuoka created a network of new *juku* in the countryside, in order to teach the Classics, including the *Great Learning*. In such a way, Yasuoka contributed to mobilizing the *Great Learning* for militarist Japan and the exaltation of “Japanese spirit.”<sup>33</sup> The defeat of 1945 did not mean a stop to Yasuoka’s behaviour and his will to promote *jiaohua*.

Indeed, Yasuoka was one of the two authors of the imperial declaration of August 15<sup>th</sup> in which the emperor used Yasuoka’s favourite expression: “It is our desire to open a period of great peace for all generations to come” (*bansei no tame ni taihei o akamu to yokusu* 万世の為に太平を開かむと欲す).<sup>34</sup> The purge did little damage to Yasuoka, who still promoted Confucianism in post-war Japanese society.<sup>35</sup> Even though he was obliged to deal with democracy, he always insisted on “Japanese democracy,” the “japanization of democracy” or “Oriental democracy.”<sup>36</sup>

Yasuoka was able to play such a role because, as Sheldon Garon has shown, the idea of the “indoctrination of the people” was still at the heart of the relationship between the Japanese and the state after 1945.<sup>37</sup> The ideal of the woman at home, being a good wife and mother, was far from disappear-

<sup>33</sup> Eddy Dufourmont, “Des Chemises vertes japonaises? Autour de l’agrisme confucéen de Yasuoka Masahiro,” in Noriko Berlinguez-Kono and Bernard Thomann (eds.), *Japan Pluriel 8: Actes du huitième colloque de la Société française des études japonaises*, Arles, Picquier, 2011, p. 377-385.

<sup>34</sup> Eddy Dufourmont, “Yasuoka Masahiro, a Conservative Vision of the Postwar,” in A. Bayard-Sakai, E. Lozerand and M. Lucken (eds.), *Japan’s Postwar*, Routledge, 2011, p. 98-118. It should be noticed that this expression is used now by some conservative Chinese thinkers, like Zhao Tingyang, who describe themselves as advocates of Confucianism. See Ji Zhe, “*Tianxia*, retour en force d’un concept oublié. Portrait des nouveaux penseurs confucianistes” [<http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Tianxia-retour-en-force-d-un.html>].

<sup>35</sup> Eddy Dufourmont, “Satō Eisaku, Yasuoka Masahiro and the Re-Establishment of February 11th as National Day: the Political Use of National Memory in Postwar Japan,” in Wolfgang Schwentker and Sven Saaler (eds.), *The Power of Memory in Modern Japan*, Folkestone, Global Oriental, 2008, p. 204-222.

<sup>36</sup> Yasuoka Masahiro, “Tōyō teki minshushugi, Nihon minshushugi kakuritsu no tame ni” (For the establishment of Oriental, Japanese democracy), *Kansai shiyū*, n° 1, October 1958, p. 1-5.

<sup>37</sup> Sheldon Garon, *Modeling Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 115-145.

ing, as confirmed by Kathleen Uno, to such an extent that the upheavals of 1945–1955 could almost be seen as an exception.<sup>38</sup>

Yasuoka was far from being the only person in Japan to discuss use of the *Great Learning* to promote the “education of the people.” Japanese sinologists also contributed largely to this.

### III. The *Great Learning* and Sinology: Uno Tetsuto, Morohashi Tetsuji and Okada Takehiko

#### 1. *The Contribution of Pre-war Sinology to Official Ideology: Uno Tetsuto*

The use of the *Great Learning* in modern times cannot be fully discussed without mentioning the role of Japanese sinologists in this respect. In fact, after Confucianism was no longer used for the education of children, the Classics became the subject matter of scholars at university. Chinese studies (*kangaku* 漢学) became sinology (*shinagaku* 支那学).<sup>39</sup> The place of sinologists in the last part of the present paper is fully justified by the fact that the academic world of Japanese sinology had strong links with the government and ideologues such as Yasuoka Masahiro. These links did not disappear after 1945.<sup>40</sup> The best example of this is Uno Tetsuto 宇野哲人 (1874–1975). He was one of the founders of Japanese sinology, as well as being the leading figure of Shibunkai before and after 1945. His longevity allowed him to be the centre of Japanese sinology and Shibunkai until his death.

Uno Tetsuto was the author of the first modern critical publications of the *Great Learning*. He considered this text and the *Zhongyong* as being philosophical works and the most important texts of Confucianism; the former representing its essence and the latter being its most abstract text. For him, the *Great Learning* also represented the essence of the philosophy of

<sup>38</sup> See Kathleen Uno, “The Death of the ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother?’,” in Andrew Gordon (ed.), *Postwar Japan as History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, p. 293–322.

<sup>39</sup> The use of the word *Shina* for China, instead of *Chūgoku* (中国), used in the past as well as nowadays, is meaningful: even for sinologists China was no longer a prestigious culture, but a barbarian country able to be “orientalized” by the Japanese. Sinology became a tool of such an orientalizing of China. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Japan's Past into History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> One example of such links is the publication of the *Anthology of Wang Yangming* under the direction of Yasuoka Masahiro and Uno Tetsuto, joined by Qian Mu, Song Xi, Tang Junyi, Chen Rongjie, Qin Jiayi, Xu Fuguan, Okada Takehiko and eight other Japanese sinologists.

our Orient."<sup>41</sup> Uno was able to make such an affirmation because of his view of history: for him, the Confucianism of ancient times (until the establishment of the empire) was religious (*shūkyō teki* 宗教的) because of its belief in Heaven. Uno did concede that Kongzi 孔子 had put an end to many superstitions, but this was not enough to not see in him a religious thinker. Uno considered Song thought as being a major turning point in the history of Confucianism, becoming philosophical (*tetsugaku teki* 哲学的) thanks to its explanations about Heaven, more abstract and influenced as they were by Buddhism.<sup>42</sup>

Uno was of course aware of the debate between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming about the *Great Learning*. Concerning Wang Yangming, he had a somewhat contradictory attitude: on the one hand he thought his ideas were erroneous,<sup>43</sup> although he did praise him for his interpretation of the *Great Learning*, which he considered as being representative of the practical character of "Oriental thought."<sup>44</sup> In another text, Uno kept a distance from both Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming regarding their interpretation of this book: whereas Wang Yangming's view of it was too extensive, Zhu Xi's one was too narrow.<sup>45</sup> Uno did not explicitly propose a third interpretation, but did suggest that it was possible. He was very much aware of modern trends in Chinese thought, believing, for example, that ideas such as collectivism and socialism, held by Kang Youwei and other modern thinkers, could only destroy Confucianism. Japan thus had the duty of protecting the Confucian model expressed in the *Great Learning*.<sup>46</sup> For contemporary readers, it was easy to conclude that the philosophy of "our Orient" would see the light of day in Japan.

Uno Tetsuto was a conservative thinker close to official ideology. He was against democracy and deliberately targeted thinkers such as Nakae

<sup>41</sup> Uno Tetsuto and Iijima Tadao, *Shinkan Daigaku Chūyō* (A new look at the *Great Learning* and the *Zhongyong*), Tokyo, Sanseidō, 1931, introduction.

<sup>42</sup> Uno Tetsuto, *Shina tetsugaku no kenkyū* (Research on Chinese philosophy), Tokyo, Daidōkan, 1920, p. 15, 109. He uses as synonyms the words *shisō* 思想 (thought) and *tetsugaku* 哲学 (philosophy).

<sup>43</sup> Uno Tetsuto, "Jukyō to shūyōhō wo ronzu" (On Confucianism and methods of moral education), *Shibun*, vol. 2, n° 2, April 1920, p. 6; *Tōyō tetsugaku taikō* (Fundamental principles of Oriental philosophy), Tokyo, Kōten kōkyūjo, 1911, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Uno, *Shina tetsugaku no kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

<sup>45</sup> Uno Tetsuto, *Shina tetsugakushi kōwa* (A discussion of the history of Chinese philosophy), Tokyo, Daidōkan, 1918, p. 69; Uno and Iijima, *Shinkan Daigaku Chūyō*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> Uno, *Shina tetsugaku no kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

Chōmin for using Chinese thought to promote equality amongst men.<sup>47</sup> He even tried to attack interpretations of the *Great Learning* presented by Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627–1705), who was well known for his ideas on the validity of human emotions.<sup>48</sup> In order to counterattack the ideas, based on personalism, of such Taishō democrats as Yoshino Sakuzō or Abe Jirō 阿部次郎 (1883–1959), he proposed to rediscover Confucianism, explaining that, through the *Great Learning*, it had explained for centuries how to perfect one's own personality (*jiko no jinkaku wo kansei shite* 自己の人格を完成して).<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to Yoshino or Abe, Uno's emphasis on *jinkaku* was not aimed at considering the individual's autonomy, but at defending the official ideology of the family-state. He thus explained that in China as well in Japan, Confucianism was a philosophy of "familism" (*kazokushugi* 家族主義).<sup>50</sup> Of course the word *jinkaku* does not appear in the *Great Learning* or other Confucian texts, but Uno considered that the expression could be used to explain certain examples of Chinese thought, such as ideas about Heaven, which according to him was personalized in ancient times.<sup>51</sup> He therefore used the *Great Learning* exactly like Yasuoka did to promote official ideology.

## 2. Post-War Sinology and the Great Learning: Morohashi Tetsuji

Uno was not the only sinologist to pay attention to the *Great Learning*. One of his closest friends, and the author of the most famous dictionary of Chinese ideograms, Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋徹二 (1883–1982), shows just how the conservative discourse on the *Great Learning* has continued after 1945. Before the war, Morohashi defended Confucianism as part of "Japanese spirit" and supported the Rescript on Education as a tool to educate the Japanese.<sup>52</sup>

His conservative position after 1945 can first and foremost be seen in the

<sup>47</sup> Uno, "Jiyū to byōdō" (Freedom and equality), *Shibun*, vol. 2, n° 5, October 1920, p. 4. See also "Mōshi no jiyū byōdō kan" (Mencius' view of freedom and equality), *Shibun*, vol. 1 n° 2, October 1919, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> Uno and Iijima, *Shinkan Daigaku Chūyō*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Uno, "Jukyō to shūyōhō wo ronzu," *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Uno, *Tōyō tetsugaku taikō*, *op. cit.*, p. 16; *Shina tetsugakushi kōwa*, *op. cit.*, p. 11; *Shina tetsugaku no kenkyū*, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Uno and Iijima, *Shinkan Daigaku Chūyō*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Uno Tetsuto, "Jukyō to tenmeikan" (The Confucian view of the mandate of heaven), *Shibun*, vol. 2, n° 2, April 1922, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Morohashi Tetsuji, *Jukyō no ryōiki* (The territory of Confucianism), Tokyo, Nihonbunka kyōkai, 1935, p. 42-43.

way he evoked the Pacific War, which he called Daitōa sensō 大東亜戦争 (War of Greater Asia), the term used by the Japanese government during the conflict and currently only by members of the right wing.<sup>53</sup> After 1945, he wrote a book on the *Great Learning*.<sup>54</sup> For him, too, it represented the essence of Confucianism.<sup>55</sup> The book is primarily an introduction for youth, and Morohashi's comments are often close to mere paraphrasing. However, his remarks on ancient Chinese society, while commenting the *Great Learning*, actually refer to modern Japanese society.

It is striking that despite being very cautious about the identity of the author, he never questioned the historical existence of Chinese sovereigns Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, or that of Japanese sovereigns appearing in the *Kojiki* 古事記.<sup>56</sup>

For him, since it contained a moral message, the *Great Learning* was still able to offer answers for modern problems, the moral dimension of which even modern society was unable to ignore.<sup>57</sup> The main problem he found in modern society was youth violence, examples of which were the young officers of the Japanese army in the 1930's and the political protests of the 1960's.<sup>58</sup> According to Morohashi, the cause of this was the decline of the family as an institution, due to the individualism of modern society.<sup>59</sup> Citing the *Great Learning*, he based the health of a society on the virtue of the family, and the virtue of the family on that of the individual.<sup>60</sup>

Morohashi's interpretation was very close to pre-war ideology: he explained that the virtues of filial piety and loyalty were fundamental for the Japanese.<sup>61</sup> With the formula *jiko no kansei* 自己の完成 he maintained moral perfection as the utmost objective of an individual, just replacing "persona" (*jinkaku*) by "self" (*jiko*).<sup>62</sup> Using the passage of the *Great Learning* on ordering the family, he also affirmed that the family was the first place of human sociability,<sup>63</sup> and added that respect of individual rights destroyed the family as an institution and reduced it to the state of nuclear

<sup>53</sup> Morohashi Tetsuji, *Jukyō no ryōiki*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> Morohashi Tetsuji, *Gendai ni ikiru Daigaku* (The *Great Learning* living nowadays), Kashiwa, Hiroike gakuen jigyōbu, 1971.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12, 155.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92-93.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142-143.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.



family. Elderly people found themselves alone and in need of help. Morohashi found a solution for this in the *Great Learning*: young people should take care of their parents in their old age.<sup>64</sup>

In writing this, he in no way differed from the stance of the Japanese government which, after 1945, did not want to create a state pension system and wanted children to continue taking care of their parents instead. All Morohashi did was to promote this idea in the name of Confucianism, at a time when the latter was no longer referred to by the government.

### 3. *Heritage Which is Still New: Okada Takehiko*

This interpretation of the *Great Learning* elaborated by Yasuoka, Uno and Morohashi is still alive today. An example of this was sinologist Okada Takehiko 岡田武彦 (1908–2005),<sup>65</sup> for whom Chinese thought was also “Oriental thought,”<sup>66</sup> a common heritage of Japan and China. He argued that the *Analects* corresponded to the “spiritual landscape, the national character and the traditional way of thinking of the Japanese,” even more than it did to those of the Chinese.<sup>67</sup> Like Yasuoka and Uno, he wrote from the perspective of the defence of Chinese thought, thinking that after 1868, and even more so after 1945, Chinese thought and values such as filial piety had been gradually forgotten.<sup>68</sup> He found in the *Great Learning* the expression of the idealism (*risōshugi* 理想主義) of Chinese thought, which reached its highest point in the *Zhongyong*.<sup>69</sup> Of course, Okada was aware of the differences between the interpretations of Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi. In fact he

<sup>64</sup> Morohashi Tetsuji, *Gendai ni ikiru Daigaku*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>65</sup> See “Chūgoku to Chūgokujin” (China and the Chinese [1973]), in *Okada Takehiko zenshū* (The complete works of Okada Takehiko), Tokyo, Meitoku shuppansha, 2007, vol. 20, p. 376–377. Okada Takehiko, *Gendai no Yōmei gaku* (Contemporary times and Wang Yangming), Tokyo, Meitoku shuppansha, 1993, p. 264–266.

<sup>66</sup> This idea is based on an archaic vision of history, according to which Chinese civilization is an essence which has existed unchanged for 5000 years, and the only surviving civilization from ancient times. Okada Takehiko, “Tōyō no aidentitī” (Orient and identity [1995]), in *Okada Takehiko zenshū*, *op. cit.*, vol. 15, p. 15. Okada was of course not the only one: neither the first to affirm this idea, which has been for example widely developed by Chinese archaeologists since 1980.

<sup>67</sup> Okada, *Gendai no Yōmei gaku*, *op. cit.*, p. 14; “Tōyō no aidentitī,” *op. cit.*, p. 233. “Chūgoku to Chūgokujin,” *op. cit.*, p. 381 and *sqq.* He calls the Japanese a “Confucian nation” (*jukyō teki minzoku* 儒教的民族).

<sup>68</sup> Okada, “Tōyō no aidentitī,” *op. cit.*, p. 233, 241; “Tōyō no michi” (The Oriental way), in *Okada Takehiko zenshū*, *op. cit.*, vol. 14, p. 189; *Gendai no Yōmei gaku*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Okada, “Tōyō no aidentitī,” *op. cit.*, p. 10; “Tōyō no michi,” *op. cit.*, p. 195; *Gendai no Yōmei gaku*, *op. cit.*, p. 35–43.

preferred Wang Yangming's position, since he found its rationality closer to European thought than that of Zhu Xi, and considered that Wang's moral subjectivism was inexistent in Europe, and unique to the "East."<sup>70</sup>

For him, the ultimate goal was personal perfection, and an "organic" (*yū-taiteki* 有体的) link existed between self-cultivation and ordering the family, the country and the world. Okada claimed to have found in the *Great Learning* a means of obtaining individual autonomy (*shutaisei* 主体性), but, as we can clearly see, he largely ignored the criticism of such people as Nishi Amane or Fukuzawa Yukichi.

Despite affirming that it was necessary to compare "Oriental thought" and European philosophy, Okada never seriously tried to do this. He emphasised the need for self-cultivation in the post-war period in just the same way as Yasuoka had for both pre-war and post-war Japan, as a form of protection against dominant European philosophy described as being too rational and utilitarian.

Such an interpretation does not seem to be limited to sinologists like Okada. For example, Higuchi Khalid Mimasaka, a Japanese Muslim and president of the Japanese Muslims Association, uses the *Great Learning* to say that modern society needs to "order the family" (*seika* 齊家); and to affirm the role of Islam in "ordering the family" and "perfecting the moral personality," as for him Islam and "Oriental thought" are very similar.<sup>71</sup>

#### Conclusion: The *Great Learning* and the Permanence of *Jiaohua*

It would be interesting to examine how, in daily life, the Japanese have appropriated the *Great Learning* or not. This could be the subject matter of further research. In any case, our inquiry into the *Great Learning* in modern Japan tells us something about the history of Confucianism: the *Great Learning* was rapidly incorporated into modern imperial ideology, in order to use Confucianism as a means of social control. Thanks to sinologists and other intellectuals, the *Great Learning* even became, after 1945, part of a conservative discourse, which tried to renew the concept of *jiaohua*. The strong links between Japan, dominated by the Liberal-Democratic Party, the Korea of Park Chunghee 朴正熙, where a "New Community movement" (*Semaoul undong* 새마을 운동) took place, and the Taiwan of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), where a Movement for the Restoration of Chinese

<sup>70</sup> Okada, *Gendai no Yōmei gaku*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> Higuchi Mimasaka, *Nihonjin musurimu toshite ikiru* (A Japanese living as a Muslim), Kyoto, Kōsei shuppan, 2007, p. 83-89.

Culture (*Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong* 中華文化復興運動) was organized, may also be understood as a continuation, on a continental scale, of the Confucian theme of *jiaohua*. From this point of view, Japan was in appearance the only democracy in East Asia after 1945, but was in fact not at all an exception. The current Confucian revival in China should also be considered from the perspective of events in Japan.

At the same time, interpretations of the *Great Learning* were also an occasion to discuss Japan's identity. There was clearly a dilemma concerning the integration of a school of thought which had played a major role in Japanese history, and criticism of it as an expression of "Chinese spirit."