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► To cite this version:

Eddy Dufourmont. Is Confucianism philosophy ? The answers of Inoue Tetsujirō and Nakae Chōmin. Nakajima Takahiro. Whither Japanese Philosophy 2? Reflections through Other Eyes, University of Tokyo Center of Philosophy, pp.71-90, 2010. hal-01522302

HAL Id: hal-01522302

<https://hal.science/hal-01522302>

Submitted on 19 May 2017

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Is Confucianism philosophy?
The answers of Inoue Tetsujirō and Nakae Chōmin

Eddy DUFOURMONT

University of Bordeaux 3/ CEJ Inalco

Introduction: a philosophical debate from beyond the grave

Is Chinese thought a philosophy? This question has been discussed by scholars in the last years from a philosophical point of view,¹ but it is possible also to adopt a historical point of view to answer the question, since Japanese thinkers faced the same problem during Meiji period (1868–1912), when the acquisition of European thought put in question the place of Chinese thought, especially Confucianism. They had to think how to appropriate new categories like “philosophy” and “religion.” This question attracts more and more attention of the scholars,² and we think that this question, far to be limited to Japan, can contribute to understand a crossed cultural history of modern Asia, based on transnational perspective and what Michel Espagne calls *transfert culturel* (cultural transfert).³

The death of Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901), called the “Rousseau of Orient” for his commitment to democracy and his efforts to translate Rousseau and more generally French republican thinkers of XIX century, was the occasion of such debate. Just before dying, thanks to his

1. See “Y-a-t-il une philosophie chinoise?: Un état de la question,” *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident*, 27, 2005.

2. Gerard Clinton Godart, “‘Philosophy’ or ‘Religion’? The Confrontation with Foreign Categories in Late Nineteenth Century Japan,” *The Journal of the history of ideas*, 2008, vol. 69.1, pp. 74–91.

3. Through this notion, discussed in his *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands*, Paris, PUF, 1999, Michel Espagne opened a new field of research.

disciple Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911), Nakae Chōmin published two books, *Ichinen yūhan* (A year and a half), and *Zoku ichinen yūhan* (Sequel to A year and a half). In the last, Nakae expressed his atheist materialism and rejected radically European thinkers who based their thoughts on the existence of spirit or God. In *Ichinen yūhan* Nakae even denied the existence of philosophers in Japan, past and present. He wrote:

In Japan, since ancient times until present day, there has never been a philosophy. While there were philologists such as Motoori and Atsutane to dig the graves of ancient times and study the ancient texts, they did not provide clear answers about the meaning of life nor the world around us. Followers of Jinsai and Sorai offered new interpretations of Confucian texts, but they were nevertheless Confucian thinkers. Although some people among the Buddhist monks proposed sometimes new ideas and created a new school, all of them remained confined to the realm of religion and it was therefore not pure philosophy. Recently appeared people like Katō and Inoue who proclaim themselves philosophers. They are recognized as such, however they are just introducing in Japan theories from the West without taking time to digest them. This attitude is not worthy of philosophers.⁴

Of course in Meiji period philosophical studies existed already, but for Nakae it was not philosophy, as the citation shows. Nakae was writing here about Katō Hiroyuki (1836–1916) and Inoue Tetsujirō (1856–1944), who were indeed important thinkers of their time. Katō was already criticized in an earlier work of Nakae Chōmin, *A Discourse of three drunkards on government* (1887).⁵ The critic of Inoue can be explained by the opposition of Inoue and Nakae's political position: Nakae Chōmin was one of the main figures of the Movement for People rights and freedom (*Jiyū minken undō*) and the opposition to the gov-

4. Nakae Chōmin, *Ichinen yūhan*, in *Nakae Chōmin Zenshū* (thereafter abbreviated as NCZ), Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1983, vol. 10, p. 155.

5. Eddy Dufourmont, "La pensée politique et la philosophie de Nakae Chōmin, à travers les discours des trois ivrognes", in Nakae Chōmin, *Dialogues politiques entre trois ivrognes*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2008, p. 154.

ernment, while on the other side, Inoue was a scholar devoted to Imperial regime and its ideology of “national morals” (*kokumin dōtoku*), partly based on Confucianism, for which he contributed to promote with his commentary of the Rescript of education (*Chokugo engi*, 1890) or his *Outline of national morals* (*Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, 1910).⁶

But this opposition between Inoue and Nakae was not only political: both Inoue and Nakae were philosophers, and their philosophies were radically opposed: Nakae was a materialist thinker deeply influenced by French laic thinkers. He has translated Alfred Fouillée’s *Histoire de la philosophie* (*Rigaku enkakushi*, 1886) and Eugène Véron’s *L’Esthétique* (*Bi shi bigaku*, 1883–4). He published also one of the first handbooks of philosophy, *Rigaku kōgen* (1886), but stayed away from academic world. Inoue was on the contrary the main figure of the philosophical studies and he taught in the Imperial university of Tokyo. His spiritualist philosophy, partly influenced by German thought, centered on the notion of persona (*jinkaku*).⁷ Inoue was also the leading figure in academic studies in philosophy during Meiji period: it was him who contributed to establish the first department of philosophy, in the Imperial university of Tokyo in 1881, and founded with Miyake Setsurei and Inoue Enryō the Association of philosophy (Tetsugakukai) in 1884.⁸

In fact, a wave of critics attacked Nakae’s *Zoku ichinen yūhan* soon after its publication, all coming from Inoue and his followers, as Funayama Shin’ichi already showed in the past.⁹ The death of Nakae

6. Inoue, who died in 1944, had of course a career longer than Nakae, and the unity of his thought and questionings should be discussed. We assume here that during Meiji period his thought was stable and remained focused on the same question, that is to say building unique Japanese identity.

7. After a controversy between Saigusa Hiroto and Funayama Shin’ichi about the possibility to qualify Inoue as a materialist (whereas not linked with marxist materialism), Mineshima Hideo has demonstrated that philosophy of Inoue was spiritualist. Mineshima Hideo, “Meiji ni okeru tetsugaku no juyō (8). Inoue Tetsujirō, sono tetsugaku no saiganmi”, *Waseda shōgaku*, 229, 1972, pp. 61–81.

8. Matsu moto Sannosuke, “Kaidai,” dans *NCZ*, vol.7, 1984, p. 282.

9. Muenshō, “*Zoku ichinen yūhan wo yomu*,” *Kokumin shinbun*, 24 October 1901, Wakanshō, “*Zoku ichinen yūhan wo hyōsu*,” *Kokumin shinbun*, 29 October–3 December 1901; Yamaji Aizan “*Zoku ichinen yūhan wo yomu*,” *Shinano mainichi shinbun*, 13 December 1901 and “Mushin mureikon ron wo hyōsu,” *Rikugō zasshi*, December 1901,

did not let him to answer to these attacks. That is why there was not strictly speaking a debate. In fact, the conflict between Inoue and Nakae existed while Nakae was alive, but was implicit: the publication by Nakae of *Rigaku Kōgen*, one of the first introductions to philosophy in Japan, or his translation of Schopenhauer was completely ignored by Inoue and academic world.¹⁰ The radical opposition between Nakae and Inoue appeared clearly with the critics of *Zoku ichinen yūhan*. The importance of Confucianism cannot be dismissed here : Inoue Tetsujirō devoted his researches on “Oriental philosophy” (*tōyō tetsugaku*) and paid much importance to Confucianism, as shows the publication of *Nihon yōmei gakuha no tetsugaku* (Philosophy of Japanese school of Wang Yangming) or *Nihon Shushi gakuha no tetsugaku* (Philosophy of Japanese school of Shuxi), while Nakae Chōmin, despite his interest for Mengzi (Mencius) and Zhuangzi, did not consider that Confucianism was philosophy, as the previous citation shows. This difference of position toward Confucianism is of course undermined on their conception of philosophy itself. This aspect has not been discussed nor in Nakae neither in Inoue’s case. Since Inoue has been the object of few researches until now we will focus here on Inoue and analyses his position in crossing with Nakae.

Confucianism as “oriental philosophy” and union of philosophy with religion in Inoue’s works

When Inoue discusses about philosophy, first it is important to notice that he doesn’t speak about just “philosophy” but always about

Hakuseki Kinoshita, “*Zoku ichinen yūhan* wo hyōsu,” *Rikugō zasshi*, December 1901, Tanaka Kiichi, “Katsudō teki ichigenron to *Zoku ichinen yūhan*,” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, December 1901, Takahashi Gorō, *Ichinen yūhan to kyūshiki no yūbutsuron*. *Mureikon mushin tetsugaku bakuron*, Tokyo, Ichinisan, December 1901 ; Maeda Chōta, *Ichinen yūhan no tetsugaku to bansei fūeki no tetsugaku*, Tokyo, Sanzaisha, December 1901, Inoue Tetsujirō, “Nakae Tokusuke shi no *Zoku ichinen yūhan* wo yomu,” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, February 1902. See Funayama Shin’ichi, *Meiji tetsugakushi kenkyū*, Kyoto, Minerva shobō, 1959, pp. 278–294.

10. Ida Shin’ya, “Kaidai,” in Nakae Chōmin trad., *Dōtoku daigenron*, NCZ, vol. 9, pp. 344–6. Nakae translated of Schopenhauer his *On the Basis of Morality*.

“oriental philosophy” (*tōyō tetsugaku*) and “western philosophy” (*seiyō tetsugaku*).

Inoue recognizes that philosophy can be defined in various ways, but according to him, “philosophy is the science of what does not change between Earth and Sky, and is based on the materials furnished by all the sciences. It is the science which inspects the fundamental basis behind all changes.”¹¹ In the same text, Inoue presented the distinction between *tōyō tetsugaku* and *seiyō tetsugaku* as the translation in Japanese of the English “oriental philosophy” and “western philosophy,” and he added that Kongzi (Confucius), Zhuangzi and Cakyamuni were philosophers.¹² For him, indeed, “Orientals are the most able to do research on oriental philosophy, to compare it with western philosophy, and to build a philosophy and thought upgraded (...) it is our responsibility to do research on western philosophy without neglect oriental philosophy, to realize fusion and unification of both philosophies.”¹³ As this citation shows, Inoue had great ambition, but his position was based on unanswered questions: why and how did he want to merge “oriental” and “western” philosophies? What was the meaning of “fusion” and “unity” in Inoue’s mind? After merging both philosophies, what kind of philosophy would appear? The position of Inoue requires examining the meaning he gave to the words “orient” and “philosophy.”

In 1880, Inoue graduated from the Imperial university of Tokyo, and from 1883 he started to give lectures on history of “Oriental philosophy”. At this time he explained that “oriental philosophy” means philosophy of China,¹⁴ India and Japan, but from the beginning Inoue never explained why the thought coming from these countries should be considered as philosophy. As Ōshima Akira pointed out, “Inoue, who saw that European philosophers were completely ignorant of ori-

11. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Seiyō tetsugaku kōgi* (1883), in Shimasono Susumu, Isomae Jun’ichi ed., *Inoue Tetsujirō shū* (Thereafter abbreviated as ITS), Tokyo, Kuresu shuppan, 2003, p.2. Inoue uses the word *tetsugaku shisō*, but for him the two words mean both philosophy (Inoue Tetsujirō, *Nihon Shushigaku no tetsugaku*), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

12. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Seiyō tetsugaku kōgi*, *op. cit.*, p.8. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri shinsetsu*, ITS, p. 33.

13. Inoue Tetsujirō, Miyake Yūjirō, *Meiji tetsugaku kai no kaiko*, Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1932, p. 86.

14. Called *Shina* and not *Chūgoku*, as many scholars of this time.

ental philosophy, was certainly aware before his stay abroad that the elaboration of a History of oriental philosophy was a necessary work to do. Moreover, he was strongly conscious that this mission was assigned to him, who learnt western philosophy.”¹⁵ Inoue received such encouragement also from European orientalists themselves.¹⁶

Thus, even before exploring the possibility that the thoughts from China, India and Japan are philosophies or not, it seems that Inoue was already convinced that they were. Then, why Inoue decided that thought from China, India and Japan were philosophies? First it is because Inoue received from European scholars the notion of “oriental philosophy” without any critics, and just translated it in Japanese as *tōyō tetsugaku*. It may possible to consider Chinese, Indian and Japanese thought as philosophy, but at the time of Inoue, some people did not consider them as it without nuances. For example, Asai Toyohisa recognized the existence of an “oriental philosophy”, but he thought that “the distinction between the two is not simply a matter of time or development, but more on their philosophical characteristics (...) Philosophy of Orient is in general characterized by religion and he’s more imaginative than speculative (...) Philosophy of West is entirely theoretical while philosophy of Orient is practical.”¹⁷ What Asai thought as “practical” was, according to the text, “something including morals and religions.” As we will show later, this is linked with the reason why Inoue gave importance to Confucianism as moral.

When we consider the reason why Inoue was interested in Confucianism, we cannot ignore his well-known critical attitude toward Christianity when occurred the incident of 1890, the same year he published *Chokugo engi*, during which Uchimura Kanzō refused to bow deeply to the portrait of Emperor Meiji and the Imperial Rescript on Education. It is very probable that he wanted to express an “Oriental

15. Ōshima Akira, “Inoue Tetsujirō no Edo jugaku sanbusaku’ni tsuite,” *Tōkyō gakugei daigaku kiyō*, 60, 2009, p. 230.

16. Ōshima Akira, “Inoue Tetsujirō no ‘Tōyō tetsugakushi’ kenkyū to Nihon Yōmeigaku no tetsugaku,” *Yōmeigaku*, 9, 1997, p. 8.

17. Asai Toyohisa, “Tōyō tetsugaku kenkyū no hitsuyō wo ron zu,” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, vol. 9, n. 87, 1894.

philosophy” in order to resist Christians, as we will show later. In others words for Inoue the existence of an “Oriental philosophy” itself was a *necessity*. Moreover, as Ōshima Akira pointed out, the necessity to elaborate a history of “Oriental philosophy” was not only toward Japanese scholars but also toward European and American scholars.¹⁸ Nevertheless, we can think it was not only for an academic goal but also to show Japan was a civilized country even in her philosophy. This kind of goal was not limited to Inoue during Meiji period: for example, the historian Hara Katsurō elaborated the notion of a Japanese Medieval Age (*chūse*) in order to show that Japan went through the same historical process and for this reason was qualified to be a civilized country as well as European and American countries.¹⁹ We cannot find such ambition in Nakae.

After examining the meaning of “orient”, let us discuss now about how Inoue defined philosophy. In “Waga sekaikan no ichijin”, Inoue defines philosophy as “the knowledge of research for general things” and added that it is impossible to elaborate a conception of the world without logic and philosophy.²⁰ For him, philosophy as well as religion are related to the notion of existence and aim for fulfills the “spiritual needs” (*seishin teki juyō*), that is why he thought that religion and philosophy were one.²¹ While Inoue recognizes that religion uses faith and philosophy logic to investigate the world and elaborate a conception of the world, he insisted on the common point to satisfy the spiritual needs of Humans. Using Confucian words, Inoue added that the final goal of such spiritual needs was to reach a state of “quietness of mind” (*anshin ritsume*).²² He believed that morality was an absolute necessity

18. Ōshima Akira, “Inoue Tetsujirō no “Tōyō tetsugakushi” kenkyū to *Nihon Yōmeigaku no tetsugaku*”, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

19. Nagahara Keiji, *20 seiki Nihon no rekishigaku*, Tokyo, Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2003, p. 48.

20. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Waga sekaikan no ichijin,” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, vol. 9, n. 89, 1894, p. 491, 493.

21. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Ninshiki to jissai to no kankei”, in Inoue Tetsujirō dir., *Tetsugaku sōsho*, vol. 1, dai ni shū, Tokyo, Shūbunkan, 1900, p. 438. This position is shared by others critics of *Zoku Ichinen yūhan* (Tanaka Kiichi, *op. cit.*, p. 1022, 1029).

22. Itabashi Yūji, “Nihon ni okeru tetsugaku no hōhō. Inoue Tetsujirō kara Nishida Kitarō he,” *Risshō daigaku bungakubu ronsō*, 119, 2004, p. 99.

even for people indifferent to religion.²³ In Inoue's thought the stability of mind was strongly linked with the fundamental order he believed hidden behind the "phenomenal world": philosophy has the duty to clarify the "unchangeable reality" (*fuhen teki jissai*).²⁴

The conception of the world in Nakae was completely opposite, since he considered the world as the constant moving of particles. The Principle (*ri*) representing the truth of the world was not an unchangeable reality hidden behind the phenomenal world but the movement of the world itself, since for him the world was something unlimited in space and time (*muhen mugen, mushū mushi*).²⁵ Moreover, for him, "When the body dies, the spirit does the same immediately. This is it unfortunate for mankind? But even if so, what can we do if this is true? The goal of philosophy is not to serve as an expedient."²⁶ In other words, Nakae did not recognize any "spiritual need" for humans. Thus, the fundamental difference opposing Nakae and Inoue was about the existence of spirit and conception of the world. For Inoue, all living creatures have spirits, and presented spirit as energy that can be eternal following the law of conversation of energy.²⁷ Moreover Inoue considered that belief in the existence of spirit was shared by all humanity and only low class scholar would criticize it.²⁸ Maybe Inoue was targeting here Nakae.

With his definition of philosophy as *rigaku*, Nakae Chōmin also sought an universal truth, which exceed individual existence, the limits of space and time. But contrary to Inoue, since he considered universe as unlimited, self-sufficient and always changing, Nakae didn't need neither something outside the universe, nor the existence of spirit. In opposition to Nakae's materialism, the spiritualism of Inoue gave a lot of importance to psychology concerning philosophical matters. As he wrote: "we can say that psychology is the basis of philosophy."²⁹

23. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri to shukyō to no kankei*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

24. Inoue Tetsujirō, "Nakae Tokusuke shi no *Zoku ichinen yūhan wo yomu*," *op. cit.*, p. 5.

25. Nakae Chōmin, *Zoku ichinen yūhan*, NCZ, pp. 264–7.

26. Nakae Chōmin, *Zoku ichinen yūhan*, NCZ, p. 237.

27. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri shinsetsu*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

28. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri shinsetsu*, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–1.

29. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Seiyō tetsugaku kōgi*, *op. cit.*, p. 5. The critic of Nakae's reject of spirit was the common point of the attacks against *Zoku ichinen yūhan*. See for example Takahashi

The definition of philosophy by Nakae differs considerably with Inoue. As he writes in *Rigaku kōgen* or *Zoku ichinen yūhan*, Nakae considers, like Inoue, that both religion and science exist to help humans to understand the universe. But for Nakae the role of religion in this perspective belongs to the past, and religion itself has no future. According to Wang Shuhua, the thinkers of enlightenment considered that European modern philosophy, because of its links with modern sciences, was a “real knowledge” (*jitsugaku*), and attacked Confucianism as “empty knowledge” (*kyogaku*).³⁰ Tsuda Mamichi, who was also a materialist, thought that nothing exists if we cannot have conscience of it, that is why he was very critical against Spencer, who pointed out the unity between science and religion. Since he considered philosophy as a science, Tsuda was necessarily against the possibility to unite philosophy and religion. On the opposite, Inoue Tetsujirō was more open to Spencer’s influence and it is maybe because of this that he affirmed on the contrary that science and religion were united, like Spencer. But, as Funayama Shin’ichi clearly demonstrated, Inoue was not completely satisfied with evolutionism and he rejected it as philosophy, writing that “the law of evolution belongs to the phenomenal world (*genshōkai*) and not to the existential world (*jitsuzaikai*) (...) If we follow the law of evolution, only phenomenal world can be discussed by philosophy.”³¹ He considered that evolution cannot be only change by hazard, but on the contrary the development of a fix order.³²

It is true that in *Zoku ichinen yūhan* Nakae criticizes all the religions but does not include Confucianism in it. Exactly like *Sakuron* in his early years, he still associates Confucius and Socrates. From this point of view Nakae seems to share with Inoue the belief that Confucianism is philosophy. But even if flaunted his interested for Mengzi and

Corō, *op. cit.*, p. 74. Takahashi (*op. cit.*, p. 106) invokes telepathy and spiritism to justify the existence of spirit.

30. Wang Shuhua, “Tsuda Mamichi,” in Suzuki Tadashi, Bian Chongdao dir., *Kindai Nihon no tetsugakusha*, Tokyo, Hokuju shuppan, 1990, p. 57.

31. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Tetsugaku jō yori mitaru shinkaron,” in Mie Hiroto ed., *Nihon tetsugaku zensho*, vol.6, p.426. Funayama Shin’ichi, *op.cit.*, p. 322.

32. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Tetsugaku jō yori mitaru shinkaron,” *op. cit.*, p. 434. Funayama Shin’ichi, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

Zhuangzi, even if he used Mengzi to translate Rousseau's *liberté morale*, Nakae never went further as Inoue did. Why? Because it seems that for Nakae, as our first quotation of *Ichinen yūhan* shows, both and Buddhism Confucianism were not able to be characterized by metaphysical reflection like philosophy. He quoted Mencius because he believed that humanity shared morality, but just morality.

The political signification of Confucianism as “Oriental philosophy”: resisting Christianity and emphasizing “national morals”

Since Inoue considered religion and philosophy as one, it is natural that he gave importance to Confucianism, but the question remains why he devoted his career especially to it. For him, what meant Confucianism?

Inoue defined Confucianism as “a moral teaching that developed since Chinese Antiquity and has been elaborated principally by Kongzi (Confucius).”³³ In his own researches Inoue gave the priority to Japanese Confucianism, especially Edo period, and he categorized the various schools as four, the school of Zhuxi, Wang Yangming, the Old school (*kogaku*) and the Eclectic school. Critics has been addressed to his method of categorization,³⁴ but we should notice that from the beginning Inoue considered Edo thinkers as philosophers, without any question concerning the pertinence to define their thought as philosophy, and his researches were only a historical research clarifying the links between each thinker and to assemble them systematically in “Oriental philosophy.”

Some years after Asai Toyohisa discussed methodology of research in “Oriental philosophy” and distinguished in sciences historical, critical, explicative, experimental, and comparative methods.³⁵ He explained that since “Oriental philosophy” was different to natural sciences,

33. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Jukyō no chōsho to tanjo,” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, vol. 23, n. 262, 1908, p. 1247.

34. Inoguchi Tetsuya, “Inoue Tetsujirō no edo jugaku sanbusaku nit suite,” *Tōkyō gakuhei daigaku kiryō. Jinbun shakai kagaku II*, vol. 60, 2009, p. 234.

35. Asai Toyohisa, *op. cit.*

therefore its methods also were different. For him methods in researches on “Oriental philosophy” had to be historical and critical. Following such criterions, we can say that Inoue made researches basically historical and not critical.

But this does not mean that Inoue was not without any critic against Confucianism itself. In fact, as Ejima Ken’ichi has shown, Inoue distinguished five qualities and six defects. The five qualities were:

- 1) The absence of supersition.
- 2) The fact to never be far from a middle position, based on a healthy common sense.
- 3) To not explain anything about supernatural world
- 4) To unify economics and politics
- 5) To go along with education.

As six defects, Inoue gave:

- 1) The vagueness concerning the notion of an individual persona.
- 2) The absence of the notion of individual persona, of ideas of rights of individual and State.
- 3) The poverty in philosophical and rational thought.
- 4) The poverty in scientific knowledge and the absence of recognition of the necessity of natural sciences.
- 5) The opposition to notion of ideal
- 6) The vagueness of notion such like “public morals,” “hygiene,” and the absence of explanation about the relation between husband and spouse.³⁶

Besides, it is very important to notice that Inoue distinguished in Confucianism its form (*keishiki*) and its content (*naiyō*).³⁷ For him, despite Confucianism existed from its beginnings as continuous

36. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Jukyō no chōsho to tanjo (ni),” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, vol.23, n.262, 1908, p. 16–24. Ejima Shin’ichi, “Kokumin dōroku ron no keisei katei ni okeru jukyō no ōyō. Inoue Tetsujirō no tatsuron ni shōten wo atete,” *Keiyō gijyū daigaku daigakuin shakaigaku kenkyū kiyō*, 65, 2007, p. 106.

37. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Jukyō no chōsho to tanjo (san),” *Tetsugaku zasshi*, vol. 24, n. 263, 1909, p. 24.

thought, a form, its content never stopped to change. Thus, we should relativize the positive attitude of Inoue toward Confucianism, and we can even recognize similarity with Nakae's atheism. Indeed, he did not critic Nakae for attacking the religions for their irrationality.³⁸ Here, it is not useless to compare the influences of Nakae and Inoue. Inoue was deeply influenced by the Orientalist Max Müller (1823–1900).

Discussing about religion and its origin, Nakae referred principally to the anthropologist and linguist André Lefèvre (1834–1904),³⁹ one of the father of scientific materialism.⁴⁰ Both Müller and Lefèvre believed in the existence of Indo-Europeans, and their views on religion were the same: both thought that religions born with the cult of natural phenomenon. The only difference is that Müller explained mythology by linguistic, while Lefèvre adopted an anthropologist point of view, position close to the generation posterior to Müller and critic to him, represented for example by Andrew Lang (1844–1912).

But this similarity is appearance more than reality, because despite the same critics Inoue did not reject radically religion as Nakae did. While Inoue praised Confucianism to be away from irrational faith, he considered that it “was not necessarily different in its form with religion.”⁴¹ Inoue found in history the reasons for which religions were fundamentally similar : for him, in the antiquity, because of the difficulty of communications, each region was a closed world, and the religions which appeared in each region assumed their specific conditions from a geographic view as well as cultural.⁴² In other words, he denied universal message to all religions. That is why he called all the religions “historical religions” (*rekishi teki shūkyō*). Inoue concluded: “the historical religions appeared in interaction with the spiritual needs of particular nations, their specificity became the basic elements of each nation, but

38. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Nakae Tokusuke shi no *Zoku ichinen yūhan wo yomu*,” *op. cit.*, p. 5 and following.

39. Miyamura Haruo, *Rigakusha Chōmin*, Tokyo, Misuzu shobō, 1989, pp. 152–8.

40. Piet Desmet, *La Linguistique naturaliste en France (1867–1922), nature, origine et développement du langage*, Leuven, Peeters, 1996, pp. 315–351.

41. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei,” *ITS*, p. 2.

42. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei,” *op. cit.*, p. 23.

apart from such specificity, they spread in all humanity.”⁴³

After a comparison between Confucianism and Christianity he concluded that despite differences in their form, they were on contrary united in their spirit. The points of convergence were first the belief in Christianity in God and in Confucianism in the Celestial Emperor.⁴⁴ Second, the emphasis on Love in Christianity and virtue of Humanity (*jin*) in Confucianism, who signified for him the same. Third, Christianity believes in Heaven and Confucianism invites to quietness of mind (*anshin ritsumei*).⁴⁵ That is why he concluded that philosophy and religion are not different and are fundamentally the same; both teach how to get happiness in life.⁴⁶

Inoue thought that Confucianism was not inferior to Christianity. That means for him Confucianism also was a universal religion. Then what was the meaning of universality in Inoue's thought? It seems that for him universality was not something exceeding the national particularities to embrace all humans but was the addition of all national particularities, without any consideration to human condition as a general notion. Besides, if Inoue wanted to exceed the “historical religions” why did he want to protect especially “Oriental philosophy” and Confucianism? This was a great contradiction in Inoue, but since he was nationalist, the survival of Confucianism was itself a goal, and he may have think that despite progress religion would not disappear.

On the opposite, Inoue thought that from now on, the importance of religions, based on the spirit of each nation, would increase. And at the same time he gave as mission to Japanese the fusion of “western and eastern civilizations” and to go past the “historical religions.” We can find here a fundamental difference between Nakae Chōmin and Inoue Tetsujirō on their conception of philosophies: Nakae ignored the nation itself and considered above all humanity. He tried to think *rigaku* beyond the religions precisely to find universality. Inoue as well

43. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei,” *op. cit.*, p. 24.

44. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei,” *op. cit.*, p. 27. In the same text, p. 58. for God Inoue uses “*Ten*” (sky) instead of “*jōtei*” (celestial emperor).

45. Inoue Tetsujirō, “Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei,” *op. cit.*, p. 27.

46. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri shinsetsu*, *op. cit.*, p. 11, 24.

as Asai thought that philosophy, morals should welcome religion and exist beside the sciences, but Nakae considered that philosophy and morals should be based on sciences and reject religion.

Thus, for Inoue the affirmation of Confucianism as philosophy was itself a goal, not the objective result of researches. We wrote: “Nowadays Buddhism is collapsing, Confucianism declining, the bushidō without energy. The old morals of our country are gradually going to the end (...) on the contrary, the morals of West has been day after day introduced and we are now in a situation where our spiritual world is close to be completely overwhelmed by it.”⁴⁷ For him, the contemporary period was also domination of materialism (in the moral sense), and the affirmation of morals was also to resist it.

At first glance Inoue seems to praise sciences but he thought that “progress of science is progress of conscience, following progress of conscience lead to the spread of freedom of thought in education, and this resulted to not believe in irrational stories. The progress of science has great consequences on the instability of society.”⁴⁸ As this sentence suggests, Inoue feared development of science because it meant development of education and through it development of political contestation against the imperial regime, based on State Shinto. Thus, Inoue was less interested by the protection of “oriental philosophy” than protection of religion itself. For him, the main reason why materialism cannot be a philosophy was the inexistence of morals in materialism but we think that in fact it is precisely because he understood that the atheist materialism of Nakae had the possibility to develop a moral without religion, that he criticized so much Nakae. Inoue used the expression of “historical religions” but he didn’t understand the historicity of religions. Despite he knew that religions appeared a certain day in the past he was unable to imagine that one day they would disappear. The religion of the future (*shōrai no shūkyō*) he wished as “ethical religion” (*rinrikyō*)

47. InoueTetsujirō, *Nihon rinri ihenjo*, quoted in Ōshima Akira, “Inoue Tetsujirō no Edo jugaku sanbusaku” ni tsuite,” *op. cit.*, p. 232.

48. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei*, *op. cit.*, 79. Inoue was thus not far with what Zeev Sternhell calls “Anti-Enlightenment” (See Zeev Sternhell, *Les Anti-Lumières*, Paris, Fayard, 2006).

was nothing more than amalgam of all religions by Japanese, as fusion between “West” and “East.”⁴⁹ Inoue and his followers wrote that Nakae’s thought was out of date, “typical of eighteen century”, but in fact they feigned to ignore the existence of French atheists like Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–1888), who in his book *L'Irreligion de l'avenir* affirmed that religion have no future.

Thus, their attacks against *Zoku ichinen yūhan* and their attempt to show that Nakae’s materialism was out of date were acting of bad faith, and Inoue and his followers probably want to use the opportunity of Nakae’s death to attack the growing materialism that atheists and socialists were claiming. Some years after the disciple of Nakae himself, Kōtoku Shūsui, created the first socialist party of Japan and was killed by the government.

Conclusion: two kokumin dōtoku ron

Nishi Amane (1829–1897), one of the first to investigate European philosophy at the beginning of Meiji period, who wrote that “all teachings are one,” had not a clear position toward religion.⁵⁰ We can consider that both Nakae and Inoue started from this point but went to very different directions: Inoue focused more on the “all teachings” and tried his best to preserve the role of religion beside science. Nakae focused more on the “one” and his research of on general principle lead him to reject religion for sciences. Our enquiry confirms the suggestion of Gerard Clinton Godart : Meiji was a period during which categories like “philosophy” and “religion” were not simply imported but have been discussed and have been given different meanings. We should add to Godart’s suggestions that political choice existed also behind the attitude toward “philosophy” and “religion,” reality that he seems to underestimate.⁵¹

Can we simply oppose Nakae and Inoue from the point of view of

49. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Rinri to shūkyō to no kankei*, *op. cit.*, p. 93 and following.

50. Mineshima Hideo, “Meiji ni okeru tetsugaku no juyō (5). Nishi Amane, Nishimura Shigeki, Kyosawa Manshi no baai,” *Waseda shōgaku*, 219, 1970, pp.82–3.

51. Gerard Clinton Godart, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

nationalism? No. In fact, Nakae was also in his own manner a nationalist. The famous sentence about the inexistence of philosophy in Japan is often cited, but few people pay attention to the remaining sentences of the chapter, which are also very important. Nakae writes:

Most people perhaps do not understand today the importance of philosophy, because it does not seem related to the health of trade, industry or finance. Yet, a country without philosophy is like an alcove without calligraphy, it undermines its prestige. Kant and Descartes are the pride of Germany and France; they are like calligraphy in the alcove. They definitely bring prestige to their fellow citizens. A people without philosophy can not undertake anything that has a deep meaning and is forced to superficiality.⁵²

The existence of artists or scholars as a symbol of national power appeared in Nakae's works throughout his life: in *Sakuron* (1875), he praised Elizabeth I of England and Henri IV of France to encourage the development of sciences.⁵³ In *A discourse of three drunkards on government* (1887), the Gentleman opposes European countries to the backward "Orient," where nobody can be compared to Newton, Lavoisier, Adam Smith and Auguste Comte.⁵⁴ From this point of view, the last sentence where Nakae says that "a people without philosophy can not undertake anything that has a deep meaning and is forced to superficiality" can be related to a passage of *Sakuron* where Nakae writes that the study of European and Chinese morals along with sciences will help Japanese to build "a paradise like no other in the world who have nothing to envy to England and France."⁵⁵

Then, can we consider that Nakae was like Inoue in favor for national morals? On this point, we should notice that Nakae translated with one of his disciple, Itō Daihachi, the handbook of morals of Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), the *Petit traité de morale* (1879). The handbook of Renouvier, partisan of laïcité, was made for college students,

52. Nakae Chōmin, *Zoku ichinen yūhan*, op. cit., p. 156.

53. Nakae Chōmin, *Sakuron*, NCZ, vol. 1, p. 25.

54. Nakae Chōmin, *Dialogues politiques entre trois ivrognes*, op. cit., p. 123.

55. Nakae Chōmin, *Sakuron*, op. cit., p. 36.

but Nakae and his disciple freely translated it, principally the passages concerning the morals of the adults, and published it with the title *Dōtokuron*.⁵⁶ Even if Nakae choose an atheist book, the fact that he wanted to make publish a book of moral for the adults show is concern to a moral for the whole of the Japanese nation. Some years ago, Ienaga Saburō suggested such hypothesis: he saw in a chapter of *Rigaku kōgen* (1887), where Nakae introduces official ideology of French Third Republic, sentences close to the Rescript of Education (*kyōiku chokugo*), the basic text of the official ideology.⁵⁷ Ienaga argued that Nakae was friend of Inoue Kowashi, which is true. The hypothesis of Ienaga Saburō is based also on the position Inoue Kowashi himself: it was him who insisted on inclusion of religious freedom in the constitution because he was suspicious of religions, and did not want the State to take over one of them, hence its interest in the Third Republic. Inoue Kowashi wanted to use Confucianism, that he did not consider as a religion, against Christianity, because of the irrational aspects of the latter. Therefore Inoue Kowashi rejected the version of Rescript developed by Nakamura Masanao (1831–1891), who was too reference to a deity.

In this context, *Dōtoku ron* seems to go in the direction of Inoue and this would mean that Nakae would support “national morals.” But this assumption is not tenable: Inoue hoped to use not religion but philosophy to nurture patriotism, and develop a national ethic that would guide the leaders of civilization to a people considered “stupid.” To Nakae, philosophy should be a way to free the people politically. He never advocated a “national ethic,” or even writes that Confucianism should be used in this sense. As noticed Yonehara Ken, it is true in its early years Nakae proposed a time to use Confucianism in public education; he was never interested in Rousseau’s notion of civil religion for the simple reason that he was an atheist. Nakae was interested in Rousseau because the

56. Itō Daihachi, *Dōtoku ron*, NCZ, vol.17, p. 257–383. While commentators have shown that Nakae contributed to the redaction of *Dōtokuron*, published with Itō Dainichi as author (Matsunaga Shōzō, “Kaidai,” NCZ, vol. 17, p. 440), they have not see that *Dōtokuron* is a free translation of Renouvier’s *Petit traité de morale. À l’usage des écoles primaires laïques* (1873).

57. Ienaga Saburō, “Kyōiku chokugo to Rigaku kōgen”, *Nihon rekishi*, mars 1953, p. 48. The hypothesis of Ienaga is repeated by the commentators of *Rigaku kōgen*, NCZ, vol. 7, “Kaidai.”

moral thought of Geneva's citizen bases human freedom on spiritual freedom and moral itself was his main concern; Nakae used Mencius Confucianism to make understandable Rousseau to Meiji Japanese.⁵⁸ Moreover in *Rigaku Kōgen* Nakae opts for materialism against all spiritualism, including the "Official French spiritualism." That is why Inoue Kowashi finally turned not toward Nakae but to Inoue Tetsujirō to finalize drafting the Rescript and use Confucianism to formulate "national morals." Inoue Tetsujirō was the inheritor of traditional Confucianism, Nakae was a free interpreter.

As Watanabe Hiroshi points out, the word *shūkyō* was used in Meiji period to translate "religion." Before the words *shūshi* or *shūmon* existed and both of them were not applied to Confucianism.⁵⁹ Watanabe Hiroshi has also suggest that all the leaders of Meiji government didn't believe themselves in any religion and used religions to control the people, exactly like their European counterparts. They decided to use worship of the emperor in the same way European kings used Christianity, mixing Confucianism and Shintō. We can consider the role of Inoue on this point was important because his analysis of Confucianism as religion and his emphasis on the unity of all religion on one side and unity of religion and philosophy on the other side constituted the academic justification for the discourse of the elites, and contribute to spread this kind of syncretism into the population through his books. Moreover, the works of Inoue played a direct role to the formation of the militaristic ideology of East Asia wars period symbolized by the book published by Ministry of Education in 1937, *Kokutai no hongi*: the mission of overcoming of Modernity that Japanese received during the war years was nothing more than the mission gave Inoue to his own studies. And at the same time, this discourse was also a tool to control the people, exactly like Meiji period. On this point the best disciple of Inoue was maybe the asianist Yasuoka Masahiro (1898–1983), because his thought was at the same time an ideology of *Japonism* (*nihonshugi*), where Confucianism was used to revive the official tennocentrism, and

58. See his preface of *Min'yaku yakukai*, *NCZ*, vol. 1, and "Shasetsu," *NCZ*, vol. 14.

59. Watanabe Hiroshi, "Kyō to inbō. Kokutai no ichi kigen," in Watanabe Hiroshi, Park Choong Seok ed., *Kankoku. Nihon. "Seiyō." Sono kōsaku to shisō henyō*, Tokyo, Keiō gijuku daigaku shuppan, 2005, p. 390.

an Asianism based on the belief of an “Oriental philosophy,” which encouraged Japanese to fusion “East” and “West” in order to free Asia as well as create a new world.⁶⁰ Of course, Inoue was not the only scholar to have spread the belief of unity between religions and between “West” and “East.” For example, at the same time the protestant leader Matsumura Kaisei (1859–1939) created his own religion following this idea.⁶¹ The historian Shiratori Kurakichi created the “Oriental Studies” (*Tōyōgaku*) and contributed through it to affirm the idea that Japanese were designated to unify “West” and “East.”⁶²

On the opposite, Nakae had no real posterity, since his only disciple, Kōtoku Shūsui, developed a different thought, introducing socialism in Japan. Materialist thought which appeared later were inspired by Marxism. Finally, neither Inoue nor Nakae had influence on philosophical studies in their country. Their conception of philosophy as tool for national development toward civilization was too much linked with preoccupations of Meiji period. It's only with Nishida Kitarō that such development appeared, and Nishida was influenced principally by zen. Both Nakae and Inoue paid attention to the existence of Chinese thought to think universality, but they analyzed it through European philosophy, due to the prestige of European culture and the belief that Europe was synonym of modernity. They didn't try a real dialogue between them. It is maybe for these reasons that the philosophical dimension of Confucianism and more generally Chinese thought is still in discussion.

60. See for example Yasuoka Masahiro, “Nihonshugi to ha nan zo ya,” *Kokui*, 5, 1932, p. 1. “Tōyō bunka no sekai teki igi,” Keimyōkai, 1931.

61. See Eddy Dufourmont, “Matsumura Kaisei et l'Eglise du Japon (Nihon kyōkai) : un asiatisme chrétien ?,” in Christian Galan et Arnaud Brotons dir., *Japon Pluriel 7. Actes du septième colloque de la Société française des études japonaises*, Paris, Picquier, 2008, pp. 159–168. Inoue was one of his supporter.

62. See Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient : Rendering Japan's Past into History*, University of California press, 1993.