

Response to Discursive Formation around "Shinto" in Colonial Korea
by Isomae Jun'ichi

In his interesting article, Isomae Jun'ichi notes, "In Japan, Shintō was defined officially as public morality" (p. 7). With the following brief remarks, I would like to take up the problem of Shintō and/as moral system, especially in its relationship to Confucianism. In so doing, I draw on the research and discussion in my book on Shintō and *kokutai* thought (*Shintō und die Konzeption des japanischen Nationalwesens (kokutai) – Der religiöse Traditionalismus in Neuzeit und Moderne Japans*, 1998).

During the later part of Meiji period (1868-1912) a new ethical system based on the now-fundamental ideology of *kokutai* thought was consciously propagated and disseminated to the Japanese people through elementary schools and military education. In order to ensure national unity and hinder the efforts toward freedom and civil rights in Japan at the time, the political leadership used means that the historian Kōsaka Masaaki summarizes under two terms: 1) "law" and 2) "morality." The nation was organized according to the ideology of familism, based on the principles of "law" and "morality." The highest expression of the legal basis of the state – the "law" – was the Constitution of the Empire of Japan that was promulgated on February 11, 1889. This document, which synthesized heterogeneous systems of government, gave the young empire a secure legal foundation for the state. But the basic state ideology was officially justified and spread among the population through the "Imperial Rescript on Education" (*kyōiku chokugo*) in 1890. The Imperial Rescript canonized the core, classical elements of the concept of the *kokutai*. While the Constitution provided the basis for the area of the "law" in the late Meiji state proposed by Kōsaka, the Imperial Rescript on Education formulated the credo of universal "morals" as a mandatory national system of morality. The Japanese nation was understood to be a literal family, connected by the bond of a theorized common lineage of divine ancestors. The unity of history and mythology, the idea of Japan as the "Land of the Gods," ultimately led to the politically motivated view of Shintō as an authoritative state ideology. Since the nation itself, on the basis of mythology and history, was understood to be a family, it found its organizing structure in the moral principles of the family and interpersonal relationships. These were based on the maxims of the originally Confucian system of individual and social ethics, which, however, in the official Japanese view, were fully reinterpreted as purely Japanese values.

It was the famous philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944), a very enigmatic person in the fields of history of ideas, who played with his 1891 work "Commentary on the Imperial Rescript [on Education]" (*Chokugo engi*) a substantial role in the intellectual and ideological development that decisively shaped the elementary mental basis of modern Japan until the 1940s. Inoue's work became the essential authority among the 600 commentaries to the Rescript. In the period between its publication and the year Meiji 40 (1907) alone, several million copies were printed across 30 editions. The work was the first instance in which the spirit of the Rescript was officially interpreted and spread to a wide audience. It marked the

beginning of the canonical interpretation of the Rescript and formed the basis for all further commentaries

Inoue provided the decisive argumentative keystone for the final Japanization and ideological acculturation of Confucianism in modern Japan. According to his interpretation, the ethical maxims of Confucianism harmonized in a natural manner with the “native” culture of Japan. Thus Inoue postulated a genuine Japanese national morality that allegedly had no further historical relationship with the “foreign” Confucian ethical system. Henceforth, this construct of hereditary Japanese national ethics (*kokumin dōtoku*) dominated the Japanese educational system until the defeat of Imperial Japan in 1945.

Inoue’s work dedicates a chapter to each of the central thematic areas of the national ideology: the basic principles of the Japanese “national morality,” the relationship between “national morality” and the *kokutai*, the importance of Shintō, *bushidō*, the characteristics of Japanese familism (*kazoku-seido*), etc. Inoue emphasizes that the principles of the Japanese national morality are found in their purest form in the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890.

Of special importance in Inoue’s thought, also expressed in his later works, is the amalgamation of Confucian morality and the Shintō concept of legitimate sovereignty, expressed solely in Imperial rule. An entire chapter of his 1912 work, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, is devoted to the relationship between “Shintō and the *kokutai*”. In this work, Inoue emphasizes the importance of Amaterasu’s mandate for the eternal rule of the Japanese imperial household (*shinchoku*) in particular. Inoue writes that the spirit of this mandate reveals the morality of the Japanese nation. It is entirely national in character (*mattaku kokkateki de arimasu*). Thus, Shintō, as Inoue states, is a “national religion” (*kokkateki shūkyō*). In the following chapter, which is devoted to the origin of Shintō, Inoue declares that Shintō and the Japanese nation both came into being at the same time; Japanese mythology possesses a unique character and forms the basis of Japanese ancestor worship. Inoue views this point as the actual – or sole – meaning of Shintō: ancestor worship in Japan – the basis of modern familism – also emerged alongside it.

However, research has since been able to prove that much of the supposedly ancient Japanese ancestor worship was the product of the national ideologues of the Meiji period, and it was Inoue who played a large role in the formation of these beliefs. In his view, the core of Shintō is ancestor worship, which in turn emerged from the mandate of Amaterasu ōmikami to the heavenly grandson Ninigi no mikoto. According to Inoue, this proves the legitimacy of the imperial household, and thus of the entire Japanese *kokutai*, both ethically and genealogically. Inoue the philosopher was always suspicious of Shintō as a religion. To him, the value of Shintō lay in the founding of the *kokutai*, not in its religious dimension. Therefore, in later works, Inoue consistently speaks of *kokutai* Shintō.

Inoue’s high estimation also of Confucianism’s significance at the time is evident in the

comments in which he suggests that the adoption of Western civilization after the Meiji Restoration was made possible only by the intellectual preparation through Confucianism during the Edo period. He writes that, although Confucianism declined in the Meiji period, its teachings found their way into the national program of education. However, Inoue remarks, this no longer occurred in the name of Confucianism itself; the teachings remained intact, but their name, and thus the consciousness of their origins, disappeared. Finally, Inoue clearly states the intellectual-historical facts: the value of Confucianism has always been to make moral education possible independent of any religion (*shūkyō wo hanarete*). How this view can be unified with *shinchoku* mysticism, toward which Inoue showed himself to be increasingly open as early as 1912, and even more so in the 1930s and '40s, ultimately remains unclear.

Inoue's remarks represented an attempt, on the one hand, to accurately portray the intellectual-historical facts, while, on the other hand, complying with the rise of *kokutai* thought in State Shintō since the late Meiji period. Inoue attempts – ultimately in vain – to establish a congruence between areas that, in truth, are irreconcilable. Just as there can be no agreement between the findings of research in archeology and early history and the orthodox time system of Shintō – and also of the *kokugaku*, which places the founding of the empire at the *shinchoku*, the divine mandate from Amaterasu ōmikami to the heavenly grandson Ninigi no mikoto – it is also impossible to harmonize the idea of the divinely founded virtue of the Japanese people and the facts of the introduction of Confucianism to Japan.

Due to his Confucian, rationalist view, Inoue, who had previously been among the most prominent pioneers of the nationalist state ideology in Japan, later became one of the persecuted. A work from the year 1926 entitled *Waga kokutai to kokumin dōtoku*, which deals with “the *kokutai* and national morality”—by that time a classic topic in Inoue's writings—was seen by the newly dominant fundamentalist Shintō ideologues as a slight to the imperial household, due to Inoue's rational interpretation of the imperial regalia. As the historians Yamazaki and Miyakawa write, following the reaction to this work, Inoue withdrew from all government offices, even from the House of Peers, to which he had been appointed by the emperor in 1925. But Yamazaki and Miyakawa neglect to mention that Inoue's attitudes ultimately did adjust to a large extent to the prevailing thought of the 1930s. At this point, he saw Shintō as the means to the moral unification of all people; thus, for Inoue, Shintō was a tool for Japan's expansion in the world. In the 1940s Inoue made a final adjustment to the spirit of the times, as Johann Nawrocki points out. Under the influence of the war and the supposed Japanese mission in Asia, he reached the conclusion that the basis of his commentary – that is, the ethical maxims of the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 – applied not only to Japan, but also formed the foundation for education in the “coming Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.”

Klaus Antoni, November 2012