Anti-Christian Ideas and National Ideology:
Inoue Enryō and Inoue Tetsujirō’s Mobilization of Sectarian History in Meiji Japan

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ABSTRACT
Christian and anti-Christian ideas played a major role in the formation of modern Japanese national ideology. This article focuses on the construction of a sectarian history of the Tokugawa state as one part of the anti-Christian ideological writing of late nineteenth-early twentieth century Japan. Academic and semi-academic writing on history and philosophy at this time was intimately connected with the major political debates which accompanied the introduction of the Imperial Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education. This article argues that these debates in many ways determined how these markers of state ideology would be interpreted in the future. Focusing particularly on the works of Inoue Tetsujirō and Inoue Enryō, this article shows how centrally historical discourses of sectarianism were deployed in the debates of the Meiji period, and how the historical, political and philosophical writings of figures like Enryō and Tetsujirō were integrated—both with each other, and with the pre-Meiji historical past.

Keywords: Nation, Modernity, Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism, Philosophy

Introduction
If we wish to establish a constitution now, first we must look for a central axis for our nation, and establish what we should say that central axis is. Without a central axis, then at times when governance is left to the disordered arguments of the masses, ordered governance will be lost, and thereby the nation lost. If we have any wish to make the nation a nation which will survive and rule the people, then we must consider this matter deeply, and plan so that the instrumentality of rule is not lost. In Europe, the seed of constitutional government has existed for around a thousand years. Not only the training of each person in this system, but the existence of religion, and the employment of religion as a central axis, deeply embedded in the minds of the people, has ultimately unified the minds of the people. In our country, however, religion does not possess this kind of power. Not one of our religions is capable of acting as the central axis of the nation. While at one point the power of Buddhism was very strong, capable of binding together people of all stations, these days that power has declined. Shinto is a...
learning based on the teachings of our imperial ancestors, but its power as a
religion to direct the minds of the people is weak. In our country, the only thing
that can be used as a central axis is the imperial house. Therefore, in the drafting
of the constitution, we must focus our minds on using this point, raising up
imperial rule, and striving that it not be restrained.¹

In 1888, possibly the most important political figure in Meiji Japan, the man credited
with authoring the Constitution of the Greater Japanese Empire, Itō Hirobumi,
opened the first meeting of the council of state called to draft the constitution with
these words. This text is probably the best example of the explicit way that the
emperor-centric ideology of modern Japan was formed in reaction to a perceived
model of the ideological role of Christianity in Europe. The importance of the
manufacture of a national ideology was clearly articulated by the political leaders
and thinkers of early Meiji Japan during the process of national construction.
Ideology was seen as a necessary tool, not only for establishing national independence,
but also, as the quote above illustrates, for the Japanese elites to maintain their control
over the “disordered masses”. Japanese elites closely examined the political systems
of contemporary Europe, and were completely open about justifying the worth of
ideas in terms of their utility in creating a unifying and exclusivist national ideology
of control based on those examples.

The construction of a modern national ideology in Japan can thereby, on the
one hand, be described as an attempt to replicate modern western constructs of
social control. Conversely, the basis of what became the content of modern national
ideology in Japan was clearly indigenous. This is clear from the fact that the basic
tenets of modern Japanese ideology were derived from Tokugawa intellectual
constructs.² In this sense, the process whereby the intellectual tools of social control
in modern Japan, or what we might otherwise refer to as modern Japan’s ideology,
was constructed, possessed an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, there was
a trend of replicating western socio-political constructs, on the other hand there was
a trend of emphasizing the continuity of certain pre-and early-modern Japanese
values and beliefs. This latter emphasis sought to replace the role that nationalist
Japanese thinkers perceived religion(Christianity) playing in Europe.

One of the important features of modern (Western) imperial nations as
observed by Japanese intellectuals in the late nineteenth century was a unifying
“national ethic” or “national religion” which played a clear ideological role in unifying
and hierarchically ordering the nation domestically, and in differentiating the nation
from others internationally.³ In late nineteenth century Europe, where many important
Japanese visited to find the model of a modern state, the prevailing way of thinking

² The intellectual roots of tennōsei ideology are often traced to Tokugawa Mito Learning scholars,
in particular Fujita Yūkoku’s defence of the primacy of imperial rule in his 1791 text Seimeiron (this can
be seen by reference to the text, for instance in Bitō Masahide et al. eds. 1973(53):13). The concept of
kokutai, of central importance in tennōsei ideology, is derived from the writings of Yūkoku’s disciple, the
most famous Mitogaku scholar, Aizawa Seishisai. Discussion of the links between the formation of the
kokutai concept and anti-Christian discourse can be found in “Mitogaku no tokushitsu” in Bitō Masahide
et al. eds. 1973:579, and in Wakabayashi 1986:143-144.