



Invité par l'Assemblée du Collège de France,
sur proposition de la professeure Anne Cheng

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Jeudi 5 juin 2025 - Conférence en anglais

Amphithéâtre Mireille Delmas-Marty — de 11h00 à 12h00

Modern Japanese Sinology As an Imperial Discourse

The Organization of Philosophy as an Institution

Inoue Tetsujirō claimed to have introduced the now widely used distinction between Western and Eastern philosophy in his Congratulatory Address to the 25th-anniversary celebration of Religious Studies at the Faculty of Letters of Tokyo Imperial University in 1930.

When the University of Tokyo was founded in 1877, it reorganized Tokyo Kaisei School and established a Faculty of Letters. The faculty was divided into two departments: the first department included history, philosophy, and political science, while the second department covered Japanese and Chinese literature. Chinese and Indian philosophy, categorized as Eastern philosophy, were initially placed within the second department. After multiple restructurings, by 1904, a three-department system of philosophy, history, and literature was established, which remained in place during the Tokyo Imperial University era. Eventually, philosophy was divided into Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy, with the latter further split into Chinese philosophy and Indian philosophy. Today we are focusing on Chinese philosophy.

Confucianism as Morality

Hattori Unokichi was a leading scholar of Chinese philosophy then. His primary concern was Confucianism, which he argued was not a religion but a system of morality. His perspective was shaped by contemporary developments in China, where Kang Youwei and others sought to establish *Kongjiao* (Confucian Religion), attempting to redefine Confucianism as a formal religion akin to Christianity. This movement, initiated during the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898 and briefly implemented in the early Republic of China (1910s), aimed to make Confucianism the spiritual foundation of modern China but ultimately failed to gain broad acceptance.

Hattori strongly opposed this movement, insisting that Confucianism should remain a moral philosophy devoid of religious elements. He criticized Kang Youwei and his followers for reinterpreting Confucius' statement «*I have long prayed*» to claim that he engaged in religious prayer. In contrast, Hattori argued that Confucius entirely rejected prayer. According to Hattori, Confucianism—or what he called *Kōkyō*—was not a religion but a secular ethical system.

Illustration : *monument for Hattori Unokichi.*

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