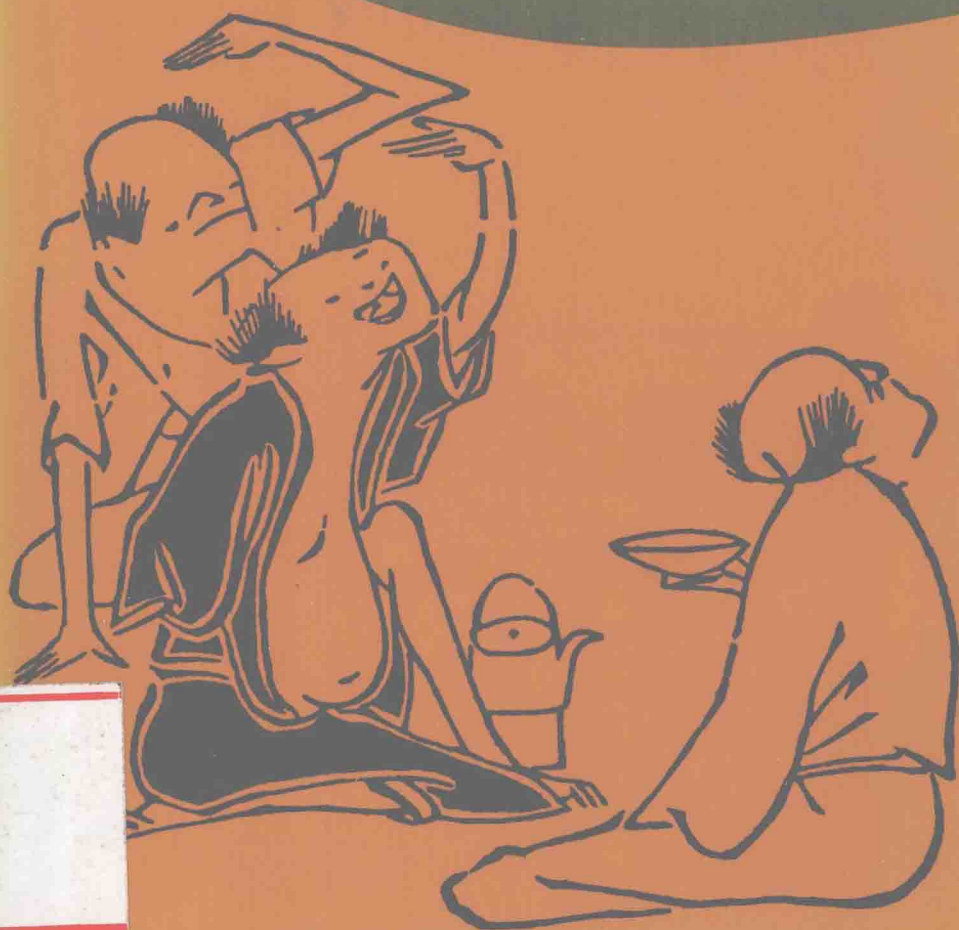


A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government

by NAKAE CHŌMIN

translated by
NOBUKO TSUKUI



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New York • WEATHERHILL • Tokyo

Publication of this book was assisted by
a grant from the Japan Foundation

UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS
Japanese Series

This book has been accepted in the Japanese Series of the Translations Collection of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Frontispiece photograph of Nakae Chōmin
courtesy of Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.

First edition, 1984

Published by John Weatherhill, Inc., of New York and Tokyo, with editorial offices at 7-6-13 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106, Japan. Copyright © 1984, by Nobuko Tsukui; all rights reserved. Printed in Korea.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data: Nakae, Chōmin, 1847-1901./A discourse by three drunkards on government./ Translation of: San suijin keirin mondō./1. Political science. I. Tsukui, Nobuko. II. Hammond, Jeffrey A. III. Title./JA69. J3N31813 1984 320 84-3666/ISBN 0-8348-0192-2

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FOREWORD

When the *Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* (*Sansuijin Keirin Mondō*) appeared in 1887, Meiji Japan was nearing a turning point. An authoritarian government was completing work on a constitution that had been promised for the end of the decade. This charter, the first of its kind to be drawn up outside the Western world, would bring to completion two decades of study and experimentation with governmental forms. Advocates of representative government, who styled themselves the Movement for Freedom and People's Rights, had called for a share in power since 1874. Their awareness had been quickened by a flood of treatises and translations that related representative institutions to national strength. Nakae Chōmin had played a major role in that movement through the vigor and the elegance of his renditions of eighteenth-century French political discourse, in which he blended Confucian terminology and values with the thought of Rousseau. Other writers and translators harked to English utilitarianism and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer to call for sweeping changes in Japanese culture and values to conform with the laws of social progress. Although it was clear that the constitution would be granted by the authorities and not wrested from them, Nakae and other intellectuals had spent almost a de-

cade discussing ways in which it might nevertheless be transformed to serve as a challenge and spur to freedom rather than remain a passive accommodation to authority.

The international environment posed equally challenging problems. Japan's relative position in the competitive world of power politics seemed to be deteriorating. France had recently dealt China a humiliating defeat. In Korea, Japanese liberal-movement activists' efforts to affect change had been so firmly repulsed by Korean conservatives that China had been the gainer, and the Japanese liberals, who included among their number some of Nakae's old friends in the study of French, were temporarily out of action. The Meiji government itself was trying to negotiate recovery of its sovereignty through abolition of the unequal treaties with which it had been saddled, but within months revelation of the compromises the government was prepared to make would rekindle political party agitation and bring Nakae back into the political arena.

The setting was thus tremulous with anticipation and apprehension. Nakae's treatise had considerable popularity when it appeared. It experienced a second and perhaps even greater surge of interest sixty years later, after Japan's defeat in World War II. It is not difficult to account for either period of interest. Nakae focused much of his discourse on the issues of pacifism and national defense, topics that were no less compelling in the second half of the twentieth century, after Japan's postwar course had been set by men who decided that national well-being was more important than national strength. Nakae would have agreed.

Nakae's career places the dilemmas of the Meiji intellectual into sharp focus. He knew, had profited from, and indeed was a product of the Meiji government's concern with the transmission of Western learning. He had been sent by the authorities of his native fief of Tosa to study English and French at Nagasaki in pre-Meiji years, and there he had

formed an admiration for the hero of the Meiji Restoration, Sakamoto Ryōma. From Nagasaki he made his way to Yokohama, where he acted as translator for the French minister and came to know early Meiji pioneers of Western learning like Mitsukuri Rinshō, Ōi Kentarō, and Fukui Gen'ichirō. Sponsored by the government as a special student of French in Tokyo, he appealed personally to Ōkubo Toshimichi to be assigned as a government-funded student in France. He reached Lyon as a student attached to the Iwakura mission of 1871 and remained there until 1874. After his recall he continued in government employment, first as an educator and then as a secretary. While he organized his own academy for the study of French (1874–86), he continued to rely on government sponsorship for the translation and publication of numerous works on French law and institutions. The Meiji Constitution of 1889 provided Nakae with further possibilities for public service; he was elected from Osaka's Fourth District (with 1,352 of the 2,041 votes cast) in Japan's first national election. Professor Kuwabara notes that Nakae could describe Japan's goal as "the creation of a Europeanized nation in Asia" in language almost identical to that used by government leaders.¹ Yet there were also important differences between Nakae and the Meiji leaders. Nakae's values remained explicitly Confucian, he had grave doubts about the need for burdensome military spending, and he believed in the importance of fully representative government.

Consequently Nakae also had a deep suspicion and distrust of his government; he knew from his Western reading that freedoms granted from above were less secure than those won from below. It seemed to him that Japan's problem was to transform the government's gift into the people's achievement. His efforts in this regard, through translations and through essays, were frequently obstructed by the Meiji government. The *Oriental Liberty Newspaper*

(*Tōyō Jiyu Shimbun*), established in 1881 with Nakae as editor and the court noble Saionji Kimmochi as president, ceased publication when the throne ordered Saionji to resign. Nakae mocked this prohibition in sardonic terms as "heaven's will," and risked prosecution for even this oblique reference to the sovereign. Nakae's editorials for the Liberal Party newspaper also invited censorship, and later, in 1887, his criticism of the government's apparent leniency on treaty reform saw him banished from the environs of the capital city of Tokyo.

Nakae's ambivalence toward his government was very nearly matched by his disillusion with the leaders of the movement for representative government. He had contempt for what seemed to him the short-sighted willingness of Itagaki Taisuke and Gotō Shōjirō to compromise with the ruling oligarchy at key points in Meiji political history. When his efforts to organize party representatives in the first Diet to demand procedural and substantive changes in constitutional practice were unsuccessful, and when the Tosa men compromised with the government instead, he resigned his Diet seat only three months after assuming it, with the contemptuous explanation that he feared his alcoholism would hinder his performance.

Nakae's subsequent efforts to make his way in the private sector were unfailingly disastrous. A series of business ventures which ranged from railroads and lumbering in Hokkaido to publishing firms ended in failure. His self-deprecation extended to establishment of a brothel, which he defended as no less appropriate to ordinary Japanese than the more elegant, and less criticized, arrangements that were made for powerful officials on the geisha circuit.

Indifferent to the opinions of the establishment of his day, Nakae was nevertheless a genuinely patriotic Meiji man. He was concerned for Japan's future in a day when the nation was inundated with Western thought and theory, coerced

by unequal treaties with the Western powers, and bordered by ineffective states on the Asian continent. His objections to unthinking acceptance of Western theory can be seen in the answers his *Discourse* makes to the Gentleman of Western Learning, whose utopian conception of international relations governed by a Panglossian view of evolutionary improvement bears so little relation to the world of the 1880s in which he lived. Nakae relented in his criticism of reformer Gotō Shojirō long enough to compose the manifesto of the league Gotō formed in 1887 denouncing the government's proposed compromises with the Western powers. In turn, Asia seemed for him an object lesson and at times an opportunity. Although he recognized the error and danger of liberal activists' efforts to sponsor change in Korea on their own, his friendship with Ōi Kentarō, who had been at the forefront of that movement, was among his warmest. The discourse of his Champion of the East, ultimately unsatisfactory and superficial, undoubtedly relates to that contact with Ōi and to Nakae's participation in the league formed by Konoe Atsumaro in 1900 to focus public attention on the dangers posed by Russian activity in north-east Asia. "If we defeat Russia," Nakae told Kōtoku Shūsui, "we expand to the continent and bring peace to Asia; if we lose, our people will awaken from their dream."²

So complex, ironic, and often sardonic a figure is difficult to structure and to analyze. The inconclusive nature of Nakae's *Discourse* speaks revealingly of the conflicting tides of ideas in which Nakae's writings played so large a role. While an intimate of the great of Meiji society, he also sided with the outcastes of Osaka, the Ainu of Hokkaido, and, indeed, with subject peoples everywhere. Fully aware of the problems the Meiji constitutional structure might bring, he nevertheless hoped that patience and education could make it a vehicle for the "god of evolution" and the future of Japan. Resolutely opposed to slavish imitation of nine-

teenth-century Western intellectual fashions, he found more in common with the questioning of the eighteenth-century philosophers whose writings reinforced his own aversion to organized religion. In his last work, written while he lay dying of cancer of the throat, he credited the ultimate success of Japan's modernization to the Japanese people's practicality and freedom from religious dogma.³

Sixty years later, as defeat in the Pacific War produced the results that Nakae, in 1900, had predicted would follow from defeat by Russia, his *Discourse's* discussion of utopian pacifism had new relevance to Japan's struggle to reconcile the prohibition on armaments of Article IX of the new constitution with the realities of the international environment. It is not difficult to imagine the ironic smile, or perhaps toast, with which Nakae might have responded to the assurance of Tosa's Yoshida Shigeru and his followers that, although the new constitution clearly outlawed war as an instrument of national policy, common sense nevertheless required some provision for national defense. Thus in some sense the argument between the Gentleman of Western Learning and the Champion of the East has been going on for almost a century. That is why Nakae so often seems to speak as a contemporary.

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¹ Kuwabara Takeo, *Japan and Western Civilization* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1983), p. 144.

² Quoted by Kōno Kenji, *Nakae Chōmin* (*Chūō Kōron, Nihon no Meichō*, vol. 36, Tokyo, 1970), p. 36. See also the dissertation by Margarat B. Dardess, "The Thought and Politics of Nakae Chōmin (1847-1901)" (Columbia University, 1973), which in-

cludes an appendix translation of the *Discourse* that was also issued as Occasional Paper No. 10 of the Western Washington State College in 1977, for further discussion of Nakae's views of China.

³ Kuwabara, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

PREFACE

As a Japanese who has lived for an equal number of years in Japan and in the United States, I have been increasingly interested in the cross-cultural studies produced over the past two decades. Although my undergraduate and graduate majors were in American and British literature, my subsequent teaching and research have led me further into studying the relations and interactions of Occidental and Oriental cultures. My examination of the American poet Ezra Pound's work on the Japanese Noh drama, published in 1983 as *Ezra Pound and Japanese Noh Plays*, is one product of this pursuit. The completion of the present translation of Nakae Chōmin's work marks a deeply rewarding culmination of my professional and scholarly examination of two very different cultures.

When *Sansuijin Keirin Mondō* (A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government) first came to my attention as a possible translation project, my knowledge of its author Nakae Chōmin was very limited. Moreover, the general characterization of this work as a classic statement of the political philosophy of the Meiji era made me hesitate to undertake its translation because my specialization is in neither Japanese history nor political science. At the same time, however, my curiosity about the book and its intriguing title

was aroused. Reading Chōmin's book in the original was an unforgettable experience. I discovered a unique, powerful, intellectually stimulating work written by a philosopher turned political activist who had a strong sense of his mission as a purveyor of solutions to the problems faced by Japan of the Meiji era. I found myself fascinated with the book in every respect: its dramatic setting with three masterfully drawn characters; its gripping, dynamic style of writing; its penetrating insight into the political, philosophical, and historical characteristics of various nations of Europe, Asia, and America; and, above all, its timelessness. The *Discourse* deals with the future course of Japan and its options for survival. These most fundamental problems that faced Japan of the 1880s are still very much in evidence today. By the time I finished reading the book, I knew I wanted to translate it, not as a text meant exclusively for students and specialists in Japanese history or political science but as an extraordinary work to be enjoyed and appreciated by a wider audience in the English-speaking world.

Although an earlier, abridged English translation of this work exists in the form of an occasional paper, the present volume offers a complete and authentic version of the Japanese text; the translation presented here reflects the book's stature not only as a historical document or a treatise on political philosophy but as a literary masterpiece as well. I am convinced that this work will have a wide appeal to Western readers, who will discover that its author was very much at home with European culture—not only its history, philosophy, politics, and economics, but also its customs and manners, even to the point of having his characters enjoy a particular brand of cognac well known in Europe at the time. Chōmin's familiarity with Western culture is especially impressive because he wrote the book