

Nakae Chomin's World of Thought and Ideology of the Meiji Period through the "Gentleman" Character in "A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government (Sansuijin Keirin Mondo)"

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[Doi: 10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p334](https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p334)

Approved: 06 December 2023
Posted: 09 December 2023

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Cite As:

Yazici Y. (2023). *Nakae Chomin's World of Thought and Ideology of the Meiji Period through the "Gentleman" Character in "A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government (Sansuijin Keirin Mondo)"*. ESI Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esipreprint.12.2023.p334>

Abstract

From the second half of the 19th century, many intellectuals of Meiji Japan served as a reference for us in order to understand the roadmap of Japan which has revealed an important modernization story under the name of the Meiji Restoration. One of the enlightened thinkers we come across at this point is Nakae Chōmin. Nakae Chōmin, (1847-1901) contributed to the establishment of concepts such as freedom, equality, democracy, and constitutionalism in the political memory of Japan through his articles. At the same time, he created a concept memory in Japanese political thought and brought new concepts to the Japanese language.

In this study, ideology analysis was made in "Sansuijin Keirin Mondō (A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government)" which is called Nakae Chōmin's masterpiece and conveys the ideas of the Meiji period to the reader through different characters. In this work, written with the Socratic dialogue method, the understanding of modernism, idealism, pacifism, freedom, equality, democracy etc. was examined by focusing on the "Gentleman", one of the characters described as Nakae Chōmin's alter ego. At the conclusion of the study, we have determined that a great majority of the ideas put forward by the character of "Gentleman" are also included in Nakae Chōmin's intellectual framework, especially in the liberal views before 1891.

Keywords: Nakae Chōmin, Liberalism in Japan, Freedom and People Rights Movement, Meiji Period, Meiji ideology.

Introduction

Although we encounter various answers to the question of what ideology is, we can express it as 'a set of political, legal, scientific, philosophical, religious, moral, aesthetic thoughts that constitute a political or social doctrine, shaping the actions of a government, a party, or a group.'¹ According to another view the value judgments, existing in societies, are element of the culture, lifestyle and ideology of that society. Therefore, these elements shape the ideology of the society in time (Dalyan, 2016). Therefore, we would like to emphasize that the question of whether all cultural elements, including literature, have an ideological dimension, led us to this study. In this regard, we are faced with the fact that when analyzing a literary work, elements such as the author's world of thought, values and the social and political structure of the period cannot be ignored. For this reason, it is essential that we consider the ideological-historical background of the period in which the work, which we consider as the main sample in our study, was written.

The first years of the Meiji era, known as Japan's modernization period, focused on the research and discussion of Western ideas and theories. Japanese intellectuals tried to understand the content of the restoration through their research and readings and also tried to create an intellectual infrastructure of modernization. In fact, when we look at the Edo Period for the origins of the Meiji modernization, ideologists such as Ōtsuki Gentaku (1757-1827) and Aizawa Seishisai (1782-1863) who believed that Japan was one of the world's most important "empires" thanks to its own culture were among the important thinkers on the road to modernization (Erkin, 2001). One of the factors affecting Japanese modernization is geography. While its proximity to the continent facilitates cultural interaction, being an island country enabled the development of a homogeneous social structure and sense of identity (Scalapino, 1970). Japan's modernization was built on key concepts: "wa-和" in preserving national identity and "yō - 洋" in terms of Western culture, known as "wakonyōsai - 和魂洋才" which signifies the Japanese spirit and Western techniques. Another concept that indicates the phenomenon of Westernisation is "bunmei kaika - 文明開化 civilisation and enlightenment" (Yazıcı, 2022). Compared to the Chinese and Ottoman modernization programs, it involves more radical changes despite the preservation of traditional values (Esenbel, 2015). Japanese political modernization which focused on discussion issues such as the constitution,

¹ <https://sozluk.gov.tr/> (16. 10. 2023).

parliament and political parties was especially nourished by the ideology of Nationalism. At this point, the main goal of the modernization pioneers is to struggle with Western hegemony, defend national rights and be among the great powers in the political arena (Hackett, 1972). At the same time, liberal thought movements such as freedom, equality, human rights and democracy have remained in the people's memory through the delegations and experts sent to the West. When we look at the political modernization process within the scope of our study, we see that the intellectual and political figures of the period desired development and change, not a revolution. While at first, Western concepts and ideas were taken as they were, gradually with the critical perspective of the thinkers of Meiji Period, concepts such as "sovereignty" and "constitution" were derived in their own language to correspond to the Japanese thought, and also political thoughts began to be examined according to the social structure (Scalapino, 1970). Nakae Chōmin, one of the important thinkers who came to the fore in creating Japan's political road map and concepts memory in this period, is the focus of this study.

Nakae Chōmin, who lived between 1847 and 1901, was a prominent thinker, journalist, politician, and writer, and was also acknowledged as a literary figure in some works. He left significant traces in the memory of the Japanese people through his writings during the period when Japan transitioned from about 250 years of seclusion policy to the modernization process. He wrote about subjects such as freedom, equality, democracy, and individual rights, presenting an important political conceptual map in Japan. Having received education in France for four years, Nakae Chōmin was heavily influenced by Rousseau, and translated Rousseau's work "The Social Contract" into Japanese. Hence, he is referred to as the "Rousseau of the East." In addition, thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Mirabeau are some of the names that influenced Chōmin's thoughts. Upon his return from France, he supported the Freedom and Human Rights Movement in Japan through his writings. Particularly within the scope of this movement, there are studies showing that the intellectual infrastructure acquired in France paved the way for popular sovereignty in Japan (Shimizu, 2019). We have also determined that these ideas intersected with nationalist thoughts and organizations in the following years. For this reason, Nakae Chōmin made an East-West comparison that emphasized Eastern morality against the logical and theoretical West, and revealed his own political parameters by displaying a nationalist view nourished by liberal values. Therefore, he has characteristic discourses and thoughts in Japan's political history. An important point that should not be overlooked when analyzing Nakae Chōmin's ideology is his commitment to Confucian thought. With the idea that there was a moral superiority in Japanese society based on Confucian

values, he argued that true democracy could be achieved with freedom and morality. At this point in Chōmin's writings, the discourse that Japan should act as the leader of the East against the West due to its moral superiority draws attention (Yazıcı, 2022).

Within this framework, the subject of our study is the ideology analysis in Nakae Chomin's seminal work "A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government (Sansuijin Keirin Mondō)". Our research focuses on the concepts of freedom, equality, democracy, pacifism, and Westernisation as presented through the character "Gentleman" one of the three characters in the work. The most important point here is that the ideologies present in "Gentleman", also defined as Nakae Chōmin's alter ego, are intensely present both in Nakae Chōmin and among the thinkers of the Meiji Period. In addition, when we start from the fact that discourse is essential in ideology analysis and the concepts in the work guide us to understand the ideology put forward by the author. Therefore, the main problematics of the study are:

Which ideologies did Nakae Chomin try to convey to society through the "Gentleman" character in the work?

What is the reflection of these ideologies in society?

What are the basic concepts that reflect the social ideology of the author and the period?

Methods

In our study, the mentality analysis method, which also includes ideology, was used. The concept of mentality, which we encounter with definitions such as "beliefs that individuals carry in common with their groups" and "the sum of the values and beliefs that the person maintains in his actual behavior", was first used by Lucien Lévy Bruhl in the meaning of "la mentalité primitive – primitive mentality". However, today, the concepts of "zeitgeist, way of thinking, belief systems, world of meanings, cognitive maps" are also used in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Göçer, 2019). Aktaş (Aktaş, 2007) states that Foucault's "discourse" and Althusser's "ideology" concepts can be met with "mentality". Ülgener divides his mentality studies into two parts: In the first one, the historical background of the period in question is discussed (Dalyan, 2016). When we look at the relationship between literature and mentality analysis, literary texts are means of expression that conveys human behavior, the social and ideological structure of the period, and human relations through language. Various questions asked to the text pave the way for basic ideologies in societies, mentality analysis and reaching the people of the period. Because the method, followed in mentality studies, is understanding and interpretation. Sabri Ülgener and Besim F. Dellaloğlu can be given as examples of

important names who do mentality studies in Turkey through literature (Göçer, 2019).

The purpose of mentality analysis in literature is to understand the period in which the text was written, through the structure and expression in the text. Thus, the mentality of the period it represents can be understood through the text. In the mentality analysis method, the elements we pay attention in the text are structure and narrative elements such as people, time, plot, concepts and discourses.

Discussion

The basic example of our study is *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* (Sansuijin Keirin Mondō), which is considered Nakae Chōmin's masterpiece and conveys the ideologies of the Meiji period to the reader through different characters. This work, written in 1887, corresponds to the period when Japan was in great change and transformation. Additionally, Nobuko (Nobuko, 1984) stated that this work attracted attention even during World War II due to its pacifist and national defense approach. Another importance of this work is that it is not known through which character Nakae Chōmin conveys his thoughts. With the method he applied, the author mirrored the social ideologies of the Meiji Period as well as his own ideas. Additionally, when we look at the Japanese writing of the names of the characters in Chōmin's work, we see the ideologies of the Meiji period in their names: Gentleman (Yōgaku-shinshi - 洋学紳士) Westernisation; Hero (Gōketsu-kun - 豪傑君) Nationalism; Mr. Nankai (Nankai Sensei 南海先生) Southern Expansion Doctrine. There are opinions that the ideologies of these three characters were present in the defenders of the Freedom and Human Rights Movement of the period and were also Nakae Chōmin's alter ego (Hiromichi, 1993). Because the ideas of idealism and expansionism are blended in human rights defenders of samurai origin, and interestingly, the name that combines all these ideologies in a single person is Nakae Chōmin (Yazıcı, 2022). At the same time, Nakae Chōmin also offered self-criticism in a sense by writing his own ideas directly in the upper notes used as a literary writing method in the work (Yamada, 2015). This work, which is considered one of Chōmin's best-known works in the world, discussed the political ideology in Japan as well as how international relations should be. In this work, written with the Socratic dialogue method, the understanding of modernism, idealism, pacifism, freedom, equality, democracy etc. was examined by focusing on the "Gentleman", one of the characters described as Nakae Chōmin's alter ego. The Socratic dialogue method includes long monologues rather than mutual question-answers, and this type of discussion is also seen as a philosophical discussion method

among priests in Japan. In this method, there are two applications: "Irony stage" and "midwifery stage". Initially, while the discussion method is followed in the irony stage, induction is provided in the thoughts in the second stage. The advantages of this method are that the ideas can be conveyed clearly with their pros and cons, the speaker can express his/her ideas convincingly through rhetoric, and different ideas can be put forward freely and equally because they can be discussed in the same environment (Yazıcı, 2022).

The focus of our research is the ideas of freedom, equality, democracy, pacifism and the understanding of Westernisation presented through the "Gentleman" character in the work. The "Gentleman" character is described as a Western-style dressed, long-nosed, articulate, moral, and rational individual. Reflections of Rousseau's philosophy, much like in Nakae Chomin, can be observed in this character. This character, which is completely pro-democracy, has put forward the ideal of absolute pacifism with the idea of demobilizing the armies and disarmament, and the defense of brotherhood of the Asian peoples within the framework of the ideal of freedom and equality in the struggle with the West. One of the clear statements in the work that shows this is as follows:

"Is there a reason why disregarding moral principles, weakening the country's economy by gathering thousands of armies and killing innocent people for empty ambitions. I wonder that civilized Europeans will be truly ashamed when a small country advancing on the path of civilization suddenly leaps from Asia and is placed on the borders of freedom and philanthropy, when it destroys castles, melts down its weapons and turns its military ships into merchant ships, reaches the teachings of civilization by demilitarising its soldiers, studies the techniques of its factories and becomes the children of pure philosophy ? " (Chōmin, 1984, p. 182).

On the other hand, he describes the "so-called barbarism" of the East, expressed by the West, as the real civilization. Here, we are of the opinion that the "Gentleman" character does not actually advocate strictly Westernisation and does not have pure Western admiration discourses. In support of this, he described the peoples of Europe as "countries that have gone crazy", boasting of their military power, pursuing a policy of aggression, and trying to dominate the world. In line with the idea of Asianism, we see that Asian people base their way of liberation from Western hegemony on freedom, equality and moral progress to be learned from the West. In particular, the idea of brotherhood and equality of Asian people leads us to the idea we call "Asianism based on the sense of we" in Nakae Chōmin. Regarding freedom and equality, the idea that freedom cannot be fully realized unless the principle of equality is established in constitutionalist systems is in line with the views of Rousseau and the liberal

thinkers of the Enlightenment period. "Gentleman", who attaches importance to science along with politics, argues that when science and political progress are achieved, the principle of freedom will become the purpose of all actions. While emphasizing basic political and human rights in the constitutionalism system, he intersects with Rousseau in the idea of general will and with Montesquieu in the idea of separation of powers. He also underlined that when a constitutionalist system is adopted, people will gain various freedoms such as the right to participate in government, the right of property, the right to publication, belief and speech. At this point, he reiterated his emphasis that the principle of equality is the most important element that completes freedom and also rights and freedoms are directly proportionate to each other. The most important emphasis on the principle of equality in the work is in the following sentence: *"Everyone with soul and body is equal. Where is the difference between Europe and Asia?"* (Chōmin, 1984, p. 207).

The understanding of freedom, which is intensely revealed through the character of "Gentleman" in the work, is reflected both as a principle of basic human rights and as the basis for the development of the Western great powers in fields such as industry, commerce, military, science, art and literature. We see that he describes the principle of freedom with the metaphor of "ferment" as follows:

" All activities in society are like yeast. No matter how good the ingredients are in sake or beer, if the ferment is bad, the ingredients will sink to the bottom and it will not be possible to obtain alcohol. In countries governed by despotism, the situation is like sake without ferment" (Chōmin, 1984, p. 192). Expressing the slogan of "enrich the country, strengthen the army" along with the spirit of freedom and progress, "Gentleman" thinks that with these principles, a spiral development will come in many fields such as economy, science, political thought, art, agriculture, industry and social welfare. Here we see the reflection of the ideology that guided the Meiji modernization program. While defending this idea in the work, references to Enlightenment thinkers such as Condorcet and Diderot reflect the sources from which Nakae Chōmin's ideology is nourished. Reaching the principle of political progress from here, the author expressed the ideal of returning the "king-slave" understanding to the "government-people" system and explained the relationship between the ruler and the ruled with Confucian principles. At this point, although the importance of Western teachings is emphasized through the character, a commitment to Confucius-based Asian roots can be seen. However, an East-West comparison has been made here regarding the fact that although Asian nations have these values, they remain behind due to their lack of progress in terms of freedom.

As in Nakae Chōmin's thoughts, we see an emphasis on moral Asian superiority in the character of "Gentleman". With the expression *"Why*

shouldn't abstract morality be our weapon?" (Chōmin, 1984, p. 182), it is stated that the sense of morality, inherent in civilization, is the most important power for Asian nations. In addition to the sense of morality, the view that politicians should not lose the spirit of progress towards freedom and equality was also emphasized. With the examples given from world history, the way to protect societies from uprisings and revolutions was found in politicians with a spirit of progress and political foresight.

Regarding pacifism, he stated that small and weak countries should produce self-protection and self-sufficiency policies in response to the Western great powers using their economic development to obtain colonies in Asia and Africa. He defined this policy as follows:

"This policy is to establish a system of equality, give people their rights, demolish castles and destroy ammunition, not commit murder against other countries, and turn the whole country into a garden of morality and a field of knowledge" (Chōmin, 1984, p. 211-212).

This idea, conveyed through the character in the work, is compatible with Chōmin's understanding of foreign policy based on morality, faith and freedom. The most important point he emphasizes about pacifism is his reference to Abbe de-Saint Pierre's theory of peace and Kant's book "Perpetual Peace". He attributes the support and development of Saint Pierre's theory by important figures such as Kant and Rousseau due to the fact that they are people with pure reason suitable for philosophy. Although he supported the theory of world peace, he found Saint Pierre's thought incomplete in that it was an extreme theory that all countries in the world should stop war and transition to democracy for peace. Another important point of our research is the identification of concepts that reflect the ideology in the work. The concepts that reflect the liberal thoughts seen in both Nakae Chōmin and the thinkers and politicians of the Meiji period through the character of "Gentleman" are as follows:

Liberal thoughts scheme

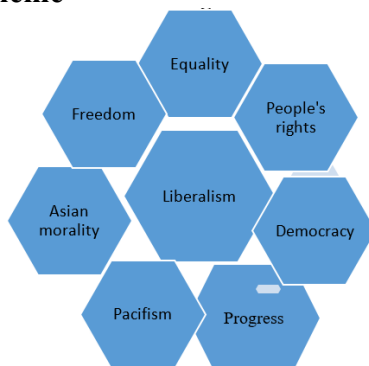


Figure. 1

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the study, we have determined that a great majority of the ideas put forward by the character of “Gentleman” are also included in Nakae Chōmin’s intellectual framework, especially in the liberal views before 1891. In addition, we see that Chōmin places political concepts such as freedom, equality, democracy, human rights and progress in the reader's mind through the Gentleman character. Finally, the discourses of unity and brotherhood put forward by Nakae Chōmin in line with the ideology of Liberal Nationalism and the ideal of freedom of Asian people, built on pacifist and liberal concepts, are also detected in the "Gentleman" character. For this reason, through the character in the work, we are faced with an ideology scheme that starts with Liberal discourses and then intersects with Nationalist ideology.

Ideology scheme

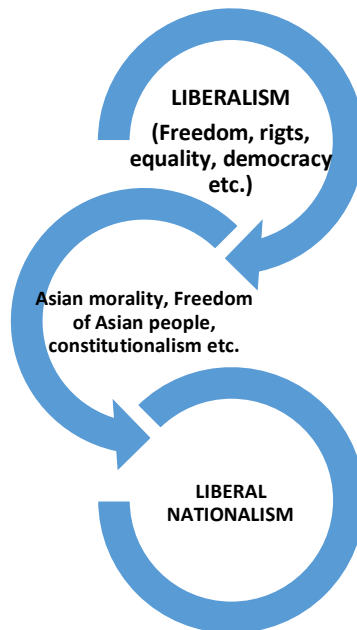


Figure 2

Funding Statement:

The authors did not obtain any funding for this research.

Data Availability:

All the data are included in the content of the paper.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors reported no conflict of interest.

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