

[Japan Society-New York: Documents Project. (1800-1890, economics)]

Document 6: “This is truly stupid!” “Solitary Thoughts” (*Hitori kangae*) Tadano Makuzu, 1818

I have written this entire text without any sense of modesty or concern about being unduly outspoken. Let me explain why. People customarily humble themselves and seek to avoid appearing overly assertive, but when I came to this place [Sendai in northern Honshu], I resigned myself to my life being over. . . . With this in mind, I feel neither pain nor irritation at being criticized by others. Please read this with that understanding. . . .

There is a rhythm generated between heaven and earth that accords with the number of days and nights. Why is it, I had wondered, that those who seem to violate the way of the sages often succeed in this world, while those who try to be righteous do not? I came to realize that it is because righteous people tend to lag behind the rhythm of heaven and earth, while those whose behavior is mixed keep in time with the rhythm. The reason why some people do not succeed, no matter how much they try, is because they do not follow the rhythm of heaven and earth. There is nothing strange about this. . . .

People may think that the way of the sages (*hijiri no michi*), having been used for public affairs since ancient times, is indeed a true way. In fact, however, it is simply a system made by human beings and borrowed from China. . . .

Everywhere in today’s world, warriors who have used up their resources have no recourse for survival other than to bow and scrape before usurers, imploring them, however distasteful it may be, for loans. That those shysters should condescend to people in addition to charging interest is most deplorable. Townspeople raise the price of goods day by day and month

by month even as they try to lower their quality, while peasants plot year by year to reduce their rice taxes. Caught in the midst of this disordered world, warriors remained unaware of this for years, until eventually these shysters succeeded in draining off from them as much gold and silver as they could. Nowadays, having become dependent on townspeople to be their moneylenders, certain domanical lords let them take control of their sources of income. They live their days relying on the power of the townspeople. Isn't it as though the townspeople with their army of money have taken the lords captive?

Having been born into this disordered world, dominated by the strife over money, people are naturally influenced by its spirit. Warriors consider it valorous to receive an increase in stipend or reward and to pass their wealth on to their descendants. But why don't the lords realize that this means that with each generation they divide more of their land among their subordinates and pass impoverishment on to their posterity. . . . Would that they were aware that the enemies coveting their wealth are everywhere, and returned fire in all directions! Why cannot they avoid poverty by noiselessly and invisible shifting wealth in their own direction?

I would humbly like to tell this to our lords. . . .

It is said that Osaka is the place that controls the source of gold and silver and oversees their circulation. No doubt the old contentious habits remain in the hearts of Osaka people: driven by base passion, they enjoy making their own region flourish and enriching themselves by exploiting the people from the Kantō region. Is this not dreadful!

Since there are no books in Japan that serve as appropriate teaching about our country's ways, from the time people begin to study they rely on Chinese books. It is thus futile to study a little bit with the idea of refining one's way of thinking since then the ideas one already has become useless. And if one studies seriously, one will become hesitant and discouraged. This is

because one is learning another country's rhythm. I wish there were works that could serve as the teachings of our own country.

When people were still backward, there may have been some point to making use of the teachings of another country. But in this fine age when even those of low station have the aspiration to learn, why should we rely on the works of another country? Only when we give priority to developing perceptive minds that understand without being told what it is that makes the gods of our country gods, will all things be as they should be. Is not such perceptivity the way of our country? Could there be another country where people leave the matters of their own country aside to study the books of other lands?

I often heard my father lament that our people don't know our country in its entirety, and that they are wise in small matters but stupid about big ones. The rise and fall of commodity prices, being an important public matter, should be handled by the government; instead it is left up to the townspeople, so prices rise and goods decline in quality. Since the income from warriors' holdings is fixed, they are open to attack and seizure by townspeople. Warriors don't even have the means to return fire in this battle. This is truly stupid!

Source. "Solitary Thoughts: A Translation of Tadano Makuzu's *Hitori Kangae*." *Monumenta Nipponica* 56, No. 1 (Spring 2001). Trans. Janet R. Goodwin, Bettina Gramlich-Oka, Elizabeth A. Leicester, Yuki Terazawa, Anne Walthall. 21-36.

Context.

Tadano Makuzu's 1818 treatise was remarkable in many ways. She was a woman, writing in an era where public life was for men alone. She questioned the Confucian classics that stood at the

foundation of Japan's social structure, calling Confucianism a foreign doctrine made by humans rather than a divine or normative truth. And she criticized the orthodox view that warriors were supposed to rule but eschew the pursuit of wealth. Warriors, she argued, should understand the way the world actually worked rather than following old and irrelevant doctrines; they should themselves seek to make money.

Tadano's iconoclasm sprang from the unique qualities of her life. Born in a physician's family in Edo (present day Tokyo), she saw her family's fortunes decline as a result of political changes in the government. Then, she experienced a failed marriage, and at age thirty-five she was married to another man, an official in the Date family, and sent to the northern city of Sendai, the center of a powerful domain but a place regarded as remote and undesirable by Edoites. The deaths of her new husband, most of her siblings, and her parents while she was relatively young added to her grief. She said she felt compelled to write in order to make a name for her father.

Questions.

1. How did Tadano view the relationship between the money-making townspeople classes and the ruling-but-poor samurai class? What should the samurai have done to change it?
2. What was Tadano's view of China's influence on Japan: both what it was and what it should have been?
3. What does this document do to support (or refute) traditional pictures of the Tokugawa era (1600-1868) as a stable, male-dominated regime in which the samurai class ruled while the merchants, peasants, and craftsmen served?



Terms.

Way of the sages. This term refers to Chinese Confucian thought, which held sway among Japan's elites. Its Japanese version maintained that society was ordered according to a natural way that placed warrior-scholars at the top, with farmers and craftsmen coming next, and merchants at the bottom. It held that men were superior to women, that commercial pursuits were selfish and evil, and that loyalty to superiors was the foundation of the good society.

“Those whose behavior is mixed.” People who do not scrupulously follow the norms of Confucianism—e.g., those who seek to make money even though Confucianism condemns that.

Warriors. Japan's ruling class in the Tokugawa years (1600-1868), made up solely of members of the samurai class. By Tadano's day, most warriors were heavily in debt, required to avoid moneymaking and live off their government stipends.

Townspeople. The urban merchant classes were called *chōnin* or “townspeople.” While supposed to be subservient to the samurai, they ran the nation's economy and held much of its wealth, controlling the warrior class through large loans and high interest rates.

Osaka and Kantō. Osaka was Japan's leading commercial city, the heart of townsperson culture, while Kantō was the region in which Edo, the government center, was located.