CHAPTER 3

Dutch Political Economy and Nishi Amane’s Philosophical Encounter with Utilitarianism

1 Political Economy as the Twin Sister of Statistics

In his lectures on statistics, Simon Vissering treated political economy as the twin sister of statistics, with both sciences aimed at elucidating social life (*het maatschappelijk leven,* *aiseiyō no michi* 相生養之道) and acting to “supplement one another” for the study of human society. This chapter will examine Vissering’s lectures on political economy to Nishi and Tsuda, who, having acquired a foundation in statistical methods, moved on to study the structures of social life, the relationship between state and society, and the mechanisms supporting wealth and prosperity.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Nishi Amane wrote the following in a letter to his friend Matsuoka Rinjirō in June 1862 (Bunkyū 2.5):

> From what I have been recently able to discern from my limited knowledge of the Western sciences of human nature [*seirigaku* 性理学], political economy [*keizaigaku* 経済学], and so forth, I have discovered that they are astonishingly fair and impartial in their judgments, and in this sense extremely different from the various traditions of Chinese scholarship... In their study of philosophy [*hirosohi* ヒロソヒ], their explanation of the principles of human nature [*seimei no ri* 性命之理] is more penetrating than that of the Neo-Confucians, with postulates grounded in the way of nature; the founding principles of their government and political economy are superior to the so-called benevolent monarchy [*ōsei* 王政] of Confucianism.1

This letter was written before Nishi went to the Netherlands, and the term *keizai* 経済 as used here (itself an abbreviation of the phrase *keisei saimin* 経世濟民, literally “governing the realm and bringing relief to the common people”) was not necessarily the most accurate translation of the nineteenth-century European concept of “political economy.” Yet even so, Nishi’s comparison of it

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1 Nishi Amane, letter to Matsuoka Rinjirō (1862), in *Nishi Amane zenshū,* vol. 1, 8.
with the ancient Confucian ideal of monarchical rule reveals a serious interest in the state of political society and government in the Western nations. It was from such a perspective that Nishi and Tsuda studied, through the medium of Vissering's lectures on constitutional law, the details of the contemporary European systems of constitutional monarchy. Then, through his lectures on statistics, they were exposed to the empirical methods of the most advanced sciences in the Europe of their day. And so it was that after their return to Japan and their experience of the events of the Meiji Restoration, they eventually proclaimed the necessity, not merely of a reform of political institutions, but of society as a whole if Japan were to retain its independence and take its place among the ranks of the civilized nations.

What image of politics and society did Nishi and Tsuda derive from Vissering's lectures on political economy, and how did they go about reinterpreting traditional views of the state and of social ethics? What thought process led them to the realization that "social" reform on the part of the people would be necessary for the advancement of Japanese civilization? Through a detailed investigation of Vissering's lectures on political economy, we will arrive at a clearer picture of the unique character underlying the five-course curriculum and of the currents of contemporary Dutch scholarship with which Nishi and Tsuda came into contact during their studies abroad. 2

Unfortunately, for the lectures on political economy, unlike the other four courses, we have neither Japanese translations by Nishi or Tsuda nor their detailed manuscript lecture notes in Dutch. All that remains are several pages of notes in Dutch by Tsuda appended to the first half of the notes on the statistics lectures that summarize the content of the lectures on political economy. 3

This did not mean, however, that Nishi and Tsuda regarded the lectures on political economy as being of lesser importance than the other four courses. Quite the contrary. Nishi later recalled the political economy lectures in the following terms:

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2 As Irene Hasenberg Butter has observed, in the Dutch universities of the time, political economy and statistics were established within the institutional framework of the faculties of law, and many political economists actively contributed to the development of statistics as a discipline and to the improvement of government administration of statistical data. (Academic Economics in Holland, 34, 54, 65–67.)

3 Simon Vissering, "De beginselen der staathuishoudkunde." Tsuda's handwritten manuscript is preserved in the Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Keiō University. A printed version has been published in Nichiran Gakkai and Ōkubo Toshiaki, eds., Bakumatsu Oranda ryūgaku kankei shiryō shūsei.