

Japanese Civilization (Part 11)

– Beyond Wealth and Military Power –

By Kawakatsu Heita

A Grand Plan for Building the Nation

The watchword of the hundred-year plan drawn up by the leaders of Meiji Japan was *fukoku kyohei* (enrich the country and strengthen the military). This is easy to criticize from a contemporary perspective, but on the basis of this national policy, Japan became the only non-Western nation to achieve political independence and economic development at a time when most regions in Asia were falling under colonial rule.

Yokoi Shonan's Advocacy of Fukoku Kyohei

One of the leading advocates of the enhancement of national wealth and military power was a pioneering thinker from Kumamoto, Yokoi Shonan (1809-69). In 1860, eight years before the Meiji Restoration, Shonan drew up his *Kokuze Sanron* (Three Principles of National Policy: national wealth, military strength and the spirit of the samurai code). Although these principles were initially formulated for the development of Echizen Province (now Fukui Prefecture), where Shonan was invited as an advisor for the *daimyo* (feudal lord), the following sentence from the *Principles* clearly shows that Shonan's vision went beyond the regional level: "Only when one has knowledge of all nations can one govern Japan; only when one can govern Japan can one govern a province; only when one can govern a province can one hold a position of responsibility." Shonan's blueprint for the building of modern Japan was clearly founded on a global vision.

Even today Shonan's argument for adopting the policy of *fukoku kyohei* has lost none of its force. Shonan was

Photo: Fukui City Shungakuko Memorial Library,
Fukui City History Museum



Yokoi Shonan had a global vision in his blueprint for the building of modern Japan

of course aware of the fate that befell China at the hands of the British after the Opium War (1840-42) and fully understood that the Great Powers were moving in the direction of colonial expansion in Asia. He advocated the enhancement of the state's productive economic resources and was particularly emphatic about the need to build a navy as strong as Britain's: "The British have placed great importance on wealth and power. They have succeeded in gaining a monopoly of the unsurpassed wealth of India, a country known as the world's treasure house. In view of the similarities in the circumstances of Britain and Japan, we should follow the British example by strengthening our military capacity." Just a few years later, the perspicacity of Shonan's vision was demonstrated by the bombardment of Satsuma (now Kagoshima Prefecture) by a British naval squadron in 1863 and the bombardment of Shimonoseki in Choshu (now Yamaguchi Prefecture) by the

joint forces of Britain, France, the Netherlands and the United States in 1864. As a member of the Iwakura Mission in 1871-73, Okubo Toshimichi (1830-78) observed at first hand the promotion of national wealth and military power in Europe and the United States in general, and in England in particular, and strongly advocated the policy of *fukoku kyohei* upon his return to Japan. Both Shonan and Okubo were assassinated by samurai who wanted to preserve the old order.

The Anachronism of the Military State

The enhancement of national wealth and military power was the guiding principle of national building in Europe from the 17th century. Japan's adoption of this as its national policy culminated in its defeat in World War II and its renunciation of the use of military force. However, the establishment of a military state has become an anachronism not only in Japan but in the international community as a whole. In his study of economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Paul Kennedy argues that the countries of modern Europe sought to increase both their wealth and military might. Since the maximization of military strength cannot be achieved without economic power, these policies went hand in hand, and the nations that achieved these objectives became powerful modern states. As a result, the countries of Europe came to exert a tremendous influence throughout the world, controlling one-third of the world's territory by 1800 and four-fifths on the eve of World War I. After the Meiji Restoration, Japan followed the European example, seeking to become a great power through expansion in East Asia.

Photo: Shoko Shuseikan

The contemporary model of *fukoku kyohei* is of course the United States. In the present day, however, economic power is no longer compatible with military strength. The two superpowers that emerged from World War II were the United States and the Soviet Union, but through the accumulation of military expenditure needed to maintain their supremacy, the Soviet Union collapsed and the United States became the world's biggest debtor nation. Disaster has not only befallen great powers. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, a minor military nation, was punished by the international community, and mass starvation is reported in the military dictatorship of North Korea. China is trying to increase both its wealth and military power, but conflicts between military expenditure and economic development will inevitably arise. The pursuit of wealth and military strength that Kennedy rightly identified as the principle underlying the rise and fall of the great powers up to the present will not be applicable in the future. This is not an age, therefore, in which Japan should aim to take over the hegemony of the United States as the world's greatest power by pursuing military strength.

In the future, military power will become something akin to a policing function both domestically and internationally led by the United Nations (UN). We are entering an age in which this policing power will not be the sole property of the United States but shared through the operation of an international organization like the UN, and the participation of Japanese Self-Defense Forces in international peacekeeping operations should be considered in this context. However, the task of dismantling the massive amount of military equipment that has been constructed will be no less costly and dangerous than the expansion of armaments. If Russia were to suffer a complete economic breakdown, the problem of managing its nuclear facilities would give rise to a major international security crisis. Nor can we afford to overlook the possibility of the economic collapse of any nation which possesses nuclear



The bombardment of Satsuma (Kagoshima) by a British naval squadron in 1863

weapons, which would lead to a similar crisis. For the present, it is important to recognize that the disarmament process will result in as great an economic burden and military danger as military expansion.

Shonan's High National Ideal

What should replace *fukoku kyohei* as the chief requirements for a great power in the 21st century? Economic strength is of course essential, for poverty is a breeding ground of all kinds of social evil and conflict. But economic strength alone is not sufficient. What should be Japan's next objective after it recovers from its present financial instability? We now need a vision for a new type of great power on the basis of economic strength.

The national policy formulated by the pioneering Japanese political thinker Yokoi Shonan was based on the ethical principle of the samurai code as well as on national wealth and military strength. Shonan was well aware of the limitations of the *fukoku kyohei* policy. While he was in Kumamoto in the late fall of 1865, he wrote: "The learning of the West is founded only on practical considerations, not upon ethics.... Because Western learning is not based on ethical principles, it does not touch

upon human feelings. Trade negotiations are built only on material promises, and this leads finally to war. Even after war, peacemaking is based on material considerations. But if one understands human feelings, there is always a way to prevent war.... If Western learning remains founded on practical rather than ethical principles, there will be no end to warfare between the Western powers." (*Numayama Kanwa*, an essay written at a place called Numayama)

For Shonan, the ethical principles needed to prevent war were those of the samurai code. The Meiji government propelled Japan along the path of rapid military expansion without giving due consideration to the spirit of the samurai code and Japan ultimately paid the price in its defeat in World War II. Yokoi Shonan's ultimate vision was disarmament. One hundred-thirty years after his assassination, his national ideal of the samurai code can be expressed as *fukoku Yutoku*, the enhancement of national wealth and the nurturing of virtue.

What formed the basis of Shonan's deep wisdom and penetrating vision? For Shonan, every human being was a microcosm of the whole universe. In *Numayama Kanwa*, he wrote: "We must strive to understand the principles

of the universe in the rivers and mountains, plains and forests, birds and beasts, and all nature's material blessings so that we can open up new frontiers and reap all of her fruits." In other words, Shonan's thinking was based on the natural philosophy of studying every aspect of nature and the application of this knowledge for the benefit of society. This natural philosophy was rooted in his deep love for the countryside surrounding his native Kumamoto, which the best-selling novelist Tokutomi Roka (1868-1927) described thus: "What a panorama awaits you just one step outside the village! Across a plain of more than 20 miles, you can see the smoke from Mt. Aso rising in the northeast. The shallow, verdant Numayamazu River flows gently up ahead, and among the mountain peaks stretching away as precipitously as walls, Mt. Unzen is clearly visible in the west." Although Shonan's first name was Heishiro, his use of "Shonan" (which literally means a "small camphor tree") as his pen name reflects his pride in and deep love for his native town of Kumamoto where that camphor tree has been most popular among local people and designated as its prefectural tree. Shonan's high national ideal is inseparable from his love for his birthplace.

Realizing the Ideal Life

One of the important purposes of accumulating wealth, I believe, may be found in enriching the culture that forms the basis of our lives. In Japan, the word "culture" is most often used to refer only to learning, the arts or public festivals in a narrow sense. Culture is defined as a way of life of a certain group in its broadest sense. Culture constitutes the identity of an ethnic group and the way they lead their daily lives. There are at least 3,000 ethnic groups throughout the world and each share a common culture. Antagonism between different cultural groups is rife and the ethnic conflicts in the present day are too numerous to mention. At the same time, however, a tremendous amount of energy is being poured into

cultural exchange all over the world to promote mutual understanding. Every year approximately 600 million people, about one-tenth of the world's total population of six billion, travel overseas. One in every seven Japanese goes overseas every year. Japan, incidentally, is not a particularly popular destination and usually comes lower than 30th in the world tourism rankings.

In an age of widespread exchange of people, materials and information, the pursuit of enhancement of culture, i.e., a better way of life to which most people aspire, is surely the best policy. People are naturally drawn to an attractive way of life. Through this centripetal force, culture becomes the center of attention and is disseminated by means of adoption. When a culture acquires universality like the American way of life, it may be said that that particular culture is a civilization. A civilization which will become universal thanks to the attractiveness of its culture will become a new condition for the achievement of great power status in this age of global exchange.

The chief characteristics required of Japan in the present day are richness and virtue through the replacement of *fukoku kyohei* with the ideal of *fukoku yutoku*. If this ideal can be realized, the imposing presence of Mt. Fuji which literally means rich and civilized, will be a fitting national symbol. As we turn a new page in Japan's history in the present age of cultural exchange, there is surely no better national ideal that the twin principles of wealth and civilization embodied in the name of Mt. Fuji.

The Grand Design for National Development in the 21st Century

The Creation of a Beautiful Garden Island

A plan is already being implemented for the development of Japan based on the concept of garden islands. In March 1998, the Hashimoto Cabinet drew up the fifth Comprehensive National Development Plan since the end of World War II. This plan was

entitled "Grand Design for National Land in the 21st Century" and subtitled "The Creation of a Beautiful Country." The basic objective of the Grand Design, scheduled to be realized by 2015, is the "establishment of an identity for Japan in the global age through the development of beautiful garden islands that the Japanese people can be proud of and where citizens can pursue new culture (ways of life) rooted in Japan's distinctive history and natural features." The essence of the Grand Design is the creation of beautiful garden islands. This ideal of beauty was completely absent in the previous four Comprehensive National Development Plans. In the Grand Design, on the other hand, the words "environment" and "scenery" appear more than 300 times. The overriding aim of creating a beautiful natural environment and living environment is spelled out very clearly. In our everyday lives we unconsciously make countless value judgments; it is impossible for us to maintain a neutral attitude. The Grand Design may be viewed as a clear statement of the values that the Japanese consider most important.

The three pillars of moral values are truth, goodness and beauty. There are now only a few countries in the world with fundamentalist cultures that recognize the truth of only one god. Unlike the people of monotheistic Muslim or Christian countries, the Japanese have a polytheistic religious outlook and a relativistic view of good and evil, as reflected in the saying "If the good go to heaven, why not the bad?" (from the *Tan'nisho*, a 13th century Buddhist treatise). Since ancient times, the Japanese have developed a unique aesthetic sense, intensely feeling the pathos of fleeting natural phenomena such as the cherry blossoms and cultivating these emotions through the composition of *waka* poetry. Beauty, however, is in the eye of the beholder: the Grand Design does not attempt to define beauty. When the National Land Council determined the common aim of placing importance on the natural and living environment, the concept of creating a "beautiful country" arose spontaneous-

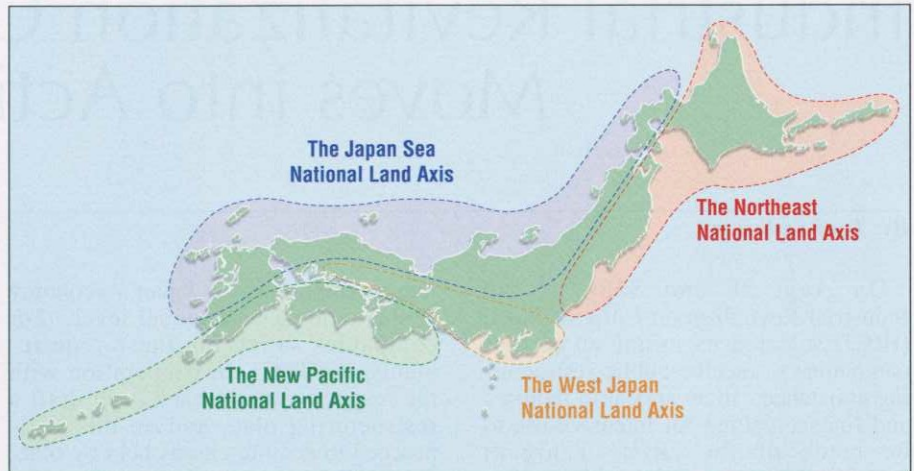
ly and was incorporated in the plan. The actual task of determining what form this should take will be left to the individuals and regional societies responsible for national land development.

The Concept of Multi-Axis National Land and Development of Natural Residential Regions

The representative landscape of present-day Japan is the man-made cityscape of the Pacific Industrial Belt. Since this urban region extends to the west of the metropolitan area, it has been designated as the West Japan National Land Axis in the Grand Design. The rest of the country is divided according to climate, natural features, cultural heritage and geographical characteristics into three axes: the Northeast National Land Axis covering Hokkaido and the Tohoku Region; the Japan Sea National Land Axis, Japan's former "front door"; and the New Pacific National Land Axis, extending with the Kuroshio current from Okinawa in the south, through Kyushu, Shikoku and the Kii Peninsula to the Izu Peninsula. This concept of multi-axis national land reflects the Grand Design's emphasis on the importance of the living environment rather than the Pacific Industrial Belt.

Four main strategies have been formulated for the realization of this plan: 1) the creation of natural residential regions; 2) the renovation of major cities; 3) the development of networks linking regions; and 4) the formation of extensive international exchange zones. The first strategy, the creation of natural residential regions, aims to develop residential regions that can receive the full range of urban services in the various regions blessed with rich natural environments that will constitute the frontiers of the new Japan. The second strategy, the renovation of major cities, will promote the development of green and pleasant urban living environments to accompany the alleviation of overcrowding in major cities through the increase of natural residential regions. The third strategy, the development of networks

The Concept of Multi-Axis National Land



linking regions, aims to develop the roads, railways, harbors, air routes and info-communications networks to provide the necessary links between natural residential regions and between these regions and cities. The fourth strategy, the formation of extensive international exchange zones, aims to ensure that all regions can develop direct links with the international community, rather than via Tokyo. As the order of these strategies suggests, the Grand Design places the highest priority on the natural residential regions that will serve as the frontiers of a rich and beautiful living and cultural environment.

True Psychological Independence from the United States

The realization of the Grand Design may help to eradicate the deep inferiority complex that the Japanese people have had towards the United States since the end of World War II. In that war, Japan lost to the United States, not to Britain, France or the Netherlands, succumbing in the end to America's overwhelmingly superior material richness. Through its rapid economic development in the post-war period, Japan has succeeded in overtaking the United States in one industry after another (including textiles, steel, automobiles, household electrical goods and semiconductors). But industry is a means rather than an end in itself. The ultimate test is how well the products of industry are put to use to enable people to lead happy and fulfilled lives. It is not the productivity of American indus-

try itself but the American way of life that the Japanese people have aspired to, but as long as they lack confidence in the Japanese way of life they are unlikely to achieve psychological independence from the United States. Until then, the mentality of the post-war period will continue.

Through the creation of beautiful garden islands based on the twin principles of wealth and civilization (*fukoku yutoku*) Japan can aim to free itself from its dependence on America, which has achieved great power status by the conventional means of building economic and military strength. From the perspective of the global environment, the American way of life based on mass production, mass consumption and mass disposal is an abortive flower that bloomed at the end of the modern era in western history. Japan has paid the price of imitating it with grave environmental problems such as pollution and waste disposal. The time has come to recognize that the pursuit of this particular way of life as the universal standard for society will lead to the extinction of bio-diversity. JTI

(Continued in Part 12)

Kawakatsu Heita is a professor of economic history at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. His books and articles have been published in both English and Japanese. He also serves as an advisor for various governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport.