

Pride and Independence: Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Spirit of the Meiji Restoration

(Part 1)

By Kitaoka Shin-ichi

Introduction

There is no person among Japanese intellectuals who has been written about or discussed as much as Fukuzawa Yukichi. But just how widely known is Fukuzawa's true value and worth?

Fukuzawa is not only an intellectual who represents Japan, but also a world-class thinker. Among autobiographies around the world, *Fukuo Jiden* (The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi) is a masterpiece of the highest level. I believe that it would be the loss of a lifetime for a person never to read this book.

There may well be those who have doubts about such a high evaluation. One reason for this may be the style of his work. Fukuzawa often wrote in a very plain and popular style that anyone could understand. At first glance, one may feel that there is not a great deal of depth to his writing.

Moreover, the glittering array of the latest scholarship of the world is not reported in Fukuzawa's works. The Western books that he was able to use were still limited. Not only were the number of books that he read few compared with Western scholars; they were also limited even compared with Japanese scholars in the next generation. Indeed, it may not be possible to say that Fukuzawa was a real "intellectual" in terms of the amount of reading and scholarly method that are usually considered requisite for such a title.

Nevertheless, what proves him a leading intellectual figure are the magnitude of the challenges that Fukuzawa faced and the depth of his thinking about them. In his *Gakumon no Susume* (Encouragement of Learning) and *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (Outline of a Theory of Civilization), Fukuzawa captures the characteristics of Japanese civilization by contrasting them with Western civilization, and also points out the characteristics of Japanese poli-

tics with keen insight. Through these works, he argued what was necessary in order for Japan to develop. Such a theme as this does not apply only to Japan. When considered more broadly in terms of a contrast between the West and the non-West and the potential of non-Western modernization, it is a topic that has meaning in terms of world history. In these points, there were very few people even outside Japan in the non-Western world who surpassed Fukuzawa's excellent treatment of these issues.

The role that Fukuzawa played in this reform was truly significant. Although it is difficult to compare statesmen with intellectuals, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, during all the years that passed from the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry (1853) until the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the role played by Fukuzawa was greater than that of the three prominent leaders of the Meiji Restoration (completed in 1868): Okubo Toshimichi, Saigo Takamori and Kido Takayoshi, or later *Genro* (senior statesmen) such as Ito Hirobumi, Yamagata Aritomo, or Inoue Kaoru, among others.

In short, Fukuzawa encountered the world at an historical, revolutionary time, and engaged it to the full. It is not at all surprising that *Fukuo Jiden*, which presents a picture of that life with a free and magnanimous spirit, is biographical literature of global prominence. When one looks at the age of the Meiji Restoration broadly and tries to find an individual representative of that time, without a doubt, one discovers Fukuzawa Yukichi.

For some time now, it has often been pointed out that Japan is facing the third "opening" of the nation, after the Meiji Restoration and postwar reform. I agree with this viewpoint. However, there is a major difference between the previous two openings. In as much as the Japanese decided on and carried

things out for themselves, the more important is the Meiji Restoration. In other words, the age that we should look back on now more than any other time is the Meiji Restoration. And the person we should look back on is Fukuzawa Yukichi.

Early Life

Yukichi was born on the premises of a warehouse of Osaka in the Nakatsu domain (now Oita Prefecture) on Jan. 10, 1835. Born to Fukuzawa Hyakusuke, his father, and Ojun, his mother, Yukichi was the youngest of five siblings, with one elder brother and three older sisters.

His father, Hyakusuke, was a person with a very keen mind and deep curiosity in learning. Thus, when he finally obtained a copy of *Shang Yu Tiao Ling* (Imperial Edict Laws and Regulations) that he had sought for many years, he took one Chinese character from the title of the book and used it in the name he gave to Yukichi, because of the double great joy of obtaining that book and the birth of his son. Hyakusuke interacted with merchants of Osaka in his work as the issuer of the Nakatsu domain's bonds. However, Hyakusuke was a traditional, conservative person who believed that all monetary concerns were inherently mean. Therefore, he did not really enjoy his work (though he was quite competent) – so much so that he even hated having his children learn multiplication tables. He had asked to be transferred to a different job several times but was refused each time. Although the Fukuzawa family was higher in rank than *ashigaru* (the lowest rank of samurai), with an annual stipend of 13 *koku* (about 2.34 kl) of rice and two retainers, they were in fact lower class samurai. The family budget was not easy, especially because it was said that they acquired a collection of more than 1,000 books with that stipend.

Photo: Fukuzawa Memorial Center for Modern Japanese Studies, Keio University

Hyakusuke died when Yukichi was a year and a half old, at which time the family returned to Nakatsu. However, after having been away for so many years, the house was in disarray. Added to this were the facts that the family budget was meager, and that the family, who had become used to life in Osaka, did not get on well with those around them in their neighborhood. The family, though, lived quietly, relying on each other, supported mainly by a stouthearted and affectionate mother. She spoke often about their father. Upon hearing that his father had wanted Yukichi to become a Buddhist monk, so that he could advance in his social position and succeed in life, Yukichi came to believe that his father died harboring feelings of resentment. He came to feel that the class system (with its emphasis on lineage) was the "enemy" of his parents.

Yukichi, as a youth, was skillful and clever with his fingers. He did many side jobs including repapering *shoji* (paper sliding doors) and recovering *tatami*, repairing roofs and tubs, making Japanese *geta* (wooden clogs) and things for them, as well as doing sword work. When his skin became badly chapped and split in winter, he sewed up the pieces with thread, and poured hot oil over the wounds to cover and fill up the cracks. He was so tough that, one winter, he got along without even any bedding, sleeping on the bare *tatami*.

Yukichi was a free-spirited youth who was richly blessed with a rational mind. Once, he was scolded by his older brother for stepping on a scrap of paper with the name of their lord on it. Yukichi, who wondered what the big deal was about stepping on some written characters, wanted to see whether he would be punished or not if he replaced the stone enshrined as a god at an Inari shrine, but nothing happened. When his older brother asked Yukichi about his goal in life, he was appalled because Yukichi spoke of wanting to make and spend as much money as possible. Yukichi then asked his brother the same question, and he said it was to be filial, faithful and honest in everything he did until the end of his life. Indeed, Yukichi's brother was an earnest and sincere person.

Yukichi began his studies when he was 14 or 15 years old. It was a very late age to embark on such a task. Still, he soon distinguished himself as a bright student. He was particularly adept at reading the *Tso-Chuan* (History Books of China). Where students ordinarily read only three or four of the entire 15 books, Yukichi read through all of them, rereading them 11 times and committing the parts he found interesting to memory. It has been said that he became something of a second-class scholar of Chinese classics.

It was inevitable that Yukichi would dislike Nakatsu. Now, in retrospect, Nakatsu was not really that bad a place. The domain had traditions of learning in both traditional and Dutch studies to a certain extent. Nor was there any profound or intense political strife such as occurred among major domains. However, Yukichi felt unbearably constrained. He especially disliked the differences in social position and class structure. At that time, whenever an upper class samurai spoke to a lower class samurai, the upper class one would speak in an imperative tone, commanding him to "do this or do that." The lower class samurai, however, had to address the upper class samurai deferentially, saying "what would you like about this or what would you like about that." Yukichi wanted to leave Nakatsu as soon as possible and kept his eyes open for any such opportunity.

Meanwhile, Yukichi's older brother, Sannosuke, began to have an interest in mathematics and gunnery. This was how Yukichi came to know about Dutch studies. In 1854, when Yukichi was 19 years old, Sannosuke had a business in Nagasaki that gave Yukichi just the chance he had been waiting for. At that time, Okudaira Iki, the son of the chief retainer of the Okudaira domain in Oita, was studying in Nagasaki. Yukichi became an attendant and soon became a student house-
of the gunnery master, Yamamoto



Fukuzawa Yukichi took a photo with a young lady in a studio in San Francisco

Monojiro.

Yukichi worked hard, winning Yamamoto's favor and also making some progress with his Dutch studies, as well. Okudaira became jealous of Yukichi and devised a plot to get rid of him. Yukichi was forced to return to Nakatsu by a false letter that stated that his mother had been taken with a sudden illness. When Yukichi discovered that the letter was false, he was angry about it, but he decided to take the opportunity to go to Edo (now Tokyo). So, he pretended to be returning to Nakatsu, and set out for Edo instead. However, when he dropped in at the house of his older brother in Osaka on the way, his brother advised him to stay in Osaka. Yukichi then entered the Tekijuku private school of Ogata Koan. It was there that Yukichi discovered the person who would be his mentor for the rest of his life.

The Ogata Tekijuku

The description of conditions at the Ogata Tekijuku private school was the most enjoyable part of Yukichi's autobiography. Students first started with the study of (Dutch) grammar at the school before embarking on studies on their own. The classes at the school were divided into eight grades that met six

times per month. At that time, students competed with each other, drawing lots for the chance to translate and interpret the texts. Students who won successively and were successful in translating and interpreting each text were promoted to the next grade. All reading and translation work was done by the students themselves on their own. There was only one dictionary that could be used for this work at the school (though there was one more advanced dictionary for upper level students). This dictionary was located in a special dictionary room, where all the students would gather to wait their turns to use it. It is said that no one slept on the day before the class meeting to read and interpret the texts. This strict competition among the students helped to make the Ogata Tekijuku one of the most renowned schools in the country.

Life at the school was somewhat rough and careless; students would go about entirely undressed in the summer and eat meals standing with their robes draped over their shoulders. Bedding was not laid out properly. Rather, students slept at their desks or used the ledge of the *tokonoma* (the recessed alcove for hanging paintings or other uses in traditional Japanese rooms) as a pillow to sleep. Conditions were such that things like pillows were never used. Times outside class meetings were informal. Everyone would go to town to let off steam and behave in a most wild manner. I recommend that readers enjoy these sections themselves in Fukuzawa's autobiography.

Yukichi suffered from typhus while in Osaka. Ogata said he treated Yukichi, but he left the preparation of the medicines to others. Otherwise, he would have wavered and hesitated, because he was treating Yukichi as his own child. Yukichi respected Ogata very deeply. In fact, he came to be a surrogate for the father who had passed away so early.

The time that Yukichi spent studying at the Ogata Tekijuku was not all that long. He entered the school in March 1855, came down with typhus a year later and shortly after recovering, returned to Nakatsu with his older brother, who had become seriously ill with rheumatism. Shortly after Yukichi having returned to Osaka, his older

brother suddenly died. Yukichi returned once again to Nakatsu, and after inheriting the position of head of the family, he finally settled down in Osaka around October. Yukichi subsequently became the head student of the school in 1857, and remained so until September of the following year. Though a total of three and a half years had passed, he was in reality in Osaka for less than three years. Thus, rather than length of time, his study was a matter of focused, concentrated effort.

It was not easy for Yukichi to go back to Osaka after becoming head of the family. In spite of the fact that no one else around him agreed with his going back, only Yukichi's mother believed in him. Thus, using the reason of going to study gunnery science for the domain, Yukichi sold most of his father's collection of books and other property and left for Osaka again.

There were not any clear long-term prospects for the study done at the Ogata Tekijuku. For his own part, Yukichi felt that though he could readily make a living in Edo if he had Western knowledge, this was not the case in Osaka. Therefore, Yukichi said that he was able instead to devote himself completely to study without any specific goal. With regards to the motives of the students at the Tekijuku, Yukichi recalled, "Being able to read the latest Western books was something that could not be done by most people in Japan at that time. It was something that could be done only by me and my fellow students. Thus, even though we might be poor, suffer hardship, wear poor clothes and eat very simply, so that to all appearances we seemed to be nothing more than poor students who were not worth a second glance, we had a pride like the knights of a king who looked down upon others in the vigor and lofty refinement of their intellect and thought." This was something that was beyond any calculable value. Yukichi simply moved forward with a strong sense of curiosity, high self-esteem and belief in his potential. He devoted himself completely to his studies during these three and a half years.

On to Edo and the West

Going to Edo was the next turning

point in Yukichi's life. In the autumn of 1858, Yukichi was ordered to go to the Nakatsu domain house in Edo to teach Dutch studies. A school of Dutch studies was opened in the Nakatsu domain house in Edo just prior to that time. Upon hearing of Yukichi's name, it was decided that he would be employed there as a teacher.

Yukichi returned once to Nakatsu and said good-bye to his mother before setting off for Edo. Although two years earlier he only had his mother's permission to leave, and ran off to Osaka under the pretense of going to study gunnery science, this time Yukichi set out for Edo with a retainer under the orders of his domain. He then reached Edo in mid-October, where he settled down and opened a school of Dutch studies at the middle-ranked retainers' house of the Okudaira clan in Teppozu, Tsukiji. This was the beginning of the *Keio Gijuku* (the forerunner of what was later to become Keio University).

In the following year of 1859, Yukichi went to see the recently opened port of Yokohama. Since Yokohama had just been opened in June of that year, his visit can be thought of as taking place immediately after the port was opened. Yukichi then discovered that Dutch was not of much use, which shocked him deeply. He had invested so much time and effort in learning Dutch, only to discover that the one language that had any real value now was English.

In spite of this, however, Yukichi immediately decided to study English. Still, it was not easy to find a teacher. According to Fukuchi Gen-ichiro (Ochi), only two persons were versed in English at that time: Moriyama Takichiro, who was an authority in written English, and Nakahama Manjiro, who was conversant in spoken English. Although Yukichi tried to learn English from Moriyama, he was very busy and could not find any time to teach. After two or three months, Yukichi decided to study English on his own. At that time, he tried to find others who would study with him. He approached Kanda Takahira, who said that he would study later, and Murata Zoroku, who refused outright, saying that English was not necessary because he was able to read Dutch translations.

However, Harada Keisaku agreed to study with Yukichi, and they began to study together. After starting to learn English, Yukichi found that there were many similarities between Dutch and English, so the study was not as difficult as he had first imagined.

This positive, forward-looking decision served to set the stage for what could be called Yukichi's next piece of good fortune: the opportunity to go to the United States. The Tokugawa government decided to send a delegation to the United States to exchange written ratifications of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Japan and the United States. It took time, however, to finalize and arrange everything. Although the leaders of the delegation were decided in September 1859, the ship, the Kanrin Maru, departed Uraga on Jan. 19, 1860. Yukichi asked the captain of the Kanrin Maru, Kimura Yoshitake, for help in finding some way to join the voyage, whereupon he succeeded in becoming a retainer to the delegation. This was about a half a year after Yukichi had determined to learn English. It is most likely that if Yukichi had visited Yokohama later, or decided to switch to the study of English later, or if the Tokugawa government had decided to send its delegation earlier, he would never have been able to board the Kanrin Maru for his fateful journey to the West.

The Kanrin Maru safely reached San Francisco with the help of an American naval officer. The America that Yukichi saw was full of fresh surprises for him. One of the biggest surprises was the amount of material wealth. Expensive carpet was laid out in the rooms of huge hotels – made from material that would be sold in Japan, not by the yard, but by a tiny unit like the *sun* (an old Japanese measure of distance equivalent to just over one inch). Further, while people in Japan would go to glean any scrap iron that could be found after a fire, scrap iron lay about everywhere in town, and nobody went to gather it.

However, Yukichi was not surprised at the level of scientific knowledge including physics and chemistry, as he knew about the principles from books. The social system, though, did surprise him and seemed strange to him. For

example, he was surprised to find that nobody could answer when asked what had become of the descendants of George Washington.

A famous episode that occurred during Yukichi's return to Japan involved a photograph that he secretly took with a young lady in a photo studio in San Francisco. He showed it to everyone and boasted about it after leaving port, to the great chagrin of all. This episode was typical of Yukichi.

Though Yukichi was employed as a translator by the Tokugawa government after his return to Japan, he had another opportunity to go overseas a year and a half later as an additional member of a delegation of the government. This was to be a long journey, setting out from Edo in January 1862, and lasting 11 months until his return in January of 1863. The destinations were France, Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia and Portugal. Compared with the excitement of his first trip to America, Yukichi was more relaxed on the trip to Europe, during which time he made much more detailed observations of everything he saw.

It was upon his return from this trip that Yukichi published the first part of his *Seiyō Jijō* (Things Western). During the trip, he devoted himself to purchasing mostly English books and studying the social systems that he saw. This time as well, he tried to learn more about such social structures as hospitals, parliaments, military service, voting and the like, deepening his understanding of these things. The Japanese as a whole had little knowledge of these things. Thus, Yukichi's book could be said to have played a very important role in disseminating knowledge about the rest of the world in Japan.

Yukichi embarked upon his third trip to the West in 1867. He went to America in January and returned to Japan in June. Just as he had on his trip to Europe, Yukichi bought as many English books as he possibly could. All told, during the nine years from the opening of Japan and Yokohama in 1859 until the fall of the Tokugawa regime (1868), Yukichi went abroad three times, spending a total of two years overseas. No one else in Japan had this unprecedented experience.

This was a period of major revolu-

tionary change in Japan. The time that Yukichi returned from his first trip to America was the time of the Sakuradamongai Incident (1860) and the height of the exclusion of foreigners from Japan. The Kagoshima bombardment (battle between the Satsuma [Kagoshima] domain and Britain) occurred in 1863, in which Yukichi's friend, Matsuki Koan (later Terajima Munenori) was involved. This was followed in 1865 by the second Choshu war (the Tokugawa government's punitive expedition against the Choshu domain [now Yamaguchi Prefecture]). One of the commanders in chief of this battle of the Choshu domain was Murata Zoroku, a former head master of the Ogata Tekijuku. The various scholars of Dutch learning each proceeded down their respective paths.

The path that Yukichi took followed that of learning and education as well as writing and enlightenment. While exclusionism raged, Yukichi assiduously avoided the danger of assassination and lived in relative obscurity. Yukichi supported the subjugation of the Choshu domain. He felt that the Tokugawa shogun, the absolute ruler of Japan under the monarchical system, had no choice but to follow the route of opening up Japan to the rest of the world. Consequently, Yukichi was bitterly disappointed when the Tokugawa government lost to the Satsuma and Choshu domains. Though Yukichi did not pay any attention to the Battle of Ueno Shogi-tai (the war between the pro-Tokugawa military unit and the troops of the newly born Meiji government in 1868), reproving students to devote themselves diligently to their studies at the time, he surely must have resented the fact that the Tokugawa government, which was moving towards opening the country, was defeated by the isolationist Satsuma and Choshu domains, with their ideology of excluding all foreigners. **UJI**

(Continued in Part 2)

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