

# Pride and Independence: Fukuzawa Yukichi and the Spirit of the Meiji Restoration (Part 2)

By Kitaoka Shin-ichi

## The Standard-Bearer of Civilization and Enlightenment

Contrary to the misgivings of Fukuzawa Yukichi that the newly born Meiji government would become isolationist and exclusionist, it took the very surprising move of opening up the country and importing Western civilization. In particular, the abolition of the *han* (domain) system and establishment of prefectures in 1871 deposed feudal lords and laid the foundations for a centralized system of government. This was truly revolutionary.

It is against this background that Fukuzawa's campaign of enlightenment came into bloom. The first volume of *Gakumon no Susume* (An Encouragement of Learning) was published in February 1872, about half a year after the abolition of the domain system. This work was full of the conviction and joy of Japan's advance toward civilization and enlightenment.

The first volume of *Gakumon no Susume* began with the words, "It is said that heaven does not create one man above or below another man." Because of the presence of the expression "it is said," we know that these words were not Fukuzawa's own. Moreover, Fukuzawa was speaking about the equality of opportunity, not the equality of outcome. Although people are equal by nature, their conditions or circumstances are not equal. Fukuzawa states that, more than anything, these differences are due to what they do or do not learn. Fukuzawa declared that anyone could become great, if only he/she studied. However, such study in this case does not consist simply of reading difficult Chinese characters or books, but encompasses a broader approach. It means that, if one is to be a farmer, one should become a great farmer, and if one is to be a merchant, one should become a great mer-

chant.

Thus, in the first volume of *Gakumon no Susume*, Fukuzawa spoke of the equality of opportunity and the importance of practical learning (scientific knowledge or real learning). This was a great boon to the young people who at the time were in the process of breaking out from under the old social order. It is estimated that, including pirated editions, some 220,000 copies of the first volume were printed. Hence, out of a population in Japan at the time of about 35 million people, one in every 160 people had bought the book. This gives a hint of the magnitude of its impact.

Although Fukuzawa had at first planned only to release *Gakumon no Susume* in one volume, he published steady sequels to the work because it sold so well. This culminated with the release of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> volumes of the book in November 1876.

Fukuzawa expressed his views about the relationship between government and the people in these works, stating that, although the two are connected by a promise (the theory of social contract), rebellion or insurgence must not arise arbitrarily. Further, he explained that the goal of learning is to achieve the independence of the nation, expressing his famous thesis "national independence through personal independence." This is because "persons without the spirit of personal independence will not have deep concern for their country," "those without the spirit of independence within themselves will also be unable to exercise their right of independence when in contact with foreigners outside," and "those who lack the spirit of independence rely on the power of others and sometimes perpetrate evil deeds." A person without a spirit of independence will always rely on others. A person who relies on others will always worry about the attitude and reactions of others, and a person

who thus worries about what others think will then always seek to flatter other people. In this way, Fukuzawa contended that the independence of the nation is almost impossible if its people do not have an independent spirit of their own.

Every part of Fukuzawa's *Gakumon no Susume* is truly interesting. For example, in section 13 entitled "The Damage of Resentment," Fukuzawa completely rejects revenge and envy. The book says that, in many cases, only a fine line separates vice and virtue. For instance, although it is immoral to exert oneself overly much in the pursuit of making money, it is perfectly acceptable if it is done in an appropriate and balanced manner. Luxury can also be immoral if too extravagant, but is not a bad thing if it is within one's means. There is also a fine line between refutation and slander. However, Fukuzawa says that holding a grudge is clearly immoral, and that there is no defense whatsoever for advocating such behavior or thinking. Doing so does not benefit oneself, and is a base and mean feeling that seeks to win balance for oneself via the loss of another person. Moreover, it gives birth to suspicion, jealousy, fear and cowardice. Fukuzawa is extremely critical of any form of grudge, stating that all grudges give rise to conspiracy, assassination, riots and civil strife. This sentiment probably reflected Fukuzawa's personal realization, because he was, in fact, often envied by others.

Fukuzawa emphasized social intercourse as being important to the development of learning. He thought that greater interaction among more and more people would lead to an advanced civilization, and had high expectations that the railroads and other modes of transportation would serve to promote this development. He also attached great importance to speeches as a



Photo: Keio University Library



Fukuzawa (front row center) and his students at the graduation ceremony of Keio Gijuku in 1897

means of facilitating the exchange of views and opinions among people. Although some asserted that the Japanese language was not suitable for speeches at the time, Fukuzawa personally refuted this argument by practicing the art of speaking himself and encouraging practice in these skills at *Keio Gijuku* (now Keio University).

Fukuzawa also grappled with the task of preparing a systematic discussion about civilization while continuing his work on *Gakumon no Susume*. In August of 1875, he published *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (An Outline of a Theory of Civilization). Fukuzawa went through considerable effort to prepare this work, doing much reading, thinking, writing and revising. In this work, he tried to capture the true essence of civilization (i.e., what it means to be “civilized”). This is cer-

tainly a topic that must have been difficult to grapple with, even for Fukuzawa.

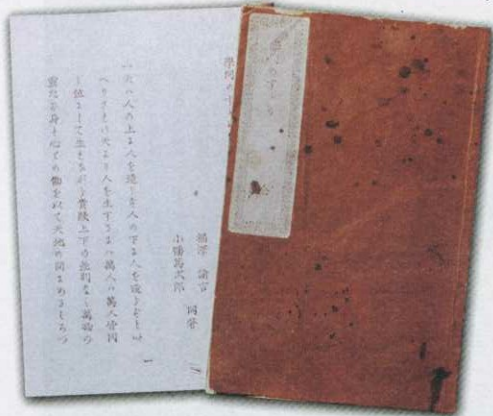
Fukuzawa first defines a theory of civilization as the “development of the human spirit.” He argues, “Its import does not lie in discussing the spiritual development of the individual, but the spiritual development of the people of the nation as a whole.” He asserted that the goal was Western civilization. This was not because Western civilization was essentially superior, but because it was comparatively better at the time. By no means did Fukuzawa have a simple mania for the West. There are many instances where he shows, by contrast, aspects of the East that are superior, side by side with the shortcomings of the West.

A distinctive characteristic of Fukuzawa is that he did not conceive of

civilization in terms of material substance, but rather in terms of spirit, that is, in terms of the ethos or characteristic traits. Many people at the time thought that the material civilization of the West was superior to that of the East, but the East or Japan was superior to the West in terms of spiritual civilization, as can be seen in such expressions as “Western science and Oriental morality” or “Japanese spirit and Western learning.” With regard to this, Fukuzawa pointed out, however, that there were problems with the Oriental spirit. He especially criticized the fact that, in the East, greater emphasis was placed on virtue or morality than on knowledge. He maintained that knowledge was more important than morality, and that public morality was more important than individual or private morality.



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



The Original edition of *Gakumon no Susume* (An Encouragement of Learning)

Fukuzawa pointed out that “blind attachment” to “outdated customs” obstructs the development of civilization. His insistence on the need to depart from such habits – which calls to mind Max Weber’s “*Entzauberung der Welt*” – was very much the same as his insistence on the independence of the individual as essential to the independence of the nation in *Gakumon no Susume*.

What is particularly interesting is the part that discusses the characteristics of Japanese politics. Fukuzawa pointed out that the “imbalance of power” in Japan made the disposition of the people more subservient. He felt that if the people of Japan did not break away from this indulgence or addiction, the independence of the nation was hardly possible.

Fukuzawa discussed the meaning of national independence by distinguishing the national polity, the constitution and the blood lineage. Japan had not been controlled by anyone other than the Japanese themselves. Independence had never been lost. Fukuzawa referred to this as maintaining the national polity. On the other hand, constitutions had changed many times as control passed from the hands of the Emperors to the nobles and then to the samurai. In addition, in other countries, when a dynasty itself came under the protection of another country, it was not uncommon for the national polities to be lost, even if the blood lineage continued.

Fukuzawa argued that the most important thing is the national polity or characteristics of the nation. The form that “national polity” took during the early Showa era before World War II (1926-45) was actually, in Fukuzawa’s terms, merely a “constitution.” The assertion that this only had secondary importance was considered a very dangerous thought before the war, and I think Fukuzawa was courageous to be able to argue this way.

### Learning and Government

In this way, Fukuzawa displayed his real ability as a standard-bearer of enlightenment from 1871 through 1876. The essence of this was represented in *Gakumon no Susume* and *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*. During this time, Keio Gijuku continued to develop smoothly and came to be established as the top school in Japan. Keio students no longer needed to copy their textbooks by hand because Fukuzawa also obtained many books during his three overseas voyages, especially the last one. A new system of collecting tuition fees from students (rather than relying on the old system such as patronage or sponsorship) took root, as well. Fukuzawa had not worked for the government since the first year of the Meiji era (1868). Even *Gakumon no Susume* emphasized the value and significance of a scholar remaining outside of government. However, he did not oppose students of the Keio Gijuku entering government service. Indeed, many talented people from Keio Gijuku did enter the government.

However, the number of students entering Keio Gijuku began to decrease after the peak year of 1871. Reasons for this can be attributed to the decline of the samurai (warrior) class, the custom of honoring government personnel and looking down on ordinary citizens, and the fact that preferential treatment was extended to those engaged in officially sponsored studies. Keio Gijuku faced its greatest difficulties during the period from 1877 to 1880, during which time the school asked for governmental protection many times.

However, these efforts to borrow money were unsuccessful. In fact, this was to Fukuzawa’s advantage, in that he never had to make any kind of concession to the government in return for borrowed funds.

Right after giving up on these efforts to borrow money, in July 1879, Fukuzawa told Fujita Mokichi and Minoura Katsundo of the *Hochi Shimbun* newspaper to publish his views on the establishment of a national assembly in their name. This had a major impact on private citizens seeking a direction after the Seinan War (Satsuma Rebellion, 1877). Fukuzawa’s views immediately spread throughout the entire country. His views also came to exert an unexpected impact on the government.

Fukuzawa was approached by Inoue Kaoru at the end of 1880. After several meetings together, Okuma Shigenobu, Ito Hirobumi and Inoue clearly determined that the government should establish a national assembly. To this end, they asked Fukuzawa to establish a newspaper that would influence the people toward a moderate political attitude. Fukuzawa was surprised, but promised to cooperate in the endeavor.

The trio of Okuma, Ito and Inoue controlled the government in those days. There was a plan in the government to establish a constitution and a Diet system in response to the growing movement to establish a parliament. In this, Okuma, Ito and Inoue proceeded with basically the same view and sought Fukuzawa’s cooperation.

Meanwhile, the Satsuma faction, whose strength could not be ignored, was against the above plan. Moreover, the Hokkaido Development Agency scandal occurred in the summer of 1881. Criticism arose when the Hokkaido Development Agency tried to dispose of its substantial assets by selling them to a Kansai trading firm belonging to the Satsuma (Kagoshima) and Choshu (Yamaguchi) faction at a very low price. The main proponent of this criticism was Fukuzawa’s newspaper. The rival of the Kansai trading firm was Okuma’s sponsor, Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Co. The Satsuma fac-



tion strongly objected to the situation, supposing that it was a plot in which Fukuzawa had joined with Okuma and Mitsubishi to overthrow the Satsuma faction. Here, Ito and Inoue were pressed into having to choose between backing the Satsuma faction or Okuma. They opted for Satsuma with the result that Okuma was forced out of the government. This political crisis took place in 1881. Fukuzawa was discarded, as well.

At the time, Okuma and Fukuzawa had proposed establishing the Diet and cabinet system two years later. It was a plan in which the leaders of feudal domains were to organize political parties based on limited elections, and not a plan for domains to yield power to the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. Thus, it was a plan for gradual progress, which differed from the movement for rapid progress toward the granting of people's rights sought by the radicals. However, it was a clearly open-minded draft.

The exclusion of Okuma and Fukuzawa had a significant impact on the characteristics of the Meiji constitution and Meiji state. The conservative Prussian style draft of Inoue Kowashi was adopted over Fukuzawa's more moderate one. At that time, Fukuzawa decided to distance himself from government and rely instead on Keio Gijuku and his *Jiji Shimpo* (Current Affairs), a newspaper he founded in 1882. Its aim was to educate and enlighten private citizens. This was a major turning point for Fukuzawa as well.

### Views on Asia

What is notable from around the political crisis of 1881 was Fukuzawa's hard-line view on matters outside Japan. Fukuzawa is known for his views advocating "*Datsu-A Ron*" (Leaving Asia) and his praise of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). He has often been criticized as an advocator of aggression in Asia. What is the real truth?

Fukuzawa was still critical of sending troops to Taiwan when they were sent

in 1874. However, after his *Jiji Shogen* (Commentary on the Current Problems) in 1881, he came to advocate the promotion of national rights and prestige of Japan. In the following year, Fukuzawa had contact with a young man of the Korean reform faction, Kim Ok Kyun, after the Imo Mutiny that took place in 1882. From that time on, Fukuzawa had strong expectations for their reform group and was not sparing in his support.

The Korean reform group ultimately fell at the Kapsin Political Coup in 1884. Fukuzawa's famous "*Datsu-A Ron*" editorial was written shortly afterwards. The editorial argued that, in its social intercourse with Asian countries, Japan should refuse to associate with bad friends, and that there was no need to be on close terms with any country in Asia simply because Japan was physically located in Asia. Though there are those who believe that these sentiments meant that Fukuzawa despised Asia, the truth is that he was shocked by the defeat of the reform group for which he had held such great expectations. The editorial was a kind of acknowledgment of defeat, in which he maintained that he would no longer lend any particular support to such activities in the future.

Fukuzawa also took a hard line in relations with China. He strongly supported a military build-up when Sino-Japanese relations became strained during the latter part of the 1880s and much of the 1890s. Then, when war did break out, he fervently supported it, as a war between civilization and barbarism, donating ¥10,000 to the military. This amount would greatly exceed ¥100 million in today's currency. During the Sino-Japanese War, those who donated ¥10,000 or more were Prince Mori Motonori (¥15,000), a former lord of Choshu, Fukuzawa and only two others. This demonstrates the zeal and enthusiasm that Fukuzawa had for the conflict.

There are many people who criticize Fukuzawa's support for the Sino-Japanese War. Indeed, a look at the editorials that appeared in the *Jiji Shimpo* at the time shows that extreme-

ly antagonistic language was used with reckless abandon, the kind of language that would likely give one great consternation today. However, China at the time was under the control of a different ethnic group, the Manchus, and was a country in which queues (long single braids of hair worn by men) and binding the feet of women were commonplace. The country had fought the West and lost repeatedly without knowing its actual strength and ability. Even from the standpoint of the spirit of civilization, it could not be supported. It would be dangerous to the security of Japan if it had been allied with this fragile China. Fukuzawa believed that it was necessary to strike out against China for both the good of civilization and for Asia. In addition, he was in favor of an independent Korea, a view differing from that of many hard-liners. Although it is easy to criticize Fukuzawa's position on Korea and China, it would have been inevitable in the context of that time, and in that sense it can be said to be a justifiable and legitimate assertion.

### Spirit of Manly Defiance

Fukuzawa became seriously ill in 1899, even though he had been in very good health. Though he recovered for a time, he became ill again in January 1901 and passed away on Feb. 3 of that year. "*Yasegaman no Setsu*" (Spirit of Manly Defiance) had been serialized in *Jiji Shimpo* starting on New Year's Day of 1901. "*Meiji Ju-nen Teichu Koron*" (Commentary on the National Problems of the 10<sup>th</sup> Year of Meiji) was serialized from February, as well.

"*Yasegaman no Setsu*" was written in 1891. In this work, Fukuzawa criticized Katsu Kaishu and Enomoto Takeaki, who were high-ranking officials under the Tokugawa government and later served as ministers in the Meiji government. His argument was to this effect: *Yasegaman* is the tenacious, obstinate stubbornness of a samurai. Even a small nation will never submit itself to a greater nation, preferring instead to keep an adamant spirit. The independence of a country



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



A portrait of Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1898

cannot be maintained without this. Katsu had badly damaged this ethos, which is the spirit of a samurai, in surrendering Edo castle without any bloodshed in 1868. Still though, his achievement in averting a domestic upheaval was great. What Fukuzawa could not stomach was that Katsu later joined the Meiji government and gained honor. So, Fukuzawa recommended that Katsu should decline the hospitality of the government and carry on behind the scenes. Enomoto was appreciated for having resisted the new government army. However, he subsequently went on to become a high official in the new government. So Fukuzawa argued that Enomoto should not be able to face the people who formerly fought in his camp, maintaining that he should hide himself in a place where he would not stand out in society. In response, Katsu said, "I decide myself about my course of action; praise or criticism from others does not concern me." He also said that he did not care even if this attitude of his were widely known. Enomoto said that he would respond eventually, but ended up never answering. When a retainer of the former *Bakufu* (shogunate), Kurimoto Joun, was shown this piece by Fukuzawa, he could not contain his

very deep emotion and cried out in a great voice.

"Meiji Ju-nen Teichu Koron" was a work that placed great value on Saigo Takamori, a hero of the Meiji Restoration, during the Satsuma Rebellion (civil war between Saigo and the central government) that occurred in 1877. The content of this work could not be published at the time, and Fukuzawa soon forgot about it, as well. Still, it was recommended by his student and was published as a serial after "Yasegaman no Setsu."

In the work, Fukuzawa maintains the following:

the tyranny of government is sometimes endless, and the people must resist this. There are various ways of resisting, and Saigo took the warrior's way. Although his view differed from that of Fukuzawa, the spirit of resistance he demonstrated is praiseworthy and priceless. Fukuzawa insisted on the spirit of independence and resistance, in the same way as he did in "Yasegaman no Setsu."

Although Fukuzawa was known as a man who advocated Europeanization in principle, he never believed that everything about Western civilization was absolutely right in every way. Rather, once civilization and enlightenment became settled in Japan, he often took up the topic of Confucianism. When Fukuzawa attempted to seek the root of the independent spirit in Japan, he found that it could be traced back to *bushi-do* (the traditional code of honor of the samurai). Though Fukuzawa did not agree with the view of Saigo on subjugating Korea, he greatly appreciated and respected Saigo as a person who did not readily obey the orders of the government and who lived his life with a strong sense of independence and self-respect.

## Conclusion

Before reaching the end of 1900 and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Fukuzawa wrote a calligraphy scroll, which read "Welcome the new century with pride and independence." The words "pride and independence" were one of Fukuzawa's favorite expressions in his later years.

Fukuzawa gave free rein to his curiosity without any particular aim, and he entered the twilight years of his life. Even as a poor student houseboy, he never belittled himself. And he never submitted to authority nor obeyed the will of foreign countries. He expressed this spirit in the words "pride and independence." This spirit was reflected in the way that Japan, a small country in the East did not submit itself to the more powerful nations of the West as it made its way toward civilization. The opening of Japan and the enterprising spirit of the Meiji Restoration were cultivated by this spirit of pride and independence.

However, Japan since then has not always continued to be open and enterprising. The country soon brought itself to ruin with its insistence on its rights and interests in the Asian region and adherence to a narrow ultra-nationalism. The spirit of free, magnanimous broad-mindedness and independent self-respect, such as that seen in the stouthearted character and fortitude of Fukuzawa, fell into decline among the leaders of the latter half of the Meiji era.

After World War II and even today, it seems that Japan still lacks this open and enterprising mind and does not have a spirit of pride and independence. Japan was not able to live through the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a spirit of pride and independence. Fukuzawa's teaching of pride and independence stands before Japan even now as a major guiding principle for the country as it embarks upon the 21<sup>st</sup> century. **UJI**

*Kitaoka Shin-ichi is a professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Tokyo. He specializes in the history of Japanese diplomacy.*