

Fukuzawa Yukichi: A Journey Through Enlightenment

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Fukuzawa Yukichi embarked on a journey in the pursuit of "civilization" and modernity, becoming a central theme for the rest of his life. Fukuzawa, throughout his life, would challenge traditional Confucian values and pave the way for Japan's transformation. This can be seen particularly through different episodes of his life, for example, his education under Ogata Koan and his journey to the United States and Europe. Through these insights can be gained on Fukuzawa's evolving vision and its profound impact on Japan's modernization.

Fukuzawa's intellectual journey began in "I Make My Way to Osaka," where he sought out Ogata Koan's tutelage. Through this journey, the seeds of his departure from Confucian orthodoxy were sown. His shift towards Dutch studies signaled a break from traditional norms and showed a broader horizon beyond Confucianism. Fukuzawa highlighted his diverse sources of learning, from interpreters to physicians, illustrating his unconventional approach to education. This broad foundation would later shape his view of Confucianism, leading to rejecting it based on its rigidity in favor of his newfound dynamic understanding of "civilization." This vision of "civilization" represented a fundamental shift from the entrenched Confucian values that dominated Japan for centuries. Confucianism, emphasizing hierarchical social structures and filial piety, stood in contrast to the ideals of progress, individualism, and scientific inquiry that Fukuzawa now championed. We see more in "I Make My Way to Osaka" as glimpses of his early departure from Confucian norms can be seen. His rejection of a fixed

path, his eagerness to learn from diverse sources, and his insistence on practical knowledge hinted at a departure from the rigidity of Confucian scholarship.

Fukuzawa, in "I Go to Europe," delves into publishing, releasing his first work, "Kaei Tsugo," a dictionary of the English language. However, his scholarly pursuits faced challenges amid the anti-foreign sentiment in Japan. Nevertheless, a turning point arose when he was able to travel to Europe as an official interpreter with Japanese envoys. The European leg of Fukuzawa's journey proved to be a transformative odyssey. In an official capacity, he navigated the diplomatic intricacies of the time, encountering cultural dissonances and political realities. One major change that Fukuzawa had was during his encounters in Europe. One notable incident involved an intriguing offer made to Fukuzawa by a Russian acquaintance. The proposition, suggesting he settle in Russia, underscored the complexities of global politics during that era. The incident became a silent testament to Japan's challenges in navigating diplomatic waters and the underlying currents of international intrigue. Armed with a wealth of knowledge and experience, he dedicated himself to advancing Japan's modernization. His writings, including "Seiyo Jijo," became seminal works that laid the intellectual foundation for Japan's transformation into a modern nation.

Fukuzawa's trip to the United States in "I visit America Again" added a global dimension to his vision of "civilization." Initially centered around negotiations for warships and rifles, the expedition transformed into a profound enlightenment journey. Fukuzawa's observations of the technological advancements in America, from the luxurious steamers to the absence of transcontinental railways, broadened his understanding of what "civilization" encompassed. In Washington, Fukuzawa engaged in negotiations beyond the acquisition of warships. His interactions with American officials emphasized transparency, ethical governance, and practical

diplomacy, which he deemed essential for Japan's modernization. This experience expanded his perception of "civilization" beyond technological progress, encompassing governance and diplomatic practices aligned with global standards. The return voyage on the Colorado, a swift steamer, symbolized the convergence of Fukuzawa's experiences, bridging the East and West to pursue a shared vision of progress. The challenges faced during negotiations and revelations about bureaucratic complexities within Japan fueled his determination to bring about meaningful change. His observations also underscored a critical stance toward prevailing government policies, emphasizing the need for a departure from outdated practices and establishing a more progressive socio-political order based on meritocracy and individual empowerment.

Fukuzawa Yukichi's vision of "civilization" left a mark on Japan's trajectory toward modernity. His intellectual journey, spanning continents and challenging entrenched norms, laid the groundwork for a new era. Fukuzawa's commitment to ethical governance, transparency, and individual empowerment paved the way for the Meiji Restoration and the subsequent modernization of Japan. Fukuzawa's distinction between "civilization" and Confucianism, rooted in rejecting hierarchical structures and embracing individual autonomy, became a guiding principle for those seeking to shape a progressive Japan. His journey also reflects the pursuit of knowledge and a visionary quest for a new societal order. Fukuzawa's vision of "civilization" is a testament to the enduring power of ideas to shape the course of nations.