

Revolution in Japan's Worldview

The term Meiji Restoration is applied not only to the events leading up to the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate, but also to the whole cluster of reforms that followed. For more than two decades, from 1868 down to 1890, a series of reforms was promulgated that established constitutional government and put Japan on the road to industrialization. As they groped for alternatives to the old order, Japan's new leaders drew heavily for inspiration on the ideas and institutions of Western societies. Later we shall consider those institutional reforms and the beginning of Japanese industrialization, but we need first to discuss why Japan proved so open to new ideas and hence so responsive to the Western challenge.

One of the most extraordinary features of modern Japanese history is that sudden change in its view of the world. The Japanese as a people demonstrated extraordinary "intellectual mobility"—an unusual flexibility of thought, which allowed the predominant opinion of its leaders to shift very rapidly from xenophobia to xenophilia, from hatred of Western barbarians to adulation of Western culture. Some Japanese underwent a gradual metamorphosis in their worldview; many others seemed to have undergone swift emotional conversions. Accounting for the rapidity with which attitudes were reversed is often difficult. Certainly the iconoclastic writings of political economists in the late Tokugawa Period prepared the way. Nevertheless, the new leaders of the government that came to power in 1868 had no clear idea of the extent of the reforms they wished to undertake, nor of the kinds of institutional changes they wished to make. But they did declare, in the Imperial Charter Oath, which they had the boy Emperor issue in 1868, that "knowledge shall be sought for all over the world, and thereby the foundations of imperial rule shall be strengthened" and that "all absurd customs of olden times shall be abandoned and all actions shall be based on international usage." These phrases signified a new openness to the outside world, and for the next two

decades there followed a period of extraordinary borrowing, a period often described as one of intoxication with Western things and Western ideas. Where other Asian countries remained committed to their traditional knowledge and institutions, Japan undertook sweeping changes. A leading survey of modern world history concludes that this "Westernization of Japan" during the Meiji Period (1868–1912) "still stands as the most remarkable transformation ever undergone by any people in so short a time."¹

In order to understand this sudden shift in attitude, it is well to remember that many Japanese "Westernizers" were in a manner anti-Western. For them, Westernization was a means to an anti-Western end: by adopting the techniques and institutions of Western society they hoped to eliminate all manifestations of Western power, especially the unequal treaties, from their country. The *jōi* goal of expelling the foreigners, in other words, remained unchanged. (Although when we come to the 1880s and the craze for Western things reaches a peak—and we find Japanese leaders wearing top hats, studying ballroom dancing, going to masked balls with foreign women, and living in Western-style houses—we may begin to wonder just how anti-Western Westernization really was!) Essentially, the observation is valid that national security remained the object even during the twenty-five years after 1868, when Japanese leadership looked to Western countries for models of all kinds of institutional reforms.

The table² on page 79 shows where Japan turned in the first Meiji years for specific models of new organizations. Later, as we shall see, in creating constitutional and bureaucratic organizations the Meiji leaders turned especially to German models. In addition to these specific models for organizations, Meiji leaders also adopted general Western models of such organizations as the newspaper, factory, incorporated enterprise, railway, and stock exchange.

Another frequent observation about the sudden reversal of attitudes is that Japan had a tradition of borrowing—of adopting and assimilating foreign culture to its own ends. In contrast to the ethnic self-sufficiency of the Chinese, Japan as an island country was keenly aware of the value of cultural assimilation in its history.

It is important to bear in mind as well the timing of the Western challenge. Momentum for change had been gathering for many decades. Had discontent not been so widespread, it stands to reason that the disposition to set aside many aspects of tradition would have been correspondingly less. But there was no great struggle to preserve the old order; it fell quite easily. The failure of the Tokugawa shogunate to deal not only with its manifold domestic problems but with the foreign threat, which materialized in the first infringements of national sovereignty in Japan's history, prepared the way for change. The fact

Source	Organization	Year Initiated
Britain	Navy	1869
	Telegraph system	1869
	Postal system	1872
	Postal savings system	1875
France	Army	1869
	Primary school system	1872
	Tokyo <i>Keishi-chō</i> (police)	1874
	Judicial system	1872
	<i>Kempeitai</i> (military police)	1881
United States	Primary school system ^a	1879
	National bank system	1872
	Sapporo Agricultural College	1879
Germany	Army ^a	1878
Belgium	Bank of Japan	1882

^aReorganization on a new model.

that the Western challenge coincided in Japan with domestic political revolution was exceedingly important: for those coming to power in such circumstances are free to make radical reforms in a way that people long entrenched are not.

Moreover, the nature of the new political leadership was of critical importance. The Meiji leaders were young: their average age in 1868 was slightly older than thirty. They came out of the old samurai elite. As such they proved keenly perceptive of Western military strength and its basis in scientific and technological achievement. They were, therefore, more disposed to accept whatever changes seemed necessary to increase Japanese strength than was true, for example, of the scholar-gentry in China. The goal of national strength justified, in turn, myriad social and economic changes.

As a feudal elite they had not owed their position to the possession of a traditional body of knowledge, as did the Confucian literati in China. Hence, they felt much less threatened by Western learning. Nor were they bound to the past, in a social sense, so strongly as were many traditional elites. Their ties to the land had been broken in the seventeenth century when they had moved from the countryside to the new castle towns. Their power was rooted in bureaucratic positions rather than in landholding. Hall stresses that they

did not constitute an entrenched land-based gentry as in China, able to back up their interests in the face of modern change. Without an economic base, the resentment they felt toward the reforms

which deprived them of their feudal privileges was soon dissipated. Instead, they were forced to ride with the times, to join the new government or to seek security in the new economic opportunities which were offered them. . . . In other words, they were a leaven for change rather than an obstacle.³

Because they were free of the fear that most aristocracies have of losing land and property, the samurai proved remarkably receptive to new ideas and institutions. "Few ruling classes," writes Thomas Smith, "have been so free of economic bias against change."⁴

Fukuzawa and the New Westernism

No one wrote more persuasively or with greater influence on behalf of the new disposition toward wholesale borrowing from Western culture than Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901). Japan's submission to the challenge of the Perry mission and to the subsequent demands for the forced opening of the ports was initially regarded as a political failure, for which the Tokugawa were blamed. As the magnitude of Western military superiority came to be understood, however, the failure was more often seen as a cultural one, requiring sweeping, fundamental reforms. Fukuzawa was the leading proponent of this line of thought.

Born into a family of lower samurai from the province of Buzen in northern Kyushu, Fukuzawa as a young man evidently chafed under the restrictions of the feudal hierarchy. In his autobiography he wrote,

the thing that made me most unhappy in Nakatsu [the domain in which he grew up] was the restriction of rank and position. Not only on official occasions, but in private intercourse, and even among children, the distinctions between high and low were clearly defined. Children of lower samurai families like ours were obliged to use a respectful manner of address in speaking to the children of high samurai families, while these children invariably used an arrogant form of address to us.

And Fukuzawa went on, with typical modesty, "in school I was the best student and no children made light of me there. But once out of the school room, those children would give themselves airs as superiors to me; yet I was sure I was no inferior, not even in physical power. In all this, I could not free myself from discontent though I was still a child."⁵

His chance to leave Nakatsu came in 1854 when he was nineteen years old. It was the year after Perry's arrival, and Fukuzawa was sent to Nagasaki and then to Ogata's school in Osaka for the so-called Dutch studies. Four years later he was sent to Edo by the han officials and ordered to establish a school for Dutch studies that other young samurai from his han could attend—the school that later grew into



The first Japanese embassy to the United States at the Navy Yard, Washington, D.C., 1860.
National Archives

Keiō University. He soon learned English and in 1860 gained passage on a ship to San Francisco, which was part of the official mission going to the United States for ratification of the Harris Treaty.

While in San Francisco it was not so much the technological achievements that impressed Fukuzawa, for his years of Dutch study had acquainted him with the scientific principles involved:

Our hosts in San Francisco were very considerate in showing us examples of modern industry. There was as yet no railway laid to the city, nor was there any electric light in use. But the telegraph system and also Galvani's electroplating were already in use. Then we were taken to a sugar refinery and had the principle of the operation explained to us quite minutely. I am sure that our hosts thought they were showing us something entirely new, naturally looking for our surprise at each new device of modern engineering. But on the contrary, there was really nothing new, at least to me. . . . I had been studying nothing else but such scientific principles ever since I had entered Ogata's school.⁶

What fascinated him far more were social practices and institutions, such as relations between the sexes, family customs, life insurance, the postal and banking systems, hospitals, and lunatic asylums. On this and succeeding trips (to Europe in 1862 and to America again in 1867) he took copious notes on his observations. Fukuzawa first gained fame in 1866 with publication of his book *Seiyō jijō* (*Conditions in the West*), one of the most important books published in Japan in modern times. It was immensely popular because it described the kinds of everyday social institutions in Western countries that the Japanese were most curious about. In short order he published a number of sequels and became an established authority on the West.

Fukuzawa took no active part in the Restoration. But when he realized that the new Meiji government was receptive to reform proposals, the whole tenor of his writings changed. Instead of merely recording information about Western society, he began vigorously urging the adoption of Western values and institutions and the fundamental transformation of Japanese culture. In his later books he went beyond the proposals of Sakuma Shōzan and others who had advocated adoption of Western science while preserving traditional values and social practices. Fukuzawa argued that one could not cling to Confucian ethics and acquire an understanding of Western science, because the former carried with it an attitude toward nature and society that was irreconcilable with scientific habits of thought. The essence of modern civilization, he contended, was found in the cultivation of individual qualities of independence, initiative, and self-reliance. Because he believed that the feudal system and Confucian values stunted those qualities, he made all-out attacks on traditional Japanese culture.

In one of his most important treatises, *Gakumon no susume* (*An Encouragement of Learning*), he began with words that became famous, "Heaven did not create men above men, nor set men below men," and thus succinctly summarized the revolt against inflexible hereditary status that had been brewing throughout the latter half of the Tokugawa Period. He went on to explain that a young man's position in society should be determined by his grasp of utilitarian knowledge. He therefore, throughout his writings, attacked Confucianism, traditional education, and authoritarian government. As an educator, newspaper editor, and advisor to politicians, he exercised immense influence over the generation of Japanese that opened the country and rebuilt its institutions.

Women, Family, and the Limits of Reform

The extent to which Fukuzawa carried his radical critique of the old society is illustrated by his views on women and the family. In *Bummei-ron no gairyaku* (*An Outline of Civilization*), he located the funda-

mental flaw of Japanese culture in its basic institution—the family. By inculcating values of absolute power on the one hand and unquestioning deference on the other, the Japanese family suppressed the spirit of independence that had formed Western civilization. Fukuzawa and other early Meiji reformers blamed the family for the absence of values on which modern scientific civilization depended. They said that it provided the foundation for authoritarian government.

The reformers frequently expressed hope of replacing the extended hierarchical family groups with independent nuclear households consisting of only parents and children and marked by the elevation of women to a new status. Fukuzawa's best-known essay in this regard was a critique of the seventeenth-century Confucian tract *The Great Learning for Women*, which had been used in the Tokugawa Period to instruct samurai wives and daughters in their roles and behavior. The tract instructed them that the "great lifelong duty of a woman is obedience"; and that the "five infirmities" (indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy, and silliness) found in "seven or eight of every ten women" arise from and exacerbate "the inferiority of women to men."⁷ A woman should cure these maladies through introspection, self-reproach, and by learning to look to her husband "as though he were heaven itself." In his essay "A New Great Learning for Women" (1899), Fukuzawa advocated modern education for women and the right to inherit property. Fukuzawa's fellow reformer, Mori Arinori, who had served as Japan's first envoy to America (1870–1872), wrote in "Essay on Wives" that marriages should have greater equality; and when he subsequently married he insisted that the union be governed by a Western-style contract—Fukuzawa was a witness—to demonstrate the equality of the partnership.

These reform efforts, however, had limits: the reformers found practicing what they preached difficult. Mori subsequently dissolved his marriage, explaining that his wife had become "peculiar and flighty" as a result of the new relationship and that "to attempt a marriage like that with an uneducated Japanese woman was my mistake."⁸ Fukuzawa's own daughters later related that their father raised them in the strictest orthodoxy: they were not given a modern education and their views were not consulted in the choice of their marriage partners. Evidently in those reforms that dealt with the most fundamental institutions of life, especially the changes in their own families, the reformers were hard-pressed to live up to their ideals. In such things Fukuzawa was less than wholehearted and once confessed, regarding some of his reform proposals, "A wine merchant is not always a drinker, a cake dealer does not always go in search of sweets. You should not make hasty judgment of the dealer's taste for what he sells in his shop." Fukuzawa may have believed, rationally, that for the good of the nation Japan needed to change its social values, but emotionally he remained tied to the old ways. As one



Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1887. *Kyodo News Service of Japan*

prominent scholar concluded, "Lurking deep in [Fukuzawa's] heart and blood was the old samurai spirit."⁹

Agents of Cultural Revolution

To understand the responsiveness of Japanese society and the rapidity with which changes that led to industrialization and constitutional government were instituted, it is important to emphasize that the revolution was carried out from above, by a party from the traditional elite. At the time of the Meiji Restoration, as we have seen, social malaise was expressed in many ways, including new religions, millenarian movements, and popular revelry in the cities of central Japan, but there was no great immediate social upheaval. No knockdown

drag-out struggle erupted between the old ruling class and a rising bourgeoisie, challenging samurai authority and demanding political rights. "There was no democratic revolution in Japan," Thomas Smith writes, "because none was necessary: the aristocracy itself was revolutionary."¹⁰ The young samurai who came to power in 1868 carried out sweeping reforms that included doing away with the privileges of their own class.

Of great significance in determining the outlook of the new government were the impressions formed by an official mission to the United States and Europe from 1871 to 1873. Comprising more than 100 members, many of whom had never before been abroad, the mission was headed by Prince Iwakura Tomomi, the most prestigious member of the new ruling group, and it included the key leaders Ōkubo Toshimichi, Kido Kōin, and Itō Hirobumi. The mission's ostensible purpose was to make preliminary soundings for revision of the unequal treaties but more fundamentally, Iwakura said, the mission was "to discover the great principles which are to be our guide in the future."¹¹ The journey lasted nearly two years and permitted a thorough examination of the world's most advanced nations. The group's members wanted to discover the sources of Western power and wealth so that a plan for strengthening the Japanese state could be worked out. They began with visits to nine cities in the United States, followed by sojourns in England and Scotland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland. In the course of the trip, Ōkubo Toshimichi wrote to a colleague at home that they were leaving no stone unturned: "Courts, prisons, schools, trading firms, factories and shipyards, iron foundries, sugar refineries, paper plants, wool and cotton spinning and weaving, silver, cutlery, and glass plants, coal and salt mines, . . . —there is nowhere we haven't gone."¹²

The final report of the Iwakura mission was a massive 2,000-page, five-volume chronicle of the mission's observations and the conclusions of its leaders. The most striking aspect of the report is its pervasive optimism. One might suppose that the visitors would have been overwhelmed by Western civilization and the task of trying to match its achievements. Instead one finds a bold self-confidence that what the West had accomplished was of recent origin and that Japan through careful planning and hard work could catch up:

Most of the countries in Europe shine with the light of civilization and abound in wealth and power. Their trade is prosperous, their technology is superior, and they greatly enjoy the pleasures and comforts of life. When one observes such conditions, one is apt to think that these countries have always been like this, but this is not the case—the wealth and prosperity one sees now in Europe dates

to an appreciable degree from the period after 1800. It has taken scarcely forty years to produce such conditions. . . . How different the Europe of today is from the Europe of forty years ago can be imagined easily. There were no trains running on the land; there were no steamships operating on the water. There was no transmission of news by telegraph. . . . Those who read this record should reflect upon the lesson to be drawn for Japan. . . ."¹³

The conversion of Ōkubo Toshimichi, one of the strongest men in the new government, illustrates the enthusiasm that many of the Meiji leaders acquired for full-scale reform. What he saw in the West deeply influenced his thinking; England especially impressed him. He recorded his awe at "the excellence of the English transportation network with its railways and canals reaching into remote areas and with its well-kept carriage roads and bridges." Industrial enterprises in city after city affected him: the textile mills of Manchester, the shipbuilding yards of Liverpool, the Armstrong gun factory of Newcastle, and iron and steel works of Sheffield. Ōkubo confided to his traveling companions that before leaving Japan he had felt his ambitions were realized: centralizing power in the imperial government had been a great achievement. Now, however, he saw that many tasks remained, that Japan did not begin to compare with "the more progressive powers in the world."¹⁴

So he returned to Japan with new ambitions and threw himself into further reforms, inspired by the Western example, with a zeal that was especially apparent in his personal life. He began to adopt many of the trappings of Western civilization. With great fastidiousness, for example, he wore European dress, and was the first to appear at court with a Western-style haircut. He built a pretentious Western-style house, appointed with Western furniture, and boasted to his friends that "even foreigners to whom I have shown the house have praised it so I am quite pleased."¹⁵ Daily he rode to the government offices in a fine two-horse English carriage. But more important, he began to push national reforms beyond the limits of what he had earlier seen as his goals. Centralization of power in a new imperial government was not sufficient; Japan would have to carry out sweeping reforms of its whole society if it were to become the equal of the Western powers.

The government hastened the adoption of the new technology and new institutions by hiring more than 3,000 foreign advisors over the course of the Meiji Period. They included engineers, technicians, field workers, military consultants, teachers, and financial and legal advisors. In all they contributed the equivalent of 10,000 years of service. Most of this work was during the first fifteen years of the Meiji Period. Then, once the Japanese had fully exploited the Westerners' expertise and learned the new ways, they replaced the foreign advisors with Japanese. At the same time, in "the first great student migration of

modern times," more than 11,000 passports were issued for overseas study between 1868 and 1902. In excess of one-half went to the United States, but the government-sponsored students increasingly were sent to Germany once it became the preferred model in organizing Japan's governmental, legal, and military organizations.¹⁶

In addition to the industrial and military power that adoption of Western technology promised, another important motivation for Japanese cultural borrowing was the drive for national equality and respect. Ōkuma Shigenobu, one of the prominent Meiji leaders, later wrote that "to attain an equal footing with the other powers . . . has been the impulse underlying all the national changes that have taken place."¹⁷ From 1868 to 1894 the prime goal of Japanese foreign policy was revision of the unequal treaties, so as to stand on equal footing with Western countries and escape the semicolonial status to which extraterritoriality and tariff control had relegated Japan. Leaders of the government concluded from discussions with Western diplomatic representatives that revision of the treaties depended not only on the development of national power but on legal and administrative reforms that would make Japan a "civilized" country capable of proper treatment of foreign nationals. The government moved quickly to plan such reforms. Committees appointed to compile penal and civil codes took French law as a model and engaged the French jurist Gustave Emile Boissonade to advise them in compiling laws. A German legal expert, Hermann Roesler, was entrusted with drafting a commercial code. As we shall see, the desire to impress Westerners with Japan's civilized progress was also a constant stimulus to the establishment of constitutional government.

The zeal for treaty revision elicited many bureaucratic efforts to reform Japanese customs. Government policy sought to modify traditional morality to avoid the criticism and disapproval of foreigners. Ordinances forbidding public nakedness and mixed bathing in public bathhouses explained that, although "this is the general custom and is not so despised among ourselves, in foreign countries this is looked on with great contempt. You should, therefore, consider it a great shame."¹⁸

Efforts to win foreigners' approval also included methods of artful persuasion. In 1883 the Rokumeikan, a gaudy Victorian hall, was opened in Tokyo so that government officials could entertain foreign residents with cards, billiards, Western music, and lavish balls. Itō Hirobumi, the Prime Minister, gave a spectacular costume ball for foreign residents, in which he appeared as a Venetian nobleman and Inoue Kaoru, the foreign minister, as a strolling musician. It is clear from such episodes that the government leaders were pressing a Westernization policy not only as a means of strengthening the nation, but also as a part of the treaty revision effort.

A primary agent of the cultural revolution in the early Meiji Period was the new educational system. Education took on the burden of imparting a knowledge and understanding of Western culture and thereby preparing the young for occupations in an industrial society. The classical curriculum, which had already been modified in the late Tokugawa Period, was now almost wholly replaced by the study of Western languages, by scientific and technical training, and by a variety of disciplines whose content was adopted from Western education.

Japanese statesmen and intellectuals in the early Meiji Period often looked back with contempt and distaste at the school system of the Tokugawa Period. Western-style and Tokugawa-style education appeared in sharp contrast in their minds. Fukuzawa was undoubtedly the most articulate advocate of the new learning, which he regarded as practical, scientific, and useful; and he was the most bitter critic of the traditional Confucian-oriented learning in Tokugawa Japan, which he regarded as stagnant, useless, and unprogressive. In a typical passage he wrote:

The only purpose of education is to show that Man was created by Heaven to gain the knowledge required for the satisfaction of his needs for food, shelter, and clothing, and for living harmoniously with his fellows. To be able to read difficult old books or to compose poetry is all very nice and pleasant but it is not really worth the praise given to great scholars of Chinese and Japanese in the past.

How many Chinese scholars have been good at managing their domestic affairs? How many clever men have been good at poetry? No wonder that a wise parent, a shopkeeper, or a farmer is alarmed when his son displays a taste for study! . . . What is really wanted is learning that is close to the needs of man's daily life.

A man who can recite the chronicles but does not know the price of food, a man who has penetrated deeply into the classics and history but cannot carry out a simple business transaction—such people as these are nothing but rice-consuming dictionaries, of no use to their country but only a hindrance to its economy. Managing your household is learning, understanding the trend of the times is learning, but why should reading old books be called learning?¹⁹

This passage reflects the contempt that Fukuzawa and his contemporaries in the 1870s felt for traditional education, with its emphasis on single-minded study of the Confucian classics. Today, however, with the advantage of perspective, we can look back and see many valuable contributions that the Tokugawa educational system made to the efforts by Fukuzawa and others to strengthen their country and transform it into a great industrial power.

In the first place, the Japanese during the Tokugawa Period had a vast educational network. The decades leading up to the Restoration saw a growing popular desire for self-improvement; society offered opportunities to apply improved skills, and the result was a surge of educational aspiration. By 1868 more than 11,000 schools of all kinds operated throughout Japan, ranging from the bakufu and domain schools for samurai to private academies and local schools (*terakoya*) for the commoners. The following table suggests the popular enthusiasm for schooling in the years before and immediately after the Restoration.

Development of Types of Schools by Date of Establishment²⁰

Year	Private Academies	Local Schools	Domain Schools
Before 1750	19	47	40
1751–1788	38	194	48
1789–1829	207	1,286	78
1830–1867	796	8,675	56
1868–1872	182	1,035	48
Total	1,242	11,237	270

Private academies, such as Ogata's school for Dutch studies in Osaka, which Fukuzawa attended, were generally in the homes of established scholars who could draw students from all classes and all parts of the country. The numerous local schools, run by public-spirited citizens without official support, offered rudimentary training in reading, writing, and arithmetic to merchants, farmers, and town dwellers.

At the end of the Tokugawa Period almost all the children of the samurai class attended some kind of school for some period of time, and by the 1860s about 40 percent of male children and 15 percent of female children attended school. Herbert Passin estimates that attendance in the immediate pre-Meiji Period was about 1,300,000 children, and he points out that this figure corresponds almost exactly with school attendance in 1873, the first year of the modern school system. "Japanese were prepared for a modern school system because by the end of the Tokugawa Period millions of families had assimilated the routines it required into their mode of life. . . . In other words, the Japanese population was ready for the formal routines and disciplines of modern education because it had already had a long experience of learning in a setting of formal routines and disciplines."²¹ The point is that the sheer presence of education as a widespread part of the environment, regardless of its content, is important.

Additionally, a much more apparent advantage that Tokugawa education bequeathed the Meiji Japanese was a high literacy rate.

Passin estimates that by the end of the Tokugawa Period 40 percent of males were literate. Richard Rubinger, a careful student of the Tokugawa education system, cautions that these estimates are rough and problematic.²² In any case, Japanese literacy rates in 1868 do appear to compare very favorably with contemporary European countries. It made the Japanese a potentially highly skilled population, and as Dore stresses, it helped implant the idea of progress and the notion of self-improvement. Education was sometimes a means of advancement in Tokugawa society, and it therefore created an emphasis on "achievement" and "ambition." By the end of the Tokugawa Period a desire to excel pervaded the schools. Dore provides an amusing example from a memoir describing how a boy and three of his dormitory friends in the 1850s engaged in a prolonged reading competition in a domain school: "We really went all out that month. If one of us got a page ahead the others would turn pale. We hardly took time to chew our food properly, and we drank as little water as possible in order that the others should not get ahead in the time wasted going to the lavatory—so keen were we to get a line or two ahead of the others."²³ The drive to excel, already far developed in late Tokugawa times, was surely in part responsible for the explosion of individual energies that characterized the Japanese of the Meiji Period and their desire to rise in the social hierarchy. A precept taught commoners in a local school makes clear how the ethic of achievement, reinforced by the threat of shame, was inculcated in children: "Illiteracy is a form of blindness. It brings shame on your teacher, shame on your parents, and shame on yourself. . . . Determine to succeed, study with all your might, never forgetting the shame of failure."²⁴ It is also worth mentioning, as Dore does, that the high literacy rate derived from Tokugawa education made the Japanese people more accessible to new ideas and new techniques, and it facilitated development of national consciousness. Both of these factors were important ingredients of the reforms Fukuzawa sought.

Finally, another aspect of the Tokugawa legacy that Fukuzawa and his contemporaries tended to forget was the fact that many of the things they advocated had already been developing in late Tokugawa times. Practical subjects, for example, had been given increasing attention despite a certain resistance by conservative Confucianists. Among the common people vocational education was widespread, and the shogunate and some of the important domains had already made major efforts in the development of technical training. The recognition of ability and special training, which was such an important underlying element of the ideology of early Meiji education, had already started in the 1840s. The heritage of Tokugawa education, therefore, was not so burdensome as Fukuzawa seemed to believe. In fact, an extensive modern educational system could not have been so readily established without it.

In 1871 the Ministry of Education was established, and the following year the Fundamental Code of Education was promulgated, emphasizing in its preamble that education should be universal and utilitarian. It set the ambitious goal that "there shall, in the future, be no community with an illiterate family, or a family with an illiterate person." It made four years of education compulsory for every child. Although that goal was not immediately realized, by the turn of the century more than 90 percent of the children of statutory school age were in school.

The content of the new education was almost entirely drawn from the West. Dr. David Murray of Rutgers University was brought to Japan in 1873 as an advisor to the Ministry of Education. He and other American advisors were instrumental in the adoption of classroom readers that were almost direct translations of American textbooks, in the acceptance of coeducational common schools as the basic unit of the school system, and in the formation of teachers' colleges and vocational (particularly agricultural) schools. After the ban on Christianity was lifted in 1873, missionaries played a prominent role in the founding of new educational institutions, many of which later became colleges and universities. Principally by this vehicle, Christianity exercised a strong influence on the better-educated Japanese.

The new schools became agents of cultural and therefore social revolution. Success no longer depended on traditional skills acquired in the family; rather it depended on mastery of some aspect of the new learning, such as mechanical engineering, French law, double-entry bookkeeping, or English conversation. These were skills learned in the new schools—which were open to everyone. In this sense, "all classes of Japanese," in Thomas Smith's valuable phrase, "were born cultural equals" in the Meiji Period.²⁵ The adoption of industrial technology created a great number of new educational groups, and professions opened up in industry, finance, journalism, education, and bureaucracy.

Education became the prime mechanism for social advancement. "Getting on" in the world, rising above one's father's station, became the consuming ambition of the "youth of Meiji." Japanese society thus became much more mobile. Young men longed to leave the countryside, go to the cities, and enter new occupations. Many youth from humble origins rose meteorlike to the heights of leadership in this freer society. That Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* was one of the most popular of the translated works in the Meiji Period was testimony to the emphasis upon getting ahead through hard work and ambition.

For a whole generation of youth in the 1870s and 1880s innovation and foreignness became vogue. As Dore writes: "Wearing a stovepipe hat, eating beef, forming a joint-stock company, using soap instead of friction, running committees by formal rules, planting new strains of

wheat, consuming tobacco wrapped in paper rather than in a pipe, reading the Bible, adopting double-entry bookkeeping, sitting on chairs, were all parts of the new, Western, and, in the cant-phrase of the time, 'civilized and enlightened' way of life."²⁶ Many Japanese came to identify with patterns of Western civilization, believing them representative of universal patterns of development to which all progressive nations must conform. As Japan advanced it must inevitably become more like Western societies. Progress, in this view, required discarding traditional Asian institutions, customs, and patterns of social behavior. There was a general revulsion from an Asian identity. Fukuzawa wrote in 1885 that Japan should "escape from Asia":

Today China and Korea are no help at all to our country. On the contrary, because our three countries are adjacent we are sometimes regarded as the same in the eyes of civilized Western peoples. Appraisals of China and Korea are applied to our country . . . and indirectly this greatly impedes our foreign policy. It is really a great misfortune for our country. It follows that in making our present plans we have not time to await the development of neighboring countries and join them in reviving Asia. Rather, we should escape from them and join the company of Western civilized nations.²⁷

This kind of alienation from Japan's own cultural heritage provided a powerful impetus to institutional reform in the generation after the restoration.

*The Challenge of the Japanese Enlightenment*²⁸

Let us sum up the dominant themes of influence exercised by Western culture during the period of civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) that held sway in the first two decades of the Meiji Period. The full sweep of European enlightenment and nineteenth-century liberal thought was introduced into Japan in a very short space of time. Western liberal civilization challenged Japan's traditional beliefs, its traditional social organization, and its traditional system of government with such ceaseless persistence as to throw nearly every area of life into a state of turmoil.

The first major theme of the Japanese enlightenment was that advocates of Western values were dominated by a negative view of Japan's traditional institutions and the learning that underlay them. Fukuzawa wrote of this sweeping rejection of his heritage: "If we compare the knowledge of the Japanese and Westerners in letters, in techniques, in commerce, or in industry, from the smallest to the largest matter . . . there is not one thing in which we excel. . . . In Japan's pres-

ent condition there is nothing in which we may take pride vis-à-vis the West. All that Japan has to be proud of . . . is its scenery."²⁹

Second, despite this thorough rejection of Japanese civilization, the enlightenment advocates held almost limitless hope for the future. As with the enlightenment in Europe, an optimistic belief held sway that human effort could master the sociopolitical environment, just as science had made it possible to master the physical environment. Japan's optimism carried over into a fierce determination to exert whatever effort was required to catch up with the West. In 1874 one of Japan's leading reformers wrote, "How will we catch up with and overtake the Western powers if we allow Sunday to be a holiday for our people?"³⁰

A third dominant theme of the Japanese enlightenment stressed the cultural example of the West. Because universal laws of nature governed human behavior, Japan could, if it developed in accord with these laws, progress in the same way that Western nations had. Progress, in other words, was unilinear; it was determined by universal forces of historic development rather than by the particular trends of national history. Civilization in the West had progressed further along this universal path of development and therefore it could be looked to as an example. Civilized development meant not only that people would use the same machines; they would also think and behave in similar ways, eat the same kinds of food, wear the same kinds of clothing, live in houses of similar architecture, and enjoy the same kinds of art. A Japanese cultural identity had no place here.

A fourth dominant theme was a wholehearted commitment to science, technology, and utilitarian knowledge. The classical curriculum in the schools must be replaced by a practical learning useful for daily life. Fukuzawa's well-known condemnation of Tokugawa scholars as "rice-consuming dictionaries" concluded that "managing your household is learning, business is learning, seeking the trend of the times is learning."

Fifth, the enlightenment promulgated a new view of humanity with revolutionary implications for society and the state. It was necessary to foster a new set of values on which a more open, constitutional, and enlightened government could be founded. The Japanese enlightenment was by no means democratic in the twentieth-century sense of advocating universal suffrage or economic equality, but it did oppose old forms of social stratification and government by a closed elite. It favored an open and mobile society in which economic rewards would be commensurate with individual talent and effort. The enlightenment writers generally argued for a parliamentary government that would function through rational deliberation and enlightened legislation with responsible ministries and an impartial, law-abiding administration. They espoused free trade ideals and put their faith in an

emerging internationalism. Fukuzawa saw little future for a narrow nationalism: "A country is a gathering of people. Japan is a gathering of Japanese and England is a gathering of Englishmen. Japanese and Englishmen alike are members of a common humanity; they must respect each others' rights."³¹

These enlightenment themes drew their support from the discrediting of the old society by social and economic change and by its incapacity to deal with the foreign crisis. But the extreme adulation of the Western cultural model could not sustain itself once the vogue had passed; it was too destructive of Japanese pride. Moreover, many of the new social values introduced during the enlightenment decades of the 1870s and 1880s ran counter to deeply ingrained mores of the Japanese people and, above all, were incompatible with the institutions of the countryside where the vast majority of the populace had its roots. Finally, the Meiji leaders saw that the values of the enlightenment could not coexist with the formation of the strong national consciousness required to unite the hearts and loyalties of all the people in the struggle to industrialize.

Notes

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7. Quoted in Jennifer Robertson, "The Shingaku Woman," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 92.
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