

TWO MODELS OF THE JAPANESE NATION-STATE  
IN THE MEIJI ERA:  
YUKICHI FUKUZAWA AND HIROYUKI KATO†

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I. *Introduction*

Meiji Japan offered a unique opportunity to evaluate the role of political theory—Japan was about to introduce a western-style nation-state, but she was not certain about the type of nation-state. To establish a new nation was not merely an exercise in introducing and modifying the political institutions of the West. The most important point was to understand the world situation in the second half of the nineteenth century, and identify Japan's political ideas and framework within the world system. In other words, political theory seemed to play a crucial role for Japanese intellectuals to determine the nature of the Japanese nation-state: how to establish a new nation-state in an essentially non-western Japan? Two intellectuals, Yukichi Fukuzawa and Hiroyuki Kato, tried to solve this problem. In this paper, the two intellectuals' ideas and visions of the Japanese nation will be examined by focusing on 1) images of the state before the Meiji Restoration (toward the end of the Tokugawa era); 2) the nature of the Meiji state in the early Meiji period.<sup>1</sup> Fukuzawa and Kato are, in a sense, innovators of a unique political experiment to plant a foreign ideas and institutions in the feudal and Oriental Japan. In addition, their experiments had to be successful—a failure might have turned Japan into another colony of the west in Asia.

In the second section of this paper, both Fukuzawa and Kato's biographical and personal details are outlined. In the following sections III and IV, contrasting views of Fukuzawa and Kato are closely investigated. While some other Meiji intellectuals are important in the process of the political modernization of Japan, Fukuzawa and Kato are, in my view, the most important political theorists of Meiji Japan.

II. *Biographical Sketches*

Fukuzawa was born in 1835 and his family belonged to a lower class samurai of the

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Nakatsu clan (presently Oita prefecture).<sup>2</sup> Only one year after his birth, Kato was born to a lower-class samurai family of the Tajima clan (now Hyogo prefecture). It is important to note that although a samurai ought to be an expert in warfare, he was sometimes a first-rate intellectual, too. In other words, as a proverb indicates, the best samurai was a man of arts and of battle (*bunbu ryodo*). Without intellectual skills and qualification, a samurai was not considered to be the best samurai at all. This is applicable to the case of our Fukuzawa and Kato, who were lower-class samurai with visible intellectual aspirations. (The main subjects of study were the *Analects of Confucius*, Japanese literature, and the history of China and Japan).

Fukuzawa considered the Tokugawa feudal system as irrational and dated, and decided to learn western ideas and science seriously. Perhaps it was only a way to escape the stifling social order of a local town—he could leave his town in order to study Western ideas in some advanced and sophisticated cities such as Nagasaki and Edo. In 1854, when he was nineteen, he went to Nagasaki, which was the center of Western learnings and the only place where a Dutch mission was allowed to remain during the Tokugawa period. From 1855 to 1857, he studied in Osaka at Koan Ogata's private school (*Tekijyuku*). He learned not only Dutch but also natural sciences. (Koan was a famous scholar who specialized in western studies). His three year training at Koan's school helped him establish an objective and scientific perspective to analyze various issues and problems. In 1858, the Nakatsu clan government decided to transfer him to Edo and attached him to the Edo office of the clan government. His main duty was to teach students on Western culture and science at that office. His school developed as *Keio Gijyuku* in 1868, and was granted the status of a university in 1871. His study was, not however well organized: he thought once his Dutch language studies were almost completed, and his basis of western study was also completed. But this was not the case at all when he visited Yokohama (near Edo, another center of western civilization in 1859, it was English but not Dutch that was used as a tool of communication and learning. In other words, it meant that his Dutch became a less useful language. His efforts seemed to be almost fruitless. In spite of discouraging experiences, he began to study English from scratch. This decision seemed very costly and time-consuming for him, but later it proved to be a good decision. (Remember there was no systematic textbook or dictionary on English written in Japanese). He became one of leading scholars on the west, and the Tokugawa government asked him to be a member of government delegations to the USA and European countries in 1860, 1862 and 1867.

In 1866, he published *Conditions in the West* (*Seiyo Jijyo*), and this work turned out to be extremely popular, for many Japanese were anxious to understand the west. After the Meiji Restoration, he was offered several positions by the government to serve the new regime. But he occasionally rejected those requests indicating that he wished to remain as an independent critic of Japan. He had to remain outside the corridors of political power in order to definitely identify his role. There were two main areas of activity for him: one was the education and training of the youth at Keio University; the other was journalism in order to inform and lead the citizens on the rules and morals of modern civil

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<sup>2</sup> In Japanese, the complete works of Fukuzawa was published by Iwanamishoten, Tokyo, 1959. In English, the following books are useful. Y. Fukuzawa, *An Encouragement of Learning*, International Publishing Services, 1970; Y. Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, Columbia University Press, 1966; Carmen Blacker, *Japanese Enlightenment*, Columbia University Press, 1964.

society. Even his own newspaper, *the Jiji Shimpo*, was established in 1882 as a strong arm of the enlightenment.

Hiroyuki Kato followed a somewhat different pattern of intellectual development<sup>3</sup>. First, he went to Edo with his father and studies the Japanese science of war (Koshu; School of strategy), and then western military science. It was 1854 when he started to learn Dutch as a first step to study western ideas. After Dutch, he chose German and German studies as his main area of activity. Unlike Fukuzawa, Kato was attached to a research institute of the Tokugawa government, and continued his study at that institute. After the Meiji Restoration, he joined the new government occupying several cabinet posts such as Minister of Education and Minister of External Affairs. In 1877, he was asked to supervise a government school (Kaisei Gakkou, later Tokyo Imperial University), which aimed at producing bureaucratic and administrative elites of modern Japan. Between 1881 to 1893 he was the president of Tokyo Imperial University; he was appointed as an advisor to the Emperor in 1895; and the title of Baron was granted to him in 1900. From 1906 to 1916 he worked as a member of the Privy Council and other prestigious posts were given to him on numerous occasions. In other words, he was one of the leading elites of the Meiji regime.

It is interesting to examine Kato and Fukuzawa's areas of intellectual activity: Kato established a department of German law at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1883. At the beginning Kato's studying German subjects was considered to be prestigious and scholarly.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, private universities such as Keio and Waseda tended to specialize in British/American studies.

Needless to say, both Fukuzawa and Kato were influential and important intellectuals in Meiji Japan. The main focus of this paper is to see how they understood the domestic and international environment surrounding Japan at that time, and how they tried to introduce western ideas. As we will see, their approaches to various problems are interesting and worthy of academic investigation.

### III. *Images of a Nation-State before the Meiji Restoration*

In the early 1860's, when the feudal regime was beginning to disintegrate and a new vision of the future was still unclear, both Fukuzawa and Kato tried to discern the image of a Nation-State. Fukuzawa and Kato respectively published their books in 1865 and 1860 in order to repair the decaying feudal regime. Obviously, under the chaotic situation which existed, they did not put forward prescriptions for a new society. Rather, they intended to reorganize and repair the old system. For this reason, a blueprint for a modern Japan is difficult to find in their works. I should also mention that their intellectual exercise was not merely a scholarly investigation, for had Japan failed to modernize it might have become a colony of the west. Hence, a strong sense of nationalism, or defending the nation, informs their analyses.

<sup>3</sup> H. Tanaka, "Western Political Thought in a Japanese Context: Hiroyuki Kato and Nyozeikan Hasegawa," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 20, 1988, pp. 15-22.

<sup>4</sup> H. Tanaka, "N. Hasegawa's Criticism on German Studies in Japan," in S. Ienaga and O. Komaki, eds., *Philosophy and Japanese Society*, Kobunsha, 1978.\*

Hiroyuki's work, *On Neighbouring Nations (Tonarigusa)*, explored western ideas and the political systems of Europe such as parliament and government. Kato was impressed by ideas of equal citizenship and democratic rights in Europe. Also, since a parliamentary government worked efficiently, the dictatorship of a minority or the despotism of monarchies did not prevail to an overwhelming degree. The oriental situation was just the opposite of that in Europe. There, despotism or dictatorship was the rule in politics. How were the ideas western democracy learned in Tokugawa Japan? First of all, it seemed unwise to criticize the Tokugawa regime directly, so Kato chose China as an example of a feudal, Oriental nation. This is why he titled his book *Our Neighbouring Nation (China)*. Thus an indirect attack on Japan was possible in his work.

There was a dialogue between two men who discussed three subjects in this book:

- (a) China's military defeat by the European powers starting with the Opium War (1840–42), and national disorder such as the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), could be explained by three reasons. First, China did not learn Western technology thoroughly. Consequently, its military devices became obsolete and dated. Second, China's political system was corrupt and malfunctioning. Third, China at the time lacked the national power required to repulse a western invasion.
- (b) One way to modernize Chinese politics was by introducing a new system of government which could promise fairness and equality for all citizens. In this context, a western-style parliamentary government appeared to be promising.
- (c) In cases of emergency, local governments should send a delegate to the capital in order to discuss urgent national issues.

This was Kato's analysis of the Chinese situation. How was the prescription applicable in Japan? One answer to this question would be as follows. A kind of nationwide assembly should immediately be called to discuss urgent problems. Since Kato seemed to imply that only samurai or clan elites from different regions should be chosen as the delegate, it was not a democratic parliament as today. But when we consider the intellectual environment of Kato's era, his suggestion should not be underrated. After all, he learned of these subjects only through reading foreign books.

On the other hand, Yukichi Fukuzawa published his *Transactions with the Chinese* in 1865. It was based on his visits to the USA (1860) and England (1862), and his indepth reading of foreign books. As a man of the Enlightenment, he warned the public that the opening of Japan to the world was the only option for Japan—no other options were possible. According to him, a sense of anti-western antagonism and exclusionism (Sonno Joi) was irrational and uncivilized, and had to be overcome. While Fukuzawa's work dealt mainly with China it implied like Kato's book, transactions with both China and Europe. Let us briefly summarize Fukuzawa's work.

First, when European missions were sent to Japan, a majority of the Japanese people thought that foreign governments would take over Japan with advanced technology and military power. This type of emotional reaction to the foreign visitors sometimes spurred acts of terrorist assassination of Europeans in Japan. Fukuzawa strongly opposed this reaction.

Second, he identified five regions of the world according to their degree of civilization: America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia. Among the five, he placed both America and Europe in the advanced class whereas he classified Australia and Africa as less devel-

oped regions. Asia once had an advanced civilization and exerted great influence, but was unable to adapt to a new environment. The result, as seen in the case of China, was excessive national pride and ethnocentrism which prevented China from learning new ideas, sciences, and technologies from the west. Japan should not follow the Chinese pattern, if the Japanese wished to maintain their national independence and integrity.

Third, free trade was necessary for every nation so that goods could be exchanged among nations. Here Fukuzawa seemed to indicate that peaceful and harmonious relationships with the rest of the world, rather than military conquest, was important for the survival of Japan. Citing the example of Portugal, he observed that it was a relatively small nation yet maintained an influential position in the world. One reason for this was Portugal's wise domestic and foreign policies. Fukuzawa's voice, however, remained that of a minority. The majority insisted on strong militarization, especially the establishment of a powerful naval force in order to protect Japan from the colonial powers.

Both Kato and Fukuzawa examined the problems of the feudal regime (China) from the standpoint of the western Enlightenment: Kato advocated parliamentary government while Fukuzawa called for opening the nation to the West on the basis of free trade and peace. While neither thinker had any clear vision of a coming modern society, their theoretical understanding is interesting for us. Also they tried to discern an image of the modern nation: they cited China as the bad case—a nation eroded by western colonialism. Was there a link of solidarity between China and Japan? If Japan wished to be a democratic nation, then it should not colonize China as with the European powers. The outcome of this issue however, was negative for, during the Meiji, Taisho and Showa eras, Japan became a Western-type power in Asia. Instead of fostering solidarity between the two nations, Japan exploited China to a large extent. Democracy within a nation and solidarity among (weak) nations did not stand side by side in the case of Japan's political modernization.

#### IV. *Models of the Nation-State after the Meiji Restoration*

In 1868, Fukuzawa and Kato recognized that the Meiji Restoration, and the modernization of Japan, was about to begin. Their role as westernized intellectuals was finally institutionalized. First, the Tokugawa Shogun (the Head of the samurai class) was replaced by an Emperor (the Head of royalty) who during 300 years of Tokugawa rule had only held nominal authority. Second, a majority of the ruling elite of the feudal period was replaced by a group of lower status samurai, most of whom were ambitious young men from the domains of Satsuma (Kagoshima) and Choshu (Yamaguchi). A radical transformation of Japan did not take place, but the centre of political power shifted from the feudal authorities to a coalition of lower-status samurai leaders and the emperor. This change in itself was not a revolution since it was unaccompanied by radical social and economic reforms. In Japan, however, it could be considered an important political event.

What followed next was a series of difficult and urgent tasks of modernization. From a political science perspective, when one discusses the formation of a nation-state, at least two requirements must be noted. First, what type of dominant *political idea* is chosen for that nation and what type of *political institution* is introduced? Second, the new nation's

societal orientation and economic system have to be determined. As we have seen, Fukuzawa and Kato provide us interesting views on the Meiji government.

Kato's book *Constitutional Political Systems* published in 1868 is considered to be the first major work on comparative politics in Japan. In this work, the characteristics of different political systems were discussed generally, then specific systems were identified one by one: the dictatorship of the monarchy, monarchical polity (which was not despotic) aristocratic rule, constitutional monarchy and the republican system. According to Kato, Meiji Japan had just abandoned a dictatorship of the monarchical type and introduced a monarchical polity. Also, explanations of the legislative, executive and judicial functions of the government were added. Kato did not venture to specify a suitable political system for Meiji Japan, but he seemed to support the idea of a constitutional monarchy. In 1869, he published another work on economy and trade entitled *Discourses on Trade*. He identified the advantages of free trade among nations. Since many Japanese were influenced by traditional schools of thought—the sakoku policy (policy of isolation and exclusion) and anti-western antagonism—his suggestion was new.

Kato established his fame in the Meiji era when his views on politics became more conservative. This was clear in his 1870 book, (*Shinsei Taii*). First, he criticized and called for the elimination of Japanese traditionalism or the idea that a citizen would sacrifice everything for his ruler. In other words, politics should not serve for the benefit of the ruler; every citizen should have a say in political society. Here we can see his liberal view of politics. However, he did not support the idea of democracy. He thought that giving political rights to uncivilized people and opening a national diet were premature in Japan. Unlike citizens of the West, a majority of Japanese were not well-educated and cultured. Thus Kato favoured only a limited form of democracy, where a handful of citizens could participate in politics.

As a man of nationalism and liberal enlightenment, Fukuzawa tried to chart a course for Japanese politics and diplomacy on various occasions. His well-known three volume work, *Conditions of the West* (1866–70), *The Encouragement of Learning* (1872–76), and *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875) display his insightful analysis of Japanese politics and civilization. The first volume, which actually consisted of six separate books, discussed the advantages of free trade and constitutional government. His second volume argued that by learning Western sciences and ideas, Japanese citizens could establish a liberal and equal society. Learning, he claimed, makes people responsible and independent participants in society. When Japan became a nation of independent citizens, then the Japanese nation could behave as a responsible country in world affairs. This was the essence of Fukuzawa's theory of development.

Fukuzawa's 1875 work marked the zenith of his analysis for thereafter his views became more sophisticated. The main theme of that book was "how to pursue the national independence of Japan." He discussed diplomacy, political systems and overall societal transformation. Interestingly, Fukuzawa abandoned his earlier optimism regarding international politics and came to believe that power politics was the rule of the game and altruism was rather groundless. Mere good faith could not assure a nation's independence. With regard to domestic politics, he warned both the government and its citizens: the government should not employ coercive force against its people and the citizens should not use violence to criticize their rulers. Only rationality could lead to the peaceful formation

of national politics.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, both Kato and Fukuzawa supported the idea of a Westernized form of government and civil society. But Kato emphasized that modernization had to be initiated by the government and the German-type of limited constitutional government was suitable for Japan. Excessive democracy as such had to be firmly rejected. Fukuzawa argued that only civilized and well-informed citizens could establish a modern Japan.

## V. Conclusion

If we compare these two powerful intellectuals, we can point out their distinctive characteristics: Fukuzawa seemed to be influenced by an Anglo-American way of thinking, and tried to persuade the Japanese citizens to behave rationally and reasonably. Without the participation and contribution of well-informed citizens, the political, social and economic modernization of Japan could not be possible. The role of the government was necessary, but the most important point was the citizens' contribution. Kato, on the other hand, rejected traditional feudalism of the Tokugawa regime, yet did not fully support democracy as a principle of Japanese politics. To some extent, democratic rights could be granted to people by the Meiji government, but it was the government that would determine the pace and degree of political modernization. In this sense, a German (Prussia) type of governing system was suitable for Japan.

The formation of Meiji Japan was a unique experiment for political scientists: Kato and Fukuzawa studied western political theory and developed two interesting and contrasting models of the nation-state. It is my belief that the development of Japanese politics and political thought has to be analyzed within the framework of a global perspective.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen in this paper, Japan's political development had a very close *rapport* with western political ideas. In this sense, it is wrong to treat Meiji Japan as if it were isolated from the rest of the world. Kato and Fukuzawa were *the missing link* between Europe and the tiny feudal nation in the Orient.

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<sup>5</sup> H. Tanaka, "The Development of Liberalism in Japan," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 21, 1989, pp. 259-268.

<sup>6</sup> H. Tanaka, *Studies on Thomas Hobbes: The Birth of Modern State Theory*, Ochanomizu Shobo, 1982.\*