CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Perhaps all developing societies since the Industrial Revolution are fated to undergo Westernization. Japan certainly did. After opening their land under pressure from Perry and Harris in the 1850s, the Japanese adopted Western ways not only in the outer realm of material culture and political forms but also in the inner realm of thought, spirit, and values. Today, Western sociopolitical ideals are so compelling that most Japanese would refuse to live by the pre-1945 imperial ethos. Thus democracy, individual freedom, egalitarianism, pacifism, and the rule of law to uphold basic human rights can be violated only by devious means and over public protest. Yet none of those ideals derived from Japanese or East Asian tradition; all originated in the modern West. Very few present-day Japanese would applaud an act of disembowelment. Fewer still would approve of police torture used to extract confessions. And virtually no one would tolerate a form of slavery whereby a father may sell his daughters into legalized prostitution – while filial piety enjoins them to submit meekly if not cheerfully. However, the Japanese would not have disowned these former folkways without the benefit of Western example, influence, or compulsion. Today, Japanese leftists condemn, and government leaders are obliged to deplore, war crimes and atrocities committed before 1945. But here too, most of those deeds can be deemed “criminal” or “atrocious” only when judged against the ethical standards that Western societies developed. This drastic refashioning of thought and values has not been an easy or straightforward process – many Japanese, often in positions of political authority, have obstructed it. It is this clash between native and alien, traditional and modern, rulers and ruled, that serves as the unifying theme for this book. We have taken the following four chapters from volumes 5 and 6 of the *Cambridge History of Japan*, and
we commissioned the sixth chapter on postwar intellectual trends especially for this project.

PRAGMATIC RECEP TIVITY, 1774–1889

Japan received its higher culture from China for most of the past two millennia; and from the West, only in the last two centuries. To embrace this new Western culture as advanced, the Japanese first had to reject time-honored Eastern learning as backward, and the 1774 translation of Ontleedkundige tafelen (also known as Tafel Anatomia) symbolizes this changed attitude. Sugita Genpaku and his colleagues checked organs from an exhumed corpse against the diagrams in this Western text, found these to be more accurate than those in medical classics reputedly written by the ancient sages, and began a tradition of translation and lexicography that continues to this day. As Hirakawa Sukehiro notes in Chapter 2, these fields of study presumed a keen desire to learn from the West and made that endeavor easier for later generations. Sugita’s “practical learning,” based on a spirit of skepticism and empiricism, spread to more sensitive areas where an accurate grasp of world conditions discredited key ideas and institutions that upheld the old order. For example, in 1838, Mito daimyo Tokugawa Nariaki argued that to engage in foreign trade would squander precious resources on worthless luxury goods. He believed that “Japan is a small island country, but it brims with rice, gold, and silver; so of course other lands envy our wealth.”¹ Such economic views were “common sense” in that day. People presumed that foreigners sought trade because they coveted Japan’s abundant riches. Since Japan enjoyed these in a “natural” state of seclusion, or sakoku, there was no need to seek more through trade or conquest overseas. As Confucian moralists such as Kaibara Ekken had always preached, all would be fine if each of the four classes would be content with its status and share of wealth as allotted by Heaven (chisoku an bun).² Feudal leaders suppressed the people’s desires for higher living standards at home and rejected expansion abroad through fatalistic precepts of resignation and providential plenitude. But Western

learning impugned the worth of these precepts and policies by exposing Japan’s true position in the world. As a result, sakoku lost cogency and Western doctrines of imperialism and colonialism gained sway. Common sense by Meiji times told the Japanese that their land was small and dirt-poor. So they, like the British, would have to seek wealth and resources overseas – either through trade or conquest.

This practical Western learning subverted established authority in political and military affairs too. The Japanese daimyo and samurai gloried in martial prowess, esteemed victory over culture, and viewed their land as “the divine realm” whose emperor was descended from Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Such sentiments might quickly evolve into nationalism. Even before the Opium War of 1840–2, Tokugawa Nariaki asserted: “All previous wars took place in Japan between Japanese, so victory or defeat did not matter. But if one inch of soil or one person in Japan ever fell subject to a foreign state, the national disgrace would be huge.” To prevent that, he called for adopting Western ways to a surprising if limited extent. He introduced milk drinking and smallpox vaccinations, and he demanded that a battlefleet be built according to Western techniques because “flimsy Japanese boats make poor warships.” After hearing of British victories in the Opium War, bakufu advisor Sakuma Shözan declared that Western power – not Eastern moral culture – determined world affairs. Foreigners threatened Japan’s imperial line “unbroken for a hundred reigns.” Here was a menace “to the entire divine realm and everyone born in it – not just the Tokugawa house.” After Satsuma and Chōshū lost to Western armed forces in 1863 and 1864, the slogan “revere the emperor, expel the barbarians” became “revere the emperor, emulate Western civilization.” Thereafter, reformers overthrew the Tokugawa bakufu and launched a crash program of cultural borrowing under imperial court aegis. Indeed, the Meiji emperor decreed that Japan should “seek knowledge throughout the world” and “abolish evil practices from the past.” Sugita’s private endeavor had become official state policy.

Unlike contemporary Ch’ing self-strengtheners, Meiji Japanese reformers did not just buy the outward products of Western civiliza-

4 Ibid., Bekki ge, pp. 226 and 231.
tion, such as guns, trains, and ships, in ready-made form. Their real goal was to master the inner “spirit” of that civilization – the principles that Westerners used to invent those products. Indeed, Fukuzawa Yukichi often glossed the old term “practical learning” (jitsugaku) as “science.” This civilization and its spirit were valid and applicable everywhere. Westerners may have discovered these first, but any people could catch up. Moreover, the Meiji state fostered capitalistic development to launch a Japanese industrial revolution. Japan amassed capital and technical expertise to build guns, trains, and ships in the Self-Help manner of Samuel Smiles. Unorthodox ideas abounded. On paper if not totally in fact, the new regime tolerated Christianity, ended polygamy, prohibited discrimination based on class or occupation, and abolished cruel punishments.6 Mori Arinori suggested adopting English as the nation’s official language. Many thinkers ate meat, and a few sought to marry Westerners, in order to “improve the Japanese race.” In the main, Enlightenment (bummei kaika) thinkers called for upholding freedom of speech, assembly, and belief, and they affirmed the open clash of ideas as bringing progress. In 1875, Katō Hiroyuki declared that “the emperor is human and the people (jinmin) too are human”;8 and Nishimura Shigeiki contended that “it is just as bigoted to label someone who ‘opposes the imperial court’ a ‘traitor’ as it is to call foreign states ‘barbarian.’” Thus deviation from the imperial will did not constitute treason.

Actually, Enlightenment figures acted from nationalism as much as from a genuine respect for Western civilization. In an age when a future prime minister might kill his wife in a drunken rage,9 Fukuzawa confessed: “As you know, I’ve always been a heavy drinker. But lately I’ve been reading Western books and thinking

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about the meaning of life and work. ... I now see how shameful drinking is, and limit myself to one or two bottles a night.”¹¹ Yet he might also fume: “Who said whites are civilized? They’re beastly white devils...... Big-shot ministers and consuls of the civilized British state don’t just ignore countrymen who rape [wives of our officials], they aid and protect those criminals, and so oppress our land, Japan.”¹² Meiji leaders reformed Japan along Western lines in part from anti-Westernism. Legislation to “abolish evil practices from the past” stemmed from a desire to revise unequal treaties and recover sovereignty. Both the Enlightenment reformers and People’s Rights activists linked personal freedom and rights with national autonomy. Without a sense of self-respect, rights, and duties, Japanese commoners would grovel before foreign colonial masters just as they had grovelled before Tokugawa feudal lords. Enlightenment reformers and government leaders, however, saw personal freedom and rights largely as an effective means to achieve and expand state power. By contrast, radical People’s Rights thinkers held that individual rights and freedom took precedence over state authority, and that Japan should remain a small-scale power who eschewed empire building in favor of prosperity at home.¹³

As part of the new Westernized view of society, Fukuzawa Yukichi taught that “Heaven does not create some people above or below others.” This was not a formula for socioeconomic leveling. He believed that inequalities of wealth and status did and should exist, but Heaven had not created these. So, no one need resign himself to penury and base status fatalistically – as Tokugawa Confucians had preached. Anyone could achieve personal wealth and eminence by diligently pursuing practical Western studies and would thereby further national strength and advancement as well. For the individual in Japan, as for the state of Japan, “rising in the world” (risshin shusse) now meant “progress.”¹⁴ Later Meiji aggression followed logically, if not inevitably, from this affirmation of “self-help.” Enlightenment reformers espoused liberalism in its nineteenth-century laissez-faire sense – coupled with big doses of Social Darwinism.

¹⁴ The idea of progress was not wholly lacking in Edo times. See Watanabe Hiroshi, “‘Shinpo’ to ‘Chōka’: Nihon no bawai,” in Mizoguchi Yūzō et al., eds., Aji kara kangaeru 5: Kindaika zō (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1994), pp. 133–76.
They cast off the shackles of inherited status and demanded freedom for themselves and for Japan to demonstrate ability and to pursue material gain in open competition. Yet the flip side of this demand was that the losers deserved whatever lot befell them. Fukuzawa despised the Chinese and Koreans as poor and backward.\(^{15}\) In 1883, he argued that “the strong devour the weak,” so “we should side with the civilized nations . . . in search of choice morsels.”\(^{16}\) Likewise, he despised destitute Japanese women and suggested that they work in brothels overseas to earn money and benefit Japan.\(^{17}\) Enlightenment thinkers were tolerant and progressive compared with Tokugawa Confucians and Shōwa fascists. In 1871, Fukuzawa idealistically declared, “We defer to the black slaves of Africa when reason is on their side; we defy the warships of Britain and America when principle is on our side.” As Maruyama Masao poignantly noted, “for a beautiful fleeting moment he balanced individual freedom with national autonomy and national autonomy with the equality of nations.”\(^{18}\) But by the 1880s, Fukuzawa would have Japan fortify Korea as a defense bulwark. And, citing Ch’ing self-strengthening efforts after the 1884 Sino-French War, he argued that losing the war actually helped China because it sparked a sense of independence and a desire for self-help.\(^{19}\) Lost wars provoked backward peoples into accepting civilization and enlightenment – as the 1863 Satsuma and 1864 Chōshū defeats had done for Japan. Thus Fukuzawa justified aggression against the Ch’ing in 1894–5.

Almost all of the Meiji Enlightenment figures were high state officials who bequeathed a mixed legacy. They saw “reform” as embracing universal “world trends” emanating from the West; indeed, they said Japan should “dissociate from Asia” for that reason. And they presumed themselves best able to guide Japan toward


\(^{17}\) *Fūji shinpō* (January 8, 1896), ibid., vol. 15, pp. 362–4.


INTRODUCTION

“civilization.” Soon, however, elitism and privileged status blunted their critical spirit. From about 1875, they closed ranks with fellow state officials, muzzled dissidents, retracted their former radical views, and supported the government after it nullified or reversed earlier progressive reforms. For example, despite legislating equality of all classes in 1871, the government ignored persisting discrimination against outcasts and reestablished social inequality by creating a peerage based on imperial ranks in 1884. Moreover, the Enlightenment thinkers’ high-handed imposition of Western ways in defiance of native traditions provoked a sharp right-wing reaction by the mid-Meiji period. On the other hand, their nineteenth-century “liberal” form of unbridled capitalism – which told poverty-stricken girls to abandon chastity and homeland – aroused left-wing indignation by the late Meiji period. Yet in their heyday from the 1860s to early 1870s, Enlightenment thinkers carried on the Tokugawa tradition of seeking practical knowledge from the West. They repudiated “blind adherence to [invalidated] old ways” (koshū no wakudeki) and stressed the advanced nature of Western ideas and institutions. In this way, they unwittingly inspired radical People’s Rights advocates and socialists whom they later suppressed.

The radical People’s Rights leaders Ueki Emori and Nakae Chōmin produced few original ideas. Instead, their significance lay in advancing a radical alternative vision for Meiji Japan that the government promptly quashed. All Japanese, they argued, had been born free and equal but now lived in an unfree and unequal condition because the Meiji state had arbitrarily deprived the people of their original freedom and inalienable rights. Hence the Japanese people had to “reclaim” these actively from below, not wait for the emperor to “bestow” these from on high. Nor should the existing state impose a constitution on the people. They should elect a Diet based on universal suffrage – without restrictions on sex, education, or wealth. The Diet would draft a constitution that defined the form


of government for a new state and ensured the people’s rights and freedom. Then the people would ratify and present this constitution to the government, thereby signifying their consent to live under that state. In sum, Ueki and Nakae advanced theories of popular sovereignty and the social contract so that the Japanese people could create a state designed to serve their own interests.

People’s Rights leaders all over Japan were producing draft constitutions for the new state. In 1881, Ueki Emori completed his own draft, Article 1 of which reads: “the nation of Japan is founded on, and shall function in accordance with, this Constitution.” Ueki wanted the people to create a constitution that would bind the government to democratic provisions. His draft called for seventy American-style equal, independent “states” (shū) to form a federal government that would observe the division of legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Armed forces would exist solely to defend the Constitution, not to wage foreign wars. Section Four of his draft was a thirty-five-article bill of rights. It provided for protection against torture and capital punishment; for the right to free speech, assembly, and religious belief; and for the right to disobey and to offer armed resistance to unlawful or unjust state actions. Thus Ueki would empower the Japanese people to overthrow their emperor and government if need be in order to recover their original rights and freedom. Section Five of Ueki’s draft listed the functions of an emperor (kōtei, not tennō) whose position as a salaried civil servant with no pretense of divinity derived solely from the constitution. This section came after the people’s bill of rights – in contrast to the constitutions of 1889 and 1947 – where the emperor comes first. Taking a line from Fukuzawa, Ueki wrote the lyrics to a popular ballad in 1879: “When Heaven created people, it made them all the same, with none above or below others, and all with equal rights.”

Yet Ueki took the ideal far further, by crusading for the rights of

22 About forty of these are extant. For a summary of their contents, see Ienaga Saburō, Rekishiki no naka no kenpō, jō (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1977), pp. 33–53; and Irokawa Daikichi, Ei Hideo, and Arai Katsuhiko, eds., Minshū kenpō no sōshō (Tokyo: Hiyōronsha, 1970).

23 For a text of this Ueki draft constitution, see Ienaga Saburō, ed., Ueki Emori senshū (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1974), pp. 85–111. Most of the following material on Ueki derives from Ienaga, Kakumei shisō no senkusha (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1955); and Ienaga, Ueki Emori kenkō (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1960). For a revisionist work from a psychohistorical perspective that also stresses Ueki’s debts to traditional Confucian thought, see Yonehara Ken, Ueki Emori (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1992).

24 Ienaga, Ueki Emori kenkō, pp. 279–93; also Ienaga, Kakumei shisō no senkusha, p. 105.

25 “Minken inaka uta,” in Ienaga, ed., Ueki Emori senshū, p. 44.
women and the poor. Although society relegated these groups to its lowest rungs, he said, neither was responsible for its current plight. Ueki turned the existing socioeconomic hierarchy upside-down by arguing that women and the poor, who worked for their daily keep, were more valuable to society than the rich, who idly consumed wealth. He was one of the few non-Christian Meiji Japanese to work actively for abolishing the patriarchal rights that fathers enjoyed over their daughters’ labor under legalized prostitution. Finally we should note that, unlike the Enlightenment thinkers, Ueki never traveled abroad and could read no Western languages. He derived his knowledge of Western political thought and institutions solely from Japanese sources. Thus the Tokugawa tradition of lexicography and translation might subvert, as well as bolster, state authority well into Meiji times.

Nakae Chōmin was even more radical than Ueki on many issues excepting women’s rights. Nakae eschewed honors and high state office and instead chose to live among the dregs of Meiji society. He dressed as a day laborer. He visited Ainu settlements and denounced exploitative Meiji colonization policies in Hokkaidō. He took up residence in an Ōsaka outcaste slum and represented its constituents in the Diet. Nakae excoriated Tokutomi Sohō and his heiminshugi colleagues for refusing to support full equality for all Japanese commoners. Instead, they reinforced the very class- and culture-bound discrimination that they claimed to be attacking. Following Rousseau’s “noble savage” idea, Nakae trumpeted “the nobility of despised persons.” He claimed that fringe groups in Japan—Okinawans, Ainu, outcastes, and the working poor—displayed a pristine form of liberty, equality, and goodness. As such, they were just as entitled to equal treatment as Tokutomi’s upstart “new generation.” Nakae supported a “rich state” but claimed that this goal precluded “strong arms.” A pacifist, he opposed conscripting a national army and instead favored creating voluntary militia to protect purely local interests. Nakae believed that the universal spirit of civilization lay in liberty, popular sovereignty, and human rights, and he denounced Western practices that violated those ideals. Thus he rejected empire building and argued that Japan should remain a small-scale power who helped neighboring Asian states resist Western colonial takeover. Nakae came to admit the temporary infeasibility of “popularly reclaimed” rights and freedom after the

government in 1881 pledged to bestow these by granting an imperial constitution from above. Until his death in 1901, he strove to raise the Japanese people’s political consciousness so that someday they would revive this “downright stupid” Meiji Constitution into a truly democratic document that enshrined popular sovereignty and protected human rights.

Meiji socialists such as Abe Isō, Kōtoku Shūsui, and Kinoshita Naoe carried on ideas that Enlightenment thinkers first espoused and People’s Rights activists later developed. The socialists argued that the vast inequalities in wealth and status that had emerged in Japan were not a proper reflection of individual merit and effort as proven under fair, free market conditions. Instead, as Peter Duus and Irwin Scheiner discuss in Chapter 4, Meiji socialists insisted that huge government-linked monopolies perpetuated and exacerbated those inequalities, and they believed that this situation was unhealthy for both individuals and the nation as a whole. They proposed limiting private ownership and employing it for the public good.27 By contrast, men like Fukuzawa Yukichi insisted that the ever-widening schism between haves and have-nots reflected progress and civilization. His main concern late in life was to keep the have-nots from destroying these goals that he had devoted his life to furthering. To that end, he argued for Meiji state leaders to exploit the opiate of religion, he urged the rich to aid charities, and he proposed ridding Japan of paupers through emigration. Above all, he argued against educating the illiterate poor for fear of what a little bit of learning would do to hungry rabble-rousers.28 As Kenneth Pyle shows in Chapter 3, government officials and capitalist leaders chose to defuse malcontent at home by implementing Bismarckian social reform policies. And the Meiji state itself launched foreign wars of aggression on the road to great-power status – thereby whipping up patriotic sentiment to neutralize criticism and forestall social upheaval.

INTELLECTUAL RETROGRESSION, 1889–1945

A pragmatic receptivity to Western thought and values grew up from Tokugawa to mid-Meiji times. But then the Japanese seemed to

28 For one of the earliest and best discussions of Fukuzawa’s later thought, see Ienaga Saburō, Kindai seishin to sono genkai (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1950), pp. 171–205.