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From: Copy of preface to part two of Alan Macfarlane, *The Making of the Modern World: Visions from East and West* (Palgrave, London, 2002)

### **Preface to a study of Yukichi Fukuzawa**

This second part of the book cannot be properly understood without an explanation of how I came to be interested in the work of the great Japanese social theorist Yukichi Fukuzawa. For many years now, as a historian and anthropologist, I have been struggling to understand how and why the peculiar modern world in which we live has emerged. Compared to what anthropologists found in other tribes and civilizations, and historians described for **ancien regime** Europe, what has become established over much of the world very recently is strange.

I had for some time sensed that useful clues to an answer to these broad questions might be found in the similarities and differences between two ex-feudal islands at opposite ends of the world, namely England and Japan. So I was delighted to be invited as a British Council visiting scholar to the University of Hokkaido in 1990. When I arrived, like most outsiders I imagine, I had never heard of Fukuzawa. While every Japanese from their school days has studied Montesquieu or Adam Smith, Fukuzawa is almost totally unknown in the west. So I was completely ignorant about his life and role in setting up the Japan I saw around me. The enthusiasm of Professor Toshiko Nakamura, one of my two chief hosts, encouraged me to start to learn about him, and she suggested I start with his most famous book, **A Theory of Civilization**

I soon realized that Fukuzawa was not just a thinker of local importance. He had addressed the fundamental question of what characterized modern civilization. In other words he was on the same quest as that on which I am engaged. Furthermore, his answer seemed to coincide very well with that which I was coming to see from other sources seemed to be the quintessence of the difference between past and present civilizations. This was the separation of different spheres, religious, political, social and economic, and then their maintenance in a dynamic set of contradictions and tensions. This is what Fukuzawa also saw as the heart of what seemed most strange and significant about the western world.

I had never before encountered any thinker outside the European intellectual tradition who had seen this and I was deeply impressed. So I decided to learn more about him, both for his own sake but also because, standing between Japan and the West, he acted as a superb introduction to the Japanese world which I was starting to try to understand. Like any really good mediator of cultures or anthropological informant he knew enough about both worlds to be able to act as a short-cut into a distant culture and also a revealing mirror of my own.

I soon wondered how Fukuzawa had managed to place himself in this position as a bridge between cultures. I found that he had written an autobiography at the end of his life and that this had been translated by Eiichi Kiyooka as **The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa** (New York, 1972).

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I read this and was entranced. Although it was clearly to a certain extent a sanitized, 'after-the-event', account, it also provided a very lively and fascinating picture of an extraordinary life. I began to appreciate that Fukuzawa was not merely an unusual intellectual, but that his practical contribution to the institutional structure of modern Japan was of considerable importance. I understood why, in the crucial years after the Meiji restoration, 'all works about the West came to be popularly known as **Fukuzawa-bon**'.<sup>1</sup> His continuing influence and popularity within Japan I discovered is reflected in the currency. There are only two bank-notes in Japan. The five thousand yen carries a portrait of one of the great modern writers of Japan, Natsume Soseki. The ten thousand yen note has Fukuzawa's portrait, a fitting tribute to a man who did more than any other to make Japan a land of liberty, wealth and equality.

When I decided to approach the history of the great transformation of the world through examining the intellectual biographies of great thinkers, I decided to include him as the only non-European thinker I could find to stand on the same level as the others I had chosen.<sup>2</sup> So I wrote a draft of some chapters on his life and thought. I showed these to Dr. Carmen Blacker, the leading western expert on Fukuzawa, and she was extremely supportive and encouraged me to proceed further.

Talking to a number of Japanese academics and giving several lectures on Fukuzawa at Japanese universities brought home to me how highly Fukuzawa is still regarded. It is therefore a considerable responsibility to find oneself introducing him to an English-speaking audience.<sup>3</sup> This is made the heavier by the linguistic difficulty. I do not speak or read Japanese. Only a small part of the more than 100 volumes of Fukuzawa's writings have been translated. I have therefore relied very heavily on my friends and colleagues who are experts, as stated in the acknowledgements. It should be stressed that this is only a preliminary introduction to this great thinker and man of action. It is hoped that it will encourage a wider audience to develop an understanding of Fukuzawa and of the Japan which he shaped. For a Japanese audience I hope it will be received as a tribute to a great man, and perhaps open their eyes to sides of his work and character which are new and unexpected when seen from an outside viewpoint and in a broad comparative framework.

Finally, it should be stressed that this account represents a further shift of focus in my argument. In my earlier book on **The Riddle of the Modern World** and in the preceding chapters on Maitland I have constantly stressed that the important divide was between continental Europe and England (and

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<sup>1</sup> Blacker, **Fukuzawa**, 27.

<sup>2</sup> The others chosen were Montesquieu, Adam Smith, De Tocqueville and F.W.Maitland. The first three are described in Macfarlane, **Riddle**.

<sup>3</sup> The only book in an English language is Blacker, **Fukuzawa**, which is extremely good but only deals with certain aspects of his work and particularly in relation to his place in the Japanese Enlightenment.

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America). Looking through the eyes of Fukuzawa, we now move to a more distant focus in which the contrast is between Japan on the one hand and a largely undifferentiated 'West' on the other. This is partly a result of Fukuzawa's own knowledge and experiences. He spent too little time in the West, and did not read enough, to know about or be interested in the fundamental, if subtle, differences between English and continental history. Furthermore, it is a reflection of the period he is concerned with. By the second half of the nineteenth century much of mainland western Europe was undergoing an industrial revolution and other changes which were lessening the differences between continental nations and Anglo-American civilization. For Fukuzawa's purposes the 'West' could be treated as a lump, a sort of simple 'Occidentalism'. This does not matter, for the point in introducing his work is not, as it was with Maitland, to help us solve the questions of the origins or early making of the modern world. Fukuzawa's importance lies both in the way in which he saw the basic structural features of what had emerged in 'the West', and in how he tried to promote and construct, literally 'make', a modern world in Japan.