

TRAVELS AND COMPARISONS

As he reached the age of fourteen or fifteen Fukuzawa grew increasingly frustrated in the provincial atmosphere of Nakatsu. 'Outwardly I was living peacefully enough, but always in my heart I was praying for an opportunity to get away. And I was willing to go anywhere and to go through any hardship if only I could leave this uncomfortable Nakatsu. Happily, a chance sent me to Nagasaki.'¹ He wrote that a particular event confirmed him in his decision to leave. Fukuzawa's brother had written a letter to the clan's chief minister for which he was reprimanded because it was not properly addressed. 'Seeing this I cried to myself, "how foolish it is to stay here and submit to this arrogance!" And I was determined then to run away from this narrow cooped-up Nakatsu.'²

Fukuzawa's chance to escape was one of the many effects of the first shock of the imminent revolution in Japan. In 1854 Commodore Perry had appeared with the American warships off the coast of Japan and this 'had made its impression on every remote town in Japan.'³ Thus 'the problem of national defense and the modern gunnery had become the foremost interest of all the samurai.'⁴ In order to study western gunnery one had to be able to read Dutch, so Fukuzawa volunteered to do that and, in 1854, at the age of nineteen was taken to Nagasaki to learn Dutch and gunnery. 'The true reason why I went there was nothing more than to get away from Nakatsu....This was a happy day for me. I turned at the end of the town's street, spat on the ground, and walked quickly away.'⁵

He set himself hard to work. 'My chief concern was, after all, the Dutch language. I often went to the interpreter's house, and sometimes to the house of the special physicians who practiced "Dutch medicine". And little by little, after fifty or a hundred days, I came to understand something of the Dutch

¹Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 20

²Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 19

³Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 21

⁴Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 21

⁵Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 22

language.⁶ Because of jealousies within the clan,⁷ it became difficult to stay in Nagasaki and the following February (1855) he left and ended up a month later as a student at the school of Koan Ogata in Osaka. Ogata was one of the foremost experts on the Dutch learning in Japan.

Fukuzawa gives a delightful and lengthy account of his life as a student with Ogata. Like many of his young contemporaries he became fascinated with western science and technology. For instance he describes how 'Of course at that time there were no examples of industrial machinery. A steam engine could not be seen anywhere in the whole of Japan. Nor was there any kind of apparatus for chemical experiments. However, learning something of the theories of chemistry and machinery in our books, we of the Ogata household [school] spent much effort in trying out what we had learned, or trying to make a thing that was illustrated in the books.'⁸ Learning about the new science was not easy. For instance, there was no good work on electricity. 'All that we knew about electricity then had been gleaned from fragmentary mention of it in the Dutch readers.'⁹ One day Ogata returned with a Dutch volume borrowed from his clan lord. 'I took in the book with devouring eyes...here in this new book from Europe was a full explanation based on the recent discoveries of the great English physicist, Faraday, even with the diagram of an electric cell. My heart was carried away with it at first sight.'¹⁰ He and his fellow students proceeded to work day and night to copy out the whole long chapter on electricity before returning it. 'This event quite changed the whole approach to the subject of electricity in the Ogata household. I do not hesitate to say that my fellow students became the best informed men on the new science in the entire country.'¹¹

Fukuzawa learnt the basics of western chemistry and physics during the years 1856-1860. This partly explains his increasing dislike of Chinese Knowledge. 'The only subject that bore our constant attack was Chinese medicine. And by hating Chinese medicine so thoroughly, we came to dislike everything that had any connection with Chinese culture. Our general opinion was that we should rid our country of the influences of the Chinese altogether.'¹² He came, as he explained later, to see Chinese mis-information as a block to knowledge and advance. 'The true reason of my opposing the Chinese teaching with such vigour is my belief that in this age of transition, if this retrogressive doctrine remains at all in our young men's minds, the new civilization cannot give its full benefit to this country.'¹³ In his old age he wrote in his **Old Man Fukuzawa's Tales** that 'I am not one who studies western learning and tries to combine it with Chinese learning. I wish to tear up traditional teaching by the roots and open the way to the new culture. In other words I wish to use one learning to destroy the other and these two

⁶Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 25

⁷ Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 25-6

⁸Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 84

⁹Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 88

¹⁰Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 88

¹¹Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 89

¹²Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 91

¹³Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 216

things have been my lifelong concerns.¹⁴

He worked with huge concentration but great uncertainty. There was no obvious job ahead and much anti-foreign feeling in the country. Like others at Ogata's school, 'most of us were then actually putting all our energy into our studies without any definite assurance of the future. Yet this lack of future hope was indeed fortunate for us, for it made us better students than those in Yedo.'¹⁵

Then in October 1858 the clan needed a Dutch scholar to open a school in Yedo (Tokyo). He moved there and continued his studies. Yet he was in for a sudden shock. He visited Yokohama in 1859 and noted that 'I had been striving with all my powers for many years to learn the Dutch language. And now when I had reason to believe myself one of the best in the country, I found that I could not even read the signs of merchants who had come to trade with us from foreign lands. It was a bitter disappointment, but I knew it was no time to be downhearted.'¹⁶ The language of the world was English, not Dutch. So 'On the very next day after returning from Yokohama, I took up a new aim in life and determined to begin the study of English.'¹⁷ He managed to find a two volume Dutch-English dictionary, and 'Once with these at my command, I felt there was hope for my endeavour. I made firm my determination to learn the new language by my own efforts. So day and night I plodded along with the new books for sole companions. Sometimes I tried to make out the English sentences by translating each word into Dutch; sometimes I tried forming an English sentence from the Dutch vocabulary. My sole interest then was to accustom myself to the English language.'¹⁸ He progressed well and the following year published his first book **Kaei Tsugo** (English Vocabulary and Idioms). 'This was not exactly a translation; my work was limited to adding **kana** (Japanese syllabary) to indicate the pronunciation of the English words, a very simple task.'¹⁹

Cometh the man, cometh the moment. 'The year after I was settled in Yedo - the sixth year of Ansei (1859) - the government of the Shogun made a great decision to send a ship-of-war to the United States, an enterprise never before attempted since the foundation of the empire. On this ship I was to have the good fortune of visiting America.'²⁰ In January 1860 Fukuzawa and others started from Uraga on the ship Kanrin-maru, reaching San Francisco on February 26 (March 27 by the western calendar). He stayed in America itself for about three weeks and returned by way of Hawaiï, to arrive back to the publication of his English dictionary in August.

American was quite literally a new and strange world for him. In his **Autobiography** he gives a few examples of the things that shocked and surprised him. Coming from a neat bamboo and paper

¹⁴ Quoted in Kato, **Japanese Literature**, III, 81

¹⁵ Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 92

¹⁶ Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 98

¹⁷ Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 98

¹⁸ Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 101

¹⁹ Fukuzawa, **Collected Works**, 34

²⁰ Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 104

culture where nothing was wasted, he was amazed by the wealth and profligacy: 'there seemed to be an enormous waste of iron everywhere. In garbage piles, on the sea-shores - everywhere - I found lying old oil tins, empty cans, and broken tools. This was remarkable for us, for in Yedo, after a fire, there would appear a swarm of people looking for nails in the ashes.'²¹ Likewise the furnishings and concepts of cleanliness were entirely different. 'Here the carpet was laid over an entire room - something quite astounding - and upon this costly fabric walked our hosts wearing the shoes with which they had come in from the streets! We followed them in our hemp sandals.'²² The relative expense of this affluent culture was a shock. 'Then too, I was surprised at the high cost of daily commodities in California. We had to pay a half-dollar for a bottle of oysters, and there were only twenty or thirty in the bottle at that. In Japan the price of so many would be only a cent or two.'²³

Due to his earlier efforts to understand western science and technology, steam, electricity, physics and chemistry, he was not particularly surprised or impressed by American technology. 'As for scientific inventions and industrial machinery, there was no great novelty in them for me. It was rather in matters of life and social custom and ways of thinking that I found myself at a loss in America.'²⁴ He was puzzled by the relations between the sexes. A small example was western dancing. Going to a ball he found that the 'ladies and gentlemen seemed to be hopping about the room together. As funny as it was, we knew it would be rude to laugh, and we controlled our expressions with difficulty as the dancing went on.'²⁵

Also surprising was the absence of interest in kinship and descendants. 'One day, on a sudden thought, I asked a gentleman where the descendants of George Washington might be. He replied, "I think there is a woman who is directly descended from Washington. I don't know where she is now, but I think I have heard she is married." His answer was so very casual that it shocked me. Of course, I knew that America was a republic with a new president every four years, but I could not help feeling that the family of Washington would be revered above all other families. My reasoning was based on the reverence in Japan for the founders of the great lines of rulers - like that for Ieyasu of the Tokugawa family of Shoguns, really deified in the popular mind. So I remember the astonishment I felt at receiving this indifferent answer about the Washington family.'²⁶

Fukuzawa left America puzzled and intrigued. He had clearly had a good time and made the most of his opportunities. For instance, to the great envy of his companions, he managed not only to have his photograph taken but persuade the fifteen-year old daughter of the photographer to pose with him. 'As I was going to sit, I saw the girl in the studio. I said suddenly, "Let us have our picture taken together." She immediately said, "All right", being an American girl and thinking nothing of it. So she

²¹Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 115-6

²²Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 113

²³Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 116

²⁴Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 116

²⁵Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 114

²⁶Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 116

came and stood by me.²⁷ He had learnt a little of the customs of the natives, but after only three weeks 'Things social, political, and economic proved most inexplicable.'²⁸ Other than the photograph of himself, his most significant acquisition was copy of Webster's dictionary, which 'is deemed to have been Fukuzawa's intellectual weapon in understanding modern civilization'.²⁹

In 1861, the year after he returned, Fukuzawa was married in traditional Japanese manner, with a go-between, to Toki Kin. She bore him nine children, four sons and five daughters, all of whom grew to adulthood, though twin babies had been born dead. He described how, 'For the next two or three years, I was more occupied with my struggles in studying English than in teaching. Then, in the second year of Bunkyu (1862), a happy opportunity came my way, and I was able to make a visit to Europe with the envoys sent by our government.'³⁰

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This second voyage took him away from Japan for almost a year, and involved months spent in several European countries. His own summary of the trip is as follows. 'We sailed in December, still the first year of Bunkyu (1861) on an English war vessel, the *Odin*, sent over for the purpose of conveying our envoy. We called at Hongkong, Singapore and other ports in the Indian Ocean. Then through the Red Sea to Suez where we landed for the railway journey to Cairo in Egypt. After about two days there, we went by boat again across the Mediterranean to Marseilles. From there we continued by the French railways to Paris, stopping a day at Lyons on our way. We were in Paris for about twenty days while our envoys completed negotiations between France and Japan. Next we crossed to England; then to Holland; from Holland to Berlin, the Prussian capital, and then to St. Petersburg in Russia. The return journey was made through France and Portugal, then retracing our course through the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, at length we reached Japan after nearly a year of travelling. It was almost the end of the second year of Bunkyu (1862) when we returned.'³¹ In fact, according to western chronology, the journey started in January 1862 and Fukuzawa returned in the December of the same year.

The Japanese authorities who sent out this large fact-finding expedition were caught in a dilemma. They wanted the delegation to gather as much information as possible on all aspects of western 'civilization' so that Japan could prepare itself for development. On the other hand, several hundred years of isolation made these same authorities nervous about the possible effects of this new knowledge on members of the expedition. Thus Fukuzawa noted that 'One ridiculous idea held by our

²⁷Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 120

²⁸Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 116

²⁹Nishikawa, 'Fukuzawa', 5

³⁰Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 124

³¹Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 125

embassy was that its members should not meet the foreigners or see the country any more than they had to. We were under the seclusion theory even when we were travelling in a foreign country.' A member of the expedition was to keep a watchful eye and 'This particularly applied to us three translators.'³² Thus they were accompanied whenever they went out. 'In spite of all these restrictions, however, we were able to see or hear pretty much everything that we wished.'³³

An amazing new world revealed itself to Fukuzawa's intensely curious eyes. 'Throughout this tour, new and surprising to us were all the things and institutions of civilization. Everywhere we stayed, we had the opportunity of meeting many people and learning much from them.'³⁴ Again he was neither particularly impressed with, puzzled by nor interested in pursuing matters scientific and technological, about which he could and had read books. 'All the information dealing with the sciences, engineering, electricity, steam, printing, or the processes of industry and manufacture, contained in my book, I did not really have to acquire in Europe. I was not a specialist in any of those technical fields, and even if I had inquired particularly into them, I could have got only a general idea which could more readily be obtained in text books. So in Europe I gave my chief attention to other more immediately interesting things.'³⁵ This proved embarrassing at times, for his hosts were under the impression that the Japanese mission, including Fukuzawa, would be most interested in precisely these technological and scientific advances. This had been a problem in America where his kind hosts directed him to the new marvels. 'But on the contrary, there was really nothing new, at least to me. I knew the principle of the telegraphy even if I had not seen the actual machine before; I knew that sugar was bleached by straining the solution with bone-black, and that in boiling down the solution, the vacuum was used to better effect than heat. I had been studying nothing else but such scientific principles ever since I had entered Ogata's school.'³⁶

Time was short and Fukuzawa was clear both as to what he did not want to spend his time on, and what was important. 'During this mission in Europe I tried to learn some of the most commonplace details of foreign culture' and the 'common matters of daily life directly from the people, because the Europeans would not describe them in books as being too obvious. Yet to us those common matters

³²Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 131

³³Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 132

³⁴Fukuzawa, **Collected Works**, 37

³⁵Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 154

³⁶Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 115

were the most difficult to comprehend.³⁷ He realized that his interests must have been puzzling to his hosts. 'It was embarrassing on both sides and I regretted it, but somehow I managed to escape to other persons whom I had recognized as likely persons to answer my questions on things I had not found in the dictionaries. All my questions were so commonplace, these gentlemen must have felt the conversation to be wasting of time, but to me, the questions were vital and most puzzling.'³⁸

He was particularly interested in the working of institutions and associations and in democratic politics. In terms of institutions, he was fascinated but deeply puzzled by things such as hospitals, the postal services, the police. 'For instance, when I saw a hospital, I wanted to know how it was run - who paid the running expenses; when I visited a bank, I wished to learn how the money was deposited and paid out. By similar first-hand queries, I learned something of the postal system and the military conscription then in force in France but not in England.'³⁹

He crammed in an enormous amount, mixing observation with continuous questioning and social contacts. 'Then I was given opportunities to visit the headquarters and buildings of the naval and military posts, factories, both governmental and private, banks, business offices, religious edifices, educational institutions, club houses, hospitals - including even the actual performances of surgical operations. We were often invited to dinners in the homes of important personages, and to dancing parties; we were treated to a continual hospitality until at times we returned exhausted to our lodgings.'⁴⁰ Blacker describes how during the six weeks in London, the delegation 'attended the Ball of the Civil Service Volunteers in Willis's Rooms, and the Grand Ball given by the Duchess of Northumberland. They paid frequent visits to the International Exhibition. They inspected Woolwich Arsenal and garrison, the Zoo, the Houses of Parliament, Buchanan's Archery Warehouse, the Crystal Palace, King's College Hospital, and the boiler factories of Messrs John Penn and Son at Blackheath.' They were also 'taken to the Derby, down a Newcastle coalmine, and over Portsmouth dockyard.'⁴¹

Other experiences were equally interesting and Fukuzawa's enthusiasm and curiosity are apparent; 'the hospitals, poor houses, schools for the blind and the deaf, institutions for the insane, museums and the

³⁷Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 133

³⁸Fukuzawa, **Collected Works**, 38

³⁹Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 134

⁴⁰Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 131

⁴¹ Blacker, **Fukuzawa**, 6-7; for a fuller account see Blacker, 'First Japanese Mission'

expositions, were all new to look at and as I learned their origins and their contributions, every detail of them filled me with admiration and fascination.⁴²

Just as Tocqueville found the alien political forms in America and England both the most intriguing and difficult to understand, likewise Fukuzawa, coming from an even greater distance, found the political systems in Europe puzzling, yet he sensed their importance. Under a heading 'The people and politics of Europe', he wrote that 'Of political situations of that time, I tried to learn as much as I could from various persons that I met in London and Paris, though it was often difficult to understand things clearly as I was yet so unfamiliar with the history of Europe.'⁴³

He noted that 'A perplexing institution was representative government'⁴⁴ and gave a vignette of his bewilderment in England when he saw the system in action. 'When I asked a gentleman what the "election law" was and what kind of bureau the Parliament really was, he simply replied with a smile, meaning I suppose that no intelligent person was expected to ask such a question. But these were the things most difficult of all for me to understand. In this connection, I learned that there were bands of men called political parties - the Liberals and the Conservatives - who were always fighting against each other in the government. For some time it was beyond my comprehension to understand what they were fighting for, and what was meant, anyway, by "fighting" in peace time. "This man and that man are enemies in the House," they would tell me. But these "enemies" were to be seen at the same table, eating and drinking with each other. I felt as if I could not make much of this. It took me a long time, with some tedious thinking, before I could gather a general notion of these separate mysterious facts. In some of the more complicated matters, I might achieve an understanding five or ten days after they were explained to me. But all in all, I learned much from this initial tour of Europe.'⁴⁵ The vast amount of new information he gathered, and the sight of a new world, would provide the foundation for his life's work.

He put down all his observations and summaries of his conversations in a notebook. 'So, whenever I met a person whom I thought to be of some consequence, I would ask him questions and would put down all he said in a notebook ... After reaching home, I based my ideas on these random notes, doing the necessary research in the books which I had brought back, and thus had the material for my book, *Seiyo Jijo* (Things Western).'⁴⁶ We are told that 'One of his notebooks has been

⁴²Fukuzawa, *Collected Works*, 40

⁴³Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 129

⁴⁴Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 134

⁴⁵Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 134-5

⁴⁶Fukuzawa, *Autobiography*, 133; the work is more normally given the translated title of 'Conditions in the West'.

preserved. It is crammed with information in Japanese, English and Dutch on such varied subjects as the cost per mile of building a railway, the number of students in King's College, London, and the correct process for hardening wood.⁴⁷

The comparative perspective.

Fukuzawa's three foreign visits and his knowledge of Dutch and English gave him an unique vantage point both in relation to his own civilization and understanding the West. As he realized, he had the basis for a double comparison: the 'ancien regime' past of his clan youth, and the post-revolutionary world that was opening up, and the comparison of Japan and the West. In relation to this he summarized his experiences at the end of his life thus: 'My life begun in the restricted conventions of the small Nakatsu clan was like being packed tightly in a lunch box. When once the toothpick of clan politics was punched into the corner of the box, a boy was caught on its end, and before he himself knew what was happening, he had jumped out of the old home. Not only did he abandon his native province but he even renounced the teaching of the Chinese culture in which he had been educated. Reading strange books, associating with new kinds of people, working with all the freedom never dreamed of before, travelling abroad two or three times, finally he came to find even the empire of Japan too narrow for his domain. What a merry life this has been, and what great changes!⁴⁸

The experience of rapidly expanding intellectual horizons, where three hundred years of western thought suddenly became available, is beautifully captured in the following reminiscence. 'When we read history, we realise that Nakatsu was but one of three hundred clans which existed during the Tokugawa period, and that the Tokugawa were merely persons who happened to have seized power in the single island of Japan. We see that beyond Japan lie the almost innumerable countries of Asia and the west, whose histories leave evidence of heroes and great men. When we contemplate the works of Napoleon and Alexander, or imagine the erudition of Newton, Watt or Adam Smith, we realise that there are Hideyoshis beyond the seas and that Butsu Sorai was but a small man of learning from the East. When we read even the bare elements of geography and history, our minds must needs be lifted from their old ways of thought. Into what lofty realms will they rise therefore when we look into the theories of the great thinkers of the west, analysing and comparing inquiring into the cause and effects of all things from the organic laws of the physical world to the formless affairs of men. As we ponder deeply on what we read, we experience a state of rapture as though we were transported into a different world. When, from this position, we look back on the world and its phases, governments seem like small

⁴⁷Blacker, **Fukuzawa**, 7

⁴⁸Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 333

compartments of men's affairs, and wars like the games of children.⁴⁹

The changes within Japan itself were immense. The opening of the country and the restoration of Imperial rule caused a great revolution never before experienced in our history. It even affected all our customs, education, and industry, and even such details as clothing, food and housing.⁵⁰ Everything was confusion. 'Japanese met Westerners for the first time since the founding of the Japanese islands. It was a sudden leap from the silent depths of night into broad daylight. Everything they saw stupefied their minds; they had no categories for understanding anything.'⁵¹ Everything was questioned. 'The fall of the Tokugawa regime of three hundred years' standing gave me the cue, and for the first time I realized that my lord was as human as I, and that it was shameful to treat him as I had. I was not the least surprised to see myself undergoing the transition, refusing even the stipend that the clan had willingly offered me. I did not stop to reason this out at the time, but I am convinced now that the fall of the feudal government was what saved me from my slavish attitude.'⁵²

In contrast with the might and sophistication of Europe and America, the first temptation was to lose faith in one's culture, or at least to recognize realistically that it had 'fallen behind'. 'As a result of our recent ties with foreigners we have begun to contrast our civilization with theirs. Our inferiority to them on the external technological level is obvious, but our mentality also differs from theirs. Westerners are intellectually vital, are personally well-disciplined, and have patterned and orderly social relations. In our present state, from the economy of the nation down to the activities of single households or individuals, we are no match for them. On the whole, it has been only recently that we have realized Western countries are civilized while we as yet are not, and there is no one who in his heart does not admit this fact.'⁵³ Japan had been sheltered from all this by the formidable bulk of China, but now China had been humiliated. 'The only trouble with us is that we have had too long a period of peace with no intercourse with outside. In the meanwhile, other countries, stimulated by occasional wars, have invented many new things such as steam trains, steam ships, big guns and small hand-guns etc. We did not know all that, for we did not see anything beyond our borders, the only studies we have had being Chinese books, and the only military arts fencing with swords and spears. Naturally we are finding ourselves very much

⁴⁹Fukuzawa, **Kyuhanjo**, 327

⁵⁰Fukuzawa, **Women**, 80

⁵¹Fukuzawa, **Civilization**, 67

⁵²Fukuzawa, **Autobiography**, 276

⁵³Fukuzawa, **Civilization**, 172

behind times and fearful of the foreign countries.⁵⁴

The enormity of the changes required were indeed daunting after the long period of seclusion. True, we have often been shaken by the changing fortunes of history in our two and a half millennia. But as a force which has shaken the very depths of men's minds, the recent relations with foreigners have been the most powerful single set of events since Confucianism and Buddhism were introduced from China in the distant past. Furthermore, Buddhist and Confucian teachings transmitted Asian ideas and practices. They were different only in degree from Japanese institutions, so they may have been novel, but they were not so very strange to our ancestors. The same cannot be said of relations with foreigners in recent history. We have suddenly been thrust into close contact with countries whose indigenous civilizations differ in terms of geographical location and cultural elements, in the evolution of those cultural elements, and in the degree of their evolution. They are not only novel and exotic for us Japanese; everything we see and hear about those cultures is strange and mysterious. If I may use a simile, a blazing brand has suddenly been thrust into ice-cold water. Not only are ripples and swells ruffling the surface of men's minds, but a massive upheaval is being stirred up at the very depths of their souls.⁵⁵

The difficulty was increased by the speed at which Japan would have to adapt if it were not to follow the path of India and China and Africa and become European colonies. 'What are, then, the alarming factors that confront the Japanese people in the Meiji Era? The foreign relations are what they are. In commerce, the foreigners are rich and clever; the Japanese are poor and unused to the business. In courts of law, it so often happens that the Japanese people are condemned while the foreigners get around the law. In learning, we are obliged to learn from them. In finances, we must borrow capital from them. We would prefer to open our society to foreigners in gradual stages and move toward civilization at our own pace, but they insist on the principle of free trade and urge us to let them come into our island at once. In all things, in all projects, they take the lead and we are on the defensive. There hardly ever is an equal give and take.'⁵⁶

The enormous gap in every aspect became more and more apparent and the bitterness at the way in which Chinese knowledge had provided such a feeble bulwark is evident in another passage. 'If we compare the levels of intelligence of Japanese and Westerners, in literature, the arts, commerce, or industry, from the biggest things to the least, in a thousand cases or in one, there is not a single area in which the other side is not superior to us. We can compete with the West in nothing, and no one even

⁵⁴Fukuzawa, *Collected Works*, 30

⁵⁵Fukuzawa, *Civilization*, 1-2

⁵⁶Fukuzawa, *Collected Works*, 62

thinks about competing with the West. Only the most ignorant thinks that Japan's learning, arts, commerce, or industry is on a par with that of the West. Who would compare a man-drawn cart with a steam engine, or a Japanese sword with a rifle? While we are expounding on **yin** and **yang** and the Five Elements, they are discovering the sixty-element atomic chart. While we are divining lucky and unlucky days by astrology, they have charted the courses of comets and are studying the constitution of the sun and the moon. While we think that we live on a flat, immobile earth, they know that it is round and in motion. While we regard Japan as the sacrosanct islands of the gods, they have raced around the world, discovering new lands and founding new nations. Many of their political, commercial, and legal institutions are more admirable than anything we have. In all these things there is nothing about our present situation that we can be proud of before them.⁵⁷

So far Fukuzawa was only reflecting what a number of his friends were saying. What makes him great is that he applied his intelligence effectively to doing something about the situation. One thing he did was to move beyond the first realistic assessment of western superiority to a more sober assessment of the weaknesses of that system. He combined enthusiasm for the new world of liberty and democracy, with a knowledge that it was far from perfect. He appeared at times to be advocating a total abandonment of Japanese traditions, writing 'If we are to open our country to the world, we must open it all the way and bring in everything of the West. This is what I have always advocated.'⁵⁸ Yet on the very same page he urged selectivity. 'Not every product of the West will be good or useful. But if there is something clearly inferior or bad on our side, then we must without a moment's delay correct it.'⁵⁹

He found the new civilization, especially in America, over-obsessed with material wealth. Although producing many things, 'the results of attaining the benefit of the best and the most beautiful have been disappointing. Their men spend their lives in the feverish pursuit of money. The only function of their women is feverishly to breed male heirs to carry on the economic struggle. Can this be called the ideal society? I hardly think so. This observation of Mill suffices to give us some ideas of at least one undesirable aspect of the American character.'⁶⁰

He also noted that although proclaiming equality, the **de facto** situation was not, perhaps, as good as it was in Japan. 'The civilization of the West is of course to be admired. It has been only recently since

⁵⁷Fukuzawa, **Civilization**, 99

⁵⁸Fukuzawa, **Women**, 148

⁵⁹Fukuzawa, **Women**, 148

⁶⁰Fukuzawa, **Civilization**, 44

we have begun to do so. But it would be better not to believe at all than to do so superficially. The West's wealth and power must truly be envied, but we must not go so far as to imitate the unequal distribution of wealth among her peoples as well.⁶¹ Likewise, while western nations proclaimed the sovereignty of nations, the rule of international law etc. they behaved with predatory unscrupulousness in their massive imperial expansion into Asia and elsewhere. Individually, many westerners were loutish, aggressive and unpleasant in their dealings with the Japanese. Or again, he noted that 'The taxes of Japan are not light, but if we consider the suffering of the poor people of England because of oppression by the landlord class, we should rather celebrate the happy condition of Japan's farmers. The custom of honouring women in the West is among the finest in the world. But if a wicked wife dominates and plagues her husband, or a disobedient daughter scorns her parents and gives free reign to disgraceful conduct, let us not be intoxicated over the custom.'⁶² In summary, the West was far ahead in its material life, its political and social institutions and scientific knowledge, but its ethical foundations were less laudable. 'When I observe the ethical behaviour of Japanese men and compare it with that of men in other civilized countries, I do not find Japanese men inferior.'⁶³

Fukuzawa saw his task as combining Western science, technology, and political institutions and a market economy, with the traditional 'spirit' or ethic of historical Japan. That Japan is today such a curious blend of 'West' and 'East' is in no small part due to his clear vision of the problem, for 'the superiority of Western over Japanese civilization is certainly very great, but Western civilization is hardly perfect.'⁶⁴

Fukuzawa's greatness also arises from the fact that he saw himself as a spectator looking at two worlds, both from the outside. In relation to his own Japanese upbringing and world, he had become a sympathetic outsider, participant and then observer. 'A man goes through life as if sailing on the sea in a boat. The men in the boat naturally move with the boat, but they may well be unaware of how fast and in what direction the boat is moving. Only those who watch from the shore can know these things with any accuracy. The samurai of the old Nakatsu clan moved with the clan, but they may have been unaware of how they were moving, and may not realise just how they came to arrive at their present state. I alone have stood, as it were, on the shore of the clan, and, as a spectator, may have had a more accurate view of the samurai within the clan. Hence I have committed my spectator's view to writing.'⁶⁵

⁶¹Fukuzawa, **Learning**, 99

⁶²Fukuzawa, **Learning**, 99

⁶³Fukuzawa, **Women**, 96

⁶⁴Fukuzawa, **Learning**, 95

⁶⁵Fukuzawa, **Kyuhanjo**, 308

Equally interesting is the fact that he could look at western civilization as it reached its greatest period of expansion and technological superiority, from the outside. While people like Mill and Buckle and others could only conjecture what a pre-industrial, **ancien regime** world was like, Fukuzawa could re-live in his own lifetime the experience of one hundred and fifty years of dramatic change. Compressed into his single life was the most massive shift which has occurred in human history in the last ten thousand years.

He saw very clearly that this gave him an advantage, the shock of surprise and amazement which is the basis of deep discovery. 'We also have the advantage of being able directly to contrast our own personal pre-Meiji experience with Western civilization. Here we have an advantage over our Western counterparts, who, locked within an already matured civilization, have to make conjectures about conditions in other countries, while we can attest to the changes of history through the more reliable witness of personal experience. This actual experience of pre-Meiji Japan is the accidental windfall we scholars of the present day enjoy. Since this kind of living memory of our generation will never be repeated again, we have an especially important opportunity to make our mark. Consider how all of today's scholars of Western Learning were, but a few years back, scholars of Chinese Learning, or of Shinto or Buddhism. We were all either from feudal samurai families or were feudal subjects. We have lived two lives, as it were; we unite in ourselves two completely different patterns of experience.'⁶⁶ He believed that this would give him a peculiarly valid set of insights. 'What kind of insights shall we not be able to offer when we compare and contrast what we experienced in our earlier days with what we experience of Western civilization? What we have to say is sure to be trustworthy. For this reason, despite my personal inadequacies, I have endeavoured in this humble work to put to use my own limited knowledge of Western Learning...my whole purpose has been to take advantage of the present historically unique opportunity to bequeath my personal impressions to later generations.'⁶⁷

⁶⁶Fukuzawa, *Civilization*, 3

⁶⁷Fukuzawa, *Civilization*, 3