

FUKUZAWA YUKICHI (1835-1901)

Prominent educator, writer, and propagator of Western knowledge during the Meiji period (1868-1912); founder of Keiō Gijuku (now KEIO UNIVERSITY), of the newspaper JIJI SHIMPŌ, and of the art of public speaking of Japan. His collected works, written over a period of 30 years, fill 22 large volumes and cover a variety of subjects ranging from philosophy to women's rights.

Born into the family of an impoverished low-ranking samurai of the Nakatsu domain (now part of Oita Prefecture) in Kyushu, Fukuzawa from an early age hated what he regarded as the "narrow stiffness" of the feudal domain. To escape from its restrictions, he went to Nagasaki in 1854 to study Western gunnery and to Osaka in 1855 to join the Tekijuku, the celebrated school for Dutch studies run by the scholar Ogata Koan. There he studied the Dutch language with tireless enthusiasm, together with any branch of Western science--chemistry, physics, or anatomy--for which there were textbooks in the meager school library.

In 1858 he was summoned to Edo(now Tokyo) by his domainal authorities to start a school for the study of Dutch. He lost no time in visiting the new foreign trading community in Yokohama, only to discover to his chagrin that the foreign spoke not Dutch, but English, and that he must set to work to learn the latter language. Undaunted, in 1860 he joined the first Japanese mission to America, sailing in the small vessel KANRIN MARU to San Francisco, where the party was lavishly entertained. Two years later he joined the first Japanese mission to Europe, visiting France, Holland, Russia, and Portugal, and learning all he could of Western civilization.

The information he collected on this journey later formed the basis of his celebrated work *Seiyō Jijō* (Conditions in the West; published in three volumes in 1866, 1868, and 1870). This book gave a simple readable account of everyday Western customs and institutions, and proved so popular that in 1866 the sales of volume 1 reached the huge figure of 150,000. Fukuzawa's reputation as an authority on things Western was thenceforth made. It was only after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, however, that he came to realize his true mission in life. This was nothing less than to educate his countrymen to an entirely new way of thinking based on the principles of Western civilization. Japan was weak and backward, he decided, because her culture lacked two things possessed by Western nations: science and the spirit of independence. Inculcate these things into the Japanese nation and it would soon grow in power and wealth so as to rival Great Britain and be secure from any threat of Western attack and exploitation.

To the task of enlightening (keimo) the Japanese people in this manner Fukuzawa devoted the rest of his life. In his teaching at Keio Gijuku (already one of the largest schools in the country), through the policy of his newspaper, in his personal life, and above all in his voluminous and lucid writings, he constantly strove to show that traditional Japanese ideas and values were wrong and to replace them with others derived from Western positivism and liberalism. To this end, he defined a new concept of jitsugaku, or practical knowledge, and propounded new views of history, ethics, politics, and international relations. He proposed a new scheme of family relationships, championing particularly the cause of women.

Fukuzawa never accepted any government post, remaining a private citizen all his life. By the time of his death he was a national figure, with former pupils in all walks of life, and revered as one of the founders of the new Japan.