The Path from a Theory of Civilization to Escape of Asia: Yukichi Fukuzawa’s Perception of Asia and the ‘Mission to Civilize’

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Abstract: This thesis analyzes Fukuzawa’s civilization discourse and perception of Asia from the view that the Japanese application of the European colonial discourse, which he unconsciously accepted, was an acknowledgement or internalization of the “mission to civilize.” I believe that the notion of the “mission to civilize,” which dominated European colonial discourse, is very useful to explain Fukuzawa’s deviation from enlightenment ideology or his duplicity. Post-colonial theory, which is recently being actively discussed, focuses on and takes up this logic of the “mission to civilize,” and judges and dismantles the ambivalence of colonial discourse (the duplicity of self-perception and the perception of others), the process of forming a self-identity by representing others, and further, the self-contradiction contained within modern enlightenment itself.

Keywords: Maruyama Masao, Fukuzawa’s civilization discourse, contempt for Asia, Post-colonial theory, Mission to civilize, colonial discourse, Escape of Asia, enlightenment

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Maruyama’s Understanding of Fukuzawa

To understand Yukichi Fukuzawa’s perception of Asia and international relations, it is necessary to first examine Masao Maruyama’s study of Fukuzawa. It is because Maruyama’s study of Fukuzawa has a firm place in Japanese academia as a reference point that must be considered in order to understand Fukuzawa’s position.

Maruyama divides Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations during the early enlightenment period into two stages, indicating that Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations undergoes a significant change at a certain point. Maruyama judges that during the early stage when Fukuzawa was writing *An Encouragement of Study* (1872), he held a perception of international relations based on an ideology of the equality of nations, that is, a perception “based on enlightenment natural law.” However, after the publication of Fukuzawa’s representative work *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1872), his perception of international relations encounters a major turning point. At this time, Fukuzawa turns from an ideology of natural law to an ideology of nationalism. His early viewpoint of the equality of nations based on enlightenment ideals retreats, and he reveals a fundamental ideological turnaround that actively argues the “Might is right” or “Power is right” position that acknowledges the reality of the law of the jungle based on strength. Despite this turnaround, Masao Maruyama highly rates Fukuzawa’s sense of balance, writing “Fukuzawa did not lose sight of the tense relationship between national actions and the dictates of natural law, even at a time when voices calling for national expansion were rising.... In this sense, Fukuzawa possessed the ‘awake’ mind that Max Weber speaks of.”

Maruyama’s understanding of Fukuzawa, which views that Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations changed over time can seem justified when examining the surface of Fukuzawa’s remarks. For example, a remark such as the following found in the first edition of *An Encouragement of Study* (February 1872) may be understood as evidence of an early enlightenment ideology of the equality of nations as Maruyama says.

“In order to form mutual relations according to natural humanity and to realize correct principles, it is necessary to bow to even black slaves from Africa. To practice humanity, we must not fear even British or American warships. The nation can only enjoy freedom and independence if every Japanese person gives his life to uphold the honor of the nation when the nation has been humiliated.”

“Outwardly, we must have relations with foreign nations based on international law, and inwardly, we must declare freedom and independence to the people ... A man’s body or a nation are both grounded on the way of heaven and possess an inalienable freedom. Therefore, if a force that interferes with this freedom of a nation appears, we must not fear it though we may go against the entire world. Also, if someone who interferes with this freedom of a body appears, we must not yield even if he is a government official.”

In light of such remarks placing supreme weight on individual and national freedom and independence and emphasizing fighting for them, Maruyama’s understanding that Fukuzawa in the early enlightenment stage had an ideology of the equality of nations based on natural humanity and international law may be accepted at a glance without any serious problem.

Also, as Maruyama says, in *Escape of Asia* (1885), which represents Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations after the turnaround, we see him holding a perception based on the reality of strength in contrast to his early viewpoint of equality.
“Our nation (Japan) does not have the time to wait for the enlightenment of neighboring nations in order to prosper together in Asia. Actually, we must free ourselves from their (China, Korea) ranks and advance and retreat together with the civilized Western nations. Furthermore, we must not give special treatment to China or Korea as neighboring nations but follow the ways in which Westerners dispose of (=invade) such nations” (“Escape of Asia”).

“Some argue that principles must be given primacy and that the army is secondary. But such an argument is no more than the logic of a few Confucian students or the senility of a few old men.”

As can be confirmed from such remarks, Maruyama’s understanding of Fukuzawa that the latter’s perception of international relations “changed” and, furthermore, underwent a “fundamental turnaround” in his middle to late stages may be seen as having its own persuasiveness. Due to this persuasiveness, this viewpoint has an established position in the Japanese understanding of Fukuzawa.

**Trace of Fukuzawa’s Perception of International Relations**

Examining Fukuzawa’s essays in chronological order, however, we discover that Fukuzawa clearly reveals a trace of understanding China, Korea and the rest of Asia in line with international relations of the law of the jungle, acknowledging the “reality of strength” long before he wrote *An Encouragement of Study*. Maruyama judges that Fukuzawa had an “ideology of the equality of nations based on international law” in his early stage, but it is not easy to suppress the impression that such an interpretation of Fukuzawa does not examine all of Fukuzawa’s arguments but is intended to create a desired

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Here we must analyze Fukuzawa’s early essays for remarks revealing a perception of international relations and remarks on China and Korea. Through such an analysis, we can reveal the fact that Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations did not change over time, but that he had a nationalistic perception of international relations from the beginning, and that only its intensity increased over time.

From 1860 to 1862, Fukuzawa traveled through Europe as an interpreter for the Bakufu delegation. After experiencing the wealth and strength of the West along with the delegation, Fukuzawa established his viewpoint that Western “civilization” and its resultant “rich nation, strong army” status must be the direction of Japan’s civilization. In that regard, that trip was truly an important turning point for Fukuzawa. After experiencing Western civilization, Fukuzawa frankly expressed his thought in a letter sent from London that “the urgent task of Japan today lies in rich nation, strong army” (1862). That letter is a significant piece of evidence for understanding the actuality of Fukuzawa’s early enlightenment ideology, which held “civilization,” could not be separated from rich nation, strong

3. Maruyama’s interpretation of the history of thought has acquired an authoritative status for his ability to create a vivid historical image based on his wide knowledge bridging both Eastern and Western thought and his exquisite theorizing. However, the criticism of scholars who revealed the fact that, at the same time, the historical images produced by Maruyama are not obtained from a systematic reading of the documents but are formulated (concocted) in the frame of his historical interpretation that precedes facts and documents, that it is a historical fiction (fabrication), cannot simply be ignored. Research from within Japanese academia that points out the fabrication of Maruyama’s methodology and his ideological interpretation is not small, beginning with the criticism of Koyasu (Jiken Toshiteno Ogyusora), Nobuyuki Kaji and others. In particular, Shisosika Maruyama Masao (Maruyama as a Historian of Thought). (July 2002), examining Maruyama’s study of the history of thought, is an entertaining collection that critically examines Maruyama’s research methods and his results regarding the thought of each age.

army status. Such a perception of civilization became established over 10 years later as the conclusion of his representative work *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875).

On the delegation’s return to Japan, Fukuzawa visited for the first time Hong Kong in the southern part of China then under British colonial rule. After having experienced Western civilization firsthand, Fukuzawa came into contact with the backward aspects of Chinese civilization that starkly contrasted with Western civilization and came to have a disdainful perception full of disappointment. Such a disdainful perception is revealed vividly in travel notes describing his experience. “The native people of Hong Kong have extremely base customs and simply follow the orders of the British.” In the same writing, he says of the Taiping Rebellion taking place on the mainland at the time, “The leader (of the Taiping Rebellion) is a man named Hong Xiuquan who calls himself the Son of God. His group has a lot of followers but is essentially no more than an undisciplined mob. No one knows the rules of tactics.” He thus reveals his disdainful attitude toward the news of the Taiping Rebellion and Hong Xiuquan, which he had heard in Hong Kong, from a thoroughly Western viewpoint.

On the other hand, as Maruyama perceived, it is a clear fact that during this period Fukuzawa held a perception of the equality of nations based on international law. However, he was arguing that the direction of civilization for Japan was to be incorporated into the international order made by the Western imperialist powers, emphasizing the equality of nations. It is important to confirm that he was not by any means arguing that all nations, including Asian nations, were equal on practical terms.

For example, arguments such as “between independent nations there is no unifying system. In order to prevent conflict that arises between them, nations forge pledges, build rapport and assure the

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6. ibid.
convenience of trade. This is called a treaty.”7 or “A wise leader of civilization ... must be well versed in the situations of all the nations of the world ... and must enter into the system called international law.”8 An Essay by Someone 1867 reveal that Fukuzawa had a thorough awareness of the need to secure international relations based on treaties or international law. However, it was neither an expression of an ideology of the equality of nations applicable to every nation nor a perception of international relations that bestows absolute authority to international law.

Even as Fukuzawa acknowledged the significance of international law and treaties, he clearly held the practical perception that ultimately international relations are swayed by strength. In the above essay An Essay by Someone in which he emphasizes the significance of international law, Fukuzawa also argues the following fact.

“In order not to be held in contempt by foreign nations, it is necessary to enhance the nation’s standing. As foreign nations have cannons and warships, we must make them too.... To not fall a single step behind other nations is it not true patriotism?”9

What is the reason for revealing such contradictory positions in the same writing? Fukuzawa understood better than anyone that the reality of international relations was not ruled by an ideology of the equality of nations based on natural law and that in order to be incorporated into the international order, it was necessary to first enhance the nation’s standing through a rich nation, strong army program. In other words, Fukuzawa argues that securing military power on a par with the West is crucial in Japan’s relations with the West in order to secure a level field in which mutual relations based on international law become applicable. However, in Japan’s rela-

tions with Asia, he acknowledges a practical approach based on military power. He had already attained the “wisdom” that practical international relations had to operate on a double standard. That double standard was a fundamental idea flowing through Fukuzawa’s perception of other nations, particularly his perception of Asia.

In *The Situation in the West* (1868), published a year after the above writing, Fukuzawa presents the following pertinent summary of the reality of international relations.

“The reason each nation stands on its own protects the nation and does not lose the territory under its possession, in many cases, is that it is made possible by military power. ... The foreign relations of each nation to this day do not differ from antiquity when barbarians fought each other boasting of their valor. Therefore, even nations that have achieved a high level of civilization

10. It is a well-known fact that in East Asian society at the time, “Elements of International Law” had been translated into Chinese and had a big influence on China and Korea. Furthermore, it seems that the optimistic view that international law was the frame that regulated international relations, that by relying on that frame a nation could carry out equal relations with the Western powers as an independent nation, that it was a specific law that could secure a balance of powers, and that small and weak nations could secure protection through international law, had been widely accepted. It was only after the damage had been done and national sovereignty had been pillaged that intellectuals from small and weak nations realized that despite the optimistic view, in reality, such a balance of powers was a rule among powerful nations and that the reality of international relations did not acknowledge the equal relations of weak nations with strong nations. Fukuzawa knew the fact that international law and treaties were a frame needed for the balance of powers among powerful nations and that in order to enter such a world, Japan had to first raise the nation’s standing, wealth and strength. In that light, it could be said that he had a realistic and “advanced” perception of international relations. The reception of *Elements of International Law* in Korea and its perception refer to the theses of Lee Gwang-rin, Kim Bong-jin and others. *Elements of International Law* in China refers to Sato Shin-ichi, *Intellectuals and Civilization in Modern China* (Tokyo University Press, 1996).
do not hesitate to start big wars. ... However, as civilization advanced, a law was created, and it was named international law. ... It cannot be decreed that all nations must obey that law, but for a nation to destroy that law is to invite enemies, and each nation has no choice but to comply with that law. ... Among powerful European nations, there is a notion of the “balance of powers,” and they use it as a support mechanism to preserve world peace. ... But the “balance of powers” alone is not enough to prevent the start of conflict. ... No method exists to suppress the unjust demands and schemes of each nation and to completely cease strife. This is the reason why war never ceases in the world.”

“After speech come warships, and after writing come cannons. ... It is an intention to degrade our nation (Japan) into a second India. Where is the so-called international law? ... It may be an accepted law among European nations, but it utterly fails to apply in the East.”

In stark contrast to Maruyama’s judgment, Fukuzawa begins to take on the aspect of a thoroughly realistic nationalist before the publication of An Encouragement of Study (1872). In An Encouragement of Study, which emphasizes the independence of the body and the nation, and in essays that seem to be the remarks of a liberal civil rights enlightenment ideologist, Fukuzawa was divulging a nationalistic perspective based on a realistic perception of international relations and a fundamental viewpoint of contempt for Asia in an unfiltered way.

**Fukuzawa’s Contempt for Asia**

Fukuzawa’s contempt for Asia did not begin to appear after his ideology turned toward conservative nationalism in his middle

stage. In fact, Fukuzawa’s contempt for Asia had a clear direction in the early stage of the formation of his West-oriented civilization ideology. In *Inter-relations with the Chinese* (1865), written 10 years before *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, Fukuzawa used the Confucian notion of principle to express the value of meeting the requirements of a civilized nation. In this case, principle obviously refers to the value system of Western civilization and the West-oriented international order.

In that writing, he emphasizes that if a nation obtains the principles of civilization, it need not submit to or fear the threats of powerful foreign nations. It may be said that principle in reality refers to the West-superior foreign relations customs. It cannot be said that the civilized nations of the West had obtained the perfect principles that are the ideal of civilization. He was asserting the point that because a rational method of international relations called international law had been established in the international order based on the principles of Western civilization, if Japan could acquire such principles, it could survive in the competition of international society.

In the same writing, he criticizes Lin Zexu who carried out the ban on opium, “China and Korea cannot perceive the world situ-

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13. To Fukuzawa, civilization is an ideal concept. Although it is true that Western civilization approaches such an ideal concept of civilization, it cannot be said that Western civilization in reality completes the ideal of civilization. But in order to achieve civilization, semi-civilized nations such as Japan and China that have yet to fully embody civilization have no choice but to adopt and learn Western civilization, incomplete as it may be. Also, Fukuzawa had as an unchanging pet theory an evolutionary perspective of progress that the level of civilization would continue to advance and that in the future a more complete civilization would be possible. In chapter 2 of *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* called “To Take Western Civilization as Our Purpose,” such a thought is formalized, but even in the early stage, Fukuzawa was using civilization as an ideal concept.

14. Fukuzawa takes the notion of “relations” very seriously. He calls all facts dealing with the establishment of dealings between individuals and nations “relations.”
tion and believe that their country is the highest in the world. ... In China now, a shortsighted and rash man without wisdom by the name of Lin Zexu has appeared. Without any prior notice, he irrationally burned the opium transported from England. ... They cannot see how the world turns, they do not know how to obtain principles ... In the end, they will face the consequences of their own actions.”

15 He places the blame for the Opium War on Lin Zexu, who failed to realize the principles of foreign relations, and the Chinese government that failed to see how the world turns. The defeat in the Opium War is a fitting outcome for the uncivilized Chinese, who could not understand the principle of foreign relations among civilized nations. Such an argument by Fukuzawa repeats the position of the British hard-liners who pushed forward with the war despite internal opponents who considered it the most shameful war in British foreign relations history. Furthermore, it is in line with his colonial theory of civilization that judges Japan’s attitude in later Japan-Korea relations as just. Here we get a glimpse of the actuality of Fukuzawa’s enlightenment ideology that ostensibly considers “independence of the body and the nation” (An Encouragement of Study) as the supreme value, and it is not difficult to understand how a notion of colonial invasion that is founded upon the mission to civilize arises from such a perception.

Fukuzawa’s remarks of contempt for China do not cease there. Also, such a theory of contempt could not help but be proposed by Fukuzawa who took Western civilization as his purpose. Until then, Japan had belonged to the sphere of Chinese civilization, and the civilization that Fukuzawa spoke of looked in a diametrically opposite direction than the Chinese civilization that remained in a semi-civilized state. The perception that to escape Chinese civilization to achieve true (Western) civilization and to free itself from the Confucian culture of Confucius and Mencius at the core of Chinese civilization was the urgent task of Japan had already been established as

15. Fukuzawa, “Inter-relation with the Chinese,” vol. 1, p. 11.
a firm direction even before being organized as an ideological argument in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*. The path from such a perception of civilization to “Escape of Asia,” which allows Japan to presume the mission to civilize (=colonialize) Asia, is not far.

I strongly believe that, contrary to the opinions of some Japanese scholars, *Escape of Asia* is neither a product of a late stage ideological turnaround nor an accidental remark far from Fukuzawa’s true thought. Furthermore, it cannot be considered a mere unimportant or uninfluential commentary of the time. Even after the above essay “Inter-relations with the Chinese,” Fukuzawa continually repeats remarks abusing China, which was at odds with England.

“The people of China did not understand England’s wealth and strength before. As a result, they recklessly scorned England and did not know that it was a strong enemy. China had a self-centered conceit and repeatedly committed confidence-destroying actions. It went to war lightly but was defeated every time, and finally, the military became weaker by day, and the nation became poorer by day. Now it has withered to an irreparable state. It is truly pitiful” (1869).

16. A lengthy essay on the backwardness of Chinese civilization due to the dominance of Confucianism as presented in Chapter 2 “To Take Western Civilization as Our Purpose” within *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*. Those who feel the mission to civilize reveal a particularly virulent opposition to other cultures with equal but completely distinctive systems from the culture that they seek to spread. Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism were important cultures that stood in opposition to the Western mission to civilize that was linked with capitalism. Entering the 19th century, the concept of “religions” became widespread to comprehensively designate the independent cultural systems of the non-Christian world. Religions became objective topics of research as cultural phenomena to be analyzed, explained and eventually dismantled, unlike Christianity, which was a tradition to be believed in. It was only a matter of time before Christianity itself was seen relatively as a topic of research.

“(Chinese people) do not cultivate virtue, do not polish knowledge, know nothing about the world, and yet are self-absorbed with the idea that they are the only people in the world. The nation is left in the hands of tyrants and corrupt officials ... and finally it sowed discord with England and, with one defeat in war, paid 20,010,000 silver liang in compensation and opened five ports as the price of peace. ... They are ignorant people who start wars recklessly without knowing principles, and lost the war due to their weak military, falling to their current state. It is pitiful”\textsuperscript{18} (1869).

In September 1875, the year \textit{An Outline of a Theory of Civilization} was published, the Kanghwa Island incident took place in Korea. As a result of that incident, Fukuzawa came to have an interest in Korean matters and published numerous essays containing a contemptuous perception of Korea. His perception of Korea then is in line with \textit{Escape of Asia} and other theories wholly favoring the invasion of Korea that were published 10 years later around the time of the Kapsin Coup in 1884. Let us take a look at Fukuzawa’s perception of Korea in the immediate aftermath of the Kanghwa Island incident of 1875.

“The independence of our nation is only a concern about several European nations. ... The troop deployment to Taiwan last year resulted in victory, but the outcome is only a deficit in the millions of yen. ... Our nation’s foreign loans amount to 15 million yen. ... Korea is only a small barbarian nation in Asia. ... So taking it as a subject state is no cause for celebration. The peace of Asia has no effect on our (Japan’s) glory or shame.”\textsuperscript{19}

This was written to frankly state his opposition on economic grounds of the Meiji government foreign policy following the Oki-

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\textsuperscript{18} Yukichi Fukuzawa, “All the Nations of the World,” vol. 2, p. 594.
\textsuperscript{19} Yukichi Fukuzawa, vol. 20, p. 149.
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nawa dissolution (1873, annexation in 1879) and the Taiwan troop deployment (to avenge the murder of Okinawa’s who had drifted to Taiwan in 1874). Here we should pay attention to the fact that the logic behind Fukuzawa’s opposition to the troop deployment is founded upon a viewpoint of thorough disdain for Asia that is unrelated to enlightenment liberalism or international egalitarianism. Fukuzawa criticized the troop deployment of the Meiji government with logic in line with the cost viewpoint that existed generally within Japan at the time. The point of the above writing is also no more than the expression of the thought that colonization of Korea is of no help to the Japanese economy like the annexation of Okinawa or the troop deployment to Taiwan. Fukuzawa argues that seizing Korea will have no influence on Japan’s wealth, strength or standing in the world because Korea is no more than a small, barbarian nation in a corner of Asia. It seems that at this stage, consideration of the economic cost on Japan, which did not have a firmly modern economic structure, outweighed the mission to civilize (undeveloped) Korea. It seems that Fukuzawa disdains Korea as a barbar-

20. Descriptions of the colonial policies of the Meiji government, including the Okinawa annexation, the Hokkaido annexation, the colonization processes of Taiwan and Korea, and the agreement and dissent within and without Japan, refer to Oguma Eiji, Nihonjin no Kyokai (Shinyosa Press, 2000).

21. At this point, a comparison of the French and Japanese colonial policies would be an interesting topic. In the process of the French colonial policy becoming established, the royalists, who thought of economic recovery as the more urgent task, opposed managing colonies on the grounds that it lacked economic benefits. But the republicans, who took pride in supporting and spreading enlightenment ideology, argued that colonization must be carried out for the glory of France and that French civilization must be spread throughout the barbarian colonies and the local people assimilated to complete the mission to civilize. Furthermore, the fact that the colonial policy that they chose was not a British-style indirect rule but a direct rule through the establishment of a governor-general and a strategy of assimilation can be an important topic of comparison to better understand the Japanese colonial policy. Refers to Henri Brunschwig, Mythe et réalités de l’Impérialisme colonial français 1871-1914, Almand Colin, 1960 and Lewis
ian nation in this writing unlike the semi-civilized nation he called it in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* because he intends to strengthen his point opposing the troop deployment to Korea based on a cost viewpoint.

In *A Treaty on Essential Knowledge* (November 1876), published a year after as an extension of his previous essay, he repeats his contemptuous remarks about Taiwan and Korea, writing that “Taiwan’s barbarians are no different from beasts, and killing several people and eating them is a common occurrence. ... Koreans are so stubborn that they fire on foreign ships as soon as they see them as we did in the past.”

It may be said that through such contemptuous disdaining of Asians, Fukuzawa attempted to create a discourse to produce a distorted image of neighboring Asian nations to justify the future conquest, administration and education (=civilization) of Asia, though Japan did not have the economic or military capacity to directly intervene in China or Korea to civilize them at the time. His remarks on Asia were a part of his work to prepare an argument for “civilizing people of undeveloped nations.”

A Theory of Civilization and the ‘Mission to Civilize’

Fukuzawa’s *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875) is the theoretical work in which he comprehensively lays out both his theory of civilization as well as its conclusions regarding his perception of Asia. Below we will examine the features of the theory of civilization presented in the work and attempt to organize it from the perspective that it was the creation of a discourse for colonization.

In Chapter 2 of *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, titled “To Take Western Civilization as Our Purpose,” Fukuzawa argues that imitating Western civilization is the only path to civilization facing

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Japan. Working from the evolutionary approach to history, which was accepted as standard knowledge at the time, Fukuzawa developed a theory of human cultural development in which societies pass through the successive stages of “barbarian,” “semi-civilized” and “civilized.” Taking his present world as a reference point, societies such as those found in Africa and Australia were at a nearly primitive level of existence and classified as “barbarian,” while nations such as Turkey, China and Japan, which featured an agricultural base, a lack of a political system and the survival of outdated customs, were viewed as “semi-civilized.” Here Fukuzawa classifies China as “semi-civilized” but labels Korea “semi-civilized” at times and “barbarian” at other times.

On the other hand, the West, centered on Europe and America (the United States), had commerce and industrial production as their bases and had achieved the highest level of “civilization” for humanity to date. Their exalted status, however, did not mean that they were without problems. “While a few Western nations can be called ‘civilized,’ such a label is really nothing more than the result of using present reality as the standard of judgment. If examined closely, these societies are hardly lacking in features that fall short of any notion of ‘civilization.’”

Fukuzawa singled out the United States in particular for high marks but did not neglect to point out that the United States was confronted with a myriad of internal problems.

So why was it that in spite of all this, Fukuzawa insisted that Japan take the attainment of Western civilization as its purpose?

“The civilization of a few Western countries is as yet not enough to satisfy us. Does it then follow that we should reject it, that we have no need to adopt it? If we do not adopt it, then what position should we occupy to bring us satisfaction? Semi-civilization is hardly a comfortable state. Also, how could we remain in a barbarian state? If the choice is made to abandon barbarism and

24. Fukuzawa, ibid, p. 47
semi-civilization, it is essential that a new, reachable position is established and attained. Waiting eternally for that perfect peace and comfort is no more than an idle dream in the realm of the imagination.”25

Regardless of the deficiencies of the current situation in the West, in the end, Western civilization was the only feasible model. Helplessly waiting for the arrival in the distant future of an ideal situation was no more than simple idealism. Therefore, there was only one choice available to contemporary Japanese.

“No matter whether they are currently barbarian or semi-civilized, if the nations of the world today are to genuinely embark upon a pursuit of civilization, then they must take European civilization as their goal and the starting point of discussion. Resting on this starting point, they must debate the advantages and disadvantages of their objective.”26

Fukuzawa insisted on taking European and American civilization, despite their many problems, as the purpose of Japan’s civilization process in order to present the Japanese people with a concrete goal that they could see. Contemporary Western civilization was not perfect, but the development of civilization headed inevitably in that direction. There was no room for choice in the direction of civilization for Japan and other non-Western nations in semi-civilized or barbarian states.27

Fukuzawa accurately perceived the current limits and problems

25. Fukuzawa, ibid, p. 18
26. Fukuzawa, ibid, p. 19
27. It is a clear fact that Fukuzawa’s perception of the outside world and his theory of civilization, as many scholars point out, are distinct from a blind infatuation with the West. It is precisely due to this ability to accurately perceive reality that Fukuzawa could exist as an important opinion leader in the formation of modern Japan. Matsuzawa Hiroyo, The Formation of Modern Japan and its Experience of Europe (1993), p. 380.
of Western civilization (internally, economic crisis; externally, the crisis of war), and he was well aware of the danger that, as a result of these deficiencies, Japan could fall to the level of a subject state of the West. As a result, he did not neglect to rouse people’s awareness of the potential crisis approaching Japan. Particularly, it is this awareness of a crisis that is reflected in his notions of “independence of body” and “independence of nation,” which formed the first principle of his enlightenment ideology. As pointed out above, however, it must not be forgotten that this demand for independence only had meaning upon the premise of Japanese nationalism. Korean or Chinese independence had no place in Fukuzawa’s enlightenment ideology.

As an enlightenment civilization theorist and also as a thoroughgoing nationalist, Fukuzawa took Japan’s modernization and civilization by imitating the West as the chief task of his ideological propaganda. However, it was only in an abstract sense that the independence and autonomy of all nations and peoples figured into his thought. The universal values of enlightenment could be pushed to the background in the name of the independence, wealth and strength of the Japanese people and the nation. For nationalist Fukuzawa, autonomy and independence of all peoples and nations was a value to be reached only in the final stage of civilization. Clearly that which could not even be attained in the Western nations of the day was something, which for Japan in its current situation, would have to be pushed back to a later stage and only had abstract meaning. The limit of the enlightenment as a universal ideology is starkly revealed in Fukuzawa.28

28. The experience of modern history in which modern nation states expanded into imperialism and colonialism is due to the self-contradiction of enlightenment ideology and capitalism, which provided the ideological basis of the nation state. After the 18th century, Western enlightenment ideology felt a “mission to civilize” to raise others (non-Westerners) to the level of civilization of the West with a belief in the common nature of humanity, whether it was with a romantic good will toward non-Westerners or a
Furthermore, it is possible to connect Fukuzawa’s unflinching belief in the evolutionary process of civilization, which rested on the conviction that the path from barbarism to civilization was a fixed social law, to his notion of the “mission to civilize,” in which it was the mission of civilized Japan to lead the barbarian nations of Asia to civilization. Being a realist, however, Fukuzawa judged that Japan in 1875 had not reached an adequate level of civilization due to inter-
malicious hostility. Such a mission was not established as a clear ideology, but it operated within the foundation of the enlightenment perception of others (non-Westerners). Such a mission was also a fundamental notion in Christian evangelism. In France, beginning in the 1850s, such a mission appears side by side with malicious hostility toward others. In particular, extreme hostility toward Islam, which existed as a dominant force in Africa where France expanded its colonialism, strengthened as the mission to civilize amplified. It was because independent civilizations in diametrical opposition to Christianity or the Western value system were the greatest enemy of the completion of the “mission to civilize.” (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, etc. At this time, from the theoretical demand to understand and dominate other civilizations, religion and anthropology developed side by side, with literate civilizations in the sphere of religion and non-literate civilizations in the sphere of anthropology.) Refers to Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, Stanford U. P. 1997 and the previously introduced work by Lewis Pyenson. A. Conklin argues that although the “mission to civilize” was a common notion that dominated the colonial policies of Western powers, only France chose it as an official ideology of the nation’s colonial policy. Meanwhile, the enlightenment, which is premised upon an a priori and universal rationale as understood by the West, rests upon the foundation of identical constituent members within Western culture (a supposed people), that is, a free entity and another free entity. However, in the case where an equal relationship is not supposed between two entities, it is necessary to expand one’s rationale to others and enlighten them by subordinating them to oneself. Adorno’s “Dialectic of Enlightenment” probably most lucidly explains the point that the logic of colonialism is actually a necessary result of the enlightenment. The enlightenment and the imperialistic expansion of nation states refer to Park Ji-hyang, *Imperialism*, Seoul National University Press, 2000, p. 260, and Na Byung-chul, *Modern Narrative and Post-Colonialism*, Munye Press, 2001, Chapter 3 “The Narrative of Nation States and Post-Colonialism,” in particular pp. 192-199.
nal political and economic situations. It was pointed out above that he opposed Japan’s clumsy penetration into Asia for this reason. However, as his theoretical work *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* appeared in the world and Asia faced increasing pressure from the Western powers, Fukuzawa began to think positively about Japanese expansion.

The disdaining of Asian nations in Fukuzawa’s perspective is closely tied to his perception of the reality of international relations. The promotion of “independence” and “freedom” in his enlightenment remarks was only valid inside of Japan. His enlightenment never went beyond the borders of the new nation state established with the formation of the Meiji government. In international relations, he emphasized that in order to avoid being devoured by strong nations such as England or France—specifically, to avoid the fate of colonized nations such as India—it was necessary to eliminate any comfortable reliance on international law. The leaders of the Meiji government shared this perception. Of course, international law was not entirely useless. It would only become useful, however, after Japan had reached a level of equal strength with the Western powers. International law only applied among nations with an equal level of civilization. International law, which was based on the equality of nations, had no currency between nations that had attained that level of civilization and those that had not. (It is a logic that extends the enlightenment notion of autonomy to international relations.)

When we look at what rests upon the premise of Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations, which I referred to as a double standard above, nations such as China and Korea, which have yet to reach the stage of civilization—those stuck in semi-civilized or barbarian states, to use his terms—must be enlightened or civilized. The West, or Japan that has modeled itself after the West and joined the ranks of civilized nations, is endowed with the “mission to civilize”*29* these nations. While Japan at the time had yet to achieve the Western level of civilization, should it take Western civilization
as its purpose and attain that civilization combining knowledge and virtue, it could then act as a proxy for the West in East Asia and fulfill the responsibilities and duties of a leader that guides the civilization process.

That was the right and duty (=mission) of civilized nations. At the same time, that was virtually the only way to create a world based on international law and to bring about world peace. As quoted above, Fukuzawa says there is no restraint of international law that can suppress the use of military force. The only way was to civilize the uncivilized (semi-civilized or barbarian) nations. In the end, for the sake of world peace, the civilized nations had no choice but to accept the “mission to civilize” and guide the barbarian nations in the direction of enlightenment (civilization). He was dominated by the idea that achieving civilization as understood within a Western context was the only path to that goal.

Fukuzawa did not directly use this notion. However, I believe that the notion of the “mission to civilize,” which dominated European colonial discourse, is very useful to explain Fukuzawa’s deviation from enlightenment ideology or his duplicity. This thesis analyzes Fukuzawa’s civilization discourse and perception of Asia from the view that the Japanese application of the European colonial discourse, which he unconsciously accepted, was an acknowledgement or internalization of the “mission to civilize.” Post-colonial theory, which is recently being actively discussed, focuses on and takes up this logic of the mission to civilize, and judges and dismantles the ambivalence of colonial discourse (the duplicity of self-perception and the perception of others), the process of forming a self-identity by representing others, and further, the self-contradiction contained within modern enlightenment itself. The mission to civilize refers to the previously introduced work by Alice Conklin, and post-colonial cultural theory refers to Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture: A Post-Colonial Cultural Theory* (translated by Na Byung-chul, Somyung Press, 2002). In particular, the representation of others and the ambivalence produced by colonial discourse refers to chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Chapter 2 of *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, which is the only theoretical work that elucidates Fukuzawa’s theory of civilization, argues that Japan’s civilization must proceed by taking Western civilization as its purpose. This is the core of Fukuzawa’s theory of civilization.
Earlier, we examined the connection between Fukuzawa’s theory of civilization and his perception of Asia from the perspective that his ideology from the beginning revealed a tendency toward national rights or nationalism. That understanding of Fukuzawa is clearly at odds with Masao Maruyama’s classical understanding of him. Though Maruyama acknowledges the nationalistic remarks in Fukuzawa’s early thought, he sees them as a secondary matter subsumed under his concern for civil rights and underplays their significance by arguing that Fukuzawa achieved an “elegant balance uniting civil and national rights into a single principle.” However, I believe that while this “balance” Maruyama speaks of may apply to Fukuzawa’s attitude regarding domestic matters, it seems unjustified and forced when applied to his perception of Asia. Furthermore, even regarding domestic affairs, it is impossible to describe the “balance” that Maruyama speaks of as anything other than an uneasy one that is soon destined to transform itself into a very self-righteous and unilateral ultra-nationalism. (In fact, Maruyama seems to have passed over the logical flaws contained within Fukuzawa’s enlightenment discourse and in modern enlightenment discourse itself by overestimating his role as an enlightenment ideologist.)

As for his perception of the outside world, in his judgments concerning the Opium War and the Sino-Japanese War, Fukuzawa unabashedly reveals his West-oriented civilization direction, its premise of the duty to enlighten and educate uncivilized neighbors for the sake of world peace, that is, the “mission to civilize,” and the idea that depending on the situation, even the use of military force can be a part of the mission. Furthermore, in the cases where military force is used, Fukuzawa demonstrates the imperialistic arrogance inherent within his perspective of civilization by placing responsibility for the war not on the invaders, but rather on the
incompetence and anachronism of governments and leaders that failed to accept civilization on peaceful terms.

The tendency of Fukuzawa’s enlightenment theory of civilization, which stressed the independence of the body and the nation, toward a nationalistic striving for wealth and strength can be seen in the early stage of his thought. In his middle and late stages, however, it loses all of the “balance” described by Maruyama and becomes quite stark and undiluted.

“A hundred volumes of international law are no matches for a few cannons. A handful of friendly treaties cannot compete with a little gunpowder. Cannons and gunpowder are machines that can make principles where there were none. ... The relations between nations can take one of two paths. Destroy or be destroyed. ... Ultimately, the fact that Japan’s relations with other nations will rely on war has already been decided.”

Such a “rich nation, strong army” argument in his Theory of Basic National Rights (1878) bears fruit in his significant document Small Talks on Current Affairs (October 1881), which reveals both his conservatism and his invasion of Asia (=mission to civilize) ideology. “Small Talks on Current Affairs” is an important document that bridges his early and later thought and comprehensively and systematically demonstrates that his later thought was a natural progression of his early thought and not indicative of a retreat or a turnaround. At the beginning of the work, Fukuzawa presents an important idea that penetrates the entirety of his thought.

“Innate civil rights is the correct path, but manmade national rights is the path of political expediency. ... We follow the path of political expediency. ... Internally, we must pursue stability, but externally, we must compete. Stability within, competition without, our ideology is contained within these four words. ... It is a

matter of course that a meritorious subject of the Meiji govern-
ment would hold the power of the Meiji government and carry
out national affairs...”32 (1881)

The argument that civil rights based on innate human rights is
the ultimate ideal of enlightenment, but that it only exists as an ideal
while the logic of national rights must be respected as being more
realistic, is the position of a realist who utilizes ideals as an excuse. It
also shows his true form as the proponent of a double standard. This
logic is also in line with the logic of his theory of civilization that
takes Western civilization as the goal. (The logic that Japan had no
choice but to learn the reality of Western civilization, that is, rich
nation, strong army and the law of the jungle.) His perception of
Asia and the “mission to civilize” (=domination of Asia) are summa-
ized again almost without change in Escape of Asia. In this sense,
Escape of Asia can be seen as a summary of his theory of civilization,
and the final statement of his view of colonization founded upon the
“mission to civilize.” Let us examine the chief point of this work.

“Japan may reside in the eastern part of Asia, but the spirit of
its people has already thrown off the narrow-mindedness of the
region and has moved in the direction of Western civilization. ...?
China and Korea still cling fast to their ancient habits and customs,
and their condition is no different from a hundred or a thousand
years ago. At this juncture of civilized reform, they shout Confu-
cianism ... From the beginning to the end; they are hindered by
outwardly ostentation and teach neither truth nor principles.
Ethics have faltered, and atrocious evil is reaching a new height,
but they arrogantly refuse to reflect upon themselves. ... Today’s
China and Korea are of no help to Japan. ... On the contrary, they
pose many obstacles to our foreign relations. ... We have no time
to wait for the enlightenment of neighboring nations in order to
prosper together in Asia. Actually, we must free ourselves from
their ranks and advance and retreat together with the civilized

Western nations. Furthermore, we must not give special treatment to China or Korea as neighboring nations but follow the ways in which Westerners dispose of (=invade to civilize) such nations.” 33

**In Place of a Conclusion: Reflections on a Modern Age Full of Enlightenment Arrogance**

Fukuzawa’s remarks on the colonization of Asia became more blatant with the publication of *Small Talks on Current Affairs* in 1881 and through the editorials of “Newspaper on Current Issues,” which he founded in 1882. The foundation of “Newspaper on Current Issues” opened a new front in Fukuzawa’s nationalistic enlightenment activities. With the acquisition of a media outlet, Fukuzawa went from an enlightenment theorist to a media authority that advised the Meiji government on policy while speaking out to the public. As a civilization theorist with a thorough knowledge of Western civilization, Fukuzawa played the role of interpreting the rapidly changing international situation from a “realistic” perspective, which also became the foreign relations perception of the Meiji government. 34 To the masses, his remarks through the media were

33. Fukuzawa, “Escape of Asia,” vol. 10, p. 239.
34. It cannot be said that Fukuzawa’s perception of international relations and that of the Meiji government were always identical. As we saw previously, Fukuzawa did not agree with the position of the Meiji government on issues such as the troop deployment to Taiwan or the Kanghwa Island incident. Despite this, it may still be said that there was no fundamental difference between the perceptions of Fukuzawa and the Meiji government, in fact, that they were completely identical, when it came to the path of expansion that took the wealth and strength of Japan as its goal, a perception of the outside world that viewed Asia as fundamentally an object of invasion or education, and nationalism. In his thesis “Ideology of the Meiji Nation” (1949), Masao Maruyama writes that Fukuzawa’s ideology represents the ideology of the Meiji nation until 1877, but it cannot be accepted that the agreement is limited to that time frame. In fact, XYZ focuses on the
an enlightenment education, and to the Meiji government, he was a policy compass providing direction.

The Imo Military Revolt of 1882 and the Kapsin Coup of 1884 in Korea served as occasions for Fukuzawa’s perception of his Asian neighbors to go beyond blatant contempt to a position of advocating ruling over them as a matter of course. In so doing, he assumed a leading role in Japanese imperialism as a prominent ideologue of Asian invasion. Of course, it is not a surprising development considering his perception of international relations in the early enlightenment stage that took as its supreme objective the strengthening of the nation.

In 1884, the coup attempt of Kim Ok-gyun and others who had learned the stages of civilization and enlightenment from Fukuzawa failed after three days, and its leaders were either executed or forced into exile. It is said that when the news reached Fukuzawa, he wrote *Escape of Asia* out of disappointment and anger at his “uncivilized” Asian neighbors.\(^\text{35}\) In no way, however, does such a circumstantial

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\(^{35}\) In *Yukichi Fukuzawa and Korea* (Sairyusha Press, 1997), Obuchi presents a circumstantial explanation that “there would be no mistake in reading in ‘Escape of Asia’ a reflection of Yukichi’s disillusionment after the failure of the Kapsin Coup.” Of course, the work clearly came out of that situation, but we must read the true nature of Fukuzawa’s disillusionment. Without examining the true nature of that disillusionment, a simple circumstantial reading is problematic. Hiroshi Hirayama, in his latest thesis “Yukichi Fukuzawa’s Understanding of the West and ‘Escape of Asia,’” writes that “Escape of Asia,” which was printed in “Newspaper on Current Issues” edited by Fukuzawa, did not receive much attention at the time and that it was only after the research of Masao Maruyama that the work came to receive more attention. He thus criticizes the attitude in academia that overestimates the relationship between “Escape of Asia” and Meiji government policy. Hirayama also judges that “Escape of Asia” is not an impor-
Indeed, the hope that Fukuzawa pinned on the pro-Japanese intellectuals behind the Kapsin Coup is proof of the arrogant superiority of his “mission to civilize.” In other words, it involved the elitism of those who felt a mission to civilize an uncivilized (semi-civilized, barbarian) people. It springs from the same source as the impulse by which Western enlighteners, particularly the French, pursued the colonization of the non-Western world with a Christian elitism. To take it a step further, the work of missionaries, however apolitical and pure their motives may be, cannot conceal the elitist feeling of superiority. According to such a notion of elitism, those who understand civilization and work actively to adopt it are progressive people with lofty ideals, while those who interfere with this progress are barbarians. Fukuzawa judged the Korean enlightenment intellectuals to be lofty patriots in pursuit of civilization and argued that those opposing them were barbarians. Furthermore, as

In “Escape of Asia,” Fukuzawa labels members of the Independence Party “patriots” as movers of reform and, in his subsequent writing “Punishment of the Korean Independence Party,” writes, “I cannot contain my surprise at the cruelty with which officials of the current flunkeyist party are killing able men. Rather than calling it barbarism, it may be better labeled as a hell of monsters and devils. The lack of humanity in Korea is no different than in China, and the treacherousness of having to live there is beyond the imagination of the Japanese.” Fukuzawa, “Punishment of the Korean Independence Party,” vol. 10, p. 224.
long as such an evolutionary theory of civilization was accepted as the truth, the dichotomy by which those pro-Japanese who aspired to emulate civilized Japan judged themselves to be civilized and their opponents to be barbarians was naturally accepted as his own value system. As a result, China and those pro-Chinese who interfered with the mission to civilize that the Independence Party was doing on behalf of Japan were barbarians, and a distinct civilization that was antithetical to civilized enlightenment (Confucianism) was the enemy of progress and civilization, that is, a barbarian ideology to be designated as an object of rejection. (It did not mean that the pro-Chinese were right, however.) Such a rejection leads quickly to a rationalization for rule. (Just as in the course of French colonization of Africa, Islam came to be seen as the enemy of civilization, Hinduism suffered the same fate under English colonization of India, and Islam is again seen as the enemy of democracy and capitalist civilization in the U.S. invasion of Iraq.)

In the end, the contempt for other Asian nations expressed in “Escape of Asia” is the inevitable result of an evolutionary perception of civilization that boasts of the great “mission to civilize,” disregards other nations for the sake of the expansion of the Japanese empire, and further, rejects one’s own past and even reduces other nations sharing this past to objects of rejection as well. A perspective of cold realism that looks at others without sympathy but as objects of colonialism by disdaining and rejecting them is buried there. Through that perspective, others are condemned as objects to be used or enemies to be defeated. With this perspective, Fukuzawa lets loose such reckless remarks on invasion founded upon the mission to civilize as “the glorious deed of awakening Korea from its deep sleep and leading it to civilization must forever be vested in Japan” and “the downfall of Korea is actually a blessing for the Korean people.”

38. Fukuzawa, “In praise of the Downfall of Choson Dynasty for her people,”
In conclusion, I believe that Fukuzawa’s *Escape of Asia* or colonial position cannot be judged as a mere personal ideological limit, a contradiction of his early thought, or a retreat or a change in position, but a thought connected to the essence of his civilization ideology. Furthermore, it is the necessary conclusion of the entirety of his enlightenment discourse that lacks self-examination\(^{39}\) and the fate of a colonial discourse that exists only through the representation of others (=Orientalism). In that sense, Fukuzawa’s theory of civilization and *Escape of Asia* constituted the only form of discourse that modern Japan, which emulated Western modernity and viewed the West and itself as one without self-examination, could reach. It was also the necessary conclusion of his theory of civilization as presented in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*.\(^{40}\) It may be said that Fukuzawa was a loyal proponent of the ideology of modern civilization, who

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39. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and Adorno focuses on the violent and repressive aspects of all enlightenment discourse that puts trust in reason. We must pay attention to the ambivalence of enlightenment discourse as a theory of modernization due to the fact that the enlightenment discourse of modern Western enlightenment is directly related to the modern Western perception of others and a colonial theory of civilization. Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (Columbia University, 1989), examining the problem of the perception of others by Western anthropology—a typically modern system of knowledge that developed along with the Western modern age—is an important work that enables an examination of the side by side phenomenon of modern Western colonial and anthropological discourse.

40. It is not the case that there were no intellectuals who criticized the imperialistic development of Japan or its colonial policy. Disapproving intellectuals criticized the expansion of Japan and pursued isolation or proposed socialism or anarchism. As a result, the view that Japan had no choice in modernization but to go down the path of imperialism in the process of civilization (the path chosen by Fukuzawa) is an attitude that dwarfs the many possibilities of the modern age. It is because the modern age of such dwarfed possibilities is the modern age that we are experiencing today that a comprehensive reflection on the modern age is needed.
paradoxically understood best, even if subconsciously, that tendency in modern civilization.

As Japanese intellectuals today are also suggesting, with a wide-ranging self-reflection, modern Japan matured on the basis of logic of military colonization that used others or viewed them as enemies for the sake of ultra-nationalist unity. Fukuzawa’s perception of Asia follows the same path as that logic of modern Japan. That was not only the personal ideological flaw of Fukuzawa, who could not comprehensively judge modern Western civilization from a perspective of self-reflection, but also the necessary limit of modern thinking that lacks self-reflection. (Original April 27, 2003, revised June 1.)