

## An Interpretation of Japanese Philosophy and Thought-Part2

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### Abstract

This paper is an outline of Japanese philosophy and thought compared with other thoughts.

Chapter 1 deals with the thoughts of the people and influential thinkers of the ancient age. Chapter 2 covers the period from the middle ages until the Middle of the 19th century. These were already dealt in the Part 1. Chapter 3 is covered with the modern era in this Part 2.

### Chapter 3

#### Section 1

#### Thoughts building a modern nation

In the middle of the 19th century, the Confucian philosopher Sakuma Shozan \*<sup>1</sup> appealed that we must plan to keep the power of the nation by studying Western science and Eastern morality after he learned of the events in China during "the Opium War" of 1842.

His pupil Yoshida Shoin \*<sup>2</sup> said that all the people must devote themselves to the Emperor while keeping the Confucian moral 'loyalty' for the Emperor.

The other pupil Sakamoto Ryoma \*<sup>3</sup> labored to combine big, different powers against the feudal Tokugawa government. These powers were recognized as the Emperor's power. And the other powers of the Tokugawa government were placed as the rebel powers. The Emperor's powers marched to Edo Castle and demanded the Tokugawa government to throw open it.

The Tokugawa government accepted the

postulation of the new big power and restored government to the Emperor and the new powers. The new government system was mostly peacefully born.

Thus, the so called "Meiji Restoration" \*<sup>1</sup> occurred in 1868. Japan started to build a modern nation like Western nations.

Sakamoto Ryoma and other young generation's works were effective in achieving this peaceful restoration.

Sakamoto Ryoma had already had a vision for a new position of Japan. He opened "The Eight Policies" \*<sup>2</sup> that was thought while he was sailing. We can see his thought and vision in it for a new Japan in the future.

It said, "Let the rein of the government restore to the emperor's court and government ordinances come from it. Establish upper and lower Congress and decide all the policies through discussions by Congressmen. Take able persons as official advisors and restrict meaningless officials. Make wide contacts with foreign countries and institute new rules among nations. Revise the old rules and institute a complete and basic Constitution. Build up a navy. Make the law concerning the exchange rates of gold, silver and materials balanced to that of other countries."

We can see here his thoughts of how to reconstruct Japan as a modern nation standing in

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\* 1. Sakuma Shozan (佐久間象山) was a staff of guarding the sea lane.

\* 2. Yoshida Shoin (吉田松陰) taught Ito Hirobumi (伊藤博文) and other nationalists.

\* 3. Sakamoto Ryoma (坂本竜馬) gave up his samurai title and labored for a new Japan.

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\* 1. "Meiji Ishin" (明治維新)

\* 2. "The Eight Policies thought in the ship" (Senchu Hassaku 『船中八策』) was built in 1867.

line with other nations. This goal was almost realized later in the new government system and the policies of its successors. The next Declaration by the Emperor for the new age was based on this.

He recognized the location of the Japanese islands surrounded by the sea. He planned that Japan should be a nation dependent on trade. He had already carried out his plan keeping a ship and companies for trading. He also planned to develop the big island Hokkaido as a base for new industries. He had visions to fit modern times. But he could not see the new age. He was assassinated by terrorists several months before the Meiji Restoration. But his plans and vision were soon realized. The rein of the government administration was restored to the Emperor. The restoration was accomplished. The new visions to establish a modern nation were declared by the Emperor. \*<sup>1</sup>

He declared, "Hold Conferences widely and decide by public discussions. Achieve many policies altogether with officers and people. Old systems and thoughts should be reformed based on the ways of the world. Gain knowledge about the world and recognize well the origin of the nation."

These were declared to be the basic visions of the new government.

The administration of land and the people was transferred from provincial government to the Emperor and the Nation. \*<sup>2</sup> The order of social position was given up and people gained the freedom to choose their job or transfer in 1872. Numerous researchers were sent to Europe and the United States to learn about modern Western culture.

Fukuzawa Yukichi \*<sup>3</sup> was a chief member of the publisher Meirokusha. The members introduced Western thought to Japan. They influenced people a great deal. Their motto was "ci-

vilization of the people." They tried to eliminate feudal morals and thought from people.

Fukuzawa was a son of an under class samurai and had experienced terrible misery. He said, "The social station of feudal system is an enemy of my parents. \*<sup>1</sup> He also said, "Heaven originally created no human superior or inferior to other humans. \*<sup>2</sup> He insisted here on equal human rights given by heaven. \*<sup>3</sup> He also appealed that nations ought to have a spirit of Independence and pride. When each person gets independence, the nation can be also independent. He said that we must study practical science. \*<sup>4</sup> And he built a college and taught students. They became owners and business men in the new industries.

But his thought intensified to say "harmony of office and people" \*<sup>5</sup> and his opinion of "making a rich nation keeping powerful military" \*<sup>6</sup> had a great influence on the public opinion. Japan went really on this way after the Japanese-Chinese war of 1894.

## Section 2

### Establishing the constitutional monarchy

New government did not carry out any policy that satisfied people. Farmers had to pay nearly the same tax as before. Farmers were formerly serfs. And then they became tenant farmers and some became landed-farmers. The tenant farmer had to pay about 60% tax. Gains of land owners were 10% in 1880. \*<sup>7</sup> But soon in 1881 they grew to 36% and more to 52% in 1890. The land owners were almost the same as the governor in the feudal age. Farmers' dissatisfaction increased year by year. Many farmers rioted. A hundred riots in the 2nd year of Meiji increased to 160 riots 15 years later. The scale

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\* 1. "Five Promises" (五カ条の御誓文) was declared by the Emperor in 1868.

\* 2. Hanzeki hokan (藩籍奉還) in 1869.

\* 3. Fukuzawa Yukichi (福沢諭吉)

\* 1. "Fukuou jiden" (『福翁自伝』)

\* 2. \* 3. \* 4. "Gakumon no susume" (『学問のすすめ』)

\* 5. Kan-min chowa ron (官民調和論)

\* 6. Fukoku kyohei saku (富国強兵策)

\* 7. "Rewriting a law of land tax" (地租改正) in 1880.

also grew, caused by not only the high tax but also the new requirements of conscription and compulsory education.

The Samurai class lost most of their duties and salary. They also rioted. They had no other recourse than to riot. There were not yet elections or a Congress.

Saigo Takamori <sup>\*1</sup> had done distinguished service for the Meiji Restoration. But he gave up his high status and went home to Kagoshima. He rioted, but he was put down with his many supporters. It was the last riot by Samurai.

On one hand, Itagaki Taisuke <sup>\*2</sup> and his companies established a political party named "Public Patriotism". They criticized the autocracy of the government. They asked government to establish a Congress with members elected by the people in 1880. It was the first movement to ask for freedom and rights of the people.

This movement spread widely among the people.

But the government denied it and moreover repressed freedom of speech, meeting and association of political parties. But public criticism grew against the injustice of the government. <sup>\*3</sup> At last, the government had to declare to promise to establish Congress within 10 years.

Ueki Emori was influenced by Itagaki Taisuke. He said, "A nation was originally a mass of people. It was neither made by government nor it was the organ for Emperor. Nation depended on people." <sup>\*4</sup> He also wrote a model constitution. He admitted the right of people's resistance in it. This thought came from that of French philosopher J.J.Rousseau. But this democratic ideology was not realized in the Constitution. <sup>\*5</sup> The right of the Emperor

was extremely superior. The Emperor was defined in it as "sacred and dignified." <sup>\*6</sup>

Nakae Chomin <sup>\*7</sup> was a leader of the movement asking for freedom and rights of the people. He criticized policy governed by specific groups. He was elected to a member of Congress. But he was very disappointed with the Congress and political parties. He gave up his seat in Congress. He said, "There are two kinds of rights of the people. The one is granted right by the Emperor or the government. The another is regained right. We must bring up the former and change it to the later to establish a constitutional government." He also said, "People without philosophy have no deep meaning or plan. He can not avoid being shallow." He worried, "Philosophical thinking had not taken place and nations have a tendency to take a short view of things." <sup>\*1</sup>

This critical analysis still has meaning for Japanese.

Nakae Chomin was succeeded by his pupil Kotoku Shusui. <sup>\*2</sup> He criticized the foreign policy of those days. He wrote that the foreign policy was Imperialism woven from so called nationalism and militarism. <sup>\*3</sup>

### Section 3

#### A national moral and Christian Uchimura Kanzo

The Meiji government tried to civilize the nation in Western style. Dance parties were often held among diplomats and beef steak restaurants were popular in town.

On one hand nationalism broke out. A nationalist Miyake Setsurei <sup>\*4</sup> and others criticized the fashions of people which imitate West-

\* 1. Saigo Takamori (西郷隆盛) was a general of the new powers.

\* 2. Itagaki Taisuke (板垣退助) established the first political party (愛国公党).

\* 3. Governor K.Kuroda (黒田清隆) planned to sell the property to his friend cheaply.

\* 4. "Theory of right and freedom of people" (『人權自由論』) written by E. Ueki (植木枝盛)

\* 5. \* 6. "the Meiji Constitution of Japan" (大日本帝国憲法) established in 1889.

\* 7. \* 1. Nakae Chomin's (中江兆民) book "San-suijin Keirin Mondo (『三酔人経倫問答』) & Ichinen Yuhan (『一年有半』)"

\* 2. Kotoku Shusui (幸徳秋水) had a socialism ideology.

\* 3. "A monster Imperialism in 20th century" (『二十世紀の怪物帝国主義』) published in 1901.

\* 4. Miyake Setsurei (三宅雪嶺)

ern culture superficially. They advocated keeping traditional customs and putting forward our subjective reformation. This thought appealed to cultivate a national consciousness among people. The Constitution was made public in 1889 and the "Emperor" was prescribed in it as "holy and nonaggressive." And "Loyalty for Emperor was asked to nation to have as basic moral in education in "Emperor's order concerning education" "Kyoiku Chokugo." \*<sup>1</sup> This moral had been thoroughly instilled into the nation until the end of the War of 1945.

Protestantism was also accepted in Japan in the beginning of the Meiji age as a thought of progressing modernization of Japan. Protestantism spread widely.

Uchimura Kanzo \*<sup>2</sup> found a way for Japan in the spirit of Christianity.

He preached that all humans were equal and worthy of esteem before God. He criticized a big company that caused environmental pollution. \*<sup>3</sup> And he opposed the Russo-Japanese war of 1904. He appealed, "We must not fight with swords on any occasion. God orders us to keep absolute peace." He also preached the belief that only depended on the Bible, and not the church. His humanistic theory influenced young generation greatly.

## Section 4

### Philosophy of Nishida

Nishida Kitaro \*<sup>4</sup> studied Western philosophy and practiced a Buddhist training way Zazen \*<sup>5</sup>. He ignored the ways of Western philosophy which take dualism, subject and object.

And he said that the most fundamental thing must be "pure experience." \*<sup>1</sup>

This pure experience is like that of someone who is absorbed in melodious music or that of a painter who is absorbed in painting. He thought that this was a real existence and direct world before subject and object separate. He also thought that establishing one's person meant learning from this experience and he must ignore his small self-consciousness actually. He thought that personality existed in working altogether with knowledge, emotion and will, and that realizing one's character was absorbing oneself in large working to unify self and thing or subject and object. He said that this realizing one's character was "good". \*<sup>2</sup>

He said, "Our real self is the substance of the cosmos. If we know our real self, we can accord ourselves with not only good of general human but also the reality of the cosmos. And we know the intention of God. Religion or moral is here truly covered. And then we can say that way how to know real self and accord with god exists only in getting power to unify subject and object." \*<sup>3</sup>

Nishida recognized Eastern traditional thought in the process of contemplating the meaning of life. And he built his own systematic philosophy.

His philosophy has been taught to students at school. Some people try to practice Zazen in Buddhist temples to experience peacefulness when they want to control themselves and find their real self.

Watsuji Tetsuro \*<sup>4</sup> developed his own ethics. His thought is that ethics are the study of human relations. \*<sup>5</sup> He considered human-beings as not only individuals but also relations among persons. On one hand Western philosophy considers people as individuals in order to establish identity. Watsuji thought that ethics con-

\* 1. "Kyoiku Chokugo" (教育勅語) was declared in 1890.

\* 2. Uchimura Kanzo (内村鑑三) met Christianity in Hokkaido University.

\* 3. A newspaper writer Uchimura disclosed an affair in Ashio Metal Mine. (足尾銅山)

\* 4. Nishida Kitaro (西田幾太郎) lived from 1870 to 1945. The following sayings of his are in his book "Studies of Goodness". (『善の研究』)

\* 5. Refer to Part 1 Chapter 2, Section 1.

\* 1. \* 2. \* 3. "Junsui keiken" (純粹経験)

\* 4. T. Watsuji (和辻哲郎) lived from 1889 to 1960. Professor of Tokyo University.

\* 5. "Ethics as study of human relation" (『人間の学としての倫理学』)

sisted of not only individual or society but also the mutual actions between individuals and society. He took human namely that he was not only aware of himself as being individual but also he devoted himself to his society again and tried to make it better. He considered that ethics consisted of the theory concerning to dynamic relations between individuals and society. He said, "If the ethics are defined within the one side, the people sometimes produce personal egoism or national fascism." \*<sup>1</sup>

He also took a view point of history or location for understanding people concretely. It was also applied to the case of nation. \*<sup>2</sup>

## Section 5

### Principles and the thought in the Constitution

The 2nd world war ended leaving the worst damage in history of Japan. It caused a big change of the spiritual life into the different way. The government made a draft constitution on a request of the American Army General Head Quarters. But the proposed Constitution preserved the supreme position of the Emperor. Democratic systems were not prescribed in it. So G.H.Q. drafted a new Constitution. The government had to make other plan based on that of G.H.Q.. And then it was decided in the Congress and made public in 1946.

The three principles of the Constitution are democracy, pacifism and protection of basic human right. \*<sup>3</sup> The Parliament is to be placed as the highest and only institution of the state \*<sup>4</sup> organized with members elected by nation. \*<sup>5</sup> The election is common election. \*<sup>6</sup> The government is led by a Prime Minister and other

Ministers. They must be civilians. \*<sup>7</sup> The Prime Minister is appointed by members of Parliament. \*<sup>1</sup> The Ministers are appointed by the Prime Minister. \*<sup>2</sup> The Emperor serves as a symbol of nation. It means a ceremonial head of state. The status is based on the will of nation. \*<sup>3</sup>

War and threat using military power or exercise of it are abandoned forever to solve international conflicts. \*<sup>4</sup>

The Nation does not keep any military power army, navy or air force. The right of the state to fight against other countries was not recognized. \*<sup>5</sup>

There are no other examples in the world like Article 9 of abandoning war and the use of military power. We can say that people's desire of "No more war, no more Hiroshima" \*<sup>6</sup> produced this declaration. We should be proud of Article 9.

But circumstances have changed somewhat with passing of time. The band of police reservists \*<sup>7</sup> was formed following the war in the north East Asia. \*<sup>8</sup> And then it was changed to the Self-Defense Force. \*<sup>9</sup> The SDF was recently sent to Cambodia and Africa to support United Nations' peace keeping operations, PKO.

The Force has also been gradually assigned to support the defense strategy of the United States. \*<sup>10</sup>

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\*1. "Ethics as study of human relation"

\*2. Refer to his book "Climate". (風土)

\*3. Prologue and Article 11 of the Constitution of Japan (日本国憲法)

\*4. Article 41

\*5. Article 43

\*6. Article 15

\*7. Article 66

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\*1. Article 67

\*2. Article 68

\*3. Article 1

\*4. \*5. Article 9

\*6. People recognize the value of peace every year in August.

\*7. The band of police reservists (警察予備隊) was established in 1950.

\*8. War in the Korean peninsula came near to the southern island of Kyushu. (九州)

\*9. The duty of the Self-Defense Force (自衛隊) was defined as guarding of the Nation and conducting disaster-relief in the law passed in 1954.

\*10. "Guide line of Japanese sea lane" based on "Japan-U.S. Security Pact" in 1997.

Nothing is written in the Constitution about the right of self-defense. Successive conservative governments appealed to public opinion that the nation originally had the right of self-defense. And they made the band. They regard the existence as a real fact and moreover they interpreted its duties wider and wider.

There are discussions about the contradiction between the Constitution and existence of the SDF as a military power.

Democracy is realized legally in the system of government. But there still remains Feudal morals and thoughts among people. It may be a good point of Japanese traditional culture to use polite or thankful expression in private or service relationships. \*<sup>1</sup> But on the other hand old generation sometimes criticize someone for not saying "Thank you". Or some people holding upper class positions in government office or companies or older men feel unhappy and criticize persons. Not only that they often scold subordinates with rough expressions even when in private affairs. It may be a proof of residual Feudal moral sense or a simple case of misunderstanding the situation.

The concept of equality among individuals is not yet established in the people.

The basic human rights are also established in Constitution definitely. Freedom of speech expression, association, and thought and religion also is defined. But Confucian moral "Rei and Kei" \*<sup>2</sup> has confirmly taken root in the society. People are not so free to use their rights. They always worry about what others think. This consideration for others came from the teachings of Confucianism. And it may originally be a Japanese virtue. \*<sup>3</sup> Japanese have valued cooperation with others and working together in harmony. \*<sup>4</sup> It may have been a

traditional thought and custom for them since the ancient age.

(This paper is based on the lectures at the University of the Philippines, Los Baños, Laguna on 22 December 1997.)

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\*1. Refer to Part 1 Chapter 2, Section 3. They affirmed also a thankful heart for benefit from others or Nature. It still remains in people.

\*2. Refer to Part 1 Chapter 2, Section 1.

\*3. Confucian moral Jo (恕) or Omoiyari (思いやり) in Japanese.

\*4. Accordance or harmony with others 'Wa' (和)