



Nationality and Christianity in Modern Japan: 'Self' and 'Others' in Japanese Political Thought

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【要約】 The word nationality [*kokutai*] was invented by Aizawa Seishisai to warn of the danger of 'Western barbarians'. In the process of opening the state after 1853, this word spread and won popularity. In 1875 Fukuzawa Yukichi used this word in his *Introduction to Western Civilization* [*Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*] and completely changed its meaning. The word *kokutai* was originally connected with the myth of Amaterasu and her descent in the text of Aizawa, but Fukuzawa gave it a new meaning by translating the word 'nationality' in John Stuart Mill's *Representative Government* as *kokutai*. But in *Brief Comments on Current Affairs* [*Jiji-shôgen*] published in 1881, Fukuzawa changed his opinion. He vehemently criticized Christianity, and took up the myth of the unbroken imperial line which he had declared 'a stupid fiction' in *Introduction to Western Civilization*. In the end, Aizawa and Fukuzawa, who had very different academic backgrounds, were in accord on the idea of *kokutai* to the effect that the imperial family should be the origin of Japanese nationality in relation to Western nations.

Preface

Kokutai [nationality] is an idea which has profoundly restricted modern Japanese society and its ideology. The notorious Public Security Law [*Chian-iji Hō*] was aimed at controlling the transformation of *kokutai* and the negation of the system of private property. In His Majesty's Council held in August 1945, the supreme leaders could not decide if Japan would submit to the Potsdam Declaration, and it was the Shōwa Emperor who made the final decision. After the new constitution was promulgated, intellectuals argued over whether the *kokutai* was changed or not. This episode shows us that the concept of *kokutai* did not have a clear definition, though it played an important role in modern Japanese history.

The word *kokutai* was invented by Aizawa Seishisai, one of the most famous scholars of Mito Learning, who wrote *New Theses* [*Shinron*] in 1825 to warn of the danger of 'Western barbarians'. In the process of opening the state after 1853, this word spread and won popularity. In 1875 Fukuzawa Yukichi, representative scholar of Western Learning, used this word in his *Introduction to Western Civilization* [*Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*] and completely changed its meaning. The word *kokutai* was originally connected with the myth of Amaterasu and her descent in the text of Aizawa, but Fukuzawa gave it a new meaning by translating the word 'nationality' in John Stuart Mill's *Representative Government* as *kokutai*. Fukuzawa clearly denied the ethnic nuance of this word and regarded the common memory of a nation as the core of *kokutai*. But in *Brief Comments on Current Affairs* [*Jiji-shōgen*] published in 1881, Fukuzawa changed his opinion. He vehemently criticized Christianity, and took up the myth of the unbroken imperial line which he had declared 'a stupid fiction' in *Introduction to Western Civilization*. In the end, Aizawa and Fukuzawa, who had very different academic backgrounds, were in accord on the idea of *kokutai* to the effect that the imperial family should be the origin of Japanese nationality in relation to Western nations.

1. Discovery of 'nationality'

Aizawa Seishisai begins his narrative of *New Theses* [*Shinron*] as follows: "Our Divine Realm is where the sun emerges. It is the source of the primordial vital force sustaining all life and order. Our Emperors, descendents of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, have acceded to the Imperial Throne in each and every generation, a unique fact that will never change. Our Divine Realm rightly constitutes the head and shoulders of the world and controls all nations."(p.149)¹ In contrast, 'Western barbarians', though their position is at the lower extremities of the world, have been "scurrying across the Four Seas" and challenging Japan.

The differentiation between the Civilized and the Barbarians is a way of thinking the scholars of Mito Learning hold in common. What made Aizawa original and most influential at the end of Edo and in the early Meiji period was that he grasped the 'Western Barbarians' from an ideological aspect; he regarded Christianity as an inseparable tool of the Western Barbarians' invasion. For example, in the 'Barbarians' Nature' in *New Theses*, Aizawa poses the question about the reason why the barbarians can enlarge their territories and fulfill their desires, and answers that it is not

¹ I cite the text of *New Theses* translated by Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi in *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan*, Harvard University Press, 1986.

because they excel in wisdom and courage, nor that their political institutions are superb. Christianity is the sole reason for their success.

Why can Christianity be a tool for the Western invasion? It goes without saying that Aizawa does not believe in the superiority of Christianity. For Aizawa Christian doctrine is evil and not worth discussing, but is so simple to grasp that the 'stupid commoners' would easily be deceived and be tempted to believe. When the cunning barbarians seek to take over a country, they begin to trade. If that nation is weak, they dispatch troops to invade; if not, they propagate Christianity to subvert it from within. Once people's minds are captivated by the barbarian God, people would consider it an honor to die for that God. Aizawa is afraid that barbarians seduce 'stupid commoners' into subverting their homeland by using Christianity to demilitarize their minds. It is not sufficient to build up military strength in order to prevent this barbarians' seduction. Aizawa thought that Japanese must have their own national ideology to defend themselves against Christianity and this is why he invented the idea of 'nationality' [*kokutai*]².

The central idea of Aizawa's ideological strategy is '*ten*' [heaven], which is originally terminology from Confucianism. Aizawa skillfully transforms its meaning and applies this word to the myth of the ancestors of the emperor [*tennō*] and the unbroken imperial line. In the chapter titled 'Nationality' [*kokutai*] in *New Theses*, Aizawa writes as follows: "In antiquity, the Heavenly Progenitress, Amaterasu, set down the precepts on which to base this nation. Her Imperial Throne was divinely ordained, Her virtue was divinely bestowed, and through these, She carried out the Processes of Heaven. All of Her achievements were the work of Heaven itself." Here we can see the construction of Japan by Amaterasu is transformed into the conduct of Heaven; tactics of this tricky transformation are based on the similarity of pronunciation of heaven[*ten*] and emperor [*tennō*]. Then Aizawa insists on the inviolable righteousness of the imperial line of Amaterasu because of Three Regalia (Jewel, Mirror and Sword) inherited for generations from Amaterasu, which mean virtue, wisdom and courage.

According to Aizawa, essentials for government are ancestor worship and the edification of people by rites and music; this accordance of religious ritual, government and edification is Japanese nationality. So, when the rites of heaven are revered and the accordance of rites, government and edification is observed, commoners would not be seduced by Christianity nor deceived by the doctrine about their fate after death.

2. Transformation of the idea of nationality in the early Meiji period

In 1868 the new Meiji government issued an edict about the restoration and the policy of accordance of rites and government. But after various difficulties, this policy could not be continued and the new government had to admit the separation of religion and politics in the 1880s. Among several Meiji Enlightenment scholars, Fukuzawa Yukichi was the most prominent critic of the traditional idea of nationality. In his *Introduction to Western Civilization* [*Bunmeiron no Gairyaku*], Fukuzawa explained the idea of nationality(*kokutai*) as follows: "*Kokutai* means the state of a

² Wakabayashi translates the word 'Kokutai' as 'What is Essential to a Nation', but I translate this word as 'nationality'.

nation where people are independent from others, enjoy and grieve together, discriminate against other people in favor of their own and govern themselves under their own government.” By the traditional idea of *kokutai*, one conceived of the *bakufu* regime and the unbroken imperial line. In contrast, Fukuzawa does not have any of these premises and he maintains a sense of difference between ‘Self’ and ‘Others’ in which he seeks to discover *kokutai*; Fukuzawa liberated the idea of nationality from the *bakufu* regime and the unbroken imperial line, and presented a new idea of nationality. It was from J.S. Mill that Fukuzawa learned the idea of nationality, which he translated as *kokutai*. He follows Mill’s explanation: “There are many origins of the sense of nationality: race, religion, language, geography, etc.. But the strongest factor is a history by which people have the same memory about their nation”.

Fukuzawa presents a new idea of nationality which corresponds to the modern nation-state by transforming the traditional idea which originated in Aizawa’s *New Theses* [*Shinron*]. He did this not only by rejecting the traditional idea, but by taking over the sense of national crisis at the end of the Edo period. The myth of the unbroken imperial line has been a theoretical foundation for Japanese intellectuals to set themselves up against foreign enemies by showing the nation’s supremacy, where the traditional idea of *kokutai* is central. Fukuzawa realized the powerfulness of the traditional idea of *kokutai*, but he believed that the nation’s independence could not be attained without introducing western civilization. Mito Learning insists on the uniqueness of Japan by the word *kokutai* and rejects western civilization as barbarian. Fukuzawa criticizes Mito Learning as a ‘stupid fiction’, but it does not follow that he attaches no importance to nationalism. On the contrary, he ends his *Introduction to Western Civilization* with a chapter about national independence, where he maintains that (Western) civilization is a means of national independence and criticizes Mito Learning, Christianity and Chinese Learning. Why does Christianity obstruct national independence? Fukuzawa answers that it propagates egalitarianism in contradiction to the discriminatory attitude toward other nations. But by this answer he could not explain the reason why Christianity does not obstruct the independence of Western nations. This problem remains without consideration by Fukuzawa at this period.

3. Fukuzawa Yukichi after 1881

Fukuzawa reconsidered the problem of Christianity and *kokutai* in his *Brief Comments on Current Affairs* [*Jiji-shôgen*] published in 1881. In the 6th part entitled ‘Enforcement of national strength’, he explains: “The accordance of language, homeland, morals and manners would enforce patriotism, but it is historical memory as a national community that enforces it most.” This recognition is already shown in his *Introduction to Western Civilization*, as I have mentioned above. But from this point of view, he cautions against the propagation of Christianity and criticizes that: “Those who learn Christianity in current Japan are people who are in debt to Westerners and follow them.” Fukuzawa fears that Japanese would be mentally castrated by Christianity; people influenced by Christianity could not differentiate their own nation from others, and their patriotism would be demilitarized from within.

Fukuzawa’s comment is quite similar to Aizawa’s: “Should the barbarians win our people’s

hearts and minds, they will have captured the realm without a skirmish.” This similarity originates in the transformation of Fukuzawa’s understanding of Christianity. He says: “Christianity does not obstruct politics of Western countries because it is a religion unique to them and it is closely connected to the government. Christianity being an external religion for Japan, one who learns it in Japan becomes a mental slave to foreigners and mental slavery will necessarily bring about physical slavery, namely, colonization. It is remarkable here that Fukuzawa regards the political system of Western countries not as a separation of politics and religion, but as a combination of political and religious power. Here is the reason why Christian egalitarianism is not an obstacle for political power in Western countries. It follows that Japan also has to construct a cooperative system between politics and religion. He suggests that Buddhism and Shinto should cooperate in order to reject external religion. In his view, Japan’s only national religion is Buddhism, and Shinto is the ‘Proper Way of respecting national strength’. So, the proper religion and the proper way must cooperate against Christianity.

Fukuzawa’s comprehension of Christianity led him to an intense movement against it. He was involved in the ‘Catholic funeral affair’ in which a Japanese Catholic performed a Catholic funeral ceremony because his wife had died and he buried her in a Buddhist cemetery. The Buddhists being indignant, brought the matter before the court in order to have her remains removed. Fukuzawa wrote a complaint on behalf of the Buddhist villagers and sent the students of his school to the anti-Christian campaign. In addition, he made speeches against Christianity in his school and wrote letters to several politicians he was familiar with to instigate them to apply pressure on the judge.

In 1882 Fukuzawa wrote a comment on an edict issued by the government which prohibited the performance of funeral ceremonies by Shinto priests. Fukuzawa welcomed this edict, which meant Shinto is not a religion. In his comment entitled ‘*Duties of Shinto priests*’, he maintains that the duties of Shinto priests are to foster the common historical memory of the nation and to enforce national strength by giving lectures about Japanese history. He says: “Never being invaded by the foreigners since the founding of the nation, we Japanese have maintained the imperial line. When Shinto priests teach people Japanese ancient history, it necessarily enforces the people’s strength because our imperial descent has never been damaged by foreign invasion”.

It is remarkable that for the first time he regards a common national memory as inseparable from the descent of the unbroken imperial line. I have already shown that he had rejected the myth of Amaterasu and her descendant as ‘an absurd story’. But now he takes it to be an important element of nationalism. It was a week after the publication of ‘*Duties of Shinto Priests*’ that he began to publish a famous article on the imperial family [*Teishitu-ron*], where he intended to liberate the myth of the unbroken imperial line from the monopoly of Mito Learning and National Learning and to justify it as national memory. Fukuzawa maintains that the imperial family should be situated outside politics. He thought that the imperial family could be ‘a center to integrate the people’ when it was isolated from politics, but it does not follow that he did not recognize its political role. In *Imperial Family* [*Teishitu-ron*], Fukuzawa says: “Our Imperial Family is a perfect jewel never damaged since its foundation. Under its brilliance we the people gather around it to keep the

social order within, and to expand our national strength outside”.

4. Leaving Asia

Fukuzawa insists in his *Reverence for the Emperor* [*Sonnô-ron*] published in 1888 that the imperial family should be neutral, and reverence for the family should be an inviolable discipline for Japanese people. As I have pointed out above, this opinion was clarified in 1882 when he realized of the danger of Christianity. But since 1884, the treaty revision came into focus and the rejection of Christianity became unreasonable. In 1884 Fukuzawa published ‘*Opening or Isolation?*’ where he presents two possible policies that he finds difficult to choose between. ‘The opening policy’ means an adjustment of Japan to the Western countries in all respects, while ‘the isolation policy’ is intended to manage everything in a Japanese way. The isolation policy means a demand of having equal rights in relation to other countries. It would be a challenge to Western countries, which regard Asian countries as ‘lower than them’. Fukuzawa does not consider it impossible to choose the isolation policy, though it involves a rivalry with the Western countries.

Two weeks after his ‘*Opening or Isolation?*’, Fukuzawa published the article ‘*We are obliged to follow the Westerners in religion too*’, where he denies the danger of Christianity. He maintains that Japanese are obliged to protect themselves by imitating the Western way, because in the current situation Westerners regard different ways of life as barbarian: “We should make it difficult for Westerners to discriminate against us by imitating them in social institutions, manners, religion, etc.”

Fukuzawa changed his policy by proposing the imitation of Western ways in all respects. There are two reasons for his transformation: one came from a change in the political situation, the other from his thought on *kokutai*. He anticipated in the near future a revision of treaties that Edo government had concluded with Western countries. When the revision is accomplished, foreigners will enter all over Japan and it will be quite difficult to exclude Christianity. If difficult, Fukuzawa admits that it is appropriate to accept Christianity rather than to reject it in vain.

The second reason is more complicated. If westernization is inevitable, the uniqueness of nationality symbolized by the unbroken imperial line will remain. But now that Fukuzawa does not pay much attention to the danger of Christianity, differentiation from other Asian countries, especially China and Korea, is more important than that from Western countries. Fukuzawa tries to detach himself from China and Korea since the Jingo-Affairs in 1882. He is worried about how Westerners see Japan and the Japanese: “If Westerners see Japan in relation to China, do they recognize any superiority of Japan to China?” He is anxious about Westerners’ view of Japan in which Japan would be ‘an ordinary Asian country’. In order to be appreciated by Westerners, it is necessary for Japan to define Asian nations as ‘Others’. When wrote a notorious article entitled ‘*Leaving Asia*’ [*Datsua-ron*] in 1885, Fukuzawa aimed at differentiating Japan from China and Korea, and gaining from Westerners recognition as a civilized nation. Now ‘Others’ for Japan are Western nations on one side, and Asian nations on the other. This is the reason why modern Japanese nationalism swings between Pan-Asianism [*Ajia-shugi*] and Leaving Asia [*Datsua-ron*].

Conclusion

According to the general view dominant in postwar Japan, it would be scandalous to connect Fukuzawa with Mito Learning. But we can find the same logic in Aizawa's *New Theses (Shinron)* and Fukuzawa's articles about *kokutai* after *Brief Comments on Current Affairs (Jiji-shôgen)*. Both recognized Christianity as a Western ideology, and not only criticized it from a strategic viewpoint, but also appealed to nationality (*kokutai*), the core of which is composed of the imperial family and its unbroken line. Many Japanese intellectuals found the nation's original 'Self' in the myth about Amaterasu and her descent when they were confronted with the formidable 'Others'. I have shown that Fukuzawa, generally considered liberal, was no exception.