



# The Meiji heritage and the tradition of Takeo Miki

by Richard Katz



To the extent Japan plays a positive role in the world today, especially through aiding the industrial development of other nations, this is a direct result of the heritage of the men who founded modern Japan more than 100 years ago. Takeo Miki is today the most direct heir of that heritage.

Miki first entered politics in 1937, having been elected to the national parliament (Diet) at the age of 30 on the Minseito party ticket. The Minseito, which was founded by the Meiji founding fathers themselves, was then leading a rearguard struggle against the policies of fascism and war being promoted by the direct mentors of today's premier, Masayoshi Ohira.

Eventually, the Minseito and other heirs of the Meiji revolution lost that battle, and Japan's destruction in World War II was thus ensured.

If Japan is today to avoid a path similar to that of the 1930s, the true spirit and political content of the Meiji Restoration must be revived.

## Modern Japan

The Minseito party and the tradition Miki imbibed in the 1930s were the remnants of the humanist effort that had created modern Japan two generations earlier. In 1868, a few courageous men led by Yukichi Fukuzawa and Toshimichi Okubo wrenched Japan from 200 years of zero growth under Confucian feudalism with the intent of transforming it into a fully modern humanist nation. Fukuzawa, who had visited Lincoln's America twice in the 1860s and France once, declared that the purpose of the 1868 Meiji Restoration was "to liberate Japan from the dregs of Chinese philosophy." Fukuzawa envisioned a complete transformation of Japan:

The final purpose of my work was to create in Japan a civilized nation as well equipped in both the arts of war and peace as those of the West. I acted as if I had become the sole functioning agent

for the introduction of Western culture . . . I regard the human being as the most sacred and responsible of all orders, unable therefore, in reason, to do anything base. So in self-respect a man cannot change his sense of humanity, his loyalty or anything belonging to his manhood even when driven by circumstances to do so . . .

As part of his campaign Fukuzawa created Japan's first newspaper, its first university and the Minseito political party.

Fukuzawa, Okubo and the other Meiji founders regarded rapid industrial development as the indispensable condition for achieving the kind of society they wanted. The ideas that the Meiji humanists used to turn Japan into an industrial nation virtual overnight came from their American allies who regarded Japan as the beachhead for an Asian-wide assault on the British Empire. Ulysses S. Grant's administration dispatched State Department Erasmus Smith—a top protégé of Lincoln's economic adviser Henry Carey—to act as an official economic adviser to the Meiji regime. Using the ideas of Carey, who is still widely read by Japanese businessmen today, Japan instituted the fastest possible growth in the urban-rural ratio and a launching of heavy industry through continually introducing the most advanced technology. The post-World War II economic miracle was possible because of the extent to which these ideas continued to guide some of the policymakers in Japan.

There had been no capitalists around to make the "bourgeois" Meiji revolution. The Meiji leaders had to create the capitalists to carry out their industrial policy. The most famous and important of their creations was the Mitsubishi business group which continues today as a titan in the Japanese business world. The Mitsubishi firm was very much involved in the effort to transform Japan. It was staffed by Fukuzawa's students and it in turn funded Fukuzawa's Minseito party. To guide and finance the growing industrial combines the Meiji government created a dirigist national bank based on the

national bank proposal of Alexander Hamilton that was implemented during Lincoln's administration. In mass-distributed pamphlets, Mitsubishi founder Yataro Iwasaki explained why a Hamiltonian system could develop Japan whereas a Rothschild-modeled monetarist banking system would keep it backward. No wonder Fukuzawa declared: "America is our father."

Not surprisingly, the British-sponsored Mitsui faction tried to bankrupt Mitsubishi and destroy the national bank. Fukuzawa and the Mitsubishi faction replied by issuing pamphlets denouncing the Mitsui group leaders as British agents trying to stifle Japan's development.

### **From Japan to all Asia**

Fukuzawa and his allies did not regard themselves primarily as Japanese nationalists but as part of a broader humanist current. Their movement had begun in Japan when, during the pre-Meiji Tokugawa police state, they smuggled in and translated the works of such leading European humanist scientists as Johannes Kepler and Spinoza. They had a very close relationship to the Lincoln Republicans in the United States and by 1872 the U.S. had admitted over 300 Japanese students to its universities, including Annapolis. U.S. Civil War General Charles LeGenre, an associate of President Grant, was sent to Japan as military adviser. As early as 1873 he told the Meiji leaders that before too long the then backward Japan would become the foremost industrial and military power in Asia. At that time, he advised, its task would be to kick the British Empire out of Asia.

The Meiji leaders also maintained a close relationship to President Benito Juárez of Mexico, another ally of Lincoln. As Mexico's President Lopez Portillo pointed out to Ohira last month, Mexico was the first country to abolish the unequal treaties which were hindering Japan's economic development. And it had done so in a treaty reached with Mitsubishi faction leader Shigenobu Okuma.

Based on this international sense of Japan's mission, Fukuzawa and the Mitsubishi faction considered the development of the rest of Asia as necessary for the industrialization of Japan itself. They regarded Japan as a transmission belt for bringing modernization to their neighbors. Within only a few decades of the 1868 Meiji Restoration, they tried to replicate that development first in Korea in 1884 and then later in the heart of the British Empire, China. The best prodevelopment elements in Korea today trace their lineage to that 1884 attempt, known as the Minister Kim movement after Fukuzawa's Korean ally.

In the late 1890s, Chinese associates of Fukuzawa started schools and posted wall posters throughout China declaring "Know the Shame of Not Being Like Japan." In 1898, Mitsubishi faction leader and Prime Minister Shigenobu Okuma collaborated with Russia's Finance Minister Count Sergei Witte to aid Chinese reformers in

replicating the Meiji Restoration in China, thus liberating it from British domination.

When the British succeeded in defeating the Hundred Days Reform, as the Chinese movement was known, Okuma fell from power to be replaced by the Mitsui faction's arch-militarist General Aritomo Yamagata. Within four years, Yamagata had brought Japan into military alliance with Britain, and three years later Japan launched a "successful" war against Russia. The so-called Anglo-Japanese alliance has since proven itself the single worst mistake by Japan in the whole of the 20th century.

The defeat in this period caused a regression among the humanist faction in Japan from which they have yet to recover.

From that time on, the Mitsubishi faction acquiesced to the ground rules of a world in which Britain and British methods predominated. No longer were the Meiji humanists consciously and actively linked to an international humanist movement, which sought to ally sovereign nation-states in the effort for industrial and cultural modernization. Instead, they retreated into Japan, and the myth of a Japan "isolated" culturally and otherwise from the rest of the world took hold throughout the country.

From that time on, the Mitsubishi faction contented itself with pursuing Japan's own rapid economic development, rather than using industrial modernization to provide the means for creating a humanist republic. Thus was born the infamous characterization of Japan—"Good on economics, weak on politics."

To be sure, the Meiji tradition stayed alive in Japan, but more as an impulse than a conscious policy. The tradition was alive as an impulse when the Minseito party, in the 1920s, established universal suffrage and aided Sun Yat Sen's "new China" efforts to liberate that country from British rule. It remained alive when the Minseito party in the 1930s provided the resistance against a Nazi-like takeover of Japan by the pro-British Mitsui group.

And the impulse continued in the postwar period, providing the basis for Japan's remarkable economic "miracle," and related economic goals of "knowledge intensification" of industry advocated by Miki and his ally Fukuda, via the 1971 Longterm Plan of the Industrial Structure Council. The core of that plan was Japan's transmission-belt role in industrializing the developing nations.

But just as an impulse in the direction of the Meiji tradition could not defeat Japanese fascism in the 1930s, so such an impulse will not be sufficient to stop Japan's drift toward war today. Only a revival of the political traditions of Yukichi Fukuzawa, in which Japanese leaders openly bring the issue of war or peace before the Japanese people and take an active role in world affairs, will be sufficient.