# MODERNIZATION: WESTERNIZATION VS. NATIONALISM — A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE JAPANESE CASE

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*This paper provides a historical overview of the changing pattern of the frame of reference for both past and present Japanese modernization. Therefore, the focus is on "modernization" as an ideological and political orientation, and not on modernization as a social process.*

## WESTERNIZATION AND NATIONALISM IN PRE-WAR JAPAN

The concept of modernization in the Japanese context was associated with an orientation of "Westernization." In the third quarter of the 19th century, when Japan was struggling to modernize, the idea was to overcome conventional "irrationality" in feudalistic and authoritarian social relations and culture by transplanting the thought of "enlightenment" for establishing modernized institutions. The leaders of this orientation stressed the importance of embracing the "West" by getting away from "Asia," as asserted by Yukichi Fukuzawa, founder of Keio Gijuku University, one of the oldest modern, private universities in Japan. His famous book for enlightenment begins with the phrase: "Heaven has not created human beings above human beings, nor human beings below human beings (Fukuzawa, 1872-76)." This statement expressed social equality. However, he held neighboring Asian nations in contempt, and regarded them as inferior from a viewpoint of modern civilization (Fukuzawa, 1885). Enlightenment in its original sense consisted of "equality" against an authoritarian hierarchy, along with "progress" against conventional retard. In the Japanese context, enlightenment exclusively concerned the idea of "equality" between people in general, but not between nations, and the idea of "progress" accompanied discriminating attitudes against other nations in Asia. The latter was easily canalized into ideological rationalization for the expansion of Japan's state power toward neighboring countries.

After the fall of feudal power, the new state elites were aware of the necessity of defending Japan against imperialistic invasion from the West, and their efforts were devoted to both avoiding colonization by Western powers, and to attaining an equal position with these powers in the interna-

tional domain. For this purpose, the State elites urged technological and institutional modernization. They prioritized industrialization and militarization, and neglected the democratic aspect of enlightenment thought and movement. Further, they extended Japan's force to neighboring countries with the aim of preventing an inflow of Western power.

In this sense, a motivation by the State elites for modernization stemmed from a fear of being colonized by the West. Therefore, modernization was regarded as an inevitable choice for national independence. Thus, transplantation of Western technologies and institutions was necessary. The State urgently introduced the Western system and technology: the governmental, the army, and the educational systems from Germany, and the industrial technology, urban infrastructure, and the naval system from Great Britain. The Constitution, which was issued in 1889, was greatly influenced by that of Prussia.

This instrumental concept of Westernization was inseparably connected with a spirit of nationalism. Combining "Western technology" and "Japanese spirit" was the goal. This type of nationalism developed an ideal of "Japanism" in the last decade of the 19th century, which emphasized the superiority of traditional Japanese values. It later matured, particularly in the 1930s and the War period, to anti-Western ideology, by generally refusing the ideas of enlightenment and of modernity.

However, the State-led modernization remarkably achieved industrialization and economic development. From 1910 to 1930, this allowed a growth of the middle classes with modern life-styles, particularly in metropolitan areas. In tandem, anti-conventional, liberal culture, and behavior also emerged. However, it could not become engrained in society, since it contradicted conventional pre-modern values and relations on which nationalism-based modernization was actualized, such as the paternalistic system in the family, and the authoritarian relationship in organization. Militaristic Statism later became overwhelming because of these values and relations.

REVIVAL OF "ENLIGHTENMENT" IN POST-WAR JAPAN

After the end of World War II, enlightenment-based social thought revived and profoundly influenced public opinion, as well as social and human sciences. The pre-War pattern of modernization was seriously reflected on and criticized. Leading proponents of this view critically inquired as to the social and cultural roots of authoritarian Statism and militarism. They focused on conventional values and relations that remained in the daily life of the people, by pointing to an immaturity of individualism

and rationalism in Japanese society. Masao Maruyama (1964), Takeyoshi Kawashima (1948), and Hisao Ootsuka (1948) represented this view. They criticized Japanese society by contrasting it with "civil society," as the ideal model of society believed to exist in the West. Thus, in a sense, the idea of "Modernization = Westernization" resurfaced.

Many empirical sociological investigations in this orientation were also conducted. They revealed "semi-feudal" relations remaining in families, villages, towns, firms, and even in newly emerging labor unions. These relations were regarded as the essential factors hindering the substantial modernization of Japanese society. Researchers directed their attention to the conventional group-dependent mentality as related to the "immaturity" of independent individuality, which was regarded as a base for pre-modern irrational thinking and social relations that accompanied industrial backwardness and economic inefficiency.

From this viewpoint, leading social scientists, including Takashi Fukutake (1949), raised a perspective of socialistic strategy for modernization, maintaining that the nature of Japanese capitalism could not overcome its structural backwardness. A significant number of the chapters in the ten volumes of "The Lecture of Sociology," published by the University Press of Tokyo in the late 1950s, followed this line.

It should be added that postwar enlightenment thinkers and their research lacked a perspective on Japan's relations with neighboring nations. The belief that Japan's modernization was bound for expansionism was held not only by State elites but also by classical enlightenment thinkers in the second half of the 19th century. The postwar enlightenment thinkers neglected a critical reflection on this aspect of the classical enlightenment in the Japanese context. They focused exclusively on inner "pre-modern" values, mentality, and social relations, without extending their thinking to Japan's modernization in the Asian context.

PROCLAMATION OF THE JAPANESE MODEL

In actuality, however, when these views against conventional values and relations spread broadly among intellectuals, the Japanese economy and society underwent structural changes that launched a new stage of development. In 1958, the "White Paper of Economy" issued by the Government proclaimed that the post-War period had ended. Simultaneously, large-scale investments occurred in industry for "modernizing" technology, organizations, and management, while the Government took measures for "modernization" in agriculture and small- and medium-sized businesses. In addi-

tion, economic and industrial circles "modernized" management and labor.

In large part, due to modernization policies and practices, the Japanese economy achieved remarkable growth. Toward the end of the 1960s, Japan's GDP was third in the global economy, after the USA and the USSR.

In view of these changes, the enlightenment-based critical view of social "pre-modernity" and economic "backwardness" mostly disappeared. Instead, in the 1960s, a new kind of modernization theory appeared, under the influence of American sociology and related disciplines, such as the theory of industrialism and convergence theory. This was promoted with an inclination toward anti- or de-socialism, excluding any criticism on society from the enlightenment perspective.

In the 1970s, however, this kind of modernization theory also lost influence among social scientists and policy-makers. The view was that Japan had reached and exceeded the Western level in different areas of social and economic life, and could not rely on the Western model any longer for further development. Hence, an identification of "Modernization" with "Westernization" lost its basis. Instead, an awareness of the necessity of finding Japan's own way toward further development arose.

In this context, habitual practices, which had been regarded negatively as conventional and pre-modern, were highlighted again. Group-oriented values and behavior, collectivism, and mutual dependency were re-evaluated positively, and were considered as bases of Japan's economic success. Seniority systems, life-long employment practices, in-house welfare facilities, and company unions were common in large Japanese enterprises, and had previously been criticized as "semi-feudal" and "pre-modern" customs. They were now reevaluated as the basic pillars of human resource development in the Japanese firm. These views were encouraged by the OECD Mission Report on Japanese management and industrial relations (OECD, 1977), and crystallized into a cultural determinant notion of the "Japanese style of management" (Ishikawa, 1982), with the further dissimilation of the "Japanese model" abroad. Vogel's (1979) book, "Japan as Number One," promoted this idea and practice.

## EGALITARIANISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN MODERNIZATION

The claim for the "Japanese Model," or the "Japanese Way of Modernization," was basically connected with a social transformation toward egalitarian tendencies in Japanese society (Ishikawa et al., 1982).

First, the conventional distinction between "white collar" employees (*shokuin*) and "blue collar" workers (*kooin*) in naming as well as in personnel

treatment, which had been transplanted from the West in the early stage of industrialization, was abolished in industrial enterprises around 1960, and both employee groups began to be called "company staffs" (*shain* or *juugyooin*). This change contributed to an increase of company identity among rank-and-file manual workers, and "labor class" consciousness among them declined. This developed a collectivistic orientation within the company.

Second, the general educational level was elevated remarkably. Toward the end of the 1950s, 15% of young adults attended four year universities or two years colleges; this rate increased to approximately 40% toward the end of the 1960s. This coincided with the change in the employment structure: namely, a decrease of manual workers due to technical innovation, and an increase of non-manual technical and marketing-sales staffs for knowledge-intensive jobs.

Third, income differentiation decreased. The primary determinants of wage differentiation in Japanese firms have been age, length of service, gender, educational level, position in the organization and size of a given firm. Hence, the highest wage earners are expected to be those 50 years old and older, with over 30 years of employment, male, university graduates, and managers in large firms (over 1,000 employees). In contrast, the lowest group is expected to be younger than 20 years old, short-term employed, female, middle school graduate, with rank-and-file jobs in smaller firms (less than 100 employees). The different wage level between these two groups was 8 times at the beginning of the 1960s, but decreased to 4 times at the end of the 1970s. Macro-level statistics also illustrated diminishing trends of income differentiation in the 1960s and later.

Fourth, concerning occupational social prestige, low prestige jobs were decreasing in both number and proportion. These jobs were gradually replaced with machines and industrial robots, or transferred to developing countries.

These trends resulted in a greater inconsistency of status characteristics. According to research by Ken'ichi Tominaga and his associates in 1975, this inconsistency was evident among 60% of the Japanese people (Tominaga, 1979).

Reflecting these tendencies, the proportion of Japanese people who expressed their feeling of belonging to the middle class was approximately 60% in the first half of the 1960's, but increased to 90% in the early 1970s.

Besides those egalitarian tendencies, workers' participation in management spread in industry and other economic sectors. At the company level, the joint consultation system as a voluntary mechanism for ensuring labor-management communication, in addition to the collective bargaining sys-

tem, was set up in the majority of large enterprises. According to a survey by the Japan Productivity Center, at the beginning of the 1970s, this system was already institutionally installed in labor-management relations in 90% of the large private enterprises. At the shop-floor level, small group activities as a suggestion system began in the mid-1960s, and were practiced in approximately 70% of large- and medium-sized private enterprises toward the late 1970's. Both systems contributed to industrial peace and productivity enhancement by mutilating the militancy and class-based solidarity of labor, and by developing a cooperative climate within the company.

MODIFICATION OF THE JAPANESE MODEL

The oil crises affecting the Japanese industry and economy twice in the mid-1970s, and increasing competition in domestic as well as international markets, resulted in significant changes in the "Japanese Model" (Ishikawa and Ando eds., 1980; Ishikawa, 1989).

The egalitarian tendencies were modified. One modification was noticeable in a remarkable increase of non-regular employees, such as part-time workers, casual employees, and workers of sub-contract small firms. They had low wages and unstable employment conditions, whereas egalitarian traits still continued among regular employees. The clearly dual structure of employment between regular and non-regular workers was installed into the company organization, and the labor market became stratified.

Another modification was visible in a spread of "ability-based" personnel management and a reduction of the "seniority-based" treatment in wage increase and career promotion. Formerly, for example, the wages and status of employees who had entered a firm in the same year after completing school basically increased in parallel with their age and the length of service. There had been a seniority-based egalitarianism as a basis of the harmonious relationship among crews in the company. Differences in work performance by individual employees were reflected in the bonus (twice a year), but not in the regular monthly salary. This wage system was gradually undermined in the 1970s, and the "ability-based" system began to exceed the "seniority-based" system in the mid-1980s. This resulted in an increasing differentiation in wages between employees with the same age, length of service and education. A similar trend occurred for career advancement in the company.

Those changes led to an increase of flexibility in human resource utilization by management, to improve productivity and economic achievement. While Japan's economy maintained a prosperous path of development, the

demand of workforces in labor markets continued to provide plenty of both regular and irregular jobs, and stable employment with life-long security in the company was ensured for regular workers. As a result, the unemployment rate was consistently very low, namely around 2%, and the income level steadily increased.

SEARCHING FOR AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL?

The changes discussed were already developed in the 1980's, and have been further accelerated since Japan's economy fell into a long-term stagnation in 1991-92 (Ishikawa and Tajima, 1999). The seniority-based egalitarianism with a collectivistic value orientation has been all the more undermined for the survival of the company, while the achievement-oriented assessment on individual performance has dissimilated with restructuring. This accompanies a promotion of an individualistic value orientation and a spread of short-term strategy choices both by management and employees. These traits are apparent particularly in newly developing industries such as information technology related businesses and mass sales businesses.

In these changing situations, both management and policy makers seem to have abandoned their reliance upon the "Japanese model" which they had believed as "No. 1," and are inclined to seek an alternative model colored with new liberalism. On the other hand, individual employees have lost their trust in life-long security being offered by the company. These situations have produced a kind of "anomie" in diverse fields of social and individual life, accompanying an increase of mental illness, suicide, and crime.

To conclude, the frame of reference for modernization in Japan moved from "Westernization" to "Japanization." Currently, the materialized socio-economic advancement seems to require an alternative frame for further development. There is no paradigm for the frame of reference to be chosen for further modernization. In order to fill this vacuum, the U.S. model is often considered, namely "Americanization" as generally noted globally. Also, efforts for modifying the domestic model are being encouraged in order to adjust to the changing and globalizing environment, without visible effects so far.

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