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Japan In the World

Analysis for the Week 4

Nation Building in Japan

In terms of modernization, Eastern countries seem to fall short in comparison to their Western counterparts. This is made evident in Fukuzawa’s writings in which he brings to light the fact that Japan as a country has not reached the level of innovation and enlightenment that European countries have reached. This is likely due to a flawed Confucian view in which China, Japan, and Korea were civilized while the rest of the world comprised of barbarians. This heavily ingrained nationalism has led Japan to reject outside teachings and therefore resulted in less “cultural intrusion”. While such nationalism is important as a marker of pride and unity in a country, it hinders rapid improvement in culture and technology within a country. As a result of Japanese nationalism, European teachings and culture were typically shunned and thus Europe was unable to share its political and technological advancements. Fukuzawa points out stunning comparisons between the thoughts of the Japanese vs European countries such as how Europe was steadily making advances to modern science while Japan was expounding old spiritual concepts. But how are advancements made? What made Europe different than the Eastern countries in terms of development? A possible explanation can be found by analyzing the effects of social interaction in civilization. As Fukuzawa points out, humans are inherently social creatures, and thus knowledge is gained through social interactions with one another. We help each other grow and expand. The problem is that we are unwilling to socialize with those we deem lesser. Therefore, under Confucian teachings, the Japanese are less likely to accept ideologies from Western cultures. If we cannot challenge our own thoughts, we cannot introduce ingenuity and we come to a roadblock on the journey to building a more complex civilization.

Even though Japan is behind Western countries in terms of civilization growth, it does not mean that Japan was not growing as a nation. The period of the Meiji government did help push Japan towards a more industrialized nation. Japan became more focused on economic growth with goods manufacturing especially with textile mills and silk production. Even though the main focus of the period was the industrialization of Japan, the economic boom (inflation and deflation periods) forced the Meiji government to improve upon currently instated political policy. They had to introduce more complex policies regarding taxation in order to ensure healthy growth of Japan as a nation. This desire for industrialization led Japanese investors to start looking into more efficient ways of managing exchange of goods and thus railways were invested in. This growth was similar to what America was experiencing at the time as well. The rate of industrialization in Japan was comparable to what it was in America. So even though Japan itself was more closed off in terms of accepting outside influences, Japan was not dead in its tracks. It still had healthy economic and industrial growth that kept Japan respectable as a major Eastern power.

During the industrialization period, women were also a key part of the growth. They were working many of the hard labor jobs, but at a reduced pay rate in comparison to their male coworkers. This mistreatment of female workers in Japan was likely due to the ingrained patriarchal teachings of Confucius. This eventually led to strikes, which are prerequisites for improvement in social policy. So even though Japan, through the Meiji rule, made countless errors during this period of growth, they still show the potential to grow towards a more enlightened society.