

My Country 'tis of Thee

Chikara Nagano
Keio Univ. ESS

In May of 1868, more than a hundred years from now, a wave of sudden flames swept the Ueno district of Tokyo. The people saw a sudden burst of explosions, fires, and fumes. Amidst the turmoil of the Meiji Restoration, one man, Yukichi Fukuzawa, stood up and said to his students, "Fellow students, you mustn't be disturbed, for we must lead Japan out of the darkness it faces now." He told his students the importance of being proud of your own country, and having the courage to criticize your own government. He realized, that if Japan was to survive the coming ages, the people must learn a very important concept. A concept called "Patriotism."

"Patriotism" was defined by Yukichi Fukuzawa as the "love and loyal support of your own country." "Patriotism" is one of the supreme moral behaviors of a human being. You see, patriotism can be exemplified best in the relationship between you and your own family. It is that you would work, fight, and even die for your own loved ones. Parents, charging into burning houses to save their only son. A woman jumping into waters to save her sister, when she herself cannot swim. The same thing can be said at a higher moral level, in the relationship between you and your own country. It is the supreme moral behavior, that makes you work, fight, and even die to save your own country; "Patriotism."

In Japan, patriotism in its early days did not have any clear form. In fact, it was not until the 19th century when Yukichi Fukuzawa defined "Patriotism" when its true meaning came into light. This caught on to the people, and became the spiritual basis for the Meiji Restoration, which gave men an early form of democracy and liberty. However, dark clouds formed over Japan. In the early half of the 20th century, the Japanese saw the emergence of "Fascism." The Fascists twisted and turned the concept of "Patriotism" into that of "Nationalism." You see, "Nationalism" differs from "Patriotism" in that it implies conquering others, subduing others, harm to others. It was subordinating yourself to the emperor, and people died for the emperor. Thus, because the symbol of the last war, the emperor system still exists, the majority of people look at "Patriotism" as being synonymous with "War" and "Nationalism."

This has led to one of the greatest misconceptions in Japan today. "Patriotism" has been so marred of its true meaning, its significance has been lost somewhere in our minds. It has been put aside in the corners of our hearts, as being anarchic, evil, and wicked.

Today, there exists a decadent atmosphere of indifference. People, only care about their own interests, their own profits, their own selfish greeds. These are the people who elect our leaders, leaders such as former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka. Tanaka has been reelected a number of times since the Lockheed scandal, but has not appeared in congress for over four years. The reasons; the people of his constituency believe he has helped their local economy. In short, they are repaying him for filling their selfish greeds. Sadly to say, cases like this can be found all over Japan.

Today's corrupt leaders are the result of that, and it is reflected in their actions. Take for instance, the recent unclear stance towards the Tiananmon Square massacre, and today, their slow reaction towards the incoming tide of illegal immigrants; both examples manifests just how our leaders don't hold any firm policy that is needed to lead a nation. History has shown us, that whenever a significant amount of people has lost interest in their country's leadership, that country is headed towards an ultimate dead end. It can happen to us.

In a democracy, and Japan is supposed to be one, the people are sovereign, that sets the direction of the nation. They must make the right choices even if it may hurt them. They must not vote for "bread and circuses" out of selfish greed. But what is to stop them. What is to make them stand out for true democracy in Japan. "Patriotism" is the answer. So let us become patriotic at the political level. In the next coming election, you must vote for those candidates who care for the future of Japan, and not for personal greed or pride.

As students, it is most important to grow patriotism among us. Like Yukichi Fukuzawa, we must all think carefully, to redefine the true meaning of "Patriotism": by first separating it from the image of the war and the emperor to the image of the proud modern Japan.

"Patriotism" -- it is a feeling of righteousness, that throbs in the hearts of each one of us. That we, the people of this land rightly give up everything we have for what our country stands for; for justice, for liberty, for democracy. It is you, me, and everybody here, who must be proud of our land, our sweet mother Japan. We are the future of

this land. So come, fellow students, let us all brace ourselves, and join our hands together, and prepare the way for our land. About:

*My country 'tis of thee,
sweet land of liberty,
of thee I sing*