

FUKUZAWA YUKICHI'S CONCEPTION OF PRACTICAL LEARNING IN "AN ENCOURAGEMENT OF LEARNING" AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

[A CONCEÇÃO DE APRENDIZAGEM PRÁTICA DE FUKUZAWA YUKICHI E SEU SIGNIFICADO HISTÓRICO EM "AN ENCOURAGEMENT OF LEARNING"]

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ABSTRACT: The book "An Encouragement of Learning" by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834 - 1901) is among those that had a significant impact on Japan's development in the late 19th century and early 20th century. It contains a wealth of original educational theory on a variety of topics, including the function of education, the subject, goal, content, and methodology of practical learning. Fukuzawa Yukichi's perspectives on practical learning still prove to have historical influence on the development of education today.

KEYWORDS: Japanese education thoughts; Fukuzawa Yukichi; An Encouragement of Learning; education ideology

RESUMO: O livro "An Encouragement of Learning", de Fukuzawa Yukichi, destaca-se como um daqueles que mais tiveram impactos significativos no desenvolvimento do Japão no fim do século XIX e no início do séc. XX. A obra contém, com certeza, a riqueza das teorias originais da educação em sua diversidade de abordagens, incluindo a função da educação, o sujeito da educação, os objetivos e conteúdos da educação, além de abordar uma proposta metodológica de aprendizagem prática. A proposta metodológica de aprendizagem prática de Fukuzawa Yukichi demonstra ter, ainda no tempos atuais, uma influência histórica sobre o desenvolvimento da educação do país.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: abordagens japonesas da educação; Fukuzawa Yukichi; educação e ideologia

INTRODUCTION

Born into a Samurai family, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834 - 1901) was raised in Nakatsu, which is now part of Oita Prefecture, Kyushu. The Japanese people recognized him as the "Voltaire of Japan" for his knowledge and significant contributions to the nation, calling him the representation of the soul, motivation and spiritual support of the Meiji Restoration. Witnessing profound social and historical shifts during the transitional period, he came to the conclusion that Japan

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would follow the path of India, China and Africa to become a European colony if it continued to adhere to the old feudal ideology and social order. He wrote: "If we compare the levels of intelligence of Japanese and Westerners, in literature, arts, commerce, or industry, from the biggest things to the least, in a thousand cases or in one, there is not a single area in which the other side is not superior to us. Only the most ignorant thinks that Japan's learning, arts, commerce, or industry is on a par with that of the West. Who would compare a man-drawn cart with a steam engine, or a Japanese sword with a rifle? While we are expounding on yin and yang and the Five Elements, they are discovering the sixty-element atomic chart. While we are divining lucky and unlucky days by astrology, they have charted the courses of comets and are studying the constitution of the sun and the moon. While we think that we live on a flat, immobile earth, they know that it is round and in motion. While we regard Japan as the sacrosanct islands of the gods, they have raced around the world, discovering new lands and founding new nations. Many of their political, commercial, and legal institutions are more admirable than anything we have" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2018, p.99). Thus, rather than advocating for learning to comprehend complicated words and sentences that were no longer appropriate for or even hindered social development, Fukuzawa Yukichi chose to innovate thinking, actively study, absorb the progressive ideas of Western science and civilization, and gradually influence and change the awareness of people in his country through practical learning.

The ideas of Fukuzawa Yukichi regarding "practical learning" are reflected in several of his writings. Among these, his 1872–1876 book *An Encouragement of Learning* demonstrated its extensive influence and introduced the Japanese people to a novel conception of "practical education", which later developed into an ideology that fervently supported the Meiji reforms, gave rise to the "lifelong learning" movement, and helped lay the groundwork for educational reform in Japan throughout the early modern era. As the movement gained traction, practical education was shown to have a significant influence on the traits of Japanese people.

The fundamental human spirit and the real aim of education are the two key topics covered in the book. After realizing that disparities in education are the primary cause of inequality, Fukuzawa Yukichi attacked the Confucian-dominated, feudalistic educational methodology. From there, he suggested ways to develop an education grounded in "practical learning" related to real-world problems.

2. DISCUSSION

As education in Japan in the late 19th century and early 20th century had become obsolete and failed to meet socio-historical requirements, Fukuzawa Yukichi also criticized ancient and Chinese educational contents, which were impractical and could not be applied to real life, because he believed that the ability to explain ancient texts and read or write poems did not benefit life enough to be "worshipped". He cited: "It is rare to find Chinese teacher who are extremely wealthy in real life, and it is even rarer to find successful businessmen who are also proficient poets. Parents, farmers, and other caregivers who genuinely care about their children's education are only more anxious due to the current learning style: "If they keep studying like that, there will be a day that we go bankrupt"" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2017, p.26). This resulted in two limitations on Japanese education: *First*, a concrete deficiency in the natural sciences; *second*, an intangible lack of independent spirit. While Westerners greatly appreciate those two aspects of education, Japanese people take them far too lightly. Thus, educational content must enable students to voice their opinions, comprehend their duties and complete their assignments in order to foster an independent spirit: "Japanese people must immediately embark on studying and developing their characters. First and foremost, let each person be determined, self-sufficient and independent" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2017, p.50). This is what Japan should strive toward in terms of educational innovation. In order to do this, education must alter people's perspectives, dispel the notions of "being unreasonably frightened of something" and "speaking badly, complaining behind one's back," and replace them with the spirit to "protest and argue in a decent way" when one is unhappy with the government (See: Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2017, p.32). Additionally, Yukichi underlined how things have changed. With the Meiji Restoration and Japan's modernization, the Meiji Government wrote a new chapter in Japanese history. The caste system in Japan was abolished as a result of significant political reforms. The law is now what people respect and obey, not the status or experience of those who uphold it. "It is now clear that everyone in Japan is treated equally and has the freedom to live and behave as they like. Therefore, in keeping with that right, we naturally have duties and responsibilities. Everyone has their own duty, so they must develop their skills and refine personalities to be deserving of that duty. In order to accomplish this, everybody must learn to read and write. By doing so, they will be able to explain everything" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2017, p.33)

Furthermore, Fukuzawa Yukichi contended that more realistic teaching materials needed to be used in place of Confucian ones. To satisfy basic human needs and enable us to support ourselves, learning must be applicable and practice. Examples of this include: "[A person

should] learn the 47-letter Kana syllabary, methods of letter writing and of accounting, the practice of the abacus, the way to handle weights and measures, and the like. And there is much additional knowledge to be acquired. Geography is the guide to the climates not only of Japan, but of the many countries of the world. Physics is the science which investigates the properties and functions of the myriad things of the universe. History books chronicle in detail the conditions of the countries of the past and present. Economics explain the financial management of self, family, and the state. Ethics expounds the natural principles of personal moral cultivation and of social intercourse" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2017, pp.26-27).

Fukuzawa Yukichi specifically stated that studying other languages was the "key" that allows the people of the nation to unlock the door to global civiliazation. He wrote: "For capable young people, I recommend reading the original versions in English, French and German" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2017, p.27).

Confronted with that fact, Fukuzawa Yukichi presented a novel viewpoint known as *Jitsugaku*, or practical learning. The maxim "Learning must go hand in hand with practice, and more than that, to learn is to practice" succinctly captures this viewpoint. "First, you must know how to write, draft useful documents, calculate and measure; then you need to know many other things; such as geography, economics and ethics. You must know how to distill useful things for practice from each branch of knowledge. The current needs must be the focus on the study of objects, phenomena, and their laws" (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2007, pp. 26 - 27).

In other words, Fukuzawa Yukichi advocated for the acquisition of Western civilization as a means of advancing national progress and fortifying national independence. This innovative approach encourages creativity, optimistic thinking, and inclusivity. While the traditional learning approach just imparts apathy and dogmatic thinking to students, practical learning really encourages initiative and investigation of the new. According to Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Jitsugaku* gives freedom and independence to every Japanese individual as well as to the nation as a whole. Clearly, this learning method is more effective, particularly in light of Japan's global integration.

In addition, Fukuzawa Yukichi suggested "Teaching mainly natural sciences and educating the spirit of independence" as the slogan of education (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2007, p. 291). These are the two fundamental flaws in Japanese education that must be fixed. In the past, the Japanese educational program placed a strong emphasis on teaching Confucian classics, which trained morals and shaped the human psyche in accordance with Confucian principles. Although the curriculum is sound, it will not help the nation modernize or advance its scientific

and technological capabilities in light of new challenges and circumstances. He therefore asked that people “consider all the motions of all living creatures. Morally speaking, we acknowledge that as man is the most important and spiritual being in the universe, he deserves respect and shouldn’t be treated unfairly. We also believe that actions that go against human morality should never been taken. It is never acceptable to act in an irrational, unfair, disloyal, or unfilial manner, no matter how much pressure or request is made of someone. Everyone needs to have a strong sense of independence and strive for honorable deeds” (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2007, p. 291).

With a keen sense of the times, he realized that it is essential to master life-appreciation subjects. In fact, the course material demonstrates that students’ learning produces no tangible outcomes because learning entails more than merely reading and composing poetry of comprehending complex sentences. That education does not foster innovation; rather, it merely serves to reinforce clichéd and biased ideas. As a result, he expressed his viewpoint as follows:

"First of all, the object of one’s primary efforts should be a practical learning that is closer to ordinary human needs. For example, a person should learn the 47-letter kana syllabary, methods of letter writing and of accounting, the practice of the abacus, the way to handle weights and measures, and the like. Next is to study subjects such as geography to know the Japanese landscape and countries around the globe. Physics is the science which investigates the properties and functions of the myriad things of the universe. History books chronicle in detail the conditions of the countries of the past and present. Economics explains the financial management of self, family, and the state. Ethics expounds the natural principles of personal moral cultivation and of social intercourse” (Fukuzawa Yukichi, 2007, pp. 24 - 25).

Fukuzawa Yukichi set two standards that each student must fulfill in order to master these subjects. The first step is to look into Western books translated into Japanese. In particular, he stressed the importance of reading those books in their original languages, i.e. English, French or German. By doing this, the reader will be able to avoid being influenced by the translator’s personal viewpoint. Understanding the topic and material and realizing the fundamentals of everything is the second requirement. In order to fulfill these two requirements, students need to be enthusiastic to learn and discover the wealth of human knowledge in addition to having a serious attitude. In other words, this type of education is known as "practical learning" and is seen necessary for all individuals, irrespective of their caste, social standing, or wealth gap. According to Fukuzawa Yukichi, the way to advance Japan’s economy and civilization is to place a strong focus on practical learning. Because of this, everyone needs to understand that they have a duty to educate themselves, for "an individual's independence leads to the independence of his family, and thus his nation" (Fukuzawa

Yukichi, 2007, p.25).

According to Fukuzawa Yukichi, Westerners are capable of applying knowledge of human and nature to practice in a way that is both sensible and extremely effective. This supports his belief that developing practical learning skills is essential to increasing public awareness and cultivating human capital for the benefit of the country. That is also the foundation of the practical teaching and learning method that he laboriously disseminated and utilized.

Thus, during the chaotic late 19th century and early 20th century in East Asia, progressive intellectuals and Confucian scholars in Japan attempted to take in and learn from Western civilization. This as well contributed to the Meiji reforms' success, which numerous Asian nations have since imitated. During the Tokugawa shogunate in Japan, there emerged three philosophers with a penchant for "practical learning", namely: Kaibara Ekken (1630 - 1714), Ito Jinsai (1627 - 1705), and Yamaga Soko (1622 - 1685). Though their arguments were nonetheless comprehensive, the thinkers who came before Fukuzawa Yukichi saw "practical learning" as a novel approach to replace the conventional Confucian one. This trend indicated how urgently common sense and innovative education were needed for Japan's progress at that time. During the period of Fukuzawa Yukichi, who had extensive experience studying Chinese and working in highly developed nations, his conception of "practical learning" included criticism of rigorous study and support for "learning to go hand in hand with practice" as a means of enhancing people's lives and knowledge.

2.5. On the approach of practical learning:

Fukuzawa Yukichi believed that a combination of the teacher's instructional strategy and the student's learning activities is required for effective education.

Ideal teachers, in his opinion, should be passionate about what they do, able to select the best teaching strategy for each student, and able to integrate many teaching philosophies to produce morally upright members of society. Teachers in particular need to understand that teaching entails self-study and self-training to advance their credentials in order to satisfy social and historical standards. Additionally, Fukuzawa Yukichi made his point that educators ought to provide a good example for students through both their words and deeds. He also attacked teachers who were full of rhetoric but short on action, "those with a reputation for being economics researchers and lecturers but still can't figure out how to manage the finances in their own homes, or those who teach ethics but can't live up to their own moral principals. They give me the impression that there are two

distinct people living in one body because of the contradiction between their theory and practice. It is impossible for me to see them as knowledgeable" (Fukuzawa Yukichi (2017), p.176).

As for students, Fukuzawa Yukichi identified them as the center of educational activities; as a result, the way they learn has a big impact on education. As per his statement, students must possess not only initiative and creativity during the learning process, but also "the ability to prepare ahead and predict life's events. This entails having the ability to examine things, make assumptions about their nature, and then express their own viewpoints and methods. Naturally, students must also read and write books" (Fukuzawa Yukichi (2017), p.174). Furthermore, he chastised the superficial approach to education that fails to grasp the true nature of things: "It would be a great misunderstanding of the nature of learning to think that it only consists in reading books" (Fukuzawa Yukichi (2017), p. 174).

Furthermore, Fukuzawa Yukichi thought that schools should plan extracurricular activities in addition to regular classes so that students can exchange knowledge and support one another's development. He made it clear: Students must have the chance to "argue and voice their viewpoints. Academic research is the application of such a mixture of measures. The methods of gathering knowledge include observation, reasoning and reading; the methods of exchanging knowledge are discussion and argumentation. While an individual can accomplish some of these tasks independently, public speaking and discourse require a broader group. This demonstrates the significance of public speaking". (Fukuzawa Yukichi (2017), p.174).

3. CONCLUSION

An Encouragement of Learning by Fukuzawa Yukichi has a wealth of deep and insightful ideas about practical learning that touch on a wide range of topics, including the functions, goals, materials, techniques, and more. Despite its limitations and variations in terms of history and sociopolitics, this remain the basis for valuable lessons, and its principles are worthwhile considering in Vietnam's current national development process as well as for innovative education in other nations. *First*, it is confirmed that practical learning plays a major part in national policy and is the primary force to address the socio-historical requirements for any nation's growth. *Second*, Fukuzawa Yukichi determined that the content of practical learning should only include the social knowledge required to fulfill the demands of national liberation and development, particularly the advancements in modern science. This means that the educational content should emphasize fostering the spirit of autonomy, independence, critical thinking, and

creativity in each learner, as these qualities serve as the cornerstones upon which knowledge is built. *Third*, a variety of approaches must be combines in order to organize instruction, associate theory with practice, assess students' learning, conduct teaching works, etc. Nonetheless, in order to support the shared objectives of national liberation, human emancipation, and national development, all educational activities must be focused on learners, encouraging the role of creativity, self-study and self-research, and placing learners at the center.

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