

Kita Ikki's Theory of Revolution

GEORGE M. WILSON

POSTWAR Japanese scholarship, in its quest to explain Japan's modern history, has yet to deal adequately with the so-called right wing. Survey histories sometimes write it off as a lunatic fringe, or equate it simply with militarism and put-schism.¹ My purpose here is not to venture a total picture of the right but to present a microcosmic analysis of doctrines attributed to it through focusing on the theory of revolution formulated early in the Taishō period by Kita Ikki (1883–1937). Japanese writers regularly identify Kita as a leading rightist. Maruyama Masao refers to him as “the ideological father of Japanese fascism,”² and his 1919 book on the “reorganization” of Japan (later published as *Nihon kaizō hōan taijō*) has been called by Kuno Osamu “the *Mein Kampf* of the Shōwa ultranationalist movement.”³

It is my contention, however, that the complexity of Kita's theory of revolution raises a question as to whether terms like right and left are really useful for classifying Japanese thinkers in the early twentieth century. Left-right analysis originated in the French Revolution and later spread to other Western nations, serving to designate certain broad lines of political orientation: right signifies a desire to conserve existing institutions and strengthen traditional social ties, especially patriotism and family bonds, while left suggests a willingness to welcome change and to support large-scale reform sponsored by government in the affairs of the people.⁴ The left is most commonly associated with lower-class support, whereas upper-class interests back rightist causes. Both are ipso facto capable of transformation from moderate to extreme forms of belief and action in order to achieve their goals.⁵ Accepting these criteria as fairly typical assumptions about the political continuum, we may say—anticipating our conclusions—that Kita Ikki does not fit the standard picture of the right. I doubt that any such label is useful for understanding his significance as a thinker. Modern Japanese intellectual history demands explanation based on the legacy of traditional patterns of thought rather than imposed Western categories.

Born of samurai and merchant stock on the small island of Sado in the Sea of Japan, Kita went to Tokyo as a youth and spent nearly a decade of fruitless dedication

George M. Wilson is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Illinois. This article results partly from research done under a grant from the Center for International Comparative Studies, University of Illinois.

¹ Cf. *Sekai to Nihon*, Vol. XII of *Nihon no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1963), p. 186; Inoue Mitsusada, *Nihonshi*, 4th ed. rev. (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1965), pp. 339–341.

² Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. Ivan Morris (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 28.

³ Kuno Osamu and Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Gendai Nihon no shisō—sono itsutsu no uzu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1956), p. 165.

⁴ W. Pickles, “Left and Right,” *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Julius Gould and William L. Kolb (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 381–384.

⁵ So is the usually liberal, moderate, and middle class-based center, according to Seymour Martin Lipset's analysis in *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday-Anchor, 1963), pp. 127–130. See also n. 48 *infra*.

to a self-styled concept of socialism.⁶ Then in 1911, despairing of the chances for reform in Japan, he crossed over to the mainland of Asia as an adventurer—a “Shina Rōnin” connected with the Kokuryūkai.⁷ He witnessed the momentous changes that took place there during the next two years and left a detailed narrative of what happened in a book called *Shina kakumei gaishi* (A private history of the Chinese Revolution), which he circulated in 1915–1916, “in large type so it would be easy to read for old men with glasses”—the genro and bureaucrats who decided Japan’s foreign policy.⁸ By relating the Chinese situation to other modern revolutions, he produced a comparative history of revolution which is unique in Japanese thought up to that time. His theory also drove him to a fierce critique of the contemporary state of affairs in Japan itself.

In a recent survey of the concept of revolution, J. S. Erös denotes three prevailing interpretations: optimistic-progressive, holding that revolution is “good” and a sign of inevitable progress; pessimistic-conservative, opposing it as a form of regression to barbarism; and neutral-scientific, representing recent social scientific attempts to look at revolution from a value-free standpoint.⁹ Kita Ikki, who was familiar with the Social Darwinist attitudes of late nineteenth-century European thought, may be said to have taken the optimistic-progressive point of view. He rejected all cyclical notions of history and upheld the idea that history proceeds in a straight line leading ultimately to the mutation of mankind into “godkind” at the end of an inevitable process of social evolution.¹⁰ This philosophy received elaboration in his first book, *Kokutairon oyobi junsei shakaishugi* (The national-polity myth and pure socialism), written in 1906, where he drew an explicit analogy between biological evolution and the growth of human society as a basis for a new and linear interpretation of Japanese history.

To Kita, however, progress along the straight line of history came about at an uneven pace. Revolution sometimes became necessary to overcome obstacles placed in evolution’s way by ruling groups whose methods characterized the preceding stage of history but were now outmoded. We may summarize his theory of revolution by examining five points which he felt all revolutions had in common.

First, revolution itself does not consist of sudden or violent change. “Revolution is not the outcome of the fires of battle, but a war of ideas.”¹¹ It is never to be equated with simple power struggles. “If we say that bloodshed constitutes revolution, we must conclude that there have been countless revolutions within [Japan’s] imperial

⁶ Kita’s youth receives detailed treatment in English at the hands of Harris Inwood Martin, “The Early Life and Thought of Kita Ikki,” unpubl. diss. (Stanford University, 1959). There is a sound biography in Japanese: Tanaka Sōgorō, *Kita Ikki: Nihonteki juashisuto no shōchō* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1959).

⁷ Kita’s connection with the Kokuryūkai was apparently neither so intimate nor so enduring as some have surmised. If he ever formally became a member, he did not remain one for long. Tanaka, p. 143, says that “Kita went to Shanghai [in October 1911] as the first to be dispatched by the Kokuryūkai.” However, as one of the official Kokuryūkai histories notes, his relationship to the organization was that of a “guest member” (*kyakubun*) whose function in 1910–1911 was to edit the monthly publication, *Jiji gekkan*. Kuzuu Yoshihisa, *Tōa senkakū shishi kiden*, II (Tokyo: Kokuryūkai, 1935), 438. Kita soon ceased to share the interests of Kokuryūkai leaders Uchida Ryōhei and Tōyama Mitsuru.

⁸ *Kita Ikki chosakushū* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1959), II, ii (hereafter “KICSS”). The complete text of *Shina kakumei gaishi* appears *ibid.*, pp. 1–213.

⁹ J. S. Erös, “Revolution,” *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, pp. 602–603.

¹⁰ KICSS, I, 344, 408; on “godkind” as the ultimate stage of evolution, *ibid.*, pp. 203, 206.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 20, 23.

court and that hundreds or thousands of revolutions occurred in the battle campaigns of the *senjōku* period. Revolution means complete separation of systems of thought. . . . So no matter how much blood is spilled or how many corpses pile up, if the same system of thought continues [to prevail] it is called a war and is not a revolution."¹²

Second, revolution results in the transformation of social values. "All revolutions are revolutions in popular beliefs."¹³ When successful, the process marks the beginning of a new stage in social evolution. "Revolution . . . means the death of an old society and the birth of a new society."¹⁴

Third, modern revolution has the effect of liberating all elements of a society, giving birth to a "citizen state" (*kōmin kokka*^a) whose political character Kita chose to call "social democratic." "Social democracy" . . . means the ideal of spreading political power to all the elements of the state."¹⁵ This extension of power involves not only the right to vote but also the right of the people in the name of society to own large concentrations of land and capital formerly belonging to an aristocracy.¹⁶ Private ownership still exists, but limited nationalization of wealth serves to free all members of society from the tyranny and poverty imposed by previous rulers. All peoples would eventually reach this evolutionary stage, not in deliberate emulation of one another but as a result of the "liberal awakening" of national consciousness.¹⁷ The countries of Asia were, therefore, not destined to copy Western models but rather to go through changes ordained by universal evolutionary law. "The law of evolution means a temporal wave flowing from past to present, not a geographical principle that divides East and West."¹⁸

The fourth point concerns the agents of revolution. Who represents the national awakening that signals the advent of social democracy? Kita argued that the old ruling groups never revolutionize themselves. "As the sun never rises from the west, so no revolution past or present has ever come from the upper classes."¹⁹ It is necessary for a self-conscious élite to gain military support and seize power in order to fulfill the change in values that has already taken place through a war of ideas. This élite acts as the vanguard of the nation as a whole, and not on behalf of any particular class. His theory thus differs from the Marxist conception of revolution since it specifies no distinctive class base.

The fifth and last point is that revolution is strictly an internal affair. Though external pressure on a society might trigger a release of popular energy contributing to revolution, foreign intervention could only bring greater disorder and panic, imped-

¹² *Ibid.*, I, 389.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II, 162.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 389.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 246; cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 350, 370-371.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25 *et passim*. This and a number of other references come from Kita's 1906 book, which laid the groundwork for his evolutionary view of history and therefore underlies all his later writings. While I cannot fully accept his own contention, stated in 1926 (*ibid.*, II, 360), that all his works are "unswervingly consistent" (*ikkan juwaku*), I do believe that a thread of continuity in basic argument runs through his whole career. For that reason, occasional reference must be made to writings other than *Shina kakumei gaishi* in order to restructure his ideas intelligibly for the purposes of this article.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

ing national consolidation.²⁰ Attempts merely to throw off foreign oppression per se are not revolutions at all. Kita hesitated to apply the term to the American War of Independence, for instance, because in his opinion it was “a by-product of international strife between England and France,” motivated not by internal change of values but by desire to escape from British rule and find “perpetual neutrality.”²¹ He drew his favorite examples of modern revolution from France, Japan (the Meiji Restoration is always the “restoration revolution”), and China (the Hsinhai Revolution of 1911). He also anticipated further revolutionary activity in Russia and later fitted the 1917 Revolution into his conceptual scheme.²²

In the end, Kita's theory remains no more systematic than the above summary indicates. It was impossible, he felt, to achieve a completely intellectual definition. Instead, he defined revolution in terms of a phrase taken from the Hokekyō or Lotus Sūtra, the canon of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism: “Revolution means entry into the law of the unity of loyalty and treason” (*jungyaku fuji no hōmon*^b), since in the revolutionary vortex what is loyal from one standpoint may equally be traitorous from another. The theory of revolution, he added, “cannot be set down in writing” (*furyū monji*^c—a characteristic Zen expression) but must be apprehended intuitively.²³ Having made these somewhat ambiguous statements, he nevertheless suggested that it was possible to understand revolution by the comparative method of citing similarities and differences among a number of revolutionary situations. “There are certain things which are . . . constant across time and national boundaries in the ideas and actions of those dispensed by heaven to perform on the stage of revolution's lifeblood.”²⁴

Essential to Kita's analysis is the concept of a war of ideas. He found a parallel between the contribution made by English liberal thought in the French Revolution and that of Chinese ideas, centering on the political role of the imperial institution, to the Meiji Restoration. Their content was dissimilar, but both had led to the triumph of new systems of thought which had brought national awakening. For the Chinese, meanwhile, it was Japan's new nationalism that contributed to the overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty and, more importantly, “awakened their own Eastern spirit.”²⁵ Each of these revolutionizing societies owed a debt to foreign ideas, even though outside participation only created havoc and foreigners generally misinterpreted the revolution as a vulgar outburst of mob violence. He criticized Burke for “not understanding the revolution across the Channel” just as he ridiculed Japanese policymakers and adventurers for their ignorance of real circumstances in China.²⁶

Kita attacked all pre-revolutionary reform movements as futile attempts to breathe new life into anachronistic institutions. In Japan, the *kōbugattai* effort to reconcile the Tokugawa government and the imperial court had to give way to intransigent anti-Bakufu hostility in the form of the Satsuma-Chōshū *sonnō* movement. In China, the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8, 10.

²² “Had I been born in Russia,” he wrote in 1906, “I would have become an advocate of bombshells” (*ibid.*, I, 388).

²³ *Ibid.*, II, vi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. v.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3, 26.

monarchist reform movement of K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao could not overcome the Manchu court's reactionary antagonism toward change and so was fated to subside before the onslaught of revolutionary ideas after 1905. The South Chinese provinces of Hunan and Kwangtung, far from Peking, were analogous to Satsuma and Chōshū, distant han traditionally hostile to Edo, as centers of revolutionary energy. Shanghai resembled Kyoto as a hotbed of dissidents, and Wuhan paralleled the Bastille—"the bell at the dawn of awakening"—as the place where actual consummation of the revolution began.²⁷

In China, military forces were necessary to fulfill the revolution, just as Satsuma and Chōshū troops had played a crucial role in the Meiji Restoration. These forces had to be drawn from the lower ranks, for officers of battalion command and above were part of the "unawakened" existing order and therefore not trustworthy. In Kita's view "lower samurai" had carried out Japan's Restoration, and in China the revolutionary élite in concert with lower military officers had brought about the fall of the Ch'ing.²⁸

By drawing these analogies, Kita intended to predict the future course of events in China. He was certain that "in the end the Chinese Revolution must go the [same] way as France and Japan," and in part it was well advanced in this direction.²⁹ The war of ideas had been won as soon as Chinese nationalism rose to the point where the alien and outdated Ch'ing dynasty became untenable. The slogan "p'ai Man hsing Han" (down with the Manchus and up with the Chinese) was comparable to "sonnō tōbaku" (revere the emperor and destroy the Bakufu) in the Restoration, and by extension to "liberté, égalité, fraternité" as well.³⁰ These were all nationalist demands decrying the parochialism of the ancien régime and heralding popular liberation and power through national unification.

But the Chinese Revolution required a period of consolidation such as the Meiji emperor and Napoleon had presided over in Japan and France. Who would emerge as China's "great unifier?" As Japan had rejected the disunified federative system of the bakuhan régime in favor of centralized monarchic rule, China must now abandon its age-old monarchic order, which had fostered regionalism, and replace it with a "republic" headed by a "lifetime president" possessing overwhelming military power and absolute authority. Yüan Shih-k'ai was unsuited to this role, not only because he had played "comprador to the English," but also because he represented the old and corrupt Ch'ing bureaucracy. China needed a new Ogotai, son of Genghis and grand khan of all the Mongols from 1229 to 1241.³¹ Who could act this part remained uncertain. Unification also demanded the appearance of a Carnot, the "organizer of victory" who had built new French military forces to support unity under the revolutionary régime. Yamagata Aritomo had been the Carnot of the Meiji

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 23, 32, 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 33-34.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 125, 158. Here Kita's reasoning became tortuous. He was searching China's history for an example of a distinctive form of "Eastern republicanism" comparable to the unique "Eastern monarchism" which he felt Japan's imperial institution represented. He thought he found it in the system by which the Mongol chieftains chose their leader. "China's republicanism . . . is based on the mandate of heaven and the people's will. . . . 'Eastern republicanism' means a republican form of government . . . such as that in which Ogotai Khan clearly became lifetime president (*shūshin daisōtō*), elected by all the khans assembled with their weapons before the gods" (*ibid.*, p. 158).

Restoration, and someone must fill this capacity in China as soon as possible.³²

These diverse and sometimes fanciful analogies suggest that Kita tried to force the Chinese Revolution into too procrustean a bed. Perhaps his greatest error in interpreting it stemmed from a correct but exaggerated perception of divisions within the revolutionary movement itself. Since he believed that revolution was generated inside a society and that direct translation of foreign ideas and institutions or the intervention of foreign powers could only serve to frustrate it, he distrusted Sun Yat-sen's Kwangtung "internationalist" group and its "American-style" republicanism. Sun, he said, did not really understand the revolution and was not its true representative.³³ This role he assigned instead to the Hunanese "nationalist" group around Sung Chiao-jen. Organizer of the Kuomintang and its initial parliamentary election victory of 1912-1913, Sung seemed destined for greatness until in March, 1913, Yüan Shih-k'ai and his prime minister, Chao Ping-chün, arranged to have him assassinated. Kita soon arrived at the unlikely conclusion that the "chief culprit" was Sun Yat-sen's close associate Ch'en Ch'i-mei, in league with Sun himself, and that Yüan was merely an "accomplice."³⁴ Sung's murder at the hands of his own fellow revolutionaries, arising out of quarrels over strategy, reminded Kita of the destruction of Saigō Takamori in the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion by the very Meiji government he had done so much to create. Both of these events initiated a period of Thermidorean reaction which threatened the revolution. Convinced that these same Thermidorean elements still blocked progress in Japan and that they stood totally opposed to the Chinese Revolution, he turned his attention increasingly to the problem of how to "reorganize" Japanese society.

Though temperamentally unsuited to the role of a charismatic leader who could mobilize the masses, Kita did conceive of himself as a provider of revolutionary strategy for such leaders. He wrote that he had been "born to a mission as a revolutionary to divide eras and transform the beliefs and institutions of centuries."³⁵ And in *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō* he put forward a detailed set of plans for revolution, holding that the Meiji Restoration had been betrayed by reactionaries around the throne. Saigō's "second revolution" had failed in 1877, and now a third attempt should be made.

There were two specific goals in Kita's revolutionary program: to bring oligarchic rule to an end and to reestablish true union between sovereign and populace. He saw the emperor as a national symbol acting in the name of Japan, who together with the people's representatives in the Diet constituted the "highest organ of the state."³⁶ He first expressed this view in his 1906 book, after hearing Minobe Tatsukichi lecture

³² *Ibid.*, p. 172. Kita detested Yamagata as an arch-foe of the Chinese Revolution and an obstacle to progress in Japan. By 1921 he was calling him "the Rasputin of Odawara" (*ibid.*, p. v).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 11 *et passim*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138. Other Japanese writers on the Chinese Revolution accept without hesitation the Shanghai Mixed Court's public evidence that Yüan and certainly Chao arranged Sung's murder. E.g., Yoshino Sakuzō, *Chūgoku kakumei shiron*, Vol. VII of *Yoshino Sakuzō Hakase minshushugi ronshū* (Tokyo: Shin Kigensha, 1947), pp. 32, 67-68.

³⁵ KICSS, II, 360. Hashikawa Bunzō remarks that Kita did manifest some of the traits Max Weber set forth in describing charisma: "Kita's case may fit halfway into the types of prophet and demagogue"; "Shōwa chōkokkashugi no shosō," *Chōkokkashugi*, Vol. XXXI of *Gendai Nihon shisō taikēi* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1964), p. 35.

³⁶ KICSS, I, 231-232.

on the organ theory.³⁷ Kita contended that “legally, Japan since the Restoration has been a social democracy,” because the people had become citizens rather than subjects.³⁸ But the Meiji oligarchy, by arrogating all power to itself and denying full popular representation, had frustrated this ideal. “Modern Japan is a medieval state mixing East and West, joining a decayed trunk to a rotten root. Worms breed in a corpse, and the plump worms oozing from the corpse of the restoration revolution are the so-called genro.”³⁹ To correct the situation, he prescribed universal manhood suffrage. A new and more representative Diet could then overrule the bureaucracy and legislate away the “economic daimyo class” of the zaibatsu who thrived in collusion with it.⁴⁰

A coup d'état was necessary to accomplish these ends, to be carried out by an enlightened civilian élite with the aid of the armed forces. This was a strategy which, as we have seen, Kita's Chinese experiences plus his interpretation of the Meiji Restoration recommended to him, and it later endeared him to reform-minded younger officers in the army, although unlike most of them he never envisioned a permanent military dictatorship. The Diet was the legislative arm of Japanese government, and under its aegis various kinds of social reform should be undertaken to produce a wealthy and powerful nation capable of competing on equal terms with the modern West.⁴¹

Kita's rereading of Meiji *fukoku kyōhei* aims applied also to the external sphere. Like the Meiji liberals, he hoped to see the peoples of Asia freed from the yoke of Western imperialism. The worst aspect of Japanese foreign policy, from his point of view, was its pandering emulation of Western imperialist methods. Prime Minister Ōkuma's plan for Anglo-Japanese collaboration to build a new China seemed to him nothing but slavish imitation of Western ideas, ignoring China's ability to remake itself by thoroughly prosecuting its own national awakening. Instead of playing imperialist politics in the chaos of early Republican China, Japanese foreign policy should construct an Asian Monroe doctrine to protect the Chinese from outside intervention while their own revolution moved toward completion. For this reason Japan needed to break off the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and go to war with Great Britain, whose predatory interests threatened the future development of both China and India. By forcing the British back to Suez, Japan could give these nations an opportunity to grow in peace. But to secure its eastern flank, Japan should conclude an economic alliance with the United States and do everything possible to foster Anglo-American animosity.⁴²

Kita warned that unless his proposals were heeded, Japan would face on the one hand a hostile phalanx of Western nations and on the other an alienated China which would never forgive his countrymen for practicing imperialism at the expense of the Chinese Revolution.⁴³ There is a certain prophetic accuracy in this warn-

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247. Kita here credited Minobe with the idea of the emperor as an organ of the state, but he explicitly disagreed with Minobe in arguing that the “highest organ of the state” was not the emperor alone, but the emperor *plus* the Diet (*ibid.*, pp. 231–234).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, vi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 404.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō*, especially Chs. i–vi.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. ii–iii, vii, 90, 186–200.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 212.

ing, and no doubt he intended it to be taken as prophecy since he compared his own role to that of Nichiren in predicting the Mongol invasions during the late thirteenth century.⁴⁴ By 1937, when he died at the hands of an army firing squad for alleged complicity in the insurrection of February 26, 1936, the holocaust he feared in Asia was rapidly gathering force.

Despite the recent appearance in Japan of a number of promising interpretive articles dealing with Kita,⁴⁵ his name still tends to evoke the stereotyped image of an ultranationalist fanatic. This image is obviously exaggerated and in any case misleading. However bleak his call for Anglo-Japanese war and severe internal reorganization may seem, the fact remains that he shared with most modern Japanese intellectuals an urge to reform society in order to *control* the process of change, not to check or reverse its course. Far from harking back to some imaginary bucolic past, Kita looked favorably upon industrialization, the rise of great cities, and the growth of representative parliamentary institutions as irreversible evolutionary trends. He represents an extension of the Meiji liberal idealist, and he partakes of the Japanese socialist tradition as well.

Where Kita departed from the liberals and socialists was in his disagreement with the imitative or "westernizing" aspect of their programs. For him the path to civilization and utopia lay not in deliberate emulation of those societies which had advanced farther on the evolutionary scale, but in a process of self-genesis through national awakening. In this sense he may be labeled a second-generation modern Japanese intellectual, who, like his Meiji predecessors, was influenced by Western ideas, but unlike so many of them saw no reason why Japan should continue to mimic Western ways. His socialism was strictly his own. He favored "building socialism in one country," a peculiarly Japanese form of socialism based on indigenous traditions and needs, rather than blindly following whatever line the Socialist International happened to lay down.⁴⁶ He identified individual freedom under an egalitarian socialism with national liberation and equality, interpreting Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, for example, not as a capitalist war for profit and empire but as a nationalist symbol that lit a torch of hope for China and all the countries of Asia.⁴⁷

We have seen, then, that Kita's theory of revolution shows evidence of strong Western influence. Having read such writers as Rousseau, Kant, Darwin, Spencer and Marx, he put forth a linear and optimistic doctrine of historical progress. Like Marx, he saw revolution as a "locomotive of history," driving society through rocky stretches of reaction along the road to eventual perfection. And, as Lenin would say later in the same decade, it could connote national as well as class liberation. But

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. iii-iv, 203-204.

⁴⁵ Kuno and Tsurumi, Ch. iv: "Nihon no chōkokkashugi—Shōwa ishin no shisō" (pp. 118-182); Kuno Osamu, "Chōkokkashugi no ichi genkei—Kita Ikki no baai," *Chishikijūm no seisei to yakuwari*, Vol. IV of *Kindai Nihon shisōshi kōza* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1959), pp. 126-154; Nomura Kōichi, "Kokuminteki shimeikan no shoruikei to sono tokushitsu—Ōkuma Shigenobu, Uchimura Kanzō, Kita Ikki," *Seikai no naka no Nihon*, Vol. VIII of *Kindai Nihon shisōshi kōza* (1961), pp. 137-173; Takahashi Kazumi, "Kita Ikki," *Hangyakuusha no shōzō*, ed. Matsuda Michio, Vol. XIII of *Nijūsseiki o ugokashita hitobito* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1963), pp. 340-414; Matsuda Michio, "Nihon oyobi Rosha no shoki shakaishugi—Gerutsen [Herzen] to Kita Ikki," *Burujiowa kakumei no hikaku kenkyū*, ed. Kuwabara Takeo (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1964), pp. 421-434.

⁴⁶ Kuno Osamu, "Kita Ikki: kakumei no jissenka," *Asahi jōnanu*, V (June 23, 1963), 99.

⁴⁷ KICSS, I, 433-434; II, 360.

class counted for little in Kita's calculations, and at this point he ceased to accept Western models. The consciousness of class conflict that had risen to such prominence in nineteenth-century Europe is virtually absent in him, making it close to meaningless to characterize his ideas according to a standard left-right pattern.⁴⁸

We may do better by recognizing that the Tokugawa Neo-Confucian tradition influenced Kita every bit as much as modern Western thought. Tokugawa thinkers stressed the need for mutually harmonious functioning of the four officially recognized status groups in society. *Kogakusha* Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728), for instance, is quoted as saying: “The peasant cultivates the fields and so nourishes the people; the artisan makes utensils and has the people use them; the merchant exchanges what one has for what one has not and so helps the people; the samurai rules so that disorders will not arise. Though each performs only his own job, he is helping the other; if even one of the four is lacking, a country cannot be maintained.”⁴⁹ Such an attitude has no place for class conflict, yet it does not rule out change. Social reform may even be desirable so long as all groups in society benefit and remain in equilibrium. Similarly, Kita's plan for restoring harmony to modern Japanese society as it experienced the tensions of rapid change reveals his conviction that no particular class, but “all the people” must gain by the revolution. In this he bears a curious resemblance to the Taishō liberal Yoshino Sakuzō,⁵⁰ whose *minponshugi* had its philosophical basis in the Mencian concept of the people's welfare as the object of good government. Though their methods differed sharply, both men held that universal suffrage and the abolition of oligarchic prerogative were necessary in order to improve the lot of the entire populace. Yoshino sought to attain these ends by purely legal means, whereas Kita perhaps placed a more literal faith in Mencius' vague dictum about the people's “right of revolution” against tyranny.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Nor does Kita fit Lipset's category of “right extremism.” It is tempting to ask whether he can be subsumed under one of the other two categories of extremism Lipset describes—center or left. His background, after all, was middle-class, and members of his family had vocally supported *jiyū minken* ideas in the mid-Meiji period. He did oppose “big business, trade-unions, and the socialist state” (Lipset, p. 129) in the ordinary meanings of those terms. But by his own standards and within certain limits he never rejected any of them. Nor was he a spokesman for “small businessmen, white-collar workers, and the anticlerical sections of the professional classes”—the social base of both liberal and extreme centrism in Lipset's model (*ibid.*). At any rate, Japan was *incapable* of “center extremism” by Lipset's definition, since it was not a country “characterized by both large-scale capitalism and a powerful labor movement” (*ibid.*, p. 135). Kita comes closer to “left extremism,” which for Lipset includes not only communist and anarchist movements but those of “nationalist army officers seeking to create a more vital society by destroying the corrupt privileged strata” (*ibid.*, p. 130). Certainly his greatest *impact* as a thinker was on just such a movement. The young officers who took part in the February 26th Affair always professed great admiration for his ideas, however much they might disagree with some of them. Cf. Hata Ikuhiko, *Gun fuashizumu undōshi* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1962), pp. 18, 96–97; or Suematsu Tahei, *Watakushi no Shōwashi* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1963), pp. 25, 91, 168. But I doubt that any of Lipset's labels contribute to our understanding of Kita's significance, since they are all misfits to one degree or another where he is concerned. It is precisely this sort of problem—the inapplicability of a given Western model—that gives rise to so many references to Japanese “eclecticism.”

⁴⁹ Translated and quoted by Albert Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 63. Of course, Soraigaku is no more typical than any other particular school of thought, but many similar examples could be cited. Although the Tokugawa period was one of great intellectual diversity, ideas about society usually reflected “the variety of interests of a single class” (*ibid.*, p. 126)—the samurai—rather than the conflicting interests of several classes. This is exactly the point: because Tokugawa thought sprang largely from a single class bent on balancing the multiple interests of society, modern Japanese thought has inherited a tendency to stress the same goal.

⁵⁰ Kuno and Tsurumi, pp. 138–139, emphasize this point of similarity between Kita and Yoshino.

⁵¹ Tanaka, pp. 20–21, recounts that Kita was strongly influenced by the *Mencius* as early as his

Finally, when Kita urged national unity to stave off Western pressure, he was echoing the traditional principle of *naiyū gaikan*^d (“internal disorder leads to external troubles”) which had so often guided Chinese and Japanese foreign-policy formulation in the past. To counter the external threat, internal divisions must first be suppressed. This was his interpretation of what had happened in the Meiji Restoration, and after all it was the Restoration that loomed largest in his theory of revolution. At that time of crisis all Japanese had composed their differences in a “great union” (*daidō danketsu*^e). Now, in response to new crises of the early twentieth century, another great union was required.⁵²

This compulsion to unify in the face of a foreign menace, typical to a considerable extent of all nation-states, was felt so intensely and in so pervasive a fashion in modern Japan that it deserves some special label such as the “Meiji Restoration reflex.” Kita is only one spokesman for this viewpoint, but the great majority of Japanese intellectuals certainly shared it. Indeed, one might well argue that his brand of nationalist reform was far more characteristic of Japanese thinking as a whole than that of the socialists and communists whose struggle against government oppression has prompted so many scholarly encomiums in the years since World War II. The “right wing” could be just as reformist as the “left” on the domestic front, and if nationalism and the expansion of Japan’s influence abroad are criteria of “rightness” then the “left” was never far behind. There is a substantial degree of similarity, for instance, between Kita and Marxist-oriented Shōwa intellectuals like Miki Kiyoshi and Ozaki Hotsumi, who called for an “East Asian community” in which Japan would show China the way to economic and social progress.⁵³

In sum, left and right as they have been used in recent scholarship do little to forward our understanding of the dilemmas faced by modern Japanese thinkers. The problems of “responding” to Western “impact” and of changing their society in patterns conforming to what has lately come to be called modernization meant that almost no Japanese could favor maintenance of the status quo, nor could many look back with any satisfaction to the days when the natural agrarian economy presumably dominated the scene. If we are to employ such terms as left and right, it seems to me that we should do so solely according to the context of Japan’s own history. For example, we might say that left signifies those who accepted class conflict as an inevitable feature of pluralist urban-industrial society, while right points to those like Kita Ikki who, although convinced that social change was both necessary and desirable, sought to channel it toward a harmonious balance of class interests reminiscent of Tokugawa Neo-Confucian ideals.⁵⁴

higher primary school days, when in addition to regular schoolwork he attended private lessons given by a famous Sado Confucianist, Maruyama Meiboku. In his first book Kita devoted much space to praise for Mencius as “the Eastern Plato” and a “fountainhead” of later socialism (KICSS, I, 411–419 *passim*).

⁵² *Ibid.*, II, 219. The phrase “*daidō danketsu*” occurs frequently in the annals of modern Japanese history, and is particularly associated with Gotō Shōjirō’s movement to unite the anti-government *minken* opposition in the late 1880’s.

⁵³ Cf. Chalmers Johnson, *An Instance of Treason: Ozaki Hotsumi and the Sorge Spy Ring* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 118–120; or, e.g., Dan Kurzman, *Kishi and Japan: The Search for the Sun* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1960), pp. 92–95, 117–118, on former prime minister Kishi Nobusuke’s pronounced receptivity to Kita’s ideas. The legacy of traditional thought may also help to explain why so many “leftists” experienced a “conversion” (*tenkō*) during the crisis-ridden 1930’s.

⁵⁴ This line of analysis forms the basis for an assessment of Taishō social thought in my forthcoming book on Kita Ikki.

- a. kōmin kokka 公民國家
- b. jungyaku fuji no hōmon 順逆不二の法門
- c. furyū monji 不出文字
- d. naiyū gaikan 內憂外患
- e. daidō danketsu 大同團結