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Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877): Meiji Japan's Cautious Revolutionary

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KIDO TAKAYOSHI is well known as one of the principal promoters of the Meiji Revolution of 1868. He has also received ample recognition for his subsequent work as an antifeudal reformer. Between 1868 and 1871 he guided the movement which swept away an obsolete administrative structure inherited from the Tokugawa era.

These glittering successes may have obscured Privy Councilor Kido's later, and significant, role as balance wheel within the new oligarchy of Meiji leaders.¹ A moderate among extremists of various sorts, Kido endeavoured from 1873 until his premature death in 1877 to restrain those whose reckless programs threatened to precipitate counter-revolution or to involve Japan in disastrous foreign war. In consequence, he broke with the other two heroes of the Meiji revolutionary triumvirate, Saigō Takamori (1827-1877) and Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), and checked their rasher schemes. In 1873 commander-in-chief Saigō, howling champion of aggressive war against Korea, bowed to the peace coalition which Kido welded together within the oligarchy. Thereafter, Home Minister Ōkubo, that autocrat and single-minded industrializer, came to dominate the oligarchy; but he, too, frequently felt obliged to temper his more extreme policies to meet the objections of Kido. In particular, Ōkubo bent before the demands of Kido when the Chōshū Councilor championed constitutional government. Ōkubo again inched backward when Kido became spokesman for the agrarian and feudal classes whose welfare Ōkubo would sacrifice to finance the state-patronized industrialization program. Inside and outside the oligarchy, Kido fought extrem-

¹ Kido, who was born on August 11, 1833, in Hagi, died May 26, 1877, in Kyoto. He served the Meiji government as Adviser to the Chief Minister, or *Sōsaikyoku Komon* (February-June, 1868); Junior Councilor, or *Sanyo* (June, 1868-March, 1879); Privy Councilor, or *Sangi* (June, 1869-April, 1874; March, 1875-March, 1876); Associate Ambassador to America and Europe (December, 1871-June, 1873); Minister of Education (January-May, 1874); Acting Home Minister (February-May, 1874); Adviser to the Cabinet, or *Naikaku Komon* (March, 1876-May, 1877); and First Controller of the Imperial Household, or *Kunai Ittō Shusshi* (August, 1876-May, 1877).

ism, whether by the reactionary samurai or by the utopian westernizer.

In the end Kido's moderate policy carried him to a position roughly analogous to that of the occidental liberal, though he was never consciously a doctrinal disciple of liberalism. Violently opposed to aggressive war on the Asiatic continent, Kido also promoted representative government, social justice for the classes disinherited by the end of feudalism, and civil liberties. He became in many respects the Jefferson of Japan.

There are those who have considered this phase of Kido's career of slight importance. They have assumed that his later tenure in office was but a disappointing anticlimax appended to the career of a competent revolutionary. Others have misunderstood his role, lumping him with members of the oligarchy who were altogether unresponsive to popular pressure.² In 1878, for example, the assassins of Okubo, setting out to eliminate the leaders who barred the path to representative government, headed their list of "master-criminals" with the name of Kido. They suggested that Heaven had already expressed its displeasure by sending him to an early grave the year before.³

Misinterpretation becomes understandable in the light of Kido's pre-1873 career. In younger days he was something of an extremist himself. Environment helped shape his revolutionary bent. Born in 1833, the son of a physician and after 1840 adopted heir of a substantial samurai official of Chōshū *han*, Kido lived in one of the outside *han* where ties of fealty to the ruling Shogunate were weakest, resentment against Shogunate "usurpation" strongest.⁴ Part of the revolutionary rationale, he absorbed at the Meirinkan, official *han* school, enough to guide him to Yoshida Shōin in 1849. Near Hagi this fanatical little propagandist conducted his own private school, "the cradle of the Revolution of 1868."⁵ There Kido

² Even when opposition to current policy moved him to seek temporary retirement, Kido remained loyal to the oligarchy. Unlike Itagaki, Kido never sought to rally public opinion to his cause by forming a political party. Such influence as he did command was felt in Tokyo through a Kido-clique of younger bureaucrats. At first Itō Ōkuma, and Yamagata were his principal proteges. Later, when personal and political conflicts dispersed the original group, Aoki Shūzō, Yamada Akiyoshi and others formed a new Kido faction.

³ Translation from the *Choya Shimbun*, May 15, 1878, in "Notes on Modern Statesmen," David Murray papers, Library of Congress; also translated in Kisaburo Kawabe, *The Press and politics in Japan* (Chicago, 1921), 55-58.

⁴ Kido's natural father was a court physician with an annual stipend of twenty *koku* of rice. His adoptive father received 150 *koku* annually, but the *han* government reduced that figure to ninety *koku* as a penalty for deathbed adoption.

Kido's name at birth was Wada Kogorō. Upon adoption he became Katsura Kogorō; and at the time of the Restoration he assumed the name of Kido Junichirō, shortly afterwards changed to Kido Takayoshi. Since his death the two characters which form Kido's given name have generally been pronounced Kōin rather than Takayoshi.

⁵ Itō Hirobumi quoted by William Elliot Griffis, "The Statesmanship of Ito," *North American Review*, CXCI (1910), 117.

and other statesmen of the future listened approvingly to reiteration of the theme that the Shogunate represented usurpation and the shadowy imperial government in Kyoto was the one legitimate government of Japan. A wrong so grievous might justifiably be rectified by virtually any tactics, including indiscriminate terrorism.⁶

Assuming leadership of the radical pro-Emperor faction of Chōshū youths upon Yoshida's martyrdom in 1859, Kido condoned, and may have practiced, the Machiavellian violence which Yoshida preached. The blood oath which Mito and Chōshū extremists signed in 1862 was a case in point. Kido and the leader of his Mito allies pledged themselves jointly "to overawe the Bakufu by setting free the death-defying patriots [in plain language, the suspects imprisoned after the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Senior Councilor Andō] by stabbing high officials, and by cutting down foreigners." Resulting terror on the streets of Edo may have hastened the end of the Shogunate and certainly hurried Kido's exit from the city. Still, he guided the radical faction to control of Chōshū politics in 1865, and, serving as chief minister of the clan in 1866, directed it to victory over the fading Shogunate on the field of battle. Soon after, the thirty-four-year-old chief minister linked Chōshū with Satsuma to complete the revolution, or Imperial Restoration, of 1868.

As a reforming privy councilor in the Meiji government, Kido would have moved with reckless haste, possibly igniting profeudal rebellion. Iwakura Tomomi and other conservative colleagues, however, blocked his impetuous course of insuring national unity by smashing the feudal administrative structure at once.⁸

Not until 1873, five years after the revolution, did Kido emerge firmly and finally as the moderate reformer. After 1873 he aimed to move Japan cautiously toward constitutional monarchy, to do it while at peace with

⁶ Yoshida's letter of January 22, 1859, justifying violence as a positive good, apparently impressed Kido. Yoshida contended that Japan's weakness in the 1850's derived from a lack of wars over a period of 200 years. "I regret no little," he continued, "that I have not yet seen a man's blood shed; not has another caused by blood to be seen." Typically Yoshida concluded that "men of peace are all disloyal and unrighteous." Reprinted in Tsumaki Chūta, editor, *Shōgiku Kido Kō den* (Biography of Prince Shōgiku Kido) (Tokyo, 1927, two volumes), I, 52–58. Hereafter, *Kido den*. On Yoshida's career see Tokutomi Iichiro, "The Life of Shoin Yoshida," translated by H. E. Coleman. *Transactions, Asiatic Society of Japan*, XIV, Part 1 (1917), 117–188; H. J. Timperley, "Yoshida Shōin-Martyred Prophet of Japanese Expansionism," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, I (1942), 337–348.

⁷ Shibusawa Eiichi, *Tokugawa Yoshinobu Kō den* (Biography of Prince Tokugawa Yoshinobu) (Tokyo, 1917, six volumes), II, 4–7, for text of the oath; *Kido den*, I, 72–73.

⁸ As "pen of the Restoration," Kido between 1868 and 1871 inserted his antifeudal ideas in Emperor Meiji's Charter Oath of Five Articles; he initiated the Return of the Land Registers to the Emperor, or *hanseki hōkan*, by composing a petition nominally from Lord Mōri Yoshichika of Chōshū and others; and he linked with Saigō and Okubo of Satsuma to perfect control of the Imperial government with the Abolition of Clans and the Establishment of Prefectures, *haihan chokken*.

profeudal classes within Japan and with menacing foreign nations without. Doubtless years in power had mellowed the fiery extremism of his youth. A keen awareness of contemporary trends in the Occident also contributed to his moderate program. Because of close association with Mitford and Satow of the English legation staff after 1867, Kido developed admiration for and fear of the Occident. This ambivalent attitude intensified during the Iwakura embassy's grand tour of America and Europe (1871–1873).⁹ Humanitarian and perhaps personal considerations also explain his program.

In 1873 most of these factors blended to force Councilor Kido's break with Saigō on the issue of a popular, aggressive war against Korea. The rupture was surprising, for "the Sword of the Restoration" was sponsoring the same expansionist views which Kido had held for many years. In 1868 Kido had asked, "If we do not aim at making Imperial prestige shine across the seas and at standing pre-eminent in the universe, how do we differ from the Bakufu?"¹⁰

In succeeding years a steady stream of memorials to the Meiji Emperor set forth Kido's rationale for opening Korea—by diplomacy if possible, by force if necessary. Prestige would accrue to the new imperial government with recognition of the restoration by Korea, he advised; and Korea in alliance or subjection would diminish Japan's defense problem.¹¹ As late as the fall of 1872 Kido remained keenly interested in Korea as a field for Japanese expansion. Writing in London, he expressed outrage at Korea's insolence in rebuffing a fourth mission of Foreign Office underlings to that isolated land. The insult fully justified war, he wrote in his diary; whatever the expense, Japan must force open the Hermit Kingdom.¹²

The war party within Japan agreed. In mid-1873 Saigō Takamori planned a popular conflict against Korea to preoccupy discontented samurai. He expected to become the *casus belli* himself by tempting the Koreans to assassinate him while on a diplomatic mission to that land.

⁹ Watanabe Ikujiro, "Kido Takayoshi no Obei junyū to sono seika" (Kido Takayoshi's tour of America and Europe and its results), *Nihon rekishi* (Japanese history), XXXVII (1951), 44–46.

¹⁰ Entry for December 19, 1868, in *Kido Takayoshi nikki* (The diaries of Kido Takayoshi), edited by Tsumaki Chūta (Tokyo, 1932), I, 135–136.

¹¹ The moral argument, that contact with Japan would teach the Koreans to look abroad and would bring progress to that backward land, Kido used chiefly in conversations with foreigners. Profits from increased trade between Japan and Korea figured hardly at all in Kido's rationale. January 26, 1869, Tokyo, *ibid.*, I, 159–161; Ernest Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan* (London, 1921), 411.

¹² July 16, 1872, Washington, *Kido nikki*, II, 199–200; September 1, 1872, London, *ibid.*, I, 223–224.

Saigō found Kido no ally, however, when the junketing Councilor returned from Europe in July, 1873. Contrary to expectation, Kido spurned the war faction and helped turn the tide for peace.

Kido had made the surprising reversal for several reasons. He now feared that a Korean war would strengthen the forces of feudalism and militarism. Merely yielding to the clamor of the idle samurai would compromise the strength of the central government. Further, lacking a fully trained national army, the government would have to depend on feudal levies. This would give additional strength to the forces of feudalism.

Nor was it wise to bolster the position of the military faction in government. Already Kido had clashed with Saigō over the latter's dual appointment to the offices of Councilor, a civil position, and of commander-in-chief of the armed forces. This had left Kido "deeply disturbed." He wrote, "If I were to single out for praise the fundamental virtue in the governments of the enlightened countries [of the Occident], it would be the established distinction between the duties of the civil and the military." The principle that the army should remain out of politics was more than a useful occidental notion, however. Kido believed that separation of civil functions from the military was a basic principle of the Restoration of Imperial Government. Dual occupancy of civil and military office by Saigō, Yamagata, and others seemed to portend re-establishment of a military dictatorship on the pattern of the fallen Shogunate.¹³

A personal factor, the realization that the feudal-military group would have no place in government for him, may also have impelled Kido to align with the forces opposing war. But his opposition was not altogether factional or personal in character. A humanitarian element also controlled his views on foreign policy. "Internal affairs are basic; and external matters come last," he memorialized at this time. Reform within Japan would elevate the welfare of the people and should command priority over a foreign war to exalt the glory of the empire. Increasing the burdensome land tax to finance the war might antagonize the already distressed peasantry enough to endanger the regime's stability.¹⁴

But war did not come. Kido, whose well-publicized memorial had initiated the peace-party campaign in September, 1873, lay bedfast in

¹³ October 20, 1872, Edinburgh, Scotland, *Kido nikki*, II, 261; Kido to Kinashi Nobuichi, *sanji* of Yamaguchi-ken, September, 1872, in *Kido Takayoshi Monjo* (The papers of Kido Takayoshi), edited by Tsumaki Chūta (Tokyo, 1929-1931), IV, 388-391; *Kido den*, II, 1534-1537.

¹⁴ Text of the Kido memorial of August, 1873, in *Kido monjo*, VIII, 129-133.

November when Ōkubo, Iwakura, and Itō triumphed over Saigō in the Grand Council. Naturally, Kido rejoiced in the victory; and the suspicious behavior of Saigō and his followers after defeat vindicated Kido's course. A third of the new imperial army followed General Saigō into retirement. Kido feared that this precedent was most dangerous. If he had learned anything in the Occident, he wrote, it was that soldiers should not "chatter" about political matters. Yet in Japan "soldiers lecture the Cabinet, then petulantly resign when the Cabinet divulges its program to them."¹⁵

Early the following year, when Ōkubo deserted the peace party to champion the Formosan expedition, Kido consistently spoke out for peace. Moreover, his philosophy of reform with peace had crystallized. In a memorial of March, 1874, he pleaded that stabilization of the northern frontier, suppression of domestic rebellion, and the establishment of suitable facilities for universal education should have priority over the expensive Formosan enterprise. As Minister of Education and as Acting Home Minister, he had reason to oppose an adventure which drained appropriations away from his departments. But his ideological opposition seemed to carry more weight. With some eloquence he wrote, "When one imagines the plight of our thirty million poverty-stricken people, the controversy over which is more urgent, internal or external affairs, resolves itself."¹⁶

Seizing on American Minister Bingham's protest against the use of American ships and personnel in the campaign against Formosa, Kido almost succeeded in blocking the expedition. Military leaders moved out of Nagasaki, however, despite government orders to stay their forces. When Home Minister Ōkubo acquiesced in the *fait accompli*, Kido resigned as Councilor and Minister of Education. He blasted the government which supposedly had moved from "feudal despotism" to "freedom, liberalism, and peace," but instead permitted war at the expense of "the rights of the stupid, the poor, and the weak." "A nation is based on its people," he continued, "a government exists to ease the lot of the people."¹⁷ This ideal of benevolent government the Meiji oligarchy had ignored.

Whether in or out of office, Kido continued to use his prestige on the

¹⁵ October 30, 1873, Tokyo, *Kido nikki*, II, 441-442; Kido to Tanaka Mitsuaki, Tokyo, October (?), 1873, *Kido monjo*, V, 73-74.

¹⁶ Text of the memorial in *Kido monjo*, VIII, 147-150.

¹⁷ Text of the memorial of April 18, 1874, in *ibid.*, 151-154. See also Watanabe Ikujiro, *Gaikō to gaikōke* (Diplomacy and diplomats) (Tokyo, 1939), 81-84.

side of moderation. He discouraged the belligerent clamor of his protégés, Itō and Yamagata, during the China war scare in the summer of 1874 and during the Korean crisis of 1875–1876. Kido's memorials on the latter occasion were equivocal, it is true. He thought a war justified, but asked principally for postponement. Yet he worried excessively when a younger, more bellicose Satsuma diplomat, Kuroda Kiyotaka, replaced him as chief of the mission to Korea; and letters from the Kido sickbed may have dampened Kuroda's martial ardor.¹⁸

Except for the Formosan skirmish, the Meiji oligarchs maintained peace with Asia and the world, allowing time for strengthening their nation militarily, industrially, and politically. Among the reform movements of the period Kido became most intimately associated with constitutional development. He had exhibited little enthusiasm for the cause of constitutional government before 1871. At that time Iwakura, who was perhaps worried by factionalism within the oligarchy, assigned Kido the task of studying the governments of America and Europe in preparation for the establishment of a permanent and stable Japanese government. At first Kido perused occidental systems with a critical eye and denounced those countrymen who would turn their backs on Japanese tradition. Students and diplomats who recklessly advocated "liberalism and republicanism" drew withering scorn. Minister Resident Mōri Arinori in Washington was the chief offender, and Kido expressed supreme contempt for the youthful diplomat who had succumbed to the vogue for things Western. Borrowing at random would destroy the essence of Japanese civilization, believed Kido, even while preserving the nation's independence.¹⁹

Still, Kido ultimately expressed admiration for Western political forms. In a famous memorial of July, 1873, he came out for constitutional government. Not that he favored representative government with guaranteed individual liberties at once. In fact, the concepts presented, for all the stylistic sparkle of the memorial, were disappointingly vague. Apparently Kido favored a government modeled after the English constitutional monarchy; but only at some vague, distant date. Japan must progress toward the ideal gradually.²⁰

¹⁸ Text of a memorial addressed to Sanjo in *Kido monjo*, VIII, 155–158. Kido to Okubo, November 15, 1875, Tokyo, *ibid.*, VI, 291–292, December 7, 1875, Tokyo, *Kido nikki*, III, 269–270.

¹⁹ April 15, 1872, Washington, *Kido nikki*, II, 157–160.

²⁰ Text in *Kido monjo*, VIII, 118–128; English translation in *Japan Weekly Mail*, November 20, 1873, pp. 731–737.

Kido's doctrine of gradualism carried with it several corollaries, as he revealed in his correspondence during the decade. First of all, he believed that the oligarchy formed an elite which should tutor the uninformed masses along the path to representative government. This idea developed partly out of conversations with Chancellor Bismarck in Berlin.²¹ Secondly, universal education must precede genuine representative government. Kido would have Japan "educate her masters" before they assumed their duties. As head of the group studying education under the Iwakura mission, Kido hired Dr. David Murray of Rutgers University to supervise the establishment of a modern Japanese school system.²² Finally, Kido would extend the educational program beyond the schools. Practice assemblies on the local and national levels should precede genuine representative government.

Tentatively, in November, 1873, he suggested creation of an Assembly of Nobles in which ex-samurai would represent their former lords.²³ But he quickly recognized the reactionary character of that proposal and, impressed with the British House of Lords, put his full support behind a plan to establish a House of Elder Statesmen, or *Genrō-in*, made up of distinguished soldiers and officials. Ultimately, a two-house parliament would emerge.²⁴

But not immediately. The Tosa memorial of January, 1874, petitioning the government to establish representative government at once, did not win Kido's approval. He refused to sign the memorial despite the fact that Itagaki Taisuke, leader of the Tosa liberals, approached Kido specifically to enlist his support. A scarcely disguised repudiation of Kido's doctrine of gradualism in the memorial did not endear the Tosa faction to Kido. The Tosa liberals contended that the Japanese people needed experience, not education alone, to prepare themselves for representative government. Nor did the inflammatory language of the Tosa

²¹ Kido to Makimura Masanao, Berlin, March 9, 1873, *Kido monjo*, V, 10-14; Kido to Inoue Kaoru, March 7, 1875, Tokyo, *ibid.*, VI, 52-54.

²² Universal education would not only stimulate an interest in public affairs among all citizens, it would also produce the men of talent necessary to man the new governmental apparatus. January 23, 1872, San Francisco, *Kido nikki*, II, 126-127; Kido to Sugiyama Takatoshi, San Francisco, January 25, 1872, *Kido den*, II, 1506-1508.

²³ Asai Kiyoshi, *Meiji rikken shisō shi ni okeru Eikoku Gikai Seido no eikyō* (The influence of the English parliamentary system in the history of Meiji constitutional thought) (Tokyo, 1935), 236-240, for text of a draft constitution prepared for Kido by Nishimura Shigeki.

²⁴ November 20, 22, 1873, *Kido nikki*, II, 452-454, for proposals made to Itō Hirobumi. For a summary of Kido's constitutional views at this time see George M. Beckmann, "Political Crises and the Crystallization of Japanese Constitutional Thought, 1871-1881," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXIII (1954), 260-262.

petition commend it to a Councilor who was a pillar of a government already uneasy over the menace of revolution.²⁵

Moderate that he was, Kido did establish grounds for compromise between the Itagaki liberals and Ōkubo, defender of the absolute monarchy. At the Osaka Round Table Conference in 1875 Kido's doctrine of gradualism won support from the diverse factions.²⁶ And the curious parliamentary bodies—the House of Elder Statesmen, or *Genrō-in*, and the Conference of Local Officials, or *Chihōkan Kaigi*, began deliberations soon afterward. Although appointment to these bodies depended on the favor of the oligarchy, a sufficient number of Itagaki men obtained membership in the two assemblies to add excitement to their proceedings. In addition, from outside the legislative chamber Councilor Itagaki himself pressed for additional powers for the House of Elder Statesmen. Kido, who was sorely tried by the Tosa statesman's importunities, stood firmly beside Ōkubo in denying the request. Nor did Kido view with any more sympathy agitation for an increase in powers of the membership of the Conference of Local Officials which he served as first president. Hence a drive against the appointed president and his absolute powers to initiate and withdraw bills developed. The harassed presiding officer soon forgot his liberal proclivities and sounded out Home Minister Ōkubo on transferring the ringleader of the agitators from the post which entitled him to membership in the Conference. The offender, Kanda Kōhei, remained; but this authoritarian gesture cast some doubt on the sincerity of Kido's expressed admiration for representative government. Nor did his ban on the press which wished to report the Conference's debates win popularity among the liberals. Indeed, vicious personal attacks from the liberal camp seemed to drive Kido into temporary alliance with the Ōkubo faction.²⁷

Despite this brief defection, however, Kido's early death in 1877 constituted a blow to the movement for representative government. By 1876 he had begun once more to campaign for more effective representative institutions. Expressed sympathy for their aims by Councilor Kido and by the *Genrō-in* constitutional committee may have deterred most Itagaki liberals from joining the Saigō rebellion in 1877. Kido's doctrine of

²⁵ January 17, 1874, *Kido nikki*, II, 480–482; Ōtsu Junichirō, *Dai Nihon kensei shi* (Constitutional history of Japan) (Tokyo, 1929), I, 834.

²⁶ "While (our subjects) . . . must necessarily abandon many of their former customs yet must they not on the other hand yield too impulsively to a rash desire for reform." Text of the Imperial rescript in Charles Lanman, *Japan: Its Leading Men* (Boston, 1886), 15–16.

²⁷ Kido to Ōkubo, June 20, 1875, Tokyo (two letters on the same day), *Kido monjo*, VI, 149–150.

gradualism, however, would in the 1880's serve constitution-maker Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) as a pretext for halting all progress toward genuine parliamentary government.

After 1873 Kido attempted to adapt the doctrine of gradualism to the social and economic transformation of Japan. Without being altogether unsympathetic to state-sponsored industrialization, he opposed overhasty execution of the program of Home Minister Ōkubo and Finance Minister Okuma Shigenobu (1838–1922). He objected to industrialization based on a heavy land tax and on the elimination of pensions granted the samurai and the former feudal lords in 1869.²⁸ A lingering sympathy for unfortunate members of his own class plus an intense fear of profeudal rebellion had caused him to deemphasize his earlier anti-feudal program.

The plan to commute samurai pensions to bonds capitalized on the basis of six years' income drew fire from Kido as early as May 14, 1873. Since the proposal provided for a small lump-sum settlement and the pensionaries lacked sufficient training to enter new vocations, it constituted official robbery. In emphasizing the injustice of the plan, Kido wrote, "The stipends are like . . . private property, so we cannot suddenly deprive [the samurai] of these. . . . The samurai are not criminals; they are subjects of the Empire." Better to train them as merchants or artisans, he believed, rather than cast them adrift as potential rebels. For consideration, he presented a program already operating in Chōshū. It called for payment of two thirds of the samurai stipends for a period of twenty years, allowing the remainder to accumulate for business capital available in a lump-sum at the end.²⁹

Compulsory commutation of the pensions did not win approval in 1873, but despite Kido's protests there was approval of Finance Minister Okuma's proposal to ward off a government deficit by voluntary commutation and a "tax" on all pensions. A heavy tax, Kido believed, would be only a prelude to rapid and compulsory abolition of the pensions—a most unjust move. Okuma's program was also unwise, Kido believed, in that it would drive into opposition the samurai—the only patriotic class and the only group concerned with public affairs. "Now if we rob two or three millions [of samurai and their families] of food and clothing . . . we shall extinguish patriotism in their starvation and cold." Wait until

²⁸ When the central government assumed responsibility for the samurai rice stipends from the *han* governments in 1869, it halved the payments.

²⁹ May 14, 1872, Washington, *Kido nikki*, II, 174–175; *Kido monjo*, VIII, 107–111 for text of memorial.

the other classes—the peasants, artisans, and merchants—had attained political maturity, he counseled.⁸⁰

The allotment tax and the voluntary commutation plan had not really constituted serious blows against the samurai, but it left them uneasy concerning future government moves against them.

Kido sensed samurai discontent during frequent visits to Chōshū, and in 1876 made a last-ditch fight to preserve the pensions. Kido admitted the anachronistic character of the samurai, but pleaded for a pension capitalization plan which would not impoverish them. Samurai poverty would obstruct the economy of the whole nation, he contended in a memorial of March 13, 1876. He also charged that government leaders “seated in luxury in the great metropolis . . . do not perceive clearly conditions in the rural regions.”⁸¹

Kido’s appeal for delay failed to win oligarchy approval. On August 5, 1876, the government announced extinction of the pensions. They would be replaced by 5 to 7 per cent bonds capitalized on the basis of five to fourteen years of pensions. Kido’s failure to secure postponement was regrettable in view of the many samurai rebellions which followed. Perhaps delay would even have drawn the poison of discontent from the Saigō samurai-rebels of 1877.⁸²

Unsuccessful spokesman for the samurai, Kido enjoyed limited success as patron of the peasantry. In 1876 during an inspection tour of northern Japan with the Emperor Meiji, Kido had observed the shocking contrast between the wretched rural area and the prosperous capital. The difference he attributed to the crushing land tax which, though fixed at 3 per cent of assessed valuation, often amounted to 30 per cent to 40 per cent of the crop yield. Payable in cash, the new tax forced peasants to unload crops just after harvest when prices were lowest.

In an eloquent memorial of May 15, 1876, Kido reversed an earlier position and came out for decentralization of government. Oppressive fiscal policies of the ruling faction of the Tokyo oligarchy had impoverished the outlying prefectures. In a homely analogy Kido depicted Japan as a living organism.

The prefectures are the limbs; the central government is the head; and the blood circulates through the whole in the form of money. During some years past the government has collected from the prefectures money and rich which

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 144–147.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 159–164; *Kido den*, II, 1951–1954.

⁸² Former feudal lords likewise commanded Kido’s solicitude. He proposed to retain the allegiance of the old feudal aristocracy by giving the ex-lords wealth and responsibility enough to integrate them into the new nobility.

it has not allowed to be applied to the wants of the people of those jurisdictions, areas which become more impoverished day by day, just as if all the blood in the body were drawn to the head:

To alleviate the unfortunate situation Kido would allot the prefectures a larger proportion of the sixty million yen national budget than the four million yen currently assigned them. He would establish village and city assemblies to handle local responsibilities, and he would assign natives as prefectural governors.⁸³

Not until peasant revolts in Mie and Ibaraki prefectures in December, 1876, had startled Kido's colleagues into an awareness of the peasant problem did the government act. Action stemmed from Kido's six-point memorial of December 22 in which he emphasized reduction of the land tax, separation of national and local budgets, and the creation of village and city assemblies to fix tax rates and to control local expenditures. At the same time, he expressed unyielding opposition to all imperial ordinances which restricted personal liberty.⁸⁴

Shortly afterwards, on January 4, 1877, Kido won approval for reduction of the land tax from 3 per cent to 2½ per cent of established valuation. Surprisingly, Home Minister Ōkubo supported the reduction. But the triumph was short-lived, for the government restored the 3 per cent tax soon after Kido's death in July.

All in all, Kido was not always consistent. For example, his demand for severe and arbitrary enforcement of the press laws against editors who criticized him in 1876 cast doubt on the sincerity of his frequent pleas for individual liberties. Nor was he always successful. He himself feared as death approached that gradual progress toward representative government had ceased. At the same time agrarian and samurai classes revolted when his program to alleviate their distress failed to win government approval.

Completely successful or not, Kido was a moderating influence within the oligarchy. His ideal of a progressive government at peace with the world and with its own people gained some favor. Perhaps two decades without major foreign wars were his chief legacy to Japan. Certainly, any Japanese statesman whose views approximated occidental liberalism holds interest for post-World War II Japan.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Kido monjo*, VIII, 165-177; Charles Le Gendre, *Progressive Japan* (New York and Yokohama, 1878), 62-63 fn., for a partial translation.

⁸⁴ *Kido monjo*, VIII, 177-186; December 24, 1876, *Kido nikki*, III, 467-469.

⁸⁵ Perhaps Kido furnishes the sort of precedent which Ambassador Iguchi Sadao had in mind when he wrote, "The democratic reforms instituted by the occupation have found acceptance because they represent a restoration of a spontaneous indigenous tendency which had been only temporarily subverted." Sadao Iguchi, "The Place of Japan in a Resurgent Asia," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* CCXCIV (1954), 12.