

Alyssa Powell

Dr. Wright

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Japan: State and Nationalism

Many arguments proposed towards how the country of Japan should exercise authority were made based on two main subjects: who should have power in the State and how the State should interact with the people within the country. Additionally, much of the rationale behind the proposals of these arguments were based on different individual's political identities. Ito Hirobumi, Kita Ikki, and Ishibashi Tanzan are all great examples of displaying differences in the two main points as mentioned above as well as varying political ideologies.

One of the main arguments towards a strong call to exercise imperial authority was proposed by Ito Hirobumi, who is well known for his contribution to the draft of the Meiji Constitution. The articles within the Meiji Constitution grant insight to Ito's staunch loyalty to the Emperor and desire for a long-reigning imperial dynasty. Article I of the Meiji Constitution, headlined 'The Emperor,' is a perfect example of how important the emperor is to Ito Hirobumi as well as many others who lived in the late 1800s. Compared to the Taisho rule before the Meiji Restoration, the emphasis on the Emperor, as well as a national polity, *kokutai*, is intended to be viewed as progressive and the start to a newly formed empire of Japan.

In Ito Hirobumi's commentary of Article I, he proposes the guidelines set for the distinction between sovereign and 'subject,' as he refers to the people of Japan: "By 'reigned over and governed' is meant that the Emperor on his Throne combines in himself the

sovereignty of the State and the government of the country and of his subjects” (*The Meiji Japan Through Contemporary Sources* 182). With this description, the people of Japan are set to revere the Emperor, and are expected to look up to him with all honor. This distinction of being ruled over as ‘subjects’ and inferiority to the Emperor is further fleshed out in Ito’s commentary of Article XX, where he proclaims that the citizens of Japan are “to protect the existence, the independence, and the glory of the country” (Ibid 191). He discusses how the male subjects of Japan must participate in protecting the country in wartime, yet also grants fixed rights of the people in regards to taxes, justice, and freedom of speech among others. It can be assumed that Ito Hirobumi had no interest in political parties, as he is evidently loyal to the Emperor, and favored an all-powerful governmental rule. To Ito Hirobumi, the definition of nationalism is plain and simple: all for one, and one for all.

On the other hand, a critic of Ito Hirobumi’s regards to national polity and the imperial household was Kita Ikki. Kita Ikki’s writing, “An Outline Plan for the Reorganization of Japan,” focused on a greater Japan through advocating expansion of territory through military rule, and hence was popular in far-right Japanese politics. Kita’s view of Asia was that there was potential for a continent-wide revolution and Japan needed to make changes within society to assume leadership in this ‘new’ Asia (Theodore et al., *Ishibashi Tanzan: A Liberal Business Journalist* 272). Kita Ikki was entirely against large corporations who had power over much of Japan’s economy, who were referred to as *zaibatsu*, and likewise advocated for the people and described them as such; ‘people,’ rather than the term ‘subjects’ used repeatedly by Ito Hirobumi (Great observation, Alyssa (comment from Prof. Wright)). Kita lists incidents involving countries who have betrayed Japan in the past as evidence for his idea of a ‘revolutionary Asia’ and notes that

despite the hardships Japan has been through, what “brightens the picture is the 60 million fellow countrymen with whom we are blessed,” (Ibid 273). The relationship the State should have with society, as Kita suggests, is a bond not shared between a ruler and its subjects, but is rather a compromise between all people of the country towards one goal: to become the strongest nation. It is to be noted, however, that Kita’s advances were not entirely of a socialist nature but rather an authoritarian one.

In terms of modern Japan and the long-ruling Liberal Democratic political party, Ishibashi Tanzan’s basis of ultra liberalism and economic expertise is much more relevant. Although many people may have been yearning to expand the nation’s territory, such as Kita Ikki, Ishibashi notes in his writing “The Fantasy of Greater Japan” that “Greater Japanism has no value” if people are simply being sent abroad and not strengthening the country from home (Theodore et al., *Ishibashi Tanzan: A Liberal Business Journalist* 186). He breaks down how giving up overseas territories may be the key to becoming a greater nation. By giving up possessions abroad and foreign influences, the State can refocus efforts on Japan’s own cultural and economic development. Ishibashi Tanzan essentially focused on a quality over quantity outlook, as he would have preferred for the country to focus on itself and improve its own internal issues rather than spreading thin the labor and capital needed to do so.

Ito Hirobumi, Kita Ikki, and Ishibashi Tanzan each took pride in their country in a different way, however, one similar aspect of each of their arguments was a desire to establish a strong country with its own distinct culture and representation. Overall, they each understand nationalism as pride in the State and strengthening it to the best of their abilities, yet have

different takes on how that could be achieved based on a preference towards passiveness, aggressiveness, and other varying positions in relation to their view of politics.

Works Cited

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[Excellent work, Alyssa! Nicely organized and well-articulated. (Comment from Prof. Wright)]