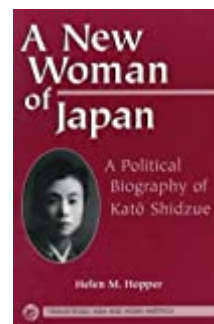


Helen M. Hopper. *A New Woman of Japan: A Political Biography of Kato Shidzue.* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996. xviii + 304 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-3422-6.



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Helen Hopper has provided us with a richly detailed political biography of Kato Shidzue, a twentieth-century Japanese woman whom we thought we knew fairly well because her 1935 autobiography, *Facing Two Ways* was originally written and published in English and was widely available as a staple in most university library collections. As recently as 1984, *Facing Two Ways* was reprinted with a brief Introduction and an Afterword by Barbara Molony, a noted scholar in the field. However, Hopper has gone far beyond anyone else in terms of uncovering archival material which sheds light on Kato's personal and political life. After reading Hopper's book, we cannot fail to appreciate that Kato Shidzue was a complex and intriguing historical personality whose life offers rich insights into modern Japanese history and especially the place of women activists in both the prewar and postwar periods.

Hopper points out in the preface an interesting anomaly. Not only has no biography of Kato Shidzue appeared in Japanese, but, when other prominent feminists and activists in the prewar women's movement have written their own memoirs or autobiographies, they have made little mention of Shidzue. Hopper refers specifically to Yamakawa Kikue, Miyamoto Yuriko, and Ichikawa Fusae, but others could be added to the list as well. Fortunately, Hopper does a good job placing

Kato in the context of some of these other women activists. For example, when discussing the early postwar formation of the *Fujin minshu kurabu* [Women's Democratic Club], she discusses in some detail the contributions of women such as Matsuoka Yoko, Hani Sestsuko, Miyamoto Yuriko, Sata Ineko, Akamatsu Tsuneko, and Yamamoto Sugi (pp. 176 ff).

Known as a Baroness, a feminist, and a member of the Japan Socialist party who was elected to both houses of the Diet in the postwar era, Kato was a woman who made a significant impact on her times. Perhaps she is best known, however, for her advocacy of Family Planning in Japan and her courageous championing of Margaret Sanger's first visit to Japan in 1922. A great admirer and friend of Sanger's, Kato was at her side during all seven of Sanger's trips to Japan. As Hopper points out in an interesting aside, over the years, Sanger "began to believe that only in Japan did she enjoy the reception she deserved." Disappointed with her treatment in her own land, Sanger stated in her will that she wished her heart to be removed before cremation and sent to Japan "to be buried in Tokyo—any place the govt. or health and Welfare Minister together with Senator Shizue Kato wish to have it buried, as it is or in ashes" (p. 266).

Kato had first met Sanger in New York in January 1920, when an acquaintance of hers, Agnes Smedley, who

edited Sanger's new journal, *Birth Control Review*, introduced the two. Known then as the Baroness Ishimoto, Kato's journey to New York had been a strange one. After graduating from the Peeresses' School, she was married to the eccentric, "liberal" Baron Ishimoto Keikichi at age seventeen. After a brief stint supervising laborers at Mitsui's Miike Coal Mine on Kyushu, the Baron and his wife returned to Kamakura where, inspired by the Russian Revolution, Ishimoto began immersing himself in the study of Marxism, socialism and labor problems. Convinced that radical steps were necessary, he left for the United States in February of 1919 and wrote postcards home urging his wife to join him. She left two infant children at home with her husband's family and sailed to San Francisco, later traveling on to New York where her husband abandoned her so that she could learn to become an independent and self-supporting woman. To that end, she had enrolled in a secretarial course at the Ballard School in the YWCA building. Baron Ishimoto went on to Washington D.C. and Europe, where Shidzue eventually joined him before they both returned to Japan. The next year, he took her on a trip to Korea and China.

In the course of time, however, Ishimoto tired of radical causes, expected Shidzue to be more of a traditional wife, and became enthralled with the notion of empire, setting off to build a utopia in Manchuria in the early 1930s. Referring to this in a 1948 autobiography published in Japanese, Kato notes "My husband had made a 180 degree conversion from his position as an intellectual humanist and a pacifist and had embraced the theory that it was natural for Japan to undertake imperialist aggression in Manchuria and Mongolia...He considered this a way to make a living while aiding Japan's national policy of opening up new lands" (p. 45). At any rate, it was enough to convince Shidzue that they no longer had a marriage worth preserving, and, although both families rejected the idea of divorce, Shidzue entered a close relationship with friend and social activist Kato Kanju. Both were married at the time, but, when Kanju's first wife died of cancer in 1941, they began the long process of extricating Shidzue from her first marriage, which required approval from the Imperial Household Agency and occurred only over the objections of her family, which felt that marrying a socialist labor organizer was beneath Shidzue's station. Eventually, they did marry in 1944, and in the following year, she gave birth to a daughter, Takiko, when she was forty-eight years old. Shidzue spoke of this child as a "miracle" baby sent to replace her older son, Tamio, who had died in the war.

As intriguing as this part of Shidzue's life story is, I

found her relationships with various American women, and the extensive correspondence which Shidzue maintained with them, to be among the most interesting features of Hopper's biography. Professor Hopper has done an enormous amount of archival digging in order to unearth Shidzue's extensive correspondence with Margaret Sanger (Library of Congress), with the historian Mary Beard (Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College), and with Lt. Ethel Weed, who was part of the occupation's Civil Information and Education Section (National Archives, Suitland, Maryland). Hopper also used the Roger Baldwin papers held at Princeton University. The result of all this digging is a more detailed portrait of this fascinating woman than we have of any other comparable figure, and some fresh insights into early postwar political developments.

I was also intrigued by the chilly reception Shidzue received, even from her American friends, when she published in 1939 an English translation of two short works by Hino Ashihei (pseudonym for writer Tamai Katsunori), *Tsuchi to heitai* [Earth and Soldiers] and *Mugi to heitai* [Wheat and soldiers]. Shidzue saw these works "as a protest against the cruelty of war...a cry against the destruction of any human life" (p. 122), but reviewers in America dismissed it as "propagandist" and T. A. Bisson considered Shidzue an "apologist for the government who had committed *tenko*, that is, had converted to a pro-militarist position" (p. 128). So, too, apparently did her friend Mary Beard, who chastised her in a letter and wondered if she would ever be able to meet with Shidzue again (pp. 128-29).

This was not the only time Shidzue startled and disappointed her friends and allies. In the tumultuous years of the late 1950s, Shidzue, who had been drawn into Dr. Frank Buchman's Moral Rearmament movement in the early 1950s, supported a fellow MRA sympathizer, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, when the controversial Security Treaty with the U.S. was before the Diet. While the JSP and JCP, and the entire left wing movement in Japan, adamantly opposed the treaty, as did hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens from all walks of life, Kato Shidzue, a member of the House of Councillors, supported it. She labeled the popular protests against the treaty "an extremely dangerous attempt to throw out the government by violence, planned by a small group of people run by subversive ideology," and she vowed "to fight all out to save Japan from communism and create a real democracy" (p. 275). Seemingly, she had come a long way from being firmly entrenched in Japan's prewar and postwar socialist movement which leads Hopper to

dub Kato a “political maverick.”

It is not easy to fathom how Kato’s beliefs shifted so dramatically, but Hopper does a good job explaining how the philosophy of the MRA wound up appealing to her. In a fascinating section of the book, Hopper describes the cathartic “religious” conversion Shidzue experienced in 1951 at MRA “sharing sessions” held on Mackinac Island in upper Michigan (pp. 253-56). There, she heard accounts of an early postwar conversion of a French socialist woman, veteran of the underground resistance movement whose own son had been tortured by the Germans, yet found it in her heart to forgive the Germans and even apologized for harboring hatred of them. This caused Shidzue to reflect on the Asian peoples her country had oppressed and to also think about her estranged relationship with her step-daughter Sumiko. In these circumstances, she had a “life-changing” experience, weeping openly, a part of something she later described as “that pride of mine” (p. 255).

Hopper is probably correct when she argues that Kato’s long years as an Americanophile predisposed her to be drawn into a spiritual, anti-communist organization, but she also maintains that Shidzue’s belief in democratic socialism was a constant throughout her career. Can the two be easily reconciled? To be sure, Kato grew disillusioned over her inability to overcome male-dominance within the Diet, the bureaucracy, and even the JSP, and this frustrated her. But her decision to abandon her colleagues on the left and support the Security Treaty cannot be taken lightly. The approval of the Security Treaty was a pivotal moment in postwar history, a source of deep disillusionment for many Japanese. But Hopper never really attempts to demonstrate how the feelings of those whose hopes for genuine democracy in Japan were dashed by this decision compared with the sort of disillusionment Kato experienced. Moreover, it was not difficult for Kato, in 1948, to label her first husband’s enthusiasm for the imperialist adventure in

Manchuria as “a 180 degree conversion from his position as an intellectual humanist and pacifist,” but neither she herself, nor Hopper seem to see her 1960 support for the Security Treaty in an analogous manner.

Nevertheless, Hopper’s detailed study of Kato’s political life, and her struggles to reform the Eugenics Law which favored abortion over contraception, constitute a valuable addition to the literature on women’s issues in Japan. I found only a few things with which to quibble in this book. The manuscript seems to be plagued by some odd word usage and a number of typographical errors. For example, on page 266 we find mention of Margaret Sanger’s death in 1966 just prior to her “eight-eighth” birthday. More substantively, the author takes on a decidedly romantic tone when treating Shidzue’s relationship with Kato Kanju as though it was a true love destined to overcome all obstacles and be realized. Thus, Hopper is able to write of her subject’s “loss of male companionship and love” as her marriage to Baron Ishimoto came apart, and how she tried unsuccessfully to console herself with the love poems in the Manyoshu, but that this could not provide “the emotional fulfillment she needed to survive” (p. 46); and she also frequently writes about how “Many times during the day Shidzue’s thoughts turned to her beloved Kanju” (p. 141). This approach seems not only a little quaint, but somehow to assume a certain heroic model of interpersonal relationships—a love which cannot be thwarted—which may, or may not, have much to do with the historical figures involved. But these are very small quibbles to raise about a book which is wonderfully researched and organized and will stand the test of time as a substantive contribution to the field of Japan studies and women’s studies, as well as both social and political history.

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