On the Modern Girls by Kiyoshi Kiyosawa

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This paper examines all of the works written in the 1920s by Kiyoshi Kiyosawa (1890-1945) on women and their problems in society, including Modern Girls (Kinseido, 1926), as "modern girl theory".

In chapter 1, I discuss two aspects of Kiyosawa's "modern girl" theory: modern girl theory as a "concept", and the criticism of Japanese society seen in "The Woman of the Harbin Night". In the case of the former, the principles of "modern girl" are shown to form the basis of an argument to emancipate Japanese women from feudal customs and morality. This argument, however, goes beyond feminism; by taking women's problems in the wider context of society's problems, and by trying to solve those problems, it is a debate that aspires to the democratisation of Japanese society as a whole. In the case of the latter, the Harbin "Woman of the Night" is shown to be an essay where Kiyosawa thoroughly criticised Japanese society, in which women were systematically oppressed, as well as the general mentality of Japanese people.

In chapter 2, I have tried to place Kiyosawa's modern girl theory in the context of modern girl theory and feminism/ the feminist movement in Japan in the 1920s. In the case of the former, unlike Marxist and conservative intellectuals, Kiyosawa has attempted to address modern girls at a conceptual level. My interpretation is that Kiyosawa's modern girl theory was a criticism of the "manners" of the modern girls who actually existed. With regards to feminism and the feminist movement, I discuss the anti-prostitution movement and its conceptual basis and explain the meaning behind Kiyosawa's Blue-Stocking "new woman" and Nora criticism. As a debate which aspired to establish a break with the "good wife, good mother" paradigm, the dissipation of political, economic and moral inequality between men and women, as well as to the democratisation of Japanese society, I conclude that Kiyosawa's modern girl theory was a feminist theory.

Finally, I look at how Kiyosawa's modern girl theory developed from a deep awareness of society's problems based on personal experience, before examining each characteristic and problematic area, as well as the characteristic of "liberalism as a frame of mind" that stems from these.

Key Words: Kiyoshi Kiyosawa, 1920s, Modern girls, "liberalism as a frame of mind", feminism