

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Tokutomi Sohō and the “Asiatic Monroe Doctrine,” 1917

Alistair Swale

Journalist, critic and historian Tokutomi Iichirō (better known under his pen name Sohō, 1863–1957) was born in Kumamoto to a farmer-samurai family (on Tokutomi’s life, see Pierson 1980; Swale 2003). After studying at the Kumamoto School of Western Studies, he entered Dōshisha Academy for English studies in Kyoto but dropped out before graduation. Having become famous as the author of *Shōrai no Nihon* (The Future Japan, 1886), he moved to Tokyo and founded a political organization called the Mīnyūsha (Society of the People’s Friends). Subsequently, he founded and edited the daily *Kokumin no Tomo* (The Nation’s Friend, 1888–1898) and, after 1890, *Kokumin Shinbun* (The Nation Newspaper) and acquired a reputation as an outspoken advocate of popular rights (Ariyama 1992).

Tokutomi was so shocked by the Triple Intervention of 1895 that, as he confessed in his autobiography, he “became a different person intellectually” and turned into an apologist for state power. He now drew increasingly closer to the ruling elites and began actively to participate in politics. In 1911 he was appointed a member of the House of Peers. Tokutomi’s ties to the government provided him with access to information and ensured a largely positive reception for his newspaper as an outlet for patriotic content especially after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 (Wada 1990: 229–46). As the Hibiya Riots that occurred after that war show, the peace treaty that Japan signed with Russia in 1905 was unpopular, and Tokutomi, who was identified with the government, saw his newspapers attacked by protesters. In reaction, Tokutomi sought to regain his popularity by finding a new cause—the threat posed by China and finding a solution to various issues concerning the Korean peninsula. To this end, he became involved in the expansionist Tōyō Kyōkai (Association of the East) in 1907. Following the formation of the second Katsura Cabinet in 1908 he redoubled his efforts in support of the

government. He participated in the exhibition of "Meiji heroes" presented at Ueno Park in 1910, and following the annexation of Korea he launched the *Seoul Daily*.

Over the next thirty years Tokutomi continued as a leading figure of Japanese journalism, producing numerous best-sellers, such as *Taishō no Seinen to Teikoku no Shōrai* (The Youth of the Taishō Era and the Future of the Empire), as well as solid works of historical research, including the authorized multivolumed biographies of influential politicians such as Prince Katsura Tarō (1847–1913; *Kōshaku Katsura Tarō Den*, 1917) and Prince Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922; *Kōshaku Yamagata Aritomo Den*, 1933).

During World War II, Tokutomi played a central role in the process of "spiritual mobilization" of public opinion for the war effort. In 1942, he became chairman of the Nihon Bungaku Hōkokukai (Patriotic Association for Japanese Literature; see Sakuramoto 1995) and the Dai Nihon Genron Hōkokukai (Great Japan Patriotic Writers Association). After the war, he was arrested as a class A war criminal and purged from public office, but he continued to write and in 1952 completed a monumental 100-volume *Kinsei Nihon Kokuminshi* (A History of the Japanese People in Early Modern Japan; Wada 1990: 7–13), the first volume of which had appeared in 1924.

The texts reproduced here, published in 1913 and 1917, are an expression of a growing self-confidence of Japan in the international arena. Tokutomi, by the time of World War I, had become an advocate of some form of East Asian regionalism premised on Japanese leadership in East Asia and a proponent of strong Japanese policy toward the Western powers. The texts call for the realization of an "Asiatic Monroe Doctrine," which held that non-Asian powers must not interfere in Asian affairs and that the East Asian region must be eventually unified under Japanese leadership (Nakamura 1991). They also express Tokutomi's views on Japan's "options" for imperial expansion onto the continent and out into the Pacific, along with a critical summary of the foreign policies of the nations that such expansion would affect (Wada 1990: 96–104).

"An Opinion on Current Issues" (1913) is particularly instructive in that it is a reflection of Tokutomi's thinking at a stage when he had become part of the political elite and held official posts. Two preoccupations emerge distinctly: one with the transformation of Japan into a great power and the other concerning the refining of a distinctive analysis of international relations based on a global balance of power and race. Drawing to some extent on the social Darwinist logic of connecting psychological traits of "national character" to natural environment, he argued for the modification of the Japanese people's insular outlook; the corollary of attempting this was in fact the development of a continental base not only in the sense of expanding the realm

but also in order to obtain a physical environment capable of transforming the Japanese character. Such an expansion would naturally upset the balance of power in the region by challenging the European powers whose interests were ever expanding on the continent. This necessitated a new diplomatic line that would exclude Western interests but enable Japan to maintain an independent initiative: this is what provided the impetus behind developing an Asian Monroe Doctrine (Umetsu 2006: 16–31; Ariyama 1992: 62–67). Tokutomi was increasingly regional in his conception of the dynamics of international relations. However, his conclusions were pulling him away from his initial ideas of liberal internationalism. Tokutomi's view of Japan's relations with the Greater Asian region stemmed from social Darwinist musings about the relative vigour of the Western Great Powers and the series of plausible options available to the Far East's only state capable of standing up to them—Japan. "An Opinion on Current Issues" is replete with references to a balancing of the relative status of "white" and "yellow" races, and indeed it is clear that Tokutomi found it difficult to discuss relative international power without reference to the issue of race.

The evocation of the Asian Monroe Doctrine, a doctrine that Tokutomi had propounded since the mid-1910s (Yonehara 2003), was a highly adroit gambit to articulate a Japanocentric view of Asian affairs while maintaining the semblance of a parallel with a contemporary diplomatic line of thought. Tokutomi's version of the doctrine, as illustrated in the following excerpts, was not animated by a positive view of how Monroeism had played out hitherto. Indeed, in his "Opinion," Tokutomi highlighted the manner in which the original *American* Monroe Doctrine had become a cover for a particularly capricious brand of self-serving diplomacy. Nonetheless, he remained confident that Japan could construct an Asian Monroe Doctrine without hypocrisy.

Tokutomi subscribed to the notion that Japan must earn the respect of fellow Asians if it were to have any chance of fulfilling its manifest duty to defend the East from Western encroachment. However, this was countered by his pessimistic view of the capacity of any other major Eastern national entity, particularly China, to thwart Western ambitions. Tokutomi was inclined to view China as about to collapse, and the power vacuum would be filled by the Western powers or the Japanese. Tokutomi strongly believed that it was "best" for Japan to be prepared to fill that void. This, as "Japan's Mighty Mission" demonstrates, in Tokutomi's view, could be achieved only by establishing an Asiatic Monroe Doctrine. The timing was perfect since, after the outbreak of World War I, the Western powers were entangled in European affairs, producing a power vacuum in East Asia. However, sooner or later the Western powers were bound to return, making a clash between the West and Japan inevitable. In this way, Tokutomi's insistence on Japan as the leader of

Asia contributed to the deterioration of relations between the Western powers and Japan, becoming eventually a self-fulfilling prophecy.

After a period of abeyance in the 1920s, Tokutomi's Asiatic Monroe Doctrine acquired a new lease of life in the early 1930s when it was used to legitimize both the Japanese annexation of Manchuria and the foundation of the puppet state of Manchukuo (Takaki 1932; *New York Times*, 20 July 1933). The 1934 statement by the Foreign Ministry's Amau Eiji (1887–1968), which insisted that Western powers refrain from meddling in China, was generally interpreted by Western (as well as Chinese) observers as an expression of this resurgence of the Asiatic Monroe Doctrine (e.g., Hugh Byas's article in the *New York Times*, 26 August 1934; Wang 1934). Although the Amau statement was subsequently revised, this version of the doctrine soon became a quasi-official foreign policy of Japan (cf. Kamikawa 1939). This fact reflected an increasing popularity of pan-Asian sentiments in the Japan of the 1930s.

Source 1 (English in the original)

Tokutomi Iichirō, "Japan's Mighty Mission," in Taraknath Das, *Is Japan a Menace to Asia?* Shanghai: no publisher, 1917, 153–59.

The Japan Chronicle of January 19, 1917, published the following article as a translation of a portion of Mr. Tokutomi's recent work "The Rising Generation in the Taisho Era and the Future of the Japanese Empire," which is one of the most popular publications issued in Japan of recent years. The distinguished author is an ardent advocate of the policy known as "Asiatic Monroe Doctrine."

Japan's Mighty Mission

By

Hon. Mr. Iichiro Tokutomi

The Chief Editor and Proprietor of the Kokumin Shinbun, Crown Member of the House of Peers of Japan, etc.

...

What . . . is the mission of the Japanese Empire? In my opinion, it is of more urgent importance for Japan to try to restore the equilibrium between the White and Yellow races than to indulge in the chimerical theory of accomplishing the unification of the world, as is preached by some irresponsible Japanese. . . .

By the Asiatic Monroe Doctrine we mean the principle that Asiatic affairs should be dealt with by the Asiatics. As, however, there is no Asiatic nation

except the Japanese capable of under taking these duties, the Asiatic Monroe Doctrine is virtually the principle of the Japanese dealing with Asiatic affairs.

There must be no misunderstanding as to the meaning of this doctrine. We do not hold so narrow-minded a view as to wish to attempt to drive the Whites out of Asia. What we want is simply that we become independent of the Whites, or Yellows free of the rampancy of the Whites. . . .

The not essential point that the Japanese people should bear in mind in carrying out the Asiatic Monroe Doctrine is that they must first win the respect and affection of the Eastern races and the deference of the Whites. The Asian Monroe doctrine is the principle of Eastern autonomy, that is, of Orientals dealing with Eastern questions. . . .

We are ready to leave the Europeans to attend to European affairs, and the Americans to American questions, but we demand that they should leave Orientals to attend to their own questions, just as we, Eastern peoples, do not interfere with their affairs. However earnestly they may preach the principle of universal brotherhood, the theory of the Whites, who regard not their property but other people's property as their own, is scarcely tenable before the impartial judgement of the Almighty. . . .

The mighty object of the [Meiji] Restoration was to place Japan on a par with the Great Powers. In other words, it consisted in safeguarding the independence of this country. The question of today is not the independence of the Japanese Empire but her expansion. This leads to the birth of the Eastern autonomy theory. Now that the national rights of this country are recovered, it is incumbent upon the Yamato race to try to recover for the weaker nations of the East their rights, which have been trampled underfoot by other powers.

If once Japan attains these objects, we must refrain from abusing our influence to bring pressure to bear on the Whites, but we must exert ourselves to break down the racial and religious prejudices to which the Whites are wedded, and show the world that the civilizations of the East and the West are reconcilable, that the White and the Yellow races are by no means natural enemies to each other, and that if they join hands on an equal plane, the ideal of universal brotherhood is not necessarily impossible to realise. . . .

Source 2 (translation from the Japanese original by Alistair Swale)

Tokutomi Sohō, "Jimu Ikkagen" (An Opinion on Current Issues), reproduced in Tokutomi Sohō (1974), *Meiji Bungaku Zenshū* (Complete Collection of Meiji Literature) vol. 34. Chikuma Shobō, 301–14.

In the current tide of world trends I believe that there is no other case as exceptional in its significance as [the emergence of] the United States. And if George Washington himself were alive to see events as they now stand he

would certainly feel that he had fallen from outer space onto a completely different planet. It was Washington who argued forcefully in print that America ought to be a nation remaining the total master of its own fate, presenting a threat to no other nation and in turn being threatened by no other nation. But what do we see today? We see that America, though already one of the great powers of the world, exercises that power almost as if it were in constant danger of being interfered with. While denying the right of others to "interfere" as a matter of course, it takes it upon itself to strut around in the world and undertake to solve all manner of problems.

I would like to attempt here an exposition of the so-called "Monroe Doctrine," although I acknowledge that definitions of the term have become more diverse and expanded over time. As the "Holy Alliance" [coalition initiated in 1815 by Russia, Austria, and Prussia that eventually included most European powers], more specifically Spain, attempted to restore its claim over territories in the New World, the then United States President [James] Monroe [1817–1825], stated that he regarded such a move as a pretext for interfering with the affairs of North America. It was at this point that he declared that the United States could not condone the colonizing activities of the European powers. In essence it was simply an embellishment of the sentiments earlier expressed by Washington.

However, by the time of President [Ulysses S.] Grant [1869–1877], the doctrine's meaning developed somewhat and came to signify something that was completely non-negotiable between the United States and Europe. Under [Grover] Cleveland [1885–1889 and 1893–1897] the implications of this [doctrine] were pursued more forcefully so that a clean break was declared with the powers of Europe and it was asserted that the sole right of adjudication in diplomatic affairs in the Americas lay solely with the United States. It almost precipitated a war with Britain. As it turned out, this war never happened as the British government backed down, but the result was that through this notion of the Monroe Doctrine, United States hegemony became almost complete throughout the Americas. And we do not know for sure what new "interpretations" of the doctrine might emerge from now on. . . .

The foreign policy of the United States today is the distillation of an utterly simplistic conception of the Monroe Doctrine. Problems are treated as being of concern to the United States even in matters that are in no way connected directly to it, with no external meddling permitted. It is as if the [Americans'] aim is not just to have control over their own country but to take the entire North American continent (Canada being in some ways separate) and exclude all other influences. Even in the case of Mexico they act as if it were their own.

It seems that, while outwardly projecting an image of promoting an open door policy, America is determined to follow the implications of the doctrine

regardless of whether there is a special connection to that country or not. There is not much more that needs to be said about this, and it should suffice to raise the example of [U.S. Secretary of State Philander C.] Knox's memorandum on the "neutrality" of the Manchurian Railway [1909]. The world is now fully aware of what this means in terms of what I have described as America's misconceived foreign policy of no self-restraint. Even so, it must have come as something of a tremendous shock. But at least we can take some solace out of the fact that America's power, though substantial, does not exactly extend to the interior of Manchuria. It is the classic case of the rider whose whip is too long to use even on his own horse!

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How will China develop from now on? And what are we supposed to do about China? These are weighty questions that are far too difficult to deal with in just a few sentences. In any event, given that China is a neighboring country and a font of civilization that has had an enormous impact on the shape of our own nation, we are particularly obliged to maintain a view on China's position in relation to ourselves. It is this that I regard as being one of the primary reasons that we should continue to attach importance to the Manchurian Railway.

One of the primary justifications offered during the Triple Intervention which sought the retrocession of the Liaodung (Liaotung) Peninsula to China [1895] was that it [the Japanese annexation of this territory] would present an immediate threat to Peking and thereby undermine the independence of China. What of course happened is that no sooner had we returned that territory to China but the Russians came in and attempted to take control of the area for themselves. There is a great deal that we ought to learn from the facts of this matter. As it applied to Peking then so does it apply to our position in Manchuria now. Indeed not only Manchuria but even in relation to Mongolia as well. . . .

It is precisely with a view to securing the integrity of Chinese territory that we need to undertake the administration of Manchuria and Mongolia. And if it comes to the situation that the powers proceed to carve up that territory by force we need to be in Manchuria and Mongolia to ensure that we are amongst the lions to get our share. . . .

All going well, we will be able to promote the transplanting of our people and our economic development through Manchuria and Mongolia. If things do go amiss in China, we will most likely find that Chinese society will collapse much like a building with a high roof weighed down with tiles; that

will give us an avenue to expand to the south. We should not be thinking of further ways in which to empower ourselves at present as we already have control over China by virtue of the current treaty port arrangement at Fujian [Fukien or Fu-chien], much as control over the thigh gives one control over the entire body. Success in this regard is little more than a repetition of the exploits of Koxinga [1624–1662, de facto ruler of Taiwan between 1661 and 1662] at the end of the Ming [1368–1644] and the beginning of the Qing [Ch'ing, 1644–1911] period.

This is a summary of the arguments in favor of moving into Manchuria and Mongolia: first, offensive defense; second, the formation of a continental empire for the Yamato people; third, moving into China; and fourth, there is the prospect that the vast skies and plains of the continent will cultivate a greater courage and nobility of character in our people. The biting winds and severe cold will nurture an indomitable spirit. It will constitute a great training ground for the people of a great nation, and we should recognize it as appropriate for us.