

Beyond the 50 Years of Postwar Japan

—ポスト「戦後50年」を考える—

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司会：功刀達朗 (国際関係学科教授)

日時：November 9, 1995 (9:50-12:20)

場所：H-213

基調講演

Justifying Aggression:

From the Manchurian Incident to Pearl Harbor

William Steele

The decision to declare war on the United States on December 8, 1941 was a popular decision. Since the Manchurian Incident in 1931, despite great loss of life and personal suffering, the military had the full support of the people. Why was this? How was the war justified? Why did people choose to believe that the Asian-Pacific war was just?

Tokutomi Soho, born in 1863, was a popular journalist and author of a series of best selling books which explained Japan's national mission in Asia.¹ He supported Japan's war effort in the 1930s and was one of the main public opinion leaders of the time. His commentaries on current affairs helped to shape the ways in which the people responded to the international problems of the 1930s. His justification of Japanese aggression was widely accepted. In many ways he was the voice of the people during the 1930s.

The Japanese occupation of Manchuria after September 18, 1931 was greeted enthusiastically by Soho. The forceful actions of the Imperial Army in bringing

Manchuria under Japanese control represented a decisive break from the negative, passive, and harmful politics of internationalism that were associated with Shidehara Kijuro in the 1920s. Soho was happy that the government was finally pursuing a course of action that was truly independent and Japan centered.

Soho had long advocated what he called Japan's Monroe Doctrine. He wanted Japan to seek national greatness and importance by becoming a leader in Asia and a champion of independence and self-determination for Asians. According to Soho, "the principles of an Asian Monroe Doctrine are those of Asian self-government, of Asians determining Asian Affairs."

Soho supported the establishment of Manchukuo—the new state was the fulfillment of Japan's national mission in Asia. Manchukuo would demonstrate the benefits that would come from cooperating with Japan. Soho proposed a new order in Asia to replace Western colonial exploitation. Unlike Westerners, Japan would not ruthlessly exploit the Manchurian people. Japan would not rob countries of their riches and reduce the native peoples to poverty. Rather the Japanese would fulfill their obligations as "Asian brothers," and bring order and peace, harmony and brotherhood to Asia.

Soho supported Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. "Our withdrawal ... teaches Europeans and Americans that the world is not a place for them to monopolize, and it also shows Asians that they can be free from domination by Europeans and Americans. Our aims are self government for Asia, autonomy of Asia."

Japanese aggression was justified because Japan was liberating, not exploiting, Asia. Some government and military officials spoke of the need for Japan to acquire colonies; to acquire space for a growing population. But these economic arguments took second place to more moralistic or spiritual arguments—the liberation of Asia. Japan had a mission to maintain peace and order in Asia. Japan had left the League of Nations, rejected the decadent, materialistic, egocentric West and as-

sumed the responsibility to protect Asia. The war was Japan's historical mission to restore Asia to Asians.

Toward the mid-1930s Tokutomi became increasingly critical of the United States. After the outbreak of full-scale war between Japan and China, the United States attempted to coerce a Japanese withdrawal by imposing economic sanctions and embargoing trade. Soho's attitude toward America became belligerent. American attitudes toward Japan were irrational, indeed arrogant. "Americans seem to think as if the Far East is in their sphere of influence. America is trying to control the world and especially the Far East, as though I were their own special places."

As pressures on Japan mounted in 1940 and 1941, when oil shipments to Japan were stopped by the United States and its allies, Soho came to the conclusion that Japan must be resolved to wage war against America. Some weeks before the declaration of war was announced, Soho wrote: "No matter how easygoing the Japanese may be, we are not ones to sit by meekly and stab our backs with the left hand while suffocating ourselves with the right hand. Japanese people! Strengthen your resolve for self defense quickly!"

Soho prepared the Japanese people for war. And it was Soho who helped write the declaration of war against the United States on December 8, 1941: "It has been truly unavoidable and far from Our wishes that Our Empire has now been brought to cross swords with America and Britain. They have failed to comprehend the true intention of Our Empire and recklessly courting trouble, disturbed the peace of East Asia and compelled Our Empire to take up arms. ... The situation being such as it is, Our Empire for its existence and self-defense has no other recourse but to appeal to arms and to crush every obstacle in its path." The call was for all the people of Japan to unite in the war effort against the Western imperialism and work for peace and stability in Asia. Pearl Harbor was not a day of infamy as in the United States. Instead, largely thanks to the popular writings of Tokutomi Soho and other patriotic journalists, Pearl Harbor was a day of great rejoicing.

1. For details on the life and writings of Tokutomi Soho, see John D. Pierson, *Tokutomi Soho 1863-1957: A Journalist for Modern Japan*, Princeton University Press, 1980. Quotations from Tokutomi's writings are taken from this source. The Declaration of War passage is taken from "Documentary Material," *Contemporary Japan*, January 1942.