

The Limits of Internationalism: Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism in the Work of Nitobe Inazō

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Introduction

In July 1933, Nitobe Inazō, pre-war Japan's most prominent internationalist, embarked from Yokohama for what would be the last time. At 71 years old, Nitobe was already in poor health and had to be accompanied by a nurse, but he insisted on braving the exertions of travel. Officially, his purpose was to attend the fourth Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Banff, Alberta. However, unofficially, he had received instructions from the Foreign Ministry to mobilize support for Japan's actions in Manchuria, which had recently become the focus of intense criticism at the League of Nations. Nitobe, as both a former Under-Secretary-General of the League and an internationalist famous for promoting Japanese culture to a western audience, was uniquely suited to the task.¹

He had already visited America to propagandize for Japanese actions in Asia two years earlier, breaking his vow not to step foot in the country until the National Origins Act of 1924 was repealed. While there, he gave a series of lectures explaining the necessity and validity of Japanese expansion to a decidedly mixed reception. His trip to Canada was much in the same vein. The first thing he did upon arriving in Banff was give a speech assuring his audience of Japan's continued commitment to internationalism following its withdrawal from the League of Nations, and after the conference's conclusion, made similar arrangements throughout Canada. Despite his worsening health, he even planned to go on another speaking tour in the US and mobilize the support of local Japanese groups, having been given money to that end by the Foreign Ministry. However, Nitobe would never have the opportunity to fulfill these plans. On

¹ For an account of the Manchurian Incident and global responses to it, see Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-33* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), and Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

September 12th, while in Victoria, he fell seriously ill and collapsed in his hotel. He spent the next month in the hospital, looked after by his wife before passing away on October 15th.²

On the surface, it seems ironic that Japan's most famous internationalist would spend his final days defending Japanese militarism. For almost his entire career, Nitobe worked towards cross-cultural understanding, serving even as the head of the League of Nations Committee on International Cooperation. He was in many ways Japan's foremost proponent of the liberal, Wilsonian internationalism of the 1920s, and as an American educated Quaker, married to an American woman, embodied the cosmopolitanism he promoted. Yet, at the end of his life, he defended Japan's rejection of the very values he'd dedicated his career to. So how do we reconcile Nitobe Inazō, the self-proclaimed "bridge across the Pacific," with the Nitobe Inazō of 1931-33, the man who spent his dying days propagandizing for an increasingly militant and isolated Japan?

To an extent, this contrast is not as great as it initially appears. Despite being a promoter of international understanding, Nitobe had never been a critic of imperialism. Far from it. He served in the administration of Taiwan and was the first Chair of Colonial Studies at Tokyo Imperial University. Moreover, throughout his writings he defended Japan's colonial and military policies. As Japan's actions in Manchuria were no great departure from regular colonial practice, there is no reason to expect Nitobe to have suddenly changed his stance on the issue. Nor is there any reason to believe that internationalism and imperialism are inherently incompatible. After all, the League of Nations which Nitobe worked for also included a Mandates Commission that granted former German and Ottoman territories to the member states as de facto colonies.³

² George Oshiro, "The End: 1929-1933," in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan's Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John F. Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995): 270-1.

³ Indeed, a recurrent criticism of the League, including from Japan, was that it was simply a means of preserving the status of the western empires. Considering that the four permanent members of the League Council were Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, the foremost imperial powers of the day, there is little evidence that the internationalism of the League of the Wilsonian vocabulary of "self-determination" contradicted the colonial world order.

However, on a deeper level, Nitobe's propagandizing for the Japanese empire towards the end of his life fits into a broader pattern evident in his attempts to promote cross-cultural understanding. Nitobe is most famous as a cultural intermediary who explained Japan to the west, but the image of Japan he conveyed was never objective. Rather, throughout his career, Nitobe strategically tailored his presentation of Japanese culture and politics to defend it from actual or potential western criticism. Starting with his first and arguably most famous work, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, which attempted to establish a fundamental moral equality between Japan and the west in response to skepticism that a non-white, non-Christian nation could be considered truly civilized, Nitobe consistently attempted to present Japan in as positive a light as possible to his western audience. This is not to say that he was uncritical of Japan. He often did publicly critique various aspects of Japanese society, but he always defended the fundamental righteousness of the Japanese nation, including the legitimacy of its actions abroad. Indeed, while Nitobe was an internationalist, he repeatedly insisted that internationalism had to be founded in a strong sense of patriotism. Thus, it should come as no surprise that even after the Manchurian Incident, Nitobe remained firmly devoted to the Japanese cause.

This paper thus will examine Nitobe Inazō's career as an internationalist with a focus on how he strategically presented Japan to a European and American audience. It will pay particular attention to how Nitobe's internationalist activities evolved both with Japan's rapidly changing place in the world and the progression of his own career. Because the work of internationalists and cultural-intermediaries is inevitably conditioned by the who and what they are trying to mediate, Nitobe's public statements cannot be divorced from such factors as the position he spoke from, the audience he addressed, the discourse he operated in, and Japan's state in the world at the time. Between the time he wrote *Bushido* in 1900 and his and his death in 1933,

Nitobe went from being a relatively obscure professor to one of the most prominent intellectuals in Japan. He became a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, the headmaster of the most prestigious high school in Japan, an Under-Secretary-General of the League of Nations, and the chairman of the Japanese branch of the Institute of Pacific Relations. Similarly, following its defeat of Russia in 1905, Japan transformed itself into a great power on par with older empires that had once dominated it, a status officially recognized at the Paris Peace Conference and then increasingly criticized after its withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. By examining the context in which Nitobe acted, I will argue his work as an internationalist was not only consistently shaped by his own position but also tailored to address specific cultural and political tensions between Japan and the west.

Nitobe Inazō: His Early Life and Education

Born in Morioka domain in 1862 to a mid-ranking Samurai family, Nitobe Inazō was a child of the Meiji Restoration. When he was only 9 years old, he was sent by his family to the new capital of Tokyo where he learned English, at the time necessary for a western education and the status it brought.⁴ His newly acquired linguistic ability would eventually allow him to join the second class of Sapporo Agricultural College in 1877. Established by the American academic William Smith Clarke at the behest of the Hokkaido Colonization Office, Sapporo Agricultural College was one of the many new western-style higher education institutions founded by the Meiji government. Like most of these new schools, its classes were all conducted in a European language, English, and initially run by state-employed foreign educators. In some ways however

⁴ John F. Howes, "Roots," in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan's Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John F. Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995): 28-9.

it was unique, not only because of its marginal position in Hokkaido, then still a quasi-colonial frontier, but also due to the unusually strong influence of its founder.⁵

William Smith Clarke already had a storied career as an academic administrator in the States, having founded the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the Massachusetts Agricultural College. It was his work with the latter that prompted the government to request he create a similar institution. Despite having no knowledge of Japan or Japanese, he agreed and spent a year in Hokkaido establishing the new Sapporo Agricultural College. Coming out of the New England Congregationalist tradition, he placed a strong emphasis on moral, and particularly Christian, education. All of the members of the first class converted under his influence, and the college retained a distinctly Christian culture even after he left. When Nitobe entered the college, he and the rest of the second class were pressured into being baptized by the older students.⁶

Nitobe would continue to have doubts about his faith after his initial conversion, repeatedly waffling between which sect he felt most affinity with, but his time in Sapporo and the change of faith it inspired would have a lasting impact on his life. After graduating from Sapporo Agricultural College in 1881, he briefly enrolled at Tokyo Imperial University, but quickly decided like many of his peers to go to the United States for further education. At first, in 1884, he entered Allegheny College, a small liberal arts college near Pittsburgh. He stayed only two weeks before moving on to John Hopkins.⁷ There, he studied political science, incidentally enrolling in the same seminar as future President Woodrow Wilson. Although he lived in Baltimore during this period, he spent much of his time in Philadelphia and was gradually drawn to Quakerism, being attracted to its lack of adornments and the quiet, solemn atmosphere of its

⁵ George M. Oshiro, "Nitobe Inazō and the Sapporo Band: Reflections on the Dawn of Protestant Christianity in Early Meiji Japan," *Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 101-104.

⁶Ibid., 109-111.

⁷ Ibid., 112-114.

meetings. While it took him several years to officially become a Quaker, he regularly attended meetings and, predicting his later career, campaigned for the revision of the unequal treaties Japan had been subjected to. He spent almost three months giving speeches at Quaker meeting houses, reportedly becoming so emotional that “tears sometimes interfered with his words.”⁸

While still studying in America, Nitobe was in absentia appointed to a professorship at Sapporo Agricultural College, giving him additional financial support. Instead of returning to Japan, however, he decided to take yet another trip abroad, this time to Germany to get a doctorate in agricultural economics. He spent 38 months in Germany, studying first at the University of Bonn and then moving to Berlin University before finally receiving his Ph.D. at Halle University. He went back to America in 1888 where he published his first book, *The Intercourse Between the United States and Japan: A Historical Sketch*. He also married an American Quaker named Mary Elkinton, who he had corresponded with while in Germany. They faced resistance from both of their families on account of the international and interracial nature of the union, but they were eventually wed in 1890, with a Haverford Professor Renald Harris and his wife standing in for Nitobe’s parents. It was at this point, after six and a half years abroad, he finally returned with his new wife to Japan to teach at Sapporo Agricultural College.⁹

Looking at this brief sketch of Nitobe’s early life and education, what is most striking is how deeply international it was. To an extent, this was true of many men of his generation. In the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration, under the Charter Oath’s famous injunction to “seek knowledge throughout the world,” it was expected that aspiring elites would undergo a western education. At the time, that required not only acquiring a western language, but attending a school staffed by foreign teachers or studying abroad in the west. Nitobe, however, was much

⁸ Furuya Jun, “Graduate Student and Quaker,” in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan’s Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John F. Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995): 61-65.

⁹ Oshiro, “Nitobe Inazō and the Sapporo Band,” 118-122.

more deeply enmeshed in the western influences than sweeping Japan than the average intellectual. From practically the time he was an adolescent through his early adulthood, he immersed himself in a western education to the point where he even later admitted to being more comfortable writing in English than in Japanese. What's more, he converted to Christianity and specifically Quakerism, which gave him a religious affiliation with the west and allowed him access to the religious community of the Society of Friends. Of course, the most dramatic expression of his multiculturalism was his marriage to a white American woman, something that was very rare at the time.

All of this is important to keep in mind when examining Nitobe Inazō's later career. Nitobe was not simply a western-educated Japanese intellectual with a cosmopolitan mindset. Instead, for his entire life, he very much straddled Japan and the west, and the ambiguous position he occupied left him uniquely mediating between the two.

Bushido: His First Step

The influence of this cosmopolitan background on Nitobe's work as a cultural intermediary would become immediately apparent in his first venture into the international spotlight: *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. Written while vacationing in America in 1900, *Bushido* was initially published in English and aimed at conveying the essence of Japanese moral education to an American audience via Bushido, the ethical code of the samurai class. Much to Nitobe's surprise, it quickly became one of the most popular texts on Japanese culture in the western world. Theodore Roosevelt bought multiple copies to give as gifts and H. G. Wells

called the virtuous elite in his novel *Modern Utopia Samurai* as a homage to Nitobe's work.¹⁰ Today even, *Bushido* is Nitobe's most famous accomplishment, although somewhat ironically, it is an anomaly with regards to his career. While Nitobe's later internationalist activities were informed by specific institutions he operated in, *Bushido* was written entirely on his own initiative. Largely this was because, as a still undistinguished professor, Nitobe had little access to institutional support, but this limitation provided him with a certain degree of liberty. There were no academic standards he had to meet, no specific audience he was addressing besides the general American public, and no demands made on what he could talk about. Instead, *Bushido* was prompted and shaped entirely by his own experience as a Japanese living among westerners.

This is especially evident in *Bushido*'s preface. In it, Nitobe explains he was prompted to write *Bushido* after a conversation with a Belgian jurist named M. de Laveleye. De Laveleye was reportedly shocked to learn from Nitobe that the Japanese received no religious education in their schools and exclaimed: "No religion! How do you impart moral education?" Initially, Nitobe was unable to answer, but after analyzing his own "notions of right and wrong," he realized that "it was Bushido that breathed them into [his] nostrils." After coming to this conclusion, he decided to write a book about Bushidō to explain the central tenets of Japanese morality to westerners like his wife and de Laveleye who were curious about "why such and such ideas and customs prevail in Japan."¹¹

Nitobe thus frames *Bushido* not only as an attempt to promote cross-cultural understanding between Japan and the west, but importantly one that arose from his difficulties negotiating cultural differences in his personal life. Consequently, despite its title, *Bushido* is not really about Bushidō. Indeed, it is unclear the extent to which Nitobe ever saw Bushidō as a

¹⁰ Sheldon Garon, "Transnational History and Japan's 'Comparative Advantage,'" *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 43, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 76.

¹¹ Nitobe Inazō, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Philadelphia: The Leeds & Biddle Co., 1900), v-vii.

pre-established tradition. As Nitobe makes clear in his preface, he initially did not recognize Bushidō's centrality to Japanese culture. It was only after he was confronted with the lack of a native Japanese equivalent to Christianity that he was compelled to articulate a model of Bushidō as "the soul of Japan." In the process of explaining Japanese culture to Europeans and Americans, Nitobe was forced to more shapely define, or even invent, an essentially Japanese character in the form of Bushidō. As a result, Nitobe's version of Bushidō is less a coherent philosophy than a self-consciously invented tradition used to easily convey what he sees as the essential points of Japanese culture to a western audience.

This is evident in the parts of the book where Nitobe tries to define Bushidō. According to Nitobe, Bushidō is the Japanese equivalent of western Chivalry, representing "the code of moral principles which the knights were required or instructed to observe." However, he makes clear that this code was neither well-defined nor written down: "at best it consists of a few maxims handed down from mouth to mouth or coming from the pen of some well-known warrior or savant." Instead, it developed over centuries as the "common standard of behavior" for the samurai, a means of disciplining an unruly gang of warriors and turning them into responsible social elites. Nitobe argues that Bushidō drew on a diverse array of traditions, including Confucianism in defining this "common standard," particularly Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucian thought, Shinto, and Zen Buddhism.¹² He also claims it was expressed and refined in the arts and customs of the samurai class, seeing its influences for example in the tea ceremony, *seppuku*, or ritual suicide, and Japanese etiquette, education, and swordsmanship.

¹² Ibid., 7-14. This particular religious and philosophical syncretism combining elements of Confucian, Shinto, and Buddhist thought was common in Japanese history and particularly evident in 19th century moral discourses. For instance, see Janine Sawada, *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004) and Koschmann, J. Victor, *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790-1864* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Bushidō as Nitobe describes it is thus a somewhat nebulous concept that encompasses multiple, loosely connected religious, philosophical, and cultural practices. It can best be understood as a term for the collective customs and beliefs of a particular ruling class rather than a distinct or coherent system of thought. Its significance lies in the fact that said class, the samurai, were in Nitobe's opinion the source of Japan's national character: "What Japan was she owed to the samurai. They were not only the flower of the nation but its roots as well."¹³ In the same way that contemporaries might associate the bourgeoisie with the character of 19th century England or France, Nitobe sees in the samurai the essence of Japanese civilization, an influence he reifies as the concept of Bushidō. Interestingly, however, while he often talks about Japan's "racial characteristics," in linking Japanese culture and the samurai, Nitobe does not essentialize Japan's distinctiveness by locating it in an unbroken line of Emperors stretching back to the Age of Gods as many nationalists did during the Meiji Period. Instead, Nitobe historicizes Japanese culture by associating it with the development of a particular ruling class. His concept of Japanese culture not only had a clear beginning, the rise of the samurai to political dominance, but could also end with the demise of the samurai as a class, a possibility Nitobe considers at the end of the book.¹⁴

In short, Nitobe's experience in navigating cultural tension in his personal life drove him to write *Bushido* to explain the essence of Japanese civilization to a western audience. In the process of this explanation, Nitobe had to refine his own understanding of Japan and its national character by locating a clear source of Japanese ethics analogous to Christianity. He eventually found this source in the samurai class, whose collective beliefs he terms Bushidō. Interestingly, unlike later writers, in articulating Bushidō, Nitobe did not promote a particular form of

¹³ Ibid., 111.

¹⁴ Ibid., 111-120.

militaristic nationalism.¹⁵ By positioning the samurai as “the flower of the nation,” Nitobe de-emphasized the Emperor’s importance to Japan’s national identity in a clear divergence from Meiji nationalist ideology. Furthermore, while Nitobe did discuss the more militant aspects of Bushidō, he asserted that “fighting in itself, be it offensive, or defensive, is, as the Quakers rightly, testify, brutal and wrong.” Bushidō’s primary purpose was not to encourage violence but to restrain it by creating a common code of conduct akin to the “professional courtesy” among doctors or lawyers.¹⁶

However, that *Bushido* was prompted by a personal conviction to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and did not promote a dogmatic form of Meiji ideology does not imply that it was non-political. Nitobe’s examination of Bushidō and its influence on Japanese culture is tailored to present a specific image of Japan to the west. Specifically, like many works on Japanese culture during the Meiji Period, *Bushido* aims to reconcile Japan’s ambiguous status as a non-white imperial power by on one hand asserting Japan’s fundamental sameness with the west while also articulating and defending its unique, native character.

For example, many scholars have noted that *Bushido* relies on western sources in explaining Bushidō as much as it does on Japanese sources.¹⁷ This is most immediately evident in his comparison of Bushidō with chivalry and of samurai with knights, but throughout the text he cites numerous prominent European and American authors, intellectuals, and politicians to demonstrate his points. Altogether his bibliography contains a veritable pantheon of the west’s most prominent figures, both ancient and modern, including such luminaries as Aristotle, Caesar,

¹⁵ Bushidō has typically been associated in the existing literature with Japanese nationalism and religion. For example, Mark J. Ravina, “The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigo Takamori: Samurai, ‘Seppuku,’ and the Politics of Legend,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 3 (August 2010): 691-721 analyzes Japanese discourses on the suicide of Saigo Takamori as the origin of Bushido as a national ideology promoting militarism.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ For example, see Yuzo Ota, “Mediation Between Cultures,” in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan’s Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John F. Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995):237-252.

Shakespeare, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Gibbon, Guizot, and Bismarck. On one level, that Nitobe chose to reference so many non-Japanese ideas and individuals in defining Bushidō should come as no surprise given his audience. The book was intended to explain Japanese culture to westerners, so it makes sense that it would do so in terms westerners were already familiar with. However, the ubiquity of Nitobe's use of western sources suggests it meant something more than that. If Nitobe was solely concerned with explaining a concept alien to the west in terms westerners could understand, then a simple analogy between Bushidō and chivalry could have sufficed. There was no need to delve into modern, often obscure, philosophy to illustrate his points. One explanation for the prevalence of western sources in *Bushido* comes from Oleg Benesch, who in *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan* attributes Nitobe's reliance on the western philosophical tradition to his academic background. Having studied first at Sapporo Agricultural College, where classes were conducted in English, and then in America and Germany, Nitobe never received a comprehensive education in Japanese history or philosophy. As a result, like his western audience, Nitobe was probably more familiar with European authors than Japanese ones.¹⁸

However, while it is undeniable that Nitobe was no expert in Japanese history, to attribute his use of western sources to ignorance neglects the fact that he also frequently cited Japanese and Chinese figures in his work. Nitobe occasionally makes factual errors, but he demonstrates at least some familiarity with Japanese tradition in his references to Wang Yangming, the *bukke shohatto*, and the Genpei War. After all, even if he never studied Japanese history in university, he still came from a samurai family and presumably was educated according to the expectations of his class. Furthermore, Benesch's analysis is limited in that it examines Nitobe's work within

¹⁸ Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 91. See also Yuza Ota, "Mediation Between Cultures," in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan's Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John F. Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995): 237-252.

the context of how Japanese theories of Bushidō evolved during the late Meiji Period. From that angle, Nitobe, whose work was published in English and was self-consciously aimed at an international audience, appears divorced from the increasingly nationalistic discourse developing in Japan, a point reinforced by Nitobe's apparent ignorance of his subject matter. If we view *Bushido* as an attempt to facilitate cross-cultural understanding, however, rather than as an attempt to articulate a theory of Bushidō, then Nitobe's use of western sources had a clear purpose beyond practical necessity.

A closer reading of *Bushido* reveals that Nitobe's invocation of the western philosophical tradition was often defensive. In explaining Bushidō's various virtues, Nitobe often brought up a custom that was particularly strange or distasteful to a western audience, only to defend it by drawing an analogy with the west. For example, one virtue Nitobe argued was peculiar to Bushidō is loyalty. "Other virtues," he claims, "feudal morality shares in common with other systems of ethics, with other classes of people, but this virtue-homage and fealty to a superior-is its distinctive feature."¹⁹ He then demonstrates Bushidō's particular type of loyalty by means of a historical anecdote. Nitobe recounts a story about a school teacher named Genzo who was formerly a vassal to "one of the greatest characters of [Japanese] history, Michizane." After Michizane was exiled from the capital, he entrusted Genzo with his son in order to protect him from his relentless enemies. They eventually found the boy however and ordered his execution, a command Genzo refused out of loyalty to his master. Instead, he found a suitable lookalike among his students, killed him, and delivered his head as a substitute. When the deed was reported to the dead boy's parents, they were neither distraught nor angry. Rather, upon hearing

¹⁹ Nitobe, *Bushido*, 50.

the news, the boy's father proclaimed: "Rejoice, my wife, our darling son has proved of service to his lord!"²⁰

Upon concluding this anecdote, Nitobe immediately addresses the apprehension of his western audience: "'What an atrocious story!' I hear my readers exclaim, 'Parents deliberately sacrifice their innocent child to save the life of another man's.'" However, he proceeds to defend this sort of sacrificial loyalty by drawing parallels with the western tradition. First, he cites Aristotle and Socrates, claiming that both of them argued citizens were bound to "live and die for [state] or the incumbent of its legitimate authority." The ethical dictates of Bushidō, in promoting a form of selfless devotion to a feudal lord, were identical to the political thought of the founders of western philosophy. Nitobe then further employs western sources to argue that, contrary to what some might imagine, loyalty to a master was perfectly compatible with a moral consciousness. Just as the Bible commanded Christians to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's," so too did Bushidō permit samurai conflicting values or loyalties. Indeed, when a vassal disagreed with his lord, he was morally bound to "use every available means to persuade him of his error." To prove this point, he cites the character of Kent in *King Lear* as an example of how feudal loyalty required a vassal to correct his master's faults rather than just blindly follow him.²¹

Nitobe thus did not rely on western sources just to better explain his points to a European and American audience or out of an ignorance of Japanese history. Instead, he very purposely cited western sources in describing Bushidō to demonstrate a fundamental commonality between Japan and the West. This was done primarily as a defensive tactic, justifying aspects of Bushidō

²⁰ Nitobe, *Bushido.*, 50-54. It is interesting to note however that the Michizane Nitobe refers to is presumably Sugawara no Michizane, a prominent scholar and aristocrat in the mid-Heian Period who was exiled to Kyushu by his rivals at court. This means that the story he recounts was not about samurai nor did it take place in a time when the samurai even existed as a class.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 57-59.

and Japanese culture westerners found strange or backward by drawing on the west's most highly regarded philosophical, literary, and political figures for legitimacy. In other words, Nitobe did not just want to convey what he saw as the essential points of Japanese culture to a European and American audience; he wanted to assert Japan's fundamental equality with the west.

In doing so, however, Nitobe did not claim Bushidō was just a Japanese-flavored version of western philosophy. While he frequently drew similarities between Bushidō and western philosophy, he also argued that Japan possessed unique national characteristics. For example, in *Bushido*, Nitobe often emphasizes that the Japanese family was fundamentally different from the western family: “The individualism of the West, which recognizes separate interests for father and son, husband and wife, necessarily brings into strong relief the duties owed by one to the other; but Bushidō held that the interest of the family and of the members thereof is intact,—one and inseparable.”²² Nitobe was perfectly willing to articulate where Japan and the west differed. However, in defining Japan's cultural distinctiveness, Nitobe was once again concerned with defending Japan against western criticism. Nitobe claims that the Japanese family system, with its emphasis on the combined interest of the family as a unit rather than of its members as individuals, was not dehumanizing as westerners might suppose. Rather, it was bound up “with affection-natural, instinctive, irresistible.” Another virtue Nitobe argues was uniquely Japanese and subsequently defends in the face of western criticism is politeness. Nitobe frames his discussion of politeness by stating: “I have heard slighting remarks made by Europeans upon our elaborate discipline of politeness. It has been criticized as absorbing too much of our thought and insofar a folly to observe strict obedience to it” While Nitobe concedes that politeness is a “poor virtue, if it is actuated only by a fear of offending good taste,” he nonetheless argues that westerners were wrong to dismiss Japanese etiquette. Japanese manners, Nitobe claims, had a

²² Ibid., 55.

utilitarian function in that they represented “the most appropriate method of achieving a certain result,” refined over generations of practice.²³

In short, Nitobe’s presentation of Japanese culture in *Bushido* uses selective comparisons with western civilization in order to establish a fundamental equivalence between Japan and the west while also defining a uniquely Japanese national character. In both projects, Nitobe assumes a distinctly defensive posture, justifying and legitimizing Japan’s particular culture in the eyes of a critical western audience. This balancing act between arguing Japan was analogous to the west and arguing Japan had a unique culture made sense within the context of the time, although some scholars have argued it was contradictory²⁴ During the Meiji Period “there was a pervasive awareness of the need to develop a culture that would be new, modern, and yet also Japanese. In the process tradition itself had to be defined, selected, and structured.”²⁵

Thus, in addition to being the product of Nitobe’s personal experience in the west, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* is also fundamentally part of this process of cultural articulation that spoke to the central tensions of the Meiji Period. In essentially inventing the idea of Bushidō as the root of Japanese culture, Nitobe Inazō attempted to simultaneously present Japan as equal to Europe and America through comparisons with the most revered figures of the western tradition while also establishing and defending Japan’s unique cultural character. In doing so, Nitobe defends Japan from the critical and implicitly racist gaze of his western audience by defining Japan in western terms without sacrificing a sense of national pride or distinctiveness. *Bushido* reveals how Japan’s understanding and presentation of its own culture during the Meiji Period was shaped by its interactions with the west. While it is questionable how deep or insightful *Bushido* is as a work on Bushidō or even Japanese culture, as an attempt at national

²³ Ibid., 28-33.

²⁴ For example, see Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Warrior*, 93.

²⁵ Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 457.

self-definition in a time when Japan occupied an ambiguous and rapidly changing place in the world, there can be no doubt that it was a success. After all, Nitobe's work quickly became an international bestseller and promoted greater respect for Japan across the western world while also conveying a sense of national distinctiveness that many Europeans and Americans would seek to emulate.

Nitobe and Japan as a Great Power

Following the publication of *Bushido*, Nitobe's career exploded. As previously mentioned, in the west, the book achieved remarkable success. Meanwhile, in Japan, Nitobe went from a Professor at Sapporo Agricultural College to the heights of Japan's academic hierarchy. In 1901, he served in Taiwan as a colonial administrator, using his expertise in agricultural economics to promote sugar cultivation in Japan's new colony. He would then take this experience as a colonial administrator to Kyoto Imperial University in 1904 where he became the first Chair of Colonial Studies. Soon after, in 1906, he was appointed Headmaster of the First Higher School, the preparatory school for Tokyo Imperial University (Tōdai) and training ground for Japan's future elite. In 1913 he joined Todai's faculty of law.²⁶

Simultaneously, following the publication of *Bushido*, Japan ascended from its ambiguous status as a modernizing, "Oriental" country to an unquestioned great power. This process started with Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the contemporaneous revision of the so-called "unequal treaties." Japan's gains, however, would only be solidified in

²⁶ John F. Howes, "Preface," in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan's Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 6-10. The Tokyo University Faculty of Law was not only the height of Japan's academic hierarchy, but also the training ground for future bureaucrats. For example, graduates were given special exemptions from the preliminary stages of the civil service examinations and even allowed to forgo the exams for judicial appointments entirely. See Robert M. Spaulding, *Imperial Japan's Higher Civil Service Examinations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

the first decade of the 20th century.²⁷ In 1902, Britain broke its “splendid isolation” to ally with Japan, putting Japan in a partnership with the world’s foremost imperial hegemon. Three years later, Japan’s defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 marked the first time in modern history that an Asian country had defeated a white nation in war. The consequent prestige Japan’s victory brought, along with its acquisition of Korea and Russia’s old treaty rights in southern Manchuria, turned Japan into an unquestioned equal of the western empires²⁸

However, Japan’s newfound international stature did not erase the anxieties of its place as a modern Asia power. In fact, in some respects, Japan’s military victories threw them into sharper focus. On one hand, its newly acquired colonies in Taiwan and Korea forced it to reconcile its commitment to its own independence from western powers with its growing domination of its Asian neighbors. On the other, as Japan became more of a military power, western observers became increasingly concerned about the spectre of a “yellow peril.” For example, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany warned of a coming race war between the west and east in response to Japan’s victories over China and Russia.²⁹ The frictions generated by Japan’s growing international strength particularly manifested itself in its relationship with the US. Japan and the US were both latecomers to the global imperial scene, and as Japan was expanding its interests in East Asia, so was America. America’s acquisition of the Philippines in the Spanish-American War of 1898 marked a significant expansion of its territorial reach and a potential source of friction with Japan as their spheres of colonial influence started to overlap. Indeed, Theodore Roosevelt would predict that Japan and America would one day go to war over

²⁷ See S. C. M., *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁸ For a discussion of this process see Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 414-455.

²⁹ See Iikura Akira, “The ‘Yellow Peril’ and its Influence on German–Japanese Relations,” in *Japanese–German Relations, 1895–1945: War, Diplomacy and Public Opinion*, eds. Christian W. Spang and Rolf-Harald Wippich (London: Routledge, 2006): 80-97.

the Philippines and negotiated the so-called “Gentlemen's Agreement” with Japan to restrict Japanese immigration into California.³⁰

As a result of these changes, both the position which Nitobe spoke from and the issues he confronted as a Japanese were markedly different than when he wrote *Bushido*. Whereas Nitobe had written *Bushido* as a relatively undistinguished Japanese professor and entirely on his own, his rise to prominence in both Japan and the west allowed him more sources of institutional support. Meanwhile, his activities as an internationalist moved past simply explaining Japanese culture to a western audience to the more explicitly political task of addressing sources of international friction.

An example of this new phase in his career was his visit to America as the first exchange professor between Japan and the United States facilitated by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace. Between 1911 and 1912, Nitobe gave 8 lectures each at Brown, Columbia, John Hopkins, and the Universities of Virginia, Illinois, and Minnesota, addressing an estimated total of 40,000 individuals. These lectures were later published under the title: “The Japanese Nation: Its Land, its People, and Its Life With Special Consideration to Its Relations with the United States,” and it is clear from reading them that the focus of Nitobe internationalist activities had evolved considerably since writing *Bushido*.

Immediately this is evident in how Nitobe presented his mission in considerably more grandiose terms. In *Bushido*, Nitobe humbly explained the origins of the book as almost an accident, being nothing more than the extension of his personal attempts to explain Japanese culture to confused acquaintances. In the preface of “The Japanese Nation,” he instead declares a

³⁰For discussions of some the key issues dividing the United States and Japan, see Hajimu Masuda, “Rumors of War: Immigration Disputes and the Social Construction of American-Japanese Relations, 1905–1913,” *Diplomatic History*, 33 (Jan. 2009), 1–37 and Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

much broader goal of reconciling eastern and western civilizations. Specifically, he begins by reciting an anecdote about how, when applying for admission to Tokyo Imperial University, he was questioned by the Dean of the Department of Literature why he chose to minor in English literature as an Economics Major. As a reply, he reportedly said, “I wish, sir, to become a bridge across the Pacific...a means of transmitting the idea of the West to the East, and the East to the West.”³¹ While he confesses that he was a little embarrassed at making such a bold claim, Nitobe proceeds in the first lecture to discuss the changing and often artificial boundary between east and west and his hope to transcend that boundary. Particularly, he discusses the importance of promoting cross-cultural understanding between America and Japan, who he presents as the representatives of western and eastern civilization respectively.³²

However, not only did the envisioned scope of Nitobe’s internationalist work change, but the subjects he addressed did as well. Compared to *Bushido*, which confined itself to abstract ruminations on Japanese ethics, in his lectures, Nitobe spends far more time talking about specific political and economic tensions between Japan and America. For instance, in the volume’s first chapter, titled “East and West,” he explicitly frames the work of reconciling the “Orient” and “Occident” in reference to the growing imperial tensions. Due to “Imperialism,” Nitobe claims, “the overwhelming trend of the last century, which, causing the stronger nations to overleap their respective territorial boundaries, has brought them face to face with one another in unexpected quarters distant from home.” The result is conflict as great powers abandoned the “innocent intercourse” and “exchange of ideas and arts of peace” that used to define international relations to instead “regard all competitors, not only as rivals, but as potential enemies, whose existence jeopardise their own and whose fate must therefore be decided at the point of the

³¹ Nitobe Inazō, “The Japanese Nation: Its Land, Its People, and Its Life,” *The Works of Inazō Nitobe Volume II* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1972): 7-9.

³² *Ibid.*, 32.

sword.” He cites economic and colonial frictions between Japan and the United States in this context, mentioning commercial competition for the Chinese market and their simultaneous expansion into Formosa and the Philippines.³³

Nitobe does not immediately elaborate on this train of thought, instead spending the next several lectures discussing the Japanese people, their morals, religion, and unique characteristics. These are much in the same vein as *Bushido* and sprinkled with similar references to the western canon and assertions of a unique Japanese cultural identity. However, his last several lectures are of a decidedly different nature. Instead of discussing Japanese characteristics in a general, abstracted way, he turns to focus on concrete economic and political issues confronting Japan’s relationship with the west. In doing so, he attempts to calm growing concerns about the “Yellow Peril” by depicting Japan as a responsible, and peaceful, colonial power.

In his lecture “Japan as Coloniser,” for instance, Nitobe discusses the Japanese colonial administration in Taiwan from the perspective of someone who worked in it. Throughout his account, he shows a clear interest in presenting Japan’s actions as not only legitimate, but a model of colonial administration. From the beginning, Nitobe depicts Japan’s acquisition of Taiwan as almost an accident. When Japan asked for Taiwan at Shimonoseki, Nitobe claims, no one knew how the Chinese plenipotentiary, the famous Qing governor Li Hongzhang, would respond. Li did concede the demand, but apparently only because Taiwan was viewed as so beset by problems that it was ungovernable. Nitobe identifies four issues that obstructed stable administration of the island: brigandage, wide-spread opium addiction, poor sanitary and public health infrastructure, and the presence of savage “head-hunting tribes” that indiscriminately killed people as part of religious rituals.³⁴

³³ Ibid., 17-18.

³⁴ Ibid., 213.

In Nitobe's account then, Taiwan was almost a burden that China cleverly handed Japan following its loss in the Sino-Japanese War. Indeed, Nitobe explains, in the early years, there was widespread skepticism in Japan about the costliness of maintaining the colony and the entire enterprise was almost abandoned. However, despite the almost immense problems it faced, the colonial administration nonetheless solved each of them in turn. The creation of a police force made the country safe from brigands, a state opium monopoly cut addiction rates in half, modern medicine and sewage systems stopped the spread of malaria, smallpox, and cholera, while the primitive natives, who ritually beheaded people on ceremonial occasions, were brought under control by the promise of trade. On top of these considerable accomplishments, Nitobe also lauds the colonial administration for bringing education, building roads, and increasing both agricultural productivity and trade to the extent that the colonial became wholly self-funded.³⁵

Nitobe thus depicts Japan's colonial administration in Taiwan as a civilizing mission and a remarkably successful one at that. Confronted with problems that Taiwan's inept former rulers saw as insurmountable, Japan successfully brought law and economic prosperity to a disorderly, "savage" island. Nitobe further makes clear that this noble intent was not limited to Taiwan, but was common to all of Japan's colonial ventures. For example, he argued that the Japanese administration of Korea similarly brought order where once there was lawlessness, claiming that reports of arrests in Korea reflected the difficulties of introducing "a jural state" into a country that had previously not known "what government is and what laws are."³⁶ This of course spoke

³⁵ Ibid., 213-230. For some scholarly and more critical accounts of events Nitobe describes, see Shiyong Liu, *Prescribing Colonization: The Role of Medical Practices and Politics in Japan-ruled Taiwan, 1895-1945* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2009) and Paul D. Barclay, *Outcasts of Empire: Japan's Rule on Taiwan's Savage Border, 1874-1945* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

³⁶ Ibid., 229-230. Nitobe's particular highlighting of law and proper administration in its colonies is also interesting to consider from the perspective of the unequal treaties. A central issue of these treaties was the "extraterritoriality," or the right of westerners to be tried for crimes they committed in Japan by western law courts. The European powers justified this on the grounds that Japan did not have a legal system that matched western standards and building a law code and judiciary the west could find acceptable was a major project in the Meiji Period. While the Unequal Treaties had already been revised, it is interesting that Nitobe uses a similar logic in his legitimization of

to the west's self-conception of its own imperial projects, which were similarly cast as civilizing missions aimed at reforming "backward" customs among the native people.³⁷ By both depicting Japan's colonial venture in a similar light and extolling their success at bettering the conditions of the native population, Nitobe presented Japan as not just a military, but also a moral and administrative equal to the western powers.

Interestingly, however, instead of relying on the ideology of the "white man's burden," i.e. the idea that the Japanese were racially superior and thus had a responsibility to guide racially inferior peoples, Nitobe instead justifies Japanese colonial rule by highlighting the racial similarities between the Japanese and the native Taiwanese. In the lecture, Nitobe insists that Japan has arguably a greater right to Taiwan than China. Not only was China's domination of Taiwan a relatively recent phenomenon, with Taiwan previously having been a Dutch colony, but the Japanese racially closer to the native "Malay tribes" than the Chinese. In fact, Nitobe claims, these tribesmen said "of the Japanese that we are their kin and that the Chinese are their enemies."³⁸ This tactic of highlighting racial commonalities rather than racial differences was unique to Japan's imperial ideology. Having no easy line of demarcation between itself and its colonial subjects, Japan was incapable of adopting unchanged the sort of color-based racial prejudice that defined western empires in this period. As a result, it instead eschewed racial justifications for its colonial projects in favor of cultural ones, arguing that its subjects were uncivilized relatives of the Japanese people who had to be assimilated into the metropolitan

Japanese colonization. For more on this topic, see Par Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgement: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁷ For some examples of western empires during this period, see E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Press, 1987) and Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

³⁸Ibid., 226.

culture.³⁹ While at the time, this ideology had yet to be fully developed, Nitobe was presenting an early version of it to his American audience as part of his broader project to legitimize Japanese colonialism to the west. Not only was Japan's administration of Taiwan a morally righteous civilizing mission, but it was also justified by the logic of racial commonality.

Having established Japan as a responsible colonial power equal to the western powers, Nitobe spends the last several lectures directly addressing the major sources of friction between Japan and the United States. In his lecture "Relations Between the U.S. and Japan," Nitobe begins by recounting the history of Japanese-American relations since Perry. As Nitobe presents it, following the opening of Japan, Japan and the United States had been on mostly good terms. Specifically, he cites America's return of the indemnity Japan paid following the Shimonoseki Incident of 1863, President Grant's visit to Japan in 1880, and Theodore's Roosevelt's role in negotiating an end to the Russo-Japanese Wars as examples of America's goodwill towards Japan.

However, this had all changed in "only six years." According to Nitobe, in recent years Americans had come to "strain their eyes to discover the slightest possible cause for troubling," seeing Japan as "harbouring territorial ambition, of casting an evil eye upon Hawaii and the Philippines, -or nearer, upon Maddalena Bay!"⁴⁰ This, he be argued, and all other American anxieties about Japanese aggression, were completely absurd. The "unsophisticated Japanese labourers" in Hawaii were not spies, there were no gunboats "in train for the bombardment of

³⁹ For almost all of Nitobe's life, this ideology was almost purely rhetorical, but in the 1930s the Japanese government became much more serious about assimilating its colonial subjects into Japanese culture. Particularly during the war, turning Koreans and Taiwanese into proper Japanese subjects became a major project for the state. For some discussions of this topic, see Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Koreans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), and Jeffrey Paul Bayliss, *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ Nitobe, *The Japanese Nation*, 254-257.

San Francisco or the seizure of Manila,” and the idea that Japan had the power to take over Hawaii or the Philippines while pacifying Korea, Manchuria, and Saghalien was “flattering beyond her deserts.” He further explains that American agitation over the influx of Japanese laborers into California was also misguided. Japanese immigrants contributed more to the American economy than they extracted, bringing more money with them from the home country than other groups of immigrants and working in the agricultural sector, a sector native Americans shunned. Besides, Nitobe argued, more Japanese returned to Japan than immigrated to America each year, making the entire problem a moot point. The idea that Japan and America competed over China was also incorrect. Both countries’ trade in the far east was growing, while Japan’s colonial expansion into Manchuria did not violate America’s state principle of an “Open Door” in China. Rather, Japan continued to allow foreign firms entry into the Manchurian market.⁴¹

Nitobe finally concludes in his final two lectures, “American Influence in the Far East” and “Peace Over the Pacific,” by laying out his vision of international exchange as the basis of future harmonious relations. Citing western, and particularly American, as positive influences, from which Japan has “received the freshest moral impetus” in recent years, he argues that through exchanges between east and west a higher form of civilization and “unity of purpose and unanimity of thought” can be achieved: “the waters of the Atlantic will mingle with the waters of the Pacific, the civilisation conceived in the womb of Asia, born on the shores of the Mediterranean and brought to maturity by the denizens of the Atlantic coasts, will soon enrich the venerable civilisation of its primal home, and thus make its complete circuit.”⁴²

In short, during his time as an exchange professor in America, Nitobe went beyond his original project in *Bushido* of explaining and legitimating Japanese culture to a western audience

⁴¹ Ibid., 256-263.

⁴² Ibid, 277-279.

to focus on addressing the specific tensions between Japan and the United States that emerged following the Russo-Japanese War. While his attempt at such a reconciliation employed the language of international cooperation and often abstract appeals to transcending the divisions between east and west, there is no mistaking his intent to present Japan in a positive light to his western audience. This is especially evident in his discussion of Taiwan which depicts Japan's colonial administration as a civilizing mission that brought order and prosperity to a previously unruly island. In doing so, Nitobe attempted to convey an image of Japan as more than just a cultural equal to the west, but also a political equal and responsible colonial power able to abide by the rules set by its western peers.

Nitobe and the League of Nations

Following the conclusion of the exchange program, Nitobe would primarily remain and work in Japan, gaining an aforementioned professorship at the Tokyo Imperial University. He published little in English and engaged in few internationalist activities during this period. Coincidentally, the next phase in his career as an internationalist would align exactly with yet another rise in Japan's stature. While Japan's status as a great power was arguably established in the Russo-Japanese War, it would not be officially recognized until another war: WWI

Other than the United States, Japan was perhaps the country that benefited the most from the First World War. Drawn in by its alliance with Britain, yet outside the major theatres of combat, Japan had the opportunity to both capture German territories in Asia and the South Pacific and to take advantage of the precipitous drop in western exports. The result was that Japan significantly expanded its colonial holdings, underwent a period of rapid industrialization

that laid the foundations for the consumer society of the 1920s, and for the first time became a creditor rather than a debtor nation. However, its most significant gains were won at the Versailles Peace Conference. Japanese delegates were not active participants in the conference, and in fact the home government had prepared comparatively little for major issues like the League of Nations, but they achieved significant victories nonetheless. Its claim to German's old colonies was recognized, including its leasehold on the Qingdao Peninsula despite Chinese objections. Meanwhile, Japan was given a privileged position in the new international organizations that were created at Versailles. It was one of the "Eight States of Eight Industrial Importance" in the International Labor Organization and had a permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations, a status it enjoyed with only France, Britain, and Italy.⁴³

It was this latter achievement that would lead to the next phase of Nitobe's career as an internationalist. In addition to its permanent Council seat, Japan was allowed to appoint an Under-Secretary-General in charge of a specific section of the League. As a prominent internationalist, intellectual, and a man fluent in both English and French, Nitobe was a natural candidate, although according to a possibly apocryphal story, the choice was partially coincidental. In part because they had made relatively few preparations for the League, and in part because it was difficult to communicate easily with the home government back in Japan from Paris, the Japanese delegate had a hard time deciding who to select to be an Under-Secretary-General. Apparently, while they were having this discussion, Goto Shimpei, Nitobe's former boss as Governor-General of Taiwan who had brought Nitobe along with him on a trip to Europe, walked into the hotel they were staying at with Nitobe at his side. Upon seeing

⁴³ For a discussion of Japan in WWI and the Versailles Conference, see Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008): 1-103 and Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 13-59.

him, Japan's chief plenipotentiary at the conference, Baron Makino Nobuaki, exclaimed "Here is a splendid candidate," and so Nitobe got the appointment.⁴⁴

Specifically, Nitobe was made head of the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, an organization whose official purpose was to "facilitate contacts between teachers, artists, scientists, and authors; to establish ties between universities in different countries; to foster the protection of intellectual property; and to encourage the development of international bibliographic facilities." In other words, Nitobe was put in charge of the League's international exchange efforts, giving him a unique opportunity to promote the sort of cross-cultural understanding that he'd devoted much of his career to. In this role, Nitobe furthered the League's mission of international peace by facilitating cultural and intellectual exchanges, for example leading a project to publish a series of twenty-two booklets on the intellectual life of various countries.⁴⁵

Interestingly, in his position as the head of the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Nitobe was not an employee of the Japanese government, but rather an employee of the League itself. He worked for a trans-national organization and lived in Geneva, the location of most of the League's facilities. As a result, during the period of his service in the League from 1919 to 1926, Nitobe did little to propagandize for Japan in the west, instead focusing his attention on promoting the League and general intellectual exchange activities. Of course, this does mean he forgot about his home country. As Nitobe constantly reiterated in his writings, cosmopolitanism had to be rooted in a sense of patriotism. However, his attachment to Japan primarily took the form of working to integrate it into the new, Wilsonian world order established at the Versailles

⁴⁴ Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 152-3.

⁴⁵ Thomas W. Burkman, "The Geneva Spirit," in *Nitobe Inazō: Japan's Bridge Across the Pacific*, ed. John F. Howes (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995): 190-191.

Conference and embodied by the League of Nations rather than explaining Japan to a western audience.

This began even before he took up his position as an Undersecretary-General of the League. For example, in 1919, after returning to Japan from his trip in Europe, Nitobe published an article titled “Hemindō” in which he sought to promote the democratic and internationalist ideas he saw developing in the west to a Japanese audience. A revision of the ideas he’d set forth in *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, Nitobe argued that because of changes domestically and internationally, Bushidō was no longer appropriate as the source of Japanese morals. As a replacement, he proposed a new moral system he named “Hemindō,” or “Way of the People.” The modern-day gentlemen (*shi*) were no longer warriors (*bushi*), but rather scholars (*gakushi*), lawyers (*bengoshi*), and parliamentarians (*daigishi*), while due to universal conscription, military service was no longer the privilege of a certain class, but a duty expected of all male citizens. As a result, Nitobe argued, Japan should place more value on “ordinary people without class distinctions” (*hina kaikyūteki kubetsu naki ippan minshū*) and the non-military arts rather than simply stick to the legacy of the samurai class. He describes this “Way of the People” as part of a broader project of democratization, although he defines democracy more as a spirit of equality than as a specific system of government. He further claims that this project would not only conform to Japan’s domestic conditions, but also the trends of the world as a whole. Due to the emergence of the League of Nations, the world had entered a stage when the military arts and the ideals of samurai were behind the times, and it was now “better to emphasize peace as the norm rather than war” (*bu ni oki wo okan to suru yoriha, heiwa wo risō to shikatsu heiwa wo jōtai to suru ga shitō de arou*).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Nitobe Inazō, “Hemindō,” *Jitsugyō no Nihon* 22, no. 10 (May 1919).

Although couched in the language of Bushidō and the samurai, the ideas Nitobe outlined in “Hemindō” were inspired by the liberal democratic trends that had gained prominence in the west after WWI and an early attempt by Nitobe to propagandize for the internationalist ideals of the League to a Japanese audience. He would continue this project upon taking up his post at the League. Although he spent the majority of his time in Geneva, he made an effort to publicize the League in his home country. For instance, in 1922 he gave a series of three lectures at Waseda University titled “The Organization and Activities of the League of Nations” (*Kokusai renmei no soshiki to katsudō*) in which he explained the structure of the League and advertised its purpose as an arena for non-violent conflict resolution between states.⁴⁷ He also gave another lecture in 1925 on “the League of Nations and Women” with Hiroshi Shimomura, a former Governor-General of Taiwan, and sent multiple reports back to Japan to be published while away in Geneva.⁴⁸

However, even with these activities in Japan, Nitobe spent the majority of his time in Geneva working for the League and publicizing its activities in Europe. Japan occupied only a minority of his time. Nitobe’s appointment to the League of Nations also marked a shift in his internationalist activities. Whereas in *Bushido* and his early work, he had focused exclusively on promoting a positive image of Japan to the west, as head of the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, he adopted a more global mindset. His commitment was not simply to Japan, but to the task of world peace and cultural exchange in general as promoted by the League. Partially this was because he worked for the League itself rather than the Japanese government or another Japanese institution, but arguably, this transition mirrored changes in international affairs more

⁴⁷ Nitobe Inazō, “Kokusai renmei no soshiki to katsudō,” *Nitobe Inazō Zenshū Vol. 4* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1972): 401-444.

⁴⁸ “Kokusai renmei fūjin kōenkai: Nitobe, Shomomura ryōshi no kōen.” *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*. January 14, 1925. http://www.lib.kobe-u.ac.jp/das/jsp/ja/ContentViewMn.jsp?METAID=10154911&TYPE=IMAGE_FILE&POS=1&LANG=JA.

generally. Prior to WWI, Nitobe operated primarily in a bilateral framework, working specifically to improve relations between Japan and the US or other western powers. Once however the system of bilateral diplomacy was abandoned at Versailles in favor of broader multilateral diplomacy exemplified by the League that ostensibly transcended narrow national interests, Nitobe's activities simultaneously broadened to encompass a wider vision of international exchange facilitated by interstate organizations.

That being said, there were still ways in which Nitobe's work at the League did promote a positive image of Japan to the world. It is important to note that although Japan achieved unprecedented privileges in the post-Versailles order, its commitment to that order remained in doubt. To put it briefly, the end of WWI and the Versailles Conference marked the end of a model of international affairs based on secret, bilateral negotiations and the balance of power between rival imperial states and the beginning of a new vision of a peaceful world order founded on international organizations like the League of Nations. This model was best articulated by Woodrow Wilson and his 14 Points, which called for self-determination for colonial territories, non-aggression, and "open diplomacy." Japan's commitment to this order, however, was severely questioned. Not only was its support of the League ambiguous during the Versailles Conference, with Japanese representatives taking a decidedly passive role outside their attempts to insert a Racial Equality Clause into the League Covenant, but many of the Japanese government's actions during and immediately after the war were uncomfortably in line with the now repudiated model of aggressive imperial expansion. In 1915, Japan submitted the infamous Twenty-One Demands to China, which were considered a dangerous encroachment on Chinese sovereignty, its brutal suppression of the March 1st Korean Independence Movement in 1919 which explicitly appealed to Wilsonian self-determination, left hundreds dead, while its

intervention in Siberia following the Russian Revolution from 1918-1922 was both longer and more extensive than any other powers'.⁴⁹ All of this was compounded by the fact that Japan, whose constitution was modeled on Prussia's, was closely associated with German militarism to the victorious western democracies.⁵⁰

In other words, it was not at all assumed that Japan would be a reliable member of the new post-war system of international relations. Nitobe Inazō, as an Under-Secretary-General of the League with impeccable intellectual and internationalist credentials was thus in a unique position to represent a new, liberal Japan that was fully in step with global trends. Arguably, he accomplished this simply by his presence as a leading official in the League of Nations and a member of the international community in Geneva.⁵¹ However, he did on occasion explicitly work to assure the west of native Japanese enthusiasm for the League of Nations and the ideals it represented.

For example, in a report submitted to the League in 1925 titled "The League of Nations Movement in Japan" for example, Nitobe discussed the "surprisingly wide-spread" support for the League. According to Nitobe, there were few critics of the League in Japan, nor did the Parliament protest the large sums Japan was required to pay the organization. Furthermore, while the most fervent support for the League was confined to the educated youth, even older members of political and business circles openly supported the League and there was a widespread

⁴⁹ For discussions of some of these topics see Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Paul E. Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922: A Great Disobedience Against the People* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

⁵⁰ For example, American and Chinese journalists and diplomats made much of Prince Konoe Fumimaro's assertion that "might someday be compelled like Imperial Germany to break loose from its confinement," expressing dismay "that a member of Japan's peace delegation so sympathetic with the policy which brought about Germany's downfall and so suspicious of the peace plans which are being worked out by America and the Allies." Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 57.

⁵¹ Burkman, "The Geneva Spirit," 196-197. According to anecdotes from multiple Japanese and western employees of the League, Nitobe and his wife were incredibly popular amongst the international community in Geneva, with Nitobe for instance

consensus that “the League is a good thing and that Japan must stick to as other great nations are in it.” While Nitobe does not deny that many Japanese offered objections to the League, listing ten criticisms in particular, he spends little time refuting them. Instead, he highlights the activities of the League of Nations Union in Japan. Describing it as a body of 2,300 members, consisting of “some of [Japan’s] best public men-statesmen, lawyers, and others,” with nineteen branches and a regular magazine, Nitobe credits the Union with effectively spreading information about the League “far and wide amongst the intelligent classes.” He reiterates that this work has encountered little opposition, with the military being too weak and unpopular to directly criticize the League and even conservative educational institutions coming around to it. He concludes by noting the hunger for more information about the League and recommends dispatching more League officials to Japan as soon as possible.

In short, Nitobe presents Japan as at best enthusiastic about the League and at worst passively in support of it, with all potential sources of conservative opposition, including the military, being pressured into tacit acceptance of the new global order. While it is clear that Nitobe did try to present a positive image of Japan’s commitment to the League and the ideals it represented, it is also clear that this made up a minority of his activities. He was much more concerned with his work in Europe and propagating the League in Japan than presenting a certain image of Japan to the west. As previously mentioned, given that Nitobe spent almost all of his time in Geneva as an employee of the League of Nations, this adoption of a more global mindset is not surprising. However, even after he retired from the League in 1926 and returned to Japan, he remained steadfastly devoted to it and his values. He would continue to write positively about it to a Japanese audience and work to promote cross-cultural understanding. For

example, he became the head of the Japanese branch of the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1928 and organized its 3rd conference in Kyoto in 1929.⁵²

Nitobe's Final Days

From his work in the 1920s, there can be no mistaking that Nitobe was fully committed to the League and the liberal internationalist ideals it represented, which leads us back to the question posed at the beginning of this paper. How was it that he spent his final days defending Japanese militarism?

Japan's acceptance of the international world order established at Versailles would end in 1931 with the Manchurian Incident. In September of 1931, rogue officers in Japan's Kwantung Army blew up a section of a Japanese railway near Mukden. While the damage was minimal, the Kwantung Army, blaming the Chinese for the incident, quickly took the opportunity to expel all Chinese forces from Manchuria. They subsequently declared Manchuria independent of the Chinese Republic centered in Nanjing. Calling this ostensibly autonomous new state "Manchukuo," officers from the Kwantung army invited the deposed last Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Puyi, to head the new regime, although all practical authority resided with the Japanese military.⁵³

Despite the fact that this aggressive action in Manchuria was not sanctioned by the government in Tokyo, the takeover of Manchuria was greeted with widespread enthusiasm

⁵² The Institute of Pacific Relations was an American organization originally founded by the YMCA to promote cultural contact between Pacific nations, with America and Japan being the two most prominent members. For an account of the organization's pre-war history and Nitobe's role in it, see Jessamyn R. Abel, *The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933-1964* (Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

⁵³For further details, see Takehiko Yoshihashi, *Conspiracy at Mukden: The Rise of the Japanese Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

among the Japanese public. Even opponents of the action were largely forced to accept it as a fait accompli or face widespread backlash. The global response however was much more negative. Seeing Japanese actions as an aggressive violation of China's territorial sovereignty, the preservation of which had long been a principle of the imperial powers, the west, not to mention China, widely condemned Japan. The Stimson Doctrine of 1932 established America's non-recognition of Manchukuo while the League of Nations ordered an investigation into the circumstances of the Manchurian Incident and the legitimacy of Japan's claims. This latter action resulted in the Lytton Report, which while not condemnatory of Japanese actions, did not recognize Manchukuo as a sovereign state. The General Assembly's acceptance of this report led to Japan leaving the League in 1933, with its delegates dramatically walking out of the conference chambers on March 27th, 1933.⁵⁴

Nitobe's personal response to these events is unclear. There is some evidence that he opposed the Japanese military's actions in Manchuria. In 1932, while giving an interview at Ehime Prefectural Agricultural School, Nitobe was asked for his views on the Manchurian Incident. After making the gathered reporters promise to keep his remarks private, he proceeded to denounce both the government and the army. He claimed not only that the military was "destroying our country," but that it constituted an even greater threat than communism. Despite his request, a report of the meeting was leaked, and the backlash was immediate. Nitobe was widely attacked in the public and multiple Military Reservist Associations demanded an apology. After more than a month of controversy, and possibly fearing for his own life, Nitobe conceded and publicly capitulated, although how sincere his apology was is up for debate.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*, 165-193.

⁵⁵ George Oshiro, "The End," 258-261.

Regardless of what Nitobe personally thought about the situation, after the so-called “Maruyama Incident,” he would never again publicly criticize the military. The same month as he reportedly denounced the army’s actions in Manchuria, it was announced following a meeting with the Navy Vice Minister and Military Affairs Bureau Chief that he would be sent to the US to “announce his views concerning contemporary problems.” In other words, he was tasked by the Japanese government to use his clout as an internationalist to defend Japan’s actions to the west. This broke his prior pledge to not set foot in America until the repeal of the 1924 National Origins Act, but evidently his desire to represent Japanese interests trumped his moral indignation over anti-Japanese discrimination in the states.⁵⁶ Again, his exact feelings on this mission are unclear. There is some evidence that he had some doubts about being perceived as an “apologist of the militarists,” but in his writings he expressed a conviction in the purity of his intentions.⁵⁷

Upon arriving in America, Nitobe quickly went to work. He began in New York, first making a broadcast with the CBC, then giving an interview to the NYT and speaking at various organizations. He proceeded to Philadelphia, where he received an honorary doctorate from Haverford College and went to speak to several Quaker groups before moving on to other parts of the country.⁵⁸ The speeches he gave during this period would later be compiled and edited by Nitobe's wife, Mary, and posthumously published under the title “Lectures on Japan.” Not all of them directly address the Manchurian Incident, and in fact most of them are focused on cultural and economic issues rather than the major political questions of the day. However, there is no mistaking that addressing the Manchurian question was a major concern. In a lecture titled “The

⁵⁶ Ibid., 261. For example, upon being requested to inaugurate the new Institute for Japanese Studies at Columbia, Nitobe reportedly replied, “Nothing will entice me to enter the country where my own kith and kin are not treated on equal terms with the rest of mankind. I shall be ashamed to be treated with special consideration, as though I do not belong to the Japanese race.”

⁵⁷ Ibid., 262.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 263-267.

Manchurian Question and Sino-Japanese Relations,” for example, Nitobe defends in unequivocal terms Japan’s actions on the continent. He begins by commenting on the universal denunciation of Japanese expansion into Manchuria, claiming “the public opinion of the world has been set against Japan.” He quickly dismisses the validity of these criticisms however, saying they are based on “systematic propaganda” and have become ever more spurious the more the facts of the situation came to light.

Having thus established that most accounts of the Manchurian Incident in the west were built on false information, he proceeds to an analysis of Japanese interests in the region. First, he denies Chinese claims to territorial sovereignty over Manchuria, arguing that Manchuria had not historically been a part of China proper and that Chinese nationalists themselves had recognized this when it suited them to depict the Qing as a foreign dynasty. Nitobe does concede that China had the stronger claim to Manchuria than other countries, but he still refutes it on the grounds that China was incapable of defending itself.⁵⁹ In particular, he invokes the spectre of Russian communism, arguing that the Soviet Union, driven by the logic of “geographical contiguity,” would quickly secure Manchuria if left to their own devices.⁶⁰

In between China’s claim based on “theoretical and legal right” and Russia’s claim based on “geographical contiguity” was Japan. He starts by insisting that although Japanese actions “has been dubbed by the opprobrious term of imperialistic invasion,” this was “very far removed from Japan’s present position in Manchuria. Instead, Japan’s claim, Nitobe argues, was two-fold: strategic and economic. Strategically, Manchuria had to be secured as “her first line of defence against the territorial advance of Russia and the propaganda of Communist ideas.” Again, not

⁵⁹ Nitobe Inazo, “Lectures on Japan,” in *The Collected Works of Inazo Nitobe Vol 4* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1972): 224-226.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

only was China incapable of resisting the military and ideological advance of the Soviet Union, but there was a possibility it would ally itself with Russia against Japan.

Nitobe thus argues that Japanese actions in Manchuria were solely committed in the name of self-defense and in fact furthered a broader project of anti-communism. He even attempts to turn western accusations of “Japanese militarism” on their head. “When I hear of my country being called militaristic,” Nitobe said, “I feel myself asking who made her so?” The answer was undoubtedly the western powers themselves, who had “ruthlessly awakened” a country that had “enjoyed unbroken peace for 250 years and taught them to arm.”⁶¹ Thus, who were they to condemn Japan for just trying to defend itself against two powers who were far larger and more populous?

The other source of Japan’s claim to Manchuria was economic. Nitobe in particular cites Japanese treaty rights in the region and Chinese unwillingness to respect them. Not only were Japanese residents in China increasingly subject to violent attacks, but anti-Japanese boycotts denied Japan access to essential sources of foodstuffs. On top of Japan’s legal claim to the Manchurian markets which were increasingly being denied by China, the sheer extent of Japan’s investment in the region was large enough to mandate intervention on the continent. Japanese investments totaled one billion yen, which Nitobe makes sure to note was 12 times the amount of American capital invested in Cuba at the time of the Spanish-American War, and this investment was again essential for Japan’s survival considering its lack of land and natural resources like coal, iron, and oil.⁶²

Nitobe thus presents Japan’s actions in Manchuria not as a case of aggressive, imperialist expansion, but as necessary to Japan’s territorial and economic security. The threat of the Soviet

⁶¹ Ibid., 226-231. Interestingly, Ishiwara Kanji, one of the architects of the Manchurian Incident, would famously use the same argument at the Tokyo War Crime Tribunal in 1946.

⁶² Ibid., 232-234.

Union and Communism required a firmer line of defense in Manchuria, while Japan's lack of natural resources made it essential to secure the Manchurian market in face of growing Chinese resistance. In making these arguments, he would once more rely on the rhetorical tactic of defending Japan by making selective comparisons with the west, although they read as more explicitly condemnatory of the European and American powers than before.

He would make similar arguments in his other speeches, and it is important to note that this line of thinking was not new for Nitobe. As previously discussed, he began defending Japanese colonialism against western assertions of blind aggression while an exchange professor in America in 1912 and he repeatedly reiterated his claim that Japan's lack of natural resources required access to overseas markets. Even his specific defense of Japanese colonialism in Manchuria was not new. For example, in a volume he had published just before the Manchurian Incident in 1931 titled "Japan: Some Phases of her Problems and Development," he asserts Japan's "special interest" in the political and economic development of China and Manchuria. Specifically, he cites the 180,000,000 pounds it had invested to claim that Japan's interest in the region was "far more vital than that which makes America proclaim her 'Monroe Doctrine,'" and more important, as the Monroe Doctrine represented an unequal and exploitative relationship between the United States and South America whereas Japan's relationship with China was aimed at "the peace of the Far East, and ultimately the Peace of the world."⁶³ Considering this history justifying Japanese imperialism to the west, it should come as no surprise that Nitobe defended Japanese actions during the Manchurian Incident as well. Without foreknowledge of the ultimate result of Japanese aggression in Manchuria, something we cannot expect out of Nitobe, there was nothing fundamentally new about what Japanese penetration of the continent.

⁶³ Nitobe Inazō, "Japan: Some Phases of her Problems and Development," in *The Works of Inazo Nitobe* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1972): 43-44.

There was no reason in 1932 or 1933 for Nitobe to believe that Japan was embarking on a path that would lead to WWII.

However, what about the League of Nations? How could Nitobe reconcile his unquestioned support of the League during the 1920s with Japan's decision to leave the organization in 1933? The answer seems to be that Nitobe did not see Japan's withdrawal as a complete rejection of the liberal internationalist values of the 1920s. Instead, while he became more critical of the League, he maintained his and Japan's continued commitment to it and its ideals. In a speech he gave during his American tour titled "Japan's Place in the Family of Nations" in 1932, before Japan withdrew from the League, Nitobe insisted that Japan's actions were consistent with the organization's principles. Because Manchuria was essential to Japan's security, expansion into Manchuria fell under the category of self-defense, something allowed under the Covenant of the League. Nitobe however does criticize the League, portraying its history with Japan in starkly more agitational terms than he did only a few years earlier when he easily dismissed Japanese criticisms of the organization. He cites numerous examples of the League disappointing Japan, namely the rejection of the Racial Equality Clause, America's refusal to join the organization, and the lack of attention paid to eastern questions. He further calls out the failure of the League to address economic inequality between countries, specifically bringing up the injustice of Japan's lack of resources and growing trade restrictions as examples. He does not present these criticisms as a denunciation of the League however, but rather an attempt to strengthen it.⁶⁴

Once Japan did leave the League of Nations, Nitobe continued to express his belief in the institution, calling it "the greatest hope for the future welfare of the world" in a speech he gave

⁶⁴ Nitobe Inazo, "Japan's Place in the League of Nations," in *Nitobe Inazo: From Bushido to the League of Nations*, ed. Teruhiko Nagao (Sapporo: Graduate School of Letters, Hokkaido University, 2006): 92-98.

on the topic titled “How Geneva Failed.” He however affirmed the justness of Japan’s decision to withdraw and claimed the League had committed a “grave error,” although he does admit that Japan was also at fault for not adequately explaining its case to the world. He ends the speech by saying that Japan’s relations were not governed by the idea of a “family of nations,” and advocates further cooperation with America as a fellow non-member of the League and optimistically predicts a new “dawn over the Pacific” of renewed friendly relations.⁶⁵

In short then, Nitobe remained committed to the League and the ideals of international cooperation it represented even as Japan withdrew from the organization. In contrast with his earlier enthusiastic promotion of the League however, he became significantly more critical following the Manchurian Incident. That such a change should occur is not surprising. During his time at the League, there had never been an issue where the interests of the League and Japan’s interests conflicted. Once they did, Nitobe was forced to reconcile his now contradictory commitments, and it should come as no surprise that he ultimately came down more on the side of Japan.

Conclusion

What then can we make of this survey of Nitobe’s work as an internationalist? First of all, while certain themes are common across his career, his attempts at cross-cultural mediation changed significantly with both Japan’s evolving position in the world and Nitobe’s own rise to prominence as a public intellectual. This was both because his stature conditioned what kinds of activities he could engage and because his English-language writings were often aimed at

⁶⁵ Nitobe Inazo, “How Geneva Erred,” in *Nitobe Inazo: From Bushido to the League of Nations*, ed. Teruhiko Nagao (Sapporo: Graduate School of Letters, Hokkaido University, 2006): 99-103.

addressing specific tensions between Japan and the west. Thus, in 1900, when he wrote *Bushido*, he did so as a relatively undistinguished academic without formal institutional support and focused on articulating a vision of Japanese culture that an often dismissive west could not only understand, but view as equal to its own. During his 1911 speaking tour meanwhile, he had gained enough prominence that he was officially sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment and, in the face of growing anxiety in America about Japanese military power, began to address more explicitly political sources of international conflict.

However, what is also clear is that in attempting to resolve these specific points of tension between Japan and the west, he consistently adopted a defensive stance. Throughout his writings, Nitobe did not just attempt to not just present the facts about Japan in order to clear up cross-cultural misunderstandings, but strove to present his country in a positive light. Again, this is evident in *Bushido* where Nitobe made a concerted effort to establish Bushidō and by extension Japanese culture as morally equal to the west, but it is most apparent in his efforts as a propagandist following the Manchurian Incident. Despite evidence that he was personally apprehensive about the Japanese military's actions on the continent, he justified without reservation Japan's actions in Manchuria. As we have seen, this ardent defense of Japanese militarism and imperialism was not new, but can be seen in an effort throughout his career to depict Japan's colonial ventures as uplifting civilizing missions legitimated by racial affinities between the metropolitan and colonial populations.

Of course, this is not to say that Nitobe never criticized Japan or that he had no personal convictions. That Nitobe had broader internationalist convictions is evidenced by his time at the League of Nations. For much of the 1920s, Nitobe spent very little time discussing Japan to western audiences and arguably spent more effort in promoting the new post-Versailles,

Wilsonian order to his fellow Japanese. However, these convictions rarely overrode his fundamental commitment to his home country. Indeed, his time in Geneva with the League of Nations was arguably a highly abnormal period in his life. Living in a scenic, international city like Geneva and working for the League of Nations, Nitobe had the freedom to temporarily transcend national particularism to promote a truly universal vision of world peace. Once he returned to Japan however and Japan and the League came into conflict, this idealistic form of internationalism was no longer possible. Hence his growing willingness to criticize the League following the Manchurian Incident and even sanction Japan's withdrawal from the organization despite his continued commitment to its basic principles.

Read in this light, Nitobe's seemingly contradictory defense of Japanese militarism towards the end of his life was not contradictory at all; it was instead the logical conclusion of the way he approached his own internationalist activities. Even as someone who lived an undeniably cosmopolitan life, studying in the west as a young man, converting to Quakerism, and marrying a white, American woman, Nitobe always operated under the logic of the nation-state. Except for his brief employment with the League, Nitobe's international activities were confined almost entirely to discussing and explaining Japanese culture to the west or improving bilateral relations between Japan and America. Only rarely did he envision a broader role for himself beyond being just a spokesperson for Japan. Perhaps it was because of latent racism in the west towards Asians, exemplified most dramatically by American exclusion of Japanese immigrants in 1924, that made Nitobe associate so strongly with his country despite his personal cosmopolitanism. More broadly, however, Nitobe's inability to substantively criticize Japan provides insight into the limits of internationalism in a world divided into nation-states.

It is important to note that although Nitobe was an “internationalist,” during most of his life, the “international” as a concept was still in its infant stages for most of his life. Rather, the idea of a global community was something that was being constructed during the course of his life, and even then unsuccessfully.⁶⁶ This left the nation, the basic unit of political division, as the most basic and fundamental unit of political and cultural life. The result was that a principled commitment to an international order or ideal that transcended the nation was difficult if not impossible to actualize. Throughout his career Nitobe was committed to cross-cultural understanding and cooperation, but so long as the Japanese nation demanded his loyalty, it required exceptional conditions like his time in Geneva for him to actually prioritize a broader vision of global peace over the specific needs of his own country. Without such conditions, as would become tragically clear in his final days, Nitobe would feel compelled to defend his homeland to his dying breath.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the process of building an international community, see Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

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