As we have seen, Yamaji Aizan regarded Japan as a maritime nation and was critical of the unilinear view of social progress and the imperial view of history that neglected foreign influences. He took account of the activities of various peoples in the past and emphasized the water-borne links from ancient times between the Japanese islands and other parts of the world. However, such a cosmopolitan view of history could have been used to justify Japan’s attempts to colonize the neighbouring regions.

Around the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), Yamaji called himself ‘an imperialist’ and supported Japan’s annexation of Korea. It seems, however, that Yamaji’s view of territorial expansionism was different from that of the state-centred nationalist Tokutomi Sohō. In this chapter, I argue that Yamaji, who advocated the independence and freedom of the individual, wanted Japan to maintain its independence in the age of imperialism and regarded Japan’s colonization of Korea as ‘an alliance’ in common defence against foreign powers. I also argue that Yamaji continued to attach great importance to the independence and freedom of the individual under state restrictions.

YAMAJI AIZAN AND TOKUTOMI SOHŌ’S CONVERSION

It has been suggested that Tokutomi Sohō was converted from being a populist to an imperialist at the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and that he became a state-centred nationalist after the Triple Intervention (Sangoku Kanshō) in 1895.1 Below, I consider Yamaji’s view of Tokutomi’s conversion to an imperialist and clarify Yamaji’s opinion of imperialism.

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, Yamaji defended Uchimura Kanzō and other Christians against the attack of the state-centred nationalist Inoue Tetsujirō in 1893. Even so, Yamaji did not denounce war and supported the Sino-Japanese War, which Japan
fought in order to gain control over Korea. In August 1894, at the outbreak of the war, the Japanese Christian Society for the China-Korea Incident (Shin-Kan jiken Nihon kiritsuto kyōto dōshikai) was established under the leadership of Honda Yōichi. This society regarded the Sino-Japanese War as ‘a Japanese people’s mission in the East’. On 21 August, Yamaji was elected as a committee member of this society, and campaigned for the war as a Christian. In the same way as Tokutomi, Yamaji supported the Sino-Japanese War, but it seems that he did not regard the Sino-Japanese War as an imperialist war.

It should be noted that there was a substantial difference of opinion between Yamaji and Tokutomi with regard to Japan’s expansionism at that time. At the time of the Sino-Japanese War, Tokutomi Sohō published a book entitled The Expansion of the Great Japan (Dai Nihon bōchō ron, 1984), in which he advocated state-centred nationalism (kokkashugi) and supported Japan’s expansionism. With the cooperation of France and Germany, Russia demanded that Japan should return the Liaotung Peninsula to China after Japan’s victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War. Following this Triple Intervention of 1895, Tokutomi Sohō changed his view, and came to believe that ‘powerless justice’ could not defeat ‘powerful unreasonableness’. It seems that a difference of opinion between Yamaji Aizan and Tokutomi Sohō regarding Japan’s foreign policy became a serious issue at that time. In his reminiscences published in 1915, Yamaji wrote:

> When Sohō advocated Large Japanism at the company, I often complained about it and insisted on Little Japanism (Shō Nihonron). For this reason, Sohō called me ‘a Little Japanist’. Even today I do not agree with him at all on this point.

While there was a difference of opinion between Yamaji and Tokutomi, Yamaji felt like becoming independent and wanted to express his opinions as he wished. In his letter to Tokutomi Sohō, who was travelling abroad, dated in October 1896, Yamaji wrote that he wished to set up his own publishing business. In the same year, Yamaji built a house in Shibuya, Tokyo, where he held Christian prayer meetings. Kunikida Doppo (1871–1908), a member of the Munyūsha, also attended one of the meetings.

In a letter addressed to Tokutomi Sohō, dated 24 February 1897, Hitomi Ichitarō, a member of the Minyūsha, in whose hands Tokutomi had left his business, stated:

> Mr Yamaji’s resignation did not shake the foundation of the Minyūsha. On the contrary, it seems to be better than it was before his resignation.