Conclusion:
Yamaji Aizan’s Legacy

In his last years, Yamaji Aizan undertook a series lectures on Japanese history at various universities. In 1907, he gave lectures on Japanese Intellectual History (Nihon shisō shi) at Waseda University’s Faculty of Literature. In 1910, Keiō Gijuku established the Department of History in the Faculty of Literature, and Yamaji taught as a lecturer of National History (Kokushi) there until 1911. From 1912 to 1916 he was employed as a lecturer in the Faculty of Politics and Economics at Dōshisha University and taught the History of the Japanese Nation (Nihon kokumin shi). In 1915, however, Yamaji was hospitalized because of his erysipelas (acute inflammation of the skin), and had a narrow escape from death. Following his recovery, he decided to complete his lifework, The History of the Japanese People (Nihon jinmin shi). In 1916, he was appointed chief editor for the Shinano Daily Newspaper, and went to Nagano once a month to edit the newspaper. In February 1917, Yamaji undertook a lecture tour in Shinshū, Nagano prefecture which affected his health.

In August 1916, Yamaji began dictating The Past, Present and Future of the World (Sekai no kako genzai mirai) to a stenographer and finished it in January 1917. The second proof was completed on 14 March. That night Yamaji was suddenly taken ill, and the following day, 15 March, he realized that he could not get up unaided. He called his wife and asked her to hand over the manuscript to the publisher. Thirty minutes before his death, he composed his last poem: ‘Although it is regrettable that I have to leave this human world, I would go to the world where I was before my birth.’ Soon after that, he died at the age of fifty-two. It is said that Yamaji whispered ‘I will go to the place where the late Emperor Meiji sleeps’, when he breathed his last. More than seven hundred people attended his funeral in an assembly hall at Aoyama Gakuin. Yamaji’s collection of books was donated to Dōshisha University through the good offices of Tokutomi Sohō, his lifelong friend, despite their differences of opinion.
During Yamaji Aizan’s lifetime, state-centred education came to be established through the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education. The Uchimura Kanzō Incident and the High Treason Incident also took place. Japan began the colonization of Taiwan and Korea at the time of the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. The movement for liberal education and the women’s liberation movement were also initiated in the Taishō period. Below, I will consider two aspects of the legacy of Yamaji Aizan, who lived in these eventful times.

YAMAJI AIZAN AS A ‘LIBERAL’ NATIONALIST

Although his works have been interpreted in different ways, Yamaji Aizan seems to have been consistent in his opinion. In 1948 Yamaji Kyisaburō, Yamaji Aizan’s second son, wrote about his father as follows:

Although being progressive, my father was a state-centred person (kokkashugisha). I wonder what he would have done if he were alive today. Because he was not opportunistic and had a consistent philosophy, he may have stopped writing when a military clique became dominant [before and during the Second World War]. This is a question we ask ourselves today.⁵

This quotation reflects a difficulty in understanding the thoughts of Yamaji Aizan. His son regarded his father as both ‘progressive’ and ‘state-centred’, and believed that he had ‘a consistent philosophy’. Such a problem is not limited to the study of Yamaji Aizan. Susan Townsend has suggested that the achievements of some intellectuals in pre-war Japan tend to be highly controversial. For example, Iinuma Jirō, professor emeritus at Kyoto University, regarded the pre-war educator Nitobe Inazo, whose portrait appeared on the 5,000 yen note in 1981, as ‘a true imperialist’. On the contrary, for Satō Masahiro of Osaka City University, Nitobe was ‘a true believer in freedom, a pacifist, and a friend of the small man and those in trouble’.⁶ It seems that such conflicting evaluations originate in the fact that their studies had different aims. Thus, Iinuma and Satō took different aspects of Nitobe’s thought into consideration and drew their ‘opposing’ conclusions. Iinuma considered Nitobe’s nationalism in the context of Japan’s imperial expansion, while Satō found liberal elements in Nitobe’s achievements. As Ōta Yūzō has asserted, however, one could not understand Nitobe in the context of his times if one simply labelled him as ‘imperialist’.⁷

If one collected fragments of Yamaji’s works and interpreted them on the basis of limited evidence, one would be able to place his thinking in the development of imperialism. As mentioned in the