

Pan-Asianism or World Federalism?
Raja Mahendra Pratap and the Japanese Empire, 1925-1945
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My dissertation is on the fate of collaborators with Japan and the politics of treason in China and Korea from the 1930s and into the early postwar period. However, I have been working on and off on a separate project studying the rise and fall of an idea: world federalism. I became interested in this movement after finding many references to it while looking through various publications in US occupied Japan in the early aftermath of the collapse of its empire in 1945. [SLIDE 2] In a wide range of periodicals I found writers that imagined pan-Asianism being replaced or made part of a new ambitious plan for world unity. In fact, in Japan from 1945-1947, there was a brief explosion of interest in the idea of a global federal state, a *world federation* (世界連邦) that would oversee a community of nations, disarmed of their militaries and organized into loose regional blocs. Unlike the United Nations, in a world federation national sovereignty would undergo a radical reconstruction, and the existing power structures would be dissolved in a genuinely democratic federalism.

In early postwar Japan the world federalist movement gained support from an unusually diverse group of individuals, [SLIDE 3] including such well known figures as the infamous military officer Ishiwara Kanji (石原完爾), the pan-Asianist socialist Rōyama Masamichi (蠟山政道), the liberal politician Ozaki Yukio (尾崎行雄), and the Christian leader and social activist Kagawa Toyohiko (賀川豊彦). How did these figures, some of which had only a few months earlier been heralding the coming of a supreme pan-Asian community under Japanese imperial leadership, become acquainted with this utopian dream? The origins of the world federalist movement in Japan are to be found in the work of an unlikely Indian activist, Raja Mahendra Pratap, [SLIDE 4] whose

campaign against British rule in South Asia came to exist side by side with a move to establish a world federation.¹ However, given Pratap's willingness to work closely with the enemies of the British empire, and his genuine desire to seek global unity by transcending all of the political ideologies of the day, his eclectic visions for the future differed in many fundamental ways with that of other contemporary world federalists. These differences reveal, however, some of the most significant challenges to any similar attempt at achieving political unity at the global scale.

Raja Mahendra Pratap (1886-1979) was an Indian religious and political leader born a Hindu, married into a Sikh aristocratic family, and educated at a Muslim university. The degree to which his life was filled with contradictions may be gleaned from the unusual distinction Pratap earned in life as someone who was both nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1932 and jailed in Tokyo's infamous Sugamo Prison at the close of World War II on suspicion of war crimes. Pratap is today best remembered for his role during World War I in the founding of the Provisional Government of India in Afghanistan in 1916 and his wartime negotiations with the German Kaiser Wilhelm II and similar pleas in his meetings with both Lenin and Trotsky in the Soviet Union to gain support for a military invasion of India led by Pratap's own volunteers. After his failure to liberate India during first world war, he sought help elsewhere, traveling widely, and meeting a wide range of activists and political leaders from Marcus Garvey (1922, 1925) to Sun Yat-sen (1925) and corresponding with many others, including Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama. Pratap's interest in East Asia grew, and he eventually found a welcome audience in Japan which he would visit several times in the 1920s, and make his home from 1936-1946.² In Japan Pratap joined other Indian exiled independence activists and a number of well-

¹ Nakajima Takeshi "R. M. Purataapu to kindai nihon no ajiashugi – hanshokuminchi nettowaaku sekairenpō nihon teikokushugi" [R. M. Pratap and Pan-Asianism in modern Japan – the anti-colonial network, world federalism, and Japanese imperialism] *Kokusai Seiji* [International politics] 146 (2006): 64.

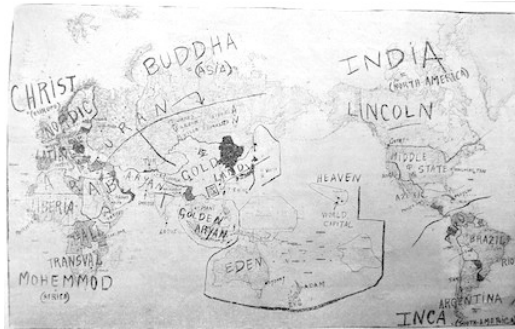
² For details of his travels see reprint of his memoir, Raja Mahendra Pratap *Reminiscences of a Revolutionary* (Books India International, 1999).

known Japanese pan-Asianists [SLIDE 5] such as Ōkawa Shūmei (大川周明) and secretary-general of the Greater Asia Society Nakatani Takeyō (中谷武世) to promote Asian unity and convince Japan to overthrow Western, and especially, British imperialism. Pratap attended conferences for the Pan-Asiatic League in Shanghai (1927) and Dalian (1934) and spoke fondly of the cultural and spiritual underpinnings of an Asian identity.

If Pratap had remained focused on the liberation of India with Japanese help in the name of Asian unity, he would closely resemble his two fellow exiles Rash Behari Bose and Subhas Chandra Bose [SLIDE 6] who also collaborated closely with the Japanese. However, there were two additional elements to Pratap's world vision both formed during his travels in the 1920s that set him apart. First, Pratap became the proponent of a pantheistic "Religion of Love" that sought to unify the world's religions and he published a widely distributed book by that name translated into Japanese by the Nakatani Takeyō himself. Secondly, from around 1929 Pratap began to support the creation of not just an Asian union, but a world federation. [SLIDE 7] From 1929 until 1943 he published a newsletter, *World Federation*, setup educational World Federation Centers in Beijing, Tokyo, and Manila, and appointed officials for his organization among his supporters in places as far off as the United States, Iceland, and Sweden.

Pratap's federation designated "English-American" as its world language, with a world capital to be established in Honolulu. [SLIDE 8] It was to be composed of newly established nations, going by names such as "Nordic," "Latin," "Lincoln," and "Eden" each with capitals in cities such as Copenhagen and Karachi. Most problematic for those who conceived of a pan-Asian unity along the lines popularly proposed in Japan, Pratap split "Greater East Asia" into several new nations. The "Aryan nation," including India, was to stretch from "Iran to Assam" but on one of his maps, southeast Asia is to be included the "Golden Aryan" nation, while East Asia, including the Japanese empire and

China, would form the “Gold Land” with its capital in Qingdao. These would together form, along with much of the Soviet Union a regional unit, the role of which is never clarified, known as “Buddha.”



Pratap's World Federation as of 1935³

Pratap's conception of a world federation differed in significant ways from plans that were being put forward by other groups at the time such as the Campaign for World Government, or organizations formed later such as the Committee to Frame a World Constitution and the United World Federalists. Whereas these other organizations developed detailed plans to establish the infrastructure and electoral mechanics of a global federal government, Pratap remained vague in the details. He even suggested in a 1941 letter to one supporter in rural Japan that, despite his personal admiration for the man, Mahatma Gandhi may not come to power in a Japanese liberated Aryan nation because a republican form of government may not be adopted.⁴

Supporters of Clarence Streit's passionate appeal for a federal "Union Now!" of democracies worldwide on the eve of World War II and the later United World Federalists were motivated by their fear of totalitarianism. The anti-Communist and anti-Fascist appeals by these groups would create one of the most important splits in the movement for global unity over who to include in a federal union. Pratap, on the other hand, saw no contradiction between his broader message of peace and his support for anti-democratic

³ *World Federation* 7.4 (July-August 1935): 3.

⁴ Letter to Yasuno Nishino, Feb. 9th, 1941.

powers. He refused a donation from an American supporter who was also a member of an anti-Fascist league, stating, “We stand for certain compromises with fascism, under certain circumstances.”⁵ [SLIDE 9] In 1935, frustrated at the denial of his visa application to enter the Soviet Union, we find him carefully trying to avoid insulting any of his potential supporters in either the Communist or Fascist world, “...the people responsible for the obstruction in my way to USSR must be the bitter enemies of Comrade Stalin and the worst type of fascists, I do not say the good type of fascists.”⁶ Eventually, following the path he took during World War I, Pratap threw in his lot with the Axis powers that opposed his bitter enemy, the British Empire. This he confides to what was still a global audience on the eve of the war in a 1939 issue of *World Federation*, [SLIDE 10]

Japan, Italy and Germany have joined hands. They are bound to clash with the old established colony owners a day earlier or later. What should we do then? I have no hesitation in suggesting that the friends of humanity, labour in general, peace workers and the oppressed nations should help this coalition... We surely stand for world order where every locality becomes self-governing and all united in a world state. However, so long as the struggle continues the weaker states have every right to strengthen their positions.⁷

Pratap imagined a world in which the “weak states,” among which he included the expanding empire of Japan and a fascist Germany, had the right to fight against the old imperial powers and a United States that “monopolized” wealth. At a rally held at Hibiya park in Tokyo on December 1st, 1941, only days before Japanese forces launched their attack on Pearl Harbor, Pratap would declare President Roosevelt an enemy of world peace.⁸

Whereas the U.S. based Campaign for World Government maintained a firm anti-war message even during World War II, the former militant revolutionary Pratap wanted to bring about his world federation with the help of a “world army,” sworn to the belief that war was a social disease but made up of five continental divisions that were dedicated,

⁵ *World Federation* 9.2 (1937): 4.

⁶ *World Federation* 7.4 (July-August 1935): 4.

⁷ *World Federation* 9.1 (1939): 1.

⁸ *World Federation* 13.1 (December, 1941): 3.

“should war come,” to the elimination of racial, national, and economic slavery.⁹ Despite Pratap’s deep love for the poor and a lifelong dedication to charitable works, these warriors for world unity were not to carry out a violent class war and though he never seemed to find similar fault with fascism, he eventually came to see Communism as a violent ideology that fed upon hatred. Instead he wanted to eliminate poverty through, “education, training and transforming the present order into the order of cooperative life.”¹⁰ He admits in one issue of his newsletter, “...I was born rich. I still have many rich friends and close relations. I do not want to see them murdered for no fault of theirs.”¹¹ Pratap would, however, eventually abandon his global military ambitions and, reverting in 1941 to liberation on a regional level. He still lived in and wrote under the letterhead of his “World Federation Center” and focused his efforts on recruiting an “Aryan army” for the liberation of India with Japanese supplied arms. To this end, he worked in close collaboration with fellow independence activist Rash Behari Bose, [SLIDE 11] but lost Japanese military support when they selected the younger Subhas Chandra Bose as their leader for the wartime pro-Japanese Indian National Army.

The correspondence of Pratap housed in the National Archives of India and found in the possession of the hundreds of recipients of his letters around the world may help us better understand what this enigmatic Indian figure really expected to emerge should a world federation come about. So much of his public writing was doubtlessly guided by the audiences he attempted to reach, especially after March, 1942 when he was ordered by his Japanese hosts to sit quietly in his World Federation Center [SLIDE 12] in Tokyo for the duration of the war. Though his lectures throughout Japan, and close connections to Japanese wartime ideologues implanted the idea of world federalism among a large number of Japanese educated elites who would return to it in the early postwar period,

⁹ *World Federation* 7.2 (March-April 1935): 2.

¹⁰ *World Federation* 7.4 (July-August 1935): 4.

¹¹ *World Federation* 9.1 (1939): 1.

ultimately his own movement, run by a small handful of individuals, was a failure that never attracted much financial support or membership. There is little to suggest that Pratap attempted to revive it in the postwar period following his release by the American military from prison in 1946 and return to India, where he served in the upper house of parliament from 1957-1962 and was a onetime chairman of the Freedom Fighters Association of India. [SLIDE 13]

In Pratap's movement, however, we see represented all the central problems faced by any attempt to create a super-national state, whether it be regional or global in scale. They remained challenges for similar regional and globally minded organizations and movements down to the present day. [SLIDE 14] First, from the start Pratap needed to answer an appeal from those who believed the key to transcending the nation was to embrace the battle for social and economic justice. [a] No one in the 20th century better represented this cause than supporters of socialism and most of the diverse movements for world federalism failed to provide a detailed and convincing alternative. Pratap always opposed class warfare, but assured his supporters that in his federated world state, "economic life will be based on the principle that all needs are truly satisfied."¹² [b] Secondly, such a movement must overlook vastly differing standards of political justice in order to achieve unity. Pratap's hatred for imperialism set him strongly against the British Empire but what he witnessed on his travels through colonial Korea, occupied Manchuria and wartime China made him an awkward ally of Japan. Finally, despite his strong connections to Japan's leading pan-Asianists, and his campaigns on behalf of his "Aryan nation," Pratap was not ignorant of one of the central flaws [c] of pursuing strong regional blocs: the fact that loyalty, and the violence carried out in its name, can easily scale to the new regional level: [SLIDE 15]

¹² *World Federation* 14.2 (February 1942): 1.

"Understand This! Why do you not understand this simple thing: If some one loves Japan he can not love India and if some one loves India he can not love Japan. But one who loves Asia he can love Japan, China, India and the other countries of this continent alike. And one who loves Asia he can not love Europe or America. He will sow seeds of bigger struggles of the continents. But one who loves the world will surely love Africa, Europe and Americas all alike."¹³

¹³ *World Federation* 8.4 (July-August 1936): 2.