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Theodore Roosevelt and William Sturgis Bigelow: The Story of a Friendship

Akiko Murakata

FEW PERSONAL FRIENDSHIPS of an American President look so incongruous at first sight as that of Theodore Roosevelt with Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow. Nothing could be further from the strenuous life, "big stick" diplomacy, and big-game hunt, championed by Roosevelt, than the esoteric Buddhism and Japanese art patronized by the Boston Orientalist. Yet the two remained on good terms, developing a remarkably enduring and mutually rewarding relationship over three decades until Roosevelt's death in 1919. The record of this unique friendship, illuminating not only as an engaging episode of the President's life but also for its important bearing on the nation's cultural and political history, is preserved among the Theodore Roosevelt papers at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

Theodore Roosevelt first met Dr. Bigelow in Paris in the spring of 1887 during his second honeymoon. The wealthy bachelor and impeccably proper Bostonian was on his way home for a visit from Japan, the land of his prolonged sojourn. Henry Cabot Lodge, just elected Congressman from Massachusetts and Bigelow's closest friend from childhood through Harvard, was responsible for their acquaintance. "In Paris we dined at the Jays, and there, to our great delight, met Bigelow," Roosevelt wrote to Lodge from London of their first meeting: "and the following evening (our last before coming here) dined with him at a restaurant. He was most charming; but, Cabot, *why* did you not tell me he was an esoteric Buddhist? I would then have been spared some frantic floundering when the subject of religion happened to be broached. I'll tell you about it in full when

we meet."¹ Roosevelt was then twenty-eight years old, eight years younger than Bigelow and Lodge.

Born of a famous surgeon and a daughter of a wealthy China-trade merchant, Bigelow received the best possible education, including five years' postdoctoral medical study in Europe, where he developed a connoisseur's taste for art. Unable to settle down to practice in Boston, he went to Japan in 1882 with Edward S. Morse, a Salem zoologist who taught Darwinism at the University of Tokyo. Bigelow stayed there for seven years, collecting objects of art and studying esoteric Buddhism of the Tendai and the Shingon sects with Ernest F. Fenollosa, who also taught at the University of Tokyo. Often compared to Dr. Peter Alden, father of Oliver, in George Santayana's novel *The Last Puritan* (1936),² Dr. Bigelow was much more faithful to proper Boston standards than the wandering physician in his private yacht, the *Black Swan*, even though he did not "come home & get up some grandchildren . . . like a well-regulated Bostonian."³ More of a patrician and less of a Bohemian, Dr. Bigelow counted among his personal friends, besides Lodge and Roosevelt, such respectable prominent men and women as Henry Lee Higginson, Henry and Marian Adams, John L. and Isabella Gardner, John LaFarge, John Hay, Edith Wharton, and Percival and A. Lawrence Lowell. The Gardners, Henry Adams, and LaFarge visited him in Japan, and Percival Lowell was his companion there. Unlike the apolitical Alden in Santayana's "Memoir in the Form of a Novel," Bigelow remained a loyal Republican all his life.⁴

¹Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), II, 52-54; Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), I, 125.

²Van Wyck Brooks set the precedent in *Fenollosa and His Circle* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962) and almost all other writers on Bigelow have since taken their cue from him.

³William S. Bigelow to Phillips Brooks, 19 August 1889, Akiko Murakata, "Selected Letters of Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow," Dissertation, George Washington, 1971, p. 84.

⁴It seems that Bigelow and Santayana knew each other, the Spanish philosopher being related to one branch of the Sturgis family tree through his mother's first marriage. Santayana was also a member of the Tavern Club to which, among more exclusive other clubs, Bigelow belonged. They met at least at one of the many dinner parties Mrs. Gardner gave, according to the guest book kept at the Isabella S. Gardner Museum, Boston.

Finally coming home in 1889, Bigelow presided over the newly founded Department of Chinese and Japanese Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where he succeeded his father as a trustee. He invited Fenollosa as its curator to take charge of their vast collections, now arriving from Japan. At his summer house on idyllic Tuckernuck Island off Nantucket, the Doctor practised esoteric meditation and initiated into Buddhism George Cabot "Bay" Lodge, the politician's poet son. A perfect host in "the seat of a double material luxury, that of the presence of everything essential as well as that of carefully thought out elimination of the superfluous," Bigelow also entertained "his masculine unencumbered guests," with "the air of an Eastern Potentate."⁵ Luxuriating in conspicuous leisure, he would tease Bay's father nailed in the nation's capital: "Unless you propose to sow yr. constitution with the seeds of disease & death (resp. Potomac malaria) you had better let Congress g. t. H. & come down to Tuckanuck." "Your bed is ready, the waves break white on the yellow sand, the soft wind is balmy, the society dam select, & the nearest telegraph at Nantucket."⁶

Lodge succumbed to the charms of Tuckernuck, if not so devotedly as his son, who would have inherited Bigelow's idyllic haven but for his untimely death on the very island. Roosevelt, while serving as Police Commissioner of New York, found it "simply impossible for me to leave just now unless I shirk my work," but he appreciated Bay's Tuckernuck-inspired poem, "The Wave," which Bigelow recited for him: "Upon my word it has a fairly Elizabethan touch."⁷

The Roosevelt-Bigelow friendship was firmly established, revolving around Senator Lodge (Senator since 1893) and the Republican Party. Bigelow's letter to Lodge, 23 November 1895, clearly testifies to his genuine concern for their younger friend of great promise:

Theodore Roosevelt dined with me the other night. He has grown several years older in the last month. He looks worn & tired, for him, and has lost much of his natural snap & buoyancy. At this rate it is only a question of time when he has a breakdown, and when he does it will be a bad one. He is in a wholly false position & ought to be got out of it. . . .

⁵Dr. Frederick C. Shattuck, "William Sturgis Bigelow," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings* (October, 1926), p. 18; Charles Warren Stoddard, "Tuckernuck," *Ave Maria*, 2 Jan. 1904, pp. 16-17.

⁶Murakata, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

⁷Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 223 and p. 216.

Roosevelt ought to have a solid rest of several months. They can't remove him. He can't resign without putting himself in the light of giving up, beaten, which he will never do till he drops. The only thing is to get him *shifted* somehow, to an *easier place* that he can hold on till the next Presidential year, when he ought to have anything he wants. . . . If he keeps on with this job he will break down, & we shall lose one of the very few really first-class men in the country. — Think this over. — ⁸

Lodge did think it over, and succeeded two years later in getting Roosevelt the office of Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Bigelow commended Lodge's work as "nothing short of *masterly*": "I am more pleased than I can tell you at T.R.'s appointment. I have an almost superstitious feeling about him that he has a great deal depending on him — 10 or 20 years hence. There is nobody else just like him above the horizon. — " ⁹ Bigelow's prophecy was to come true sooner than he expected.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 created a minor crisis in the Roosevelt-Bigelow relationship. Distrusting the jingoism of the yellow press and fearing for Roosevelt's political future, Bigelow did his best to dissuade the leader of the Rough Riders from going to the Cuban front. "If T.R. goes, the country will not trust him again," Bigelow wrote to Lodge.¹⁰ He was afraid that the war would give the European powers a chance to combine against the United States as the tripartite intervention of Germany, France, and Russia had forced Japan to give up the spoils of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. Little did he dream that the new Assistant Secretary of the Navy would seize the opportunity of acting for his chief to alert the Asiatic Squadron for an attack on the distant Philippines in case of war with Spain. On 27 March 1898, Bigelow wrote a special letter to Roosevelt by way of Lodge "nominally so that his secretary shall not read it — really that you may use your judgment about giving it to him."¹¹ This letter unfortunately has been lost, but was apparently handed to Roosevelt, as he wrote back two days later.

Dear Old Man: Cabot handed me your letter yesterday, and I was deeply touched by it, as I always am by your repeated proofs of sincere interest. It is very hard for me to have to follow a course to which Cabot and you are

⁸ Murakata, pp. 136-137.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁰ p. 166.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

opposed. I can only assure you that I adopted it after having given most careful consideration to all that both you and many other friends have said to me on the other side; and whether I am mistaken or not my action will be due to my conscientious belief and to really careful thought. . . .¹²

From Santiago de Cuba Theodore sent "warmest love" to Sturgis Bigelow via Cabot Lodge. Bay also left for the war. Too busy trying to keep Roosevelt out of the war, Bigelow lost a chance to go back to Japan for further studies of Buddhism.

Having underestimated the exuberant energy of the emerging American empire, Bigelow became resigned to the reign of his former protégé, returned a war hero, elected Governor of New York, and then Vice-President. "Dear Mr. Vice-President—," Bigelow sent his greetings on 18 March 1901:

Allow me to write that again. I feel a peculiar sense of vastness in doing so. —Dear V.P. It is hard to get used to it. —. . . I note you are billed to appear in this town at the Annual Benefit of the Market-man's Benevolent Association, or some such thing, & merely wish to remind you that if repose is what you want there is a 'umble but 'appy 'ome yawning for you here, where the women cease from troubling and the wicked are at rest, and the parlor girl is educated to say, "not at home" to stray visitors with a face that makes marble look like putty. — Write a few days beforehand to *Mary A. Clancey, 60 Beacon* in case by any chance I am not in town when your note comes, & she will take charge of & feed you as Elijah did the Ravens; she has the key of the wine cellar — Try the *Graacher Dinnelreich* — a rather good moselle I have just got.¹³

When President McKinley was assassinated within six months, Bigelow soon had to renew his homage to the new President. "*Vive le roi*," said the telegram from Nantucket, co-signed by George Cabot Lodge.

The most important impact of Bigelow's friendship with President Roosevelt was in the area of Japanese-American relations. The exponent of Japanese art attempted to extend his subtle cultural influence to the White House. Bigelow showed the President the grips and catches of Jyu-jitsu (Judo), asking the Secretary of War to lie down on the floor. He then recommended Professor J. J. O'Brien, the first American teacher of the art which "all the police and army officers learn" in Japan.¹⁴ "Dear Sturgis," the President reported to

¹² Morison, *op. cit.*, II, 801.

¹³ Murakata, pp. 180-181.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

his Boston friend on his progress: "I am having a great time with O'Brien. His system is marvellous, but I am finding difficulty in learning it."¹⁵ A Judo room was installed in the White House before long where Professor Yamashita and the Japanese naval attaché, Commander Takshita, gave lessons to the President and his sons. When Bigelow returned from his second trip to Japan in 1902-03, a book on Judo, six Judo jackets, and tea were his souvenirs for the First Family.

The President received Nitobe Inazo's *Bushido, the Soul of Japan* (1900) with more reservation. Acknowledging Bigelow's gift of the book, Roosevelt wrote: "I have read 'Bushido' and so has Ted [Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.]. Now, do you know enough to say whether that is really studied in Japan, and represents home Japanese philosophy, and not Japanese philosophy for export? The last is alleged by the enemies of Japan."¹⁶ "Dear Theodore," Bigelow gallantly met the Presidential challenge:

"Bushido" is the real thing. There is no trace of manufacture for export about it. The Japanese value the book highly. For instance: — when I landed two years ago an old friend — a Samurai who had fought through the Satsuma rebellion on the losing side, been imprisoned, and now holds a high government place in Tokyo under his former enemies — a man whom I have always called the typical Samurai — brought me the book as the best thing extant in English. Nothing could be farther from the truth than the suggestion that it is a gallery-play.¹⁷

As the war clouds gathered over the Far East with the pending confrontation between Japan and Russia, the President reminded Bigelow: "Poor Japan has more important things to attend to than Jiu Jitsu at present!"¹⁸ There was no question about whose side Bigelow was on in the Russo-Japanese War, which broke out on 20 February 1904, but his main concern lay in the protection of precious cultural property, threatened with perishing under the fire of war. "Dear Mr. President," Bigelow began his letter of 9 May 1904, with his usual coaxing tone when asking for some favor:

Don't you want to do one good act? Because here is your chance.

¹⁵ 19 March 1902, Theodore Roosevelt papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶ 19 January 1905, Roosevelt papers, I.C.

¹⁷ Murakata, p. 267.

¹⁸ 8 February 1904, Roosevelt papers, LC.

Mukden is the old capital of the Manchus. The old Manchu palace still stands. The Kien-lung Emperor collected and sent to Mukden for preservation an immense library of all the most valuable books and MSS. that could be found in China, from the earliest down to their own time, and stored them in the palace, where they have been untouched ever since. — There are things of the greatest value, and others beyond valuation — for instance the only copies of the earliest Chinese translations of Indian MSS. of which the originals are lost, even in India.

When the war broke out the Japanese scholars sent a petition to the Minister of War asking him to save the palace and library if possible. — If the Japanese get it it will be safe.

But the Russians in Peking quartered their troops in the temples, and tore up the books of the temple-libraries to sleep on. The Chinese paper is soft, and they piled it on the floors thickly enough to be comfortable.

They may be doing the same in Mukden now. And if they evacuate the city, they will burn it, and then everything will go.

The Japanese want to have the books put in safety, no matter where or by whom, at St. Petersburg — London — Paris — anywhere — so long as they are only saved.

It is a sort of second Alexandrian library business.

Cannot you arrange by cable with King Edward, the German Emperor and the French President to put some combined pressure on Russia — in the form of a united request — that will prevent the disaster? ¹⁹

The above-quoted letter is to be found among the John Hay papers at the Library of Congress so that the President probably referred the matter to his Secretary of State.

Elated over Japan's initial success in battle, Bigelow blurted out to the President:

Teikoku Banzai! [Hurrah for the Empire!] The papers say that Europe is trying to get you to stop the fight. — I hope you will see them damned first. Kuroki and Nogi will stop it fast enough after they get together. All they need now is to be let alone.²⁰

In this the President good-naturedly concurred: "Banzai! How the fur will fly when Nogi joins Oyama!"²¹ "Last night I saw a Jap. naval officer who was second in command on one of their cruisers in the fight in which the *Burik* was sunk," the President wrote to Bigelow on 9 January 1905, enclosing a special 22-page report from

¹⁹ Murakata, pp. 257–258. It appears that much, at least, of this material was transferred to Tokyo, where it was destroyed in the earthquake of 1923.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²¹ 7 January 1905, Roosevelt papers, LC.



PLATE I
WILLIAM STURGIS BIGELOW
(HARVARD GRADUATION PHOTOGRAPH, 1871)



PLATE II
WILLIAM STURGIS BIGELOW
1850-1926

George Kennan at Port Arthur: "I guess the Baltic fleet being on its way home means that all danger to Japan on the sea is over, unless the war lasts a year or two longer." Kennan's letter, dated 20 November 1904, congratulated the President on his re-election and, describing the siege of Port Arthur in full detail, was outspokenly in favor of the Japanese:

To complete my happiness and confirm my optimistic view of life and the future is the surrender of Port Arthur. The task set the Japanese here was a most tremendous one, but they are accomplishing it with *certainty*, and with an exhibition of patience, ingenuity, and heroic courage that I have never before seen in my lifetime and that I never expect to see again. . . .²²

Following their overwhelming victory in the Battle of Tsushima Straits toward the end of May, the Japanese government formally asked the American President to mediate, which led to the Portsmouth Peace Conference in August 1905. Japan secured the recognition of her hegemony in Korea and, through the acquisition of Russia's Liaotung Peninsula leasehold and the South Manchurian Railway, consolidated her position in North China, but failed to obtain all of the Island of Sakhalin and an indemnity (contrary to all the precedents set by the West in its conquest of the East). The anti-government riot in Tokyo following the conclusion of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty expressed Japanese outrage at what they considered grossly unfair terms of peace. Their disappointment was shared by the Boston doctor, of whom Roosevelt complained to Lodge: "If Sturgis Bigelow, who ought to know better, does not see things straight about the Russian-Japanese peace, no wonder the Japanese mob goes crooked."²³ The Senator in turn confessed:

I am a good deal surprised that the Japs should have yielded so completely. I think they could have made a stand on Saghalin and broken off on that with credit, but it is evident that the Russians were perfectly willing to have the slaughter go on rather than yield. Their febleness and stupidity came out very strong. My opinion of the Japanese has risen enormously. I think they have shown themselves very high minded, and although just now they are in the midst of dissatisfaction and discontent I believe that what they have done will make them much stronger in the end.²⁴

²² With Roosevelt's letter to Bigelow, 9 January 1905.

²³ Lodge, p. 190.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

The President agreed with Lodge "as to the feebleness and stupidity of the Russians and also as to what you say of the Japs," but thought that

the rioting in Tokio, directed as it has been partly against foreigners and Christians . . . shows that the people have not advanced as far as their government and that it is a good thing for mankind that the war should have ended as it did, without the Japanese getting an enormous indemnity and with them still facing Russia in East Asia. . . . I shall do everything I can to help Japan and have a most friendly feeling for her, but it would be a bad thing for her and for all mankind if the hopes of her ultra admirers like Sturgis Bigelow had been gratified; for evidently the Japanese people have been in great danger of having their heads turned.²⁵

Lodge felt the need to ease the strain between the President and their Japanophile friend: "Bigelow, you know, thinks you the greatest of modern Statesmen. Don't think his admiration of you has ever waned. Not at all. But he thought that the Japs yielded too much and was terribly disappointed. He became reasonable after the first."²⁶ Bigelow, however, was not yet quite reconciled. "Dear Theodore," he pleaded from his island retreat where he was sojourning with Bay Lodge:

I am yearning to ask the President a question, but am deterred by shyness. — Now you know him well and see him often, and you are not shy. — Why can't you *tâter le terrain* and see if I can do it without being sent to the Bastille?

What I want to know is *who began it?*

Did the initiative to calling the Portsmouth Conference come from Japan or Russia?

Apparently Japan is worse off in some ways than before the Conference met. — Cabot says the Japanese have now got, without the indemnity, all they said they wanted before the war. — I answer that no nation goes to war for an indemnity any more than a man goes to law for costs. — The costs go with the verdict. The indemnity goes with the victory. . . . Cabot says he knows for certain that it is all right, which I am only too glad to believe. But from outside what the Japanese have done appears as unintelligible as if the Germans in '70 had suddenly made peace and gone home just before Sedan. — I can't make head or tail of it. — . . .²⁷

The President's long, confidential answer from the White House, dated 23 September 1905, is a testimony to his sincerity and patience

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁷ Murakata, p. 270.

with a friend who could be unduly obstinate at times. We do not need to reproduce the whole letter, but note his explanation that the Japanese asked him to mediate "much as our politicians do when they ask 'voluntary contributions' from office-holders."²⁸

Another major issue in Japanese-American relations under the Roosevelt administration was the anti-Japanese hostility in California. On 11 October 1906, the San Francisco School Board ordered the segregation of all Japanese and other Oriental children. This was followed by a riot in San Francisco and talk of an anti-American boycott in Japan. On 25 October the Japanese government gravely warned that the Board's action violated the treaty of 1894 which prescribed equal rights with Americans for Japanese residents in the United States. On the same day Bigelow wrote to the President:

Japanese feeling swings like a pendulum. -- I saw it alternate from anti- to pro-foreign and back several times while I lived there. The present flare-up is the normal reaction from the extreme pro-American feeling after the war. They are sensitive as children to apparent slights, or apparent respect and consideration.

If they could be brought to realize that the bank-president in S.F. was killed not because he was a Japanese but in the same way that our own people were killed at the same time by rioters who were out of control for the moment they would be more apt to sympathize with our misfortune than to complain of their own.

They don't care -- broadly speaking -- what is done to them as long as it does not seem to be done to them *as Japanese*. -- On this they are touchy. For California -- or Congress -- to legislate against them on the ground that they are Mongolians is just as if they should legislate against us on the ground that we are Germans -- or negroes.

If a boycott comes out of this California will feel it most. -- Serve her right. -- If you should say you favor the naturalization of Japanese the present trouble would disappear like a puff of smoke -- even if Congress failed to authorize it. -- All of which you know better than I. --²⁹

To this Bigelow received a "kind and unexpected answer," most promptly, too. Moreover, the President enclosed a draft of the Japanese part of his message to Congress which he also intended to show to the Japanese Ambassador Aoki. Entitled "International Morality," the passage incorporated all the points made by Bigelow, who happily wrote back:

²⁸ Roosevelt papers, J.C.

²⁹ Murakata, pp. 280-281.

You have said exactly the right thing from the Jap. standpoint, and it will come at the physiological [sic] moment to catch the ball on the bounce there as far as feeling toward us is concerned.

Root's excellent and tactful dispatch must I think have blocked all chance of a boycott in the mean time. . . . It is hard to see how the craziest agitator in San Francisco is going to get away from what you have said this time.

I would give a good deal to see Aoki's face when you read it to him. — . . . You perhaps do not realize how intensely this thing — the recommendation of naturalization — will please the Japanese. Very likely they will not show it much. It is not good manners to express emotion with them. But they will be pleased right into the middle of their souls.³⁰

This was probably the most overt case of Bigelow's personal pressure actually influencing a Presidential decision. With his characteristic vigor, the President sent his Secretary of Labor and Commerce, Victor H. Metcalf, to San Francisco and simultaneously invited the whole School Board to the White House for a conference. The President's message, sent to Congress on 4 December, however, embittered the California delegation and roused San Franciscans. Even though the Japanese question concerned only a part of his 30,000-word message, the *New York Times* ran the following headline: "President Demands Citizenship for Japanese. Says he will use all the present power, civil and military, to meet the present emergency in California." Bigelow was not unaware of such unwelcome developments, as he wrote to Lodge: "If the President has not modified the Japanese part of his message since Metcalf came back, there will be a stir in San Francisco tomorrow."³¹ The President did not modify his message appended to the Metcalf Report, which was presented to Congress on 19 December with a plea that San Francisco must remove the bar against the Japanese school children without Federal intervention. The San Francisco School Board, however, did not withdraw its order until after the Gentlemen's Agreement was reached in February 1907 between Japan and the United States, drastically curbing Japanese immigration.

It was not Bigelow's wont to ask for Presidential favors. But the favors he did ask touched on improving America's relations with Japan, as he wrote again on 17 January 1908:

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-282.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

I hear from Japan in a way that makes me believe it that the Japanese would be gratified and flattered if the U.S. would propose an exchange of professors such as we make with France and Germany. They have made such an agreement with both these nations. . . . I have in Japan some considerable quantity of books and paintings of very high grade that Anthony Comstock will not let me bring into this country. — The old Japanese like the Greeks and Romans put some of their best work into such subjects. — Every Museum, like every Library, has things of value that are not for the general public. I should like to see these safely stored in the Art Museum here, but I will give them to the National Museum or Congressional Library rather than not get them into this country. — There are Comstocks in Japan, too, and there is friction in getting them out. — It would need special arrangements at both ends to get them out and in. Can anything be done about it? ³²

The books and paintings in question seem to have come to the Asiatic Department of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, but they are so jealously guarded by its staff that nobody, not even qualified scholars from outside, can see them.

Later in 1909, the Emperor of Japan conferred upon Dr. Bigelow the third order of the Rising Sun, the highest decoration to be given to a foreign private citizen. The Japanese government cited his outstanding contribution to the conservation in Japan and introduction to America of traditional Japanese art as the main reason for the exceptional honor, a citation which Bigelow well deserved for his indefatigable championing of the Empire.

The American President encouraged the Boston aesthete to make a "numismatic excursion." With the help of Bela L. Pratt, a Boston sculptor, Bigelow designed an incised coin with an American eagle on one side and an Indian's head on the other, to be called the "Bigelow-Pratt coin." "I enclose you the visible proof of a great service you have rendered the country," the President wrote to Bigelow on 26 September 1908:

Here you will see the five dollar gold piece, the copy of the models you had prepared, and a month hence our 5-dollar gold pieces that are issued from the mint will all be of this type. This one I send you is the first one struck. It therefore has a peculiar historic interest and I feel you are peculiarly entitled to have it; so please accept it with the compliment of Director Leach and myself.³³

The old man humbly wrote back:

³² pp. 298-299.

³³ Roosevelt papers, LC.

It is a great pleasure and privilege to have the first one struck — . . . and a still greater to have your letter. To "have rendered a great service to the country" is a thing I never dreamed of aspiring to. I am going to have that cut on a tombstone forthwith and keep it in the Storage Warehouse till I need it. . . . One thing is sure — I should never have rendered the service if it had not been for you. If the thing turns out well it is your doing. *Thanks!*⁸⁴

The line about his tombstone was apparently meant as a joke; Bigelow's ashes were to be divided between his American grave, a simple slate at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a more elaborate set of lanterns, vases, and a pagoda-shaped granite tomb at Homyo-in Temple, Otsu, Japan. The former has merely the inscription, "W.S.B. 1850-1926," while the latter bears his Buddhist legal name, "Gesshin," in two Chinese characters, meaning "Moon Mind."

Early in 1909 the President appointed Bigelow a member of the Assay Commission, which was supposed to test annually the coins produced the previous year. Bigelow's acknowledgment of the honorary position betrayed a Bostonian's playful condescension, even to a President:

They say that a stranger went to a Brookline party and said there was nobody but Cabots — that there seemed to be two kinds of Cabots — one kind would not speak to anybody but Cabots — the other kind would not speak to anybody.

Since the receipt of the appointment with which you have honored me I have adopted the general attitude of the latter class. I shall, however, relax my principles so far as to come and express my appreciation in person in a day or two.⁸⁵

"Do come on here soon and speak to an alien who would like to be a Cabot by adoption!" the President replied.⁸⁶

The Bostonian and the President visited each other. Most eloquently, Bigelow invited Roosevelt to his Eden:

. . . The thing for you to do is to take the Dolphin (resp. Mayflower), tell the world you are going fishing, steer straight out to sea, and land on the south side of Tuckernuck, which you can do in a small ship's boat in calm weather. — Cabot knows the ropes. — He says you like violent exercise, with danger. — You won't after you have been in Tuckernuck twenty-four hours, but in the mean time you can try spearing flounders from a dory. Poling against the tide is guaranteed exercise enough for anybody, and as for danger — I need not tell you of the giant N.E. Flounder, whose teeth take off a man's leg as you

⁸⁴Murakata, p. 303.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 308.

⁸⁶Roosevelt papers, LC.

cut a straw with scissors, and a blow of whose tail shatters a boat to kindling wood. . . . You are a naturalist yourself.³⁷

But in 1905, when the President finally yielded to Bigelow's temptation, he exhausted the resources of the island in less than twenty-four hours and left for the mainland bored. Roosevelt had a more eventful visit in Boston in February 1907, which was preceded by a lively exchange of notes between the White House and 60 Beacon Street. The President's appreciation was as efficient as his activities:

First, let me thank you heartily for the delightful time I had and which I could not possibly have had save as your guest. I enjoyed the entire visit, but in their order I enjoyed most the following three things: the breakfast at your house with Crothers, Dean Briggs and Arlo Bates; the meeting at the Union; and the tea at the Bishop's with Colonel Higginson. Next, may I bother you to ask your butler to send me the two shirts which I left behind? ³⁸

In the early summer of 1906 Bigelow, as a guest at the White House, was "delightful . . . easy as an old shoe . . . and no bother at all in the house," as the President reported to his son Kermit.³⁹

The Age of Roosevelt, marking the first decade of this century, proved to be the best years for Theodore and Sturgis. As Roosevelt left the White House for extended travels in Europe and Africa, Republican supremacy eroded under his successor, President Taft. Democrats gained control of Congress in 1910 and even the veteran Senator Lodge faced a hard fight for re-election in his home state. Bigelow's warning to Lodge, as the Roosevelts were sailing home in June 1910, served as a prophecy: "Keep Theodore out of politics at any cost, if you want him to be President later."⁴⁰ Annoyed by the ex-President's judicial radicalism regarding social legislation, Bigelow roared at Lodge: "Why in thunder did he go out of his way to kick the Supreme Court's tail just at this juncture? When you want a man to ask you to his house, you don't begin by making disparaging remarks about his housekeeper's honesty."⁴¹

As the election year of 1912 set in, Roosevelt's alienation from the Taft forces placed a strain on the personal relationship between the

³⁷ 3 July 1902, Murakata, p. 202.

³⁸ Roosevelt papers, I.C.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Murakata, p. 322.

⁴¹ 5 November 1910, *ibid.*, p. 323.

ex-President and Senator Lodge. This came to a head when Congressman A. P. Gardner, Lodge's son-in-law, challenged Roosevelt to a debate on the principal issues of the campaign. It was Bigelow's turn to mediate between his politician friends. Bigelow gladly offered his annex at 56 Beacon Street for Roosevelt's headquarters in Boston. "It was good to have you here. It has made me ten years younger. If we do not win today I am afraid it will be from unseen influences."⁴² While encouraging Theodore, Bigelow gently admonished Lodge: "He spoke several times of Gus [Gardner]'s attack. Not for its formidable character — he does not seem to think it formidable — but from the — '*et tu, Brute!*' — point of view. — He was evidently surprised and hurt."⁴³ The Republican split, ending in Roosevelt running under the Progressive banner, helped assure the Democratic victory in November. Roosevelt's electoral defeat, however, did not change Bigelow's hospitality, for the Doctor wrote to Theodore on 15 November 1912: "Good! — Come to your regular abiding place, of course. '*Se mesfier de la concurrence deloyal.*' We did pretty well for a party three months old."⁴⁴ Bigelow happily reported to Lodge: "T.R. came and went. He was apparently never better. You never said a truer thing than that he has no spilt milk in his life. He is always just as much interested in the next thing as if the last one had never existed."⁴⁵

In 1913 another crisis in Japanese-American relations flared up as the California legislature debated an anti-alien land law, prohibiting alien ownership of land, specifically aimed at the Japanese. Roosevelt wrote to the California Progressives about the matter, "but not with much hope." The ex-President complained to Bigelow: "It is just like the situation six years ago, only Wilson is not taking hold of it the right way, and meanwhile Taft has done what he could to tangle things up. . . . Wilson now puts a premium on California acting by itself by announcing to her, through Bryan, and in his own letter, that she has the power to act, and yet not offering any alternative."⁴⁶ Bigelow wished, "for the sake of all concerned, that you [Roosevelt] were in charge."⁴⁷ Lodge argued that this was an entirely different case as

⁴² 30 April 1912, p. 344.

⁴³ p. 343.

⁴⁴ p. 351.

⁴⁵ 5 January 1913, pp. 351-352.

⁴⁶ 30 April 1913, Roosevelt papers, LC.

⁴⁷ 5 May 1913, Murakata, p. 361.

the California land law did not violate any treaty rights. The Senator realized that the real question the Japanese were raising was a much larger one:

They take the ground that we must not discriminate against them in a question of admitting them to this country as immigrants or in any other way. This is a matter of policy and expedience. No nation can concede for a moment as a general proposition that any other nation has the right to impose its citizens upon them. We can exclude anybody we choose to exclude . . . The American people are not going to admit Chinese, Japanese, or Malays, or people of Hindustan to this country. . . . I think exclusion should go much further, and you well know my views about European immigration, but in the case of Asian immigration there is the further objection that it involves race problems. We have one race problem in this country, which has been with us for a good many years and has been a pretty expensive one. I do not want another.⁴⁸

While Bigelow feared that "Wilson might flounder into a war with Japan,"⁴⁹ Lodge expressed his dissatisfaction: "If this administration would only have the sense to send our Fleet to the Pacific, as Theodore sent the Fleet around the world."⁵⁰

Admitting that Lodge's logic was "as clear as a bell and made the cross purposes and confused talk of the newspapers seem even more superficial than usual," Bigelow had this to say in defence of Japan:

Of course every country has got a right to exclude anybody it wants to. The Japanese themselves established that precedent in old days when they wouldn't let anybody in at all. On the other hand, we established the precedent, by Perry's expedition and what followed, that such reluctance to receive visitors may be overcome by force of arms even if the process involve a complete overturn of the government of the country concerned.

The real fact about it is that the Japanese, from the point of evolution and survival of the fittest, are the superior race. They produce more and consume less than we do; so do the Chinese. Moreover, the Japanese have, or always have had, the incomparable advantage of being homogeneous and able to unite on a single, central idea; whereas it would be pretty hard digging to find an idea on which our great, straggling, heterogeneous population could get together. There is no single interest which they all have in common.⁵¹

Despite his lifelong association with the Japanophile friend, Senator Lodge remained a persistent foe of Japan. It was Lodge's idea to attach an amendment to the 1907 immigration law, authorizing the

⁴⁸ Lodge to Bigelow, 15 May 1913, Henry Cabot Lodge papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

⁴⁹ Murakata, p. 361.

⁵⁰ Lodge, *Ibid.*

⁵¹ 21 May 1913, Murakata, p. 366.

President to refuse admission to any alien bearing a passport to Hawaii, Canada, or Mexico and thus sealing the "leak" of Japanese immigration. In 1912, a plan to sell a large tract of land around Magdalena Bay in Baja California to a Japanese syndicate moved the Senator to advance his famous "corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, designed to prevent transfer of strategic points in the Western hemisphere to private companies that might possibly be controlled by foreign powers. The National Origins Act of 1924 completed Lodge's policy of total exclusion of Japanese from the United States.⁵²

Bigelow understood the essence of Buddhism as "kindness and help to others." "Buddhist morals are — Love your neighbors better than your self."⁵³ Unfortunately, his Buddhist principle seems to have had little spiritual influence on his political friends. "'Buddhism and Immortality' has just come," President Roosevelt wrote in acknowledging Bigelow's published Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard University in 1908: "I shall read it forthwith, I shall like it of course."⁵⁴ It is highly unlikely that Roosevelt relished esoteric Buddhism, but at the suggestion of Frederick C. Shattuck, Bigelow's doctor friend, he encouraged the semi-hermit in Boston to "write that book about Buddhism. It would be a great misfortune if the one man fit to deal with the subject should not leave a book upon it."⁵⁵

Dr. Bigelow never wrote another book, but presented a series of "communications" at the Academy of Arts and Sciences, of which he was a member, in the winter of 1913-14 on "The Method of Practising Concentration and Contemplation, by Chisha Daishi, translated by Okakura," "Details of Buddhist System," and "The Relation of Samaji to the Normal Waking Consciousness," of which the first was published in the *Harvard Theological Review* (April, 1923). Only his correspondence with Naobayashi Kanryo (later Keien), the Japanese abbot of Homyo-in Temple, reveals his spiritual life, which deteriorated progressively with the decline of his physical health.⁵⁶

⁵² John A. Garraty, *Henry Cabot Lodge: a Biography* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1953), pp. 406-407.

⁵³ Murakata, p. 83 and p. 498.

⁵⁴ 2 November 1908, Roosevelt papers, LC.

⁵⁵ 10 May 1912, Morison, VII, 541.

⁵⁶ Murakata's checklist appended to her dissertation lists twenty-five communications from Bigelow to Naobayashi, preserved at Homyo-in Temple, of which she included sixteen in her "Selected Letters." On Bigelow's spiritual crisis in the last years of his life, see Murakata, pp. 495-500.

The ex-Rough Rider and the recluse on Beacon Hill faced the outbreak of World War I in quite a different manner. Seized by a German scare, Bigelow inquired timorously of Theodore: "Are they [the Germans] likely to *declare* war, or shall we wake some morning and find them in charge?"⁵⁷ When Colonel Roosevelt was refused permission to raise and lead a division in France, Bigelow wrote to Lodge despondently: "By preventing his going, the President has apparently cut off the last chance in sight for the Allies."⁵⁸ Unable to go himself, the ex-President sent his three sons to the front. In his last letter to Roosevelt, Bigelow praised "Theodore's refusing to give up the command of his troops after he was blinded" as "one of the most heroic things in recorded history."⁵⁹

The former President died quietly in his sleep on 6 January 1919. "This is very bad for us and for everybody," Bigelow wrote to Lodge: He was an absolutely honest man and he had the highest ideals and always acted up to them. He was perfectly unselfish. He was sincere and real through and through. There was not a shade or trace of sham, hypocrisy or pretence about him. Whatever he found to do, he did it with all his might. His energy was incredible. That, I take it, was what killed him. If he had been able to sit still instead of going on that ill-fated South American expedition, he at any rate would not have picked up that fatal microbe down there, which I suppose was at the bottom of it. His one thought was what he could do for the country — It's not clear what we are any of us going to do without him.⁶⁰

Lodge wrote to the surviving friend of the funeral which the latter could not attend for illness:

I was asked to come to the house, where they had just a few for a little service as Mrs. Roosevelt did not go to church. She sent for me to come and see her, and manifested so much affection and feeling at seeing me that it rather broke me up. She then took me aside and told me about his last days and hours and she said: "I want you particularly to tell Dr. Bigelow that I did not forget the talk he and I had about the use of morphine, and after he had two or three sleepless nights in succession, we gave him morphine the night before he died so that he was able to go to sleep and forget his pain." She said, "I am very grateful and I want Dr. Bigelow to know it." It is an absolute desolation for her, and I think the country feels it enormously.⁶¹

⁵⁷ 15 March 1917, Murakata, p. 423.

⁵⁸ 5 June 1917, pp. 425-426.

⁵⁹ 25 June 1918, p. 450.

⁶⁰ 6 January 1919, p. 454.

⁶¹ 10 January 1919, Lodge papers, MHS.

Bigelow was "profoundly grateful for your note about Mrs. Roosevelt and more glad to get it than I can say, as it makes me feel as if I had done something, even indirectly, if not to help him, at any rate to make him more comfortable."⁶²

Senator Lodge survived Theodore Roosevelt by five years and Dr. Bigelow survived Lodge by two years. Today Bigelow is remembered by his compatriots for the collection he gave to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and as a "Friend of Roosevelt and Lodge," as one of the obituary headlines put it at his death on 6 October 1926. It is true that Dr. Bigelow did not leave a notable legacy in the nation's political history as his two famous friends did. This, however, is no justification for obliterating his memory. When the nation is forced to re-examine some of the basic premises and attitudes advanced by such earlier leaders as Roosevelt and Lodge in its relations with the rest of the world, and those with East Asia in particular, would it be an entirely profitless undertaking to recognize the far-sightedness of their less known friend, the discoverer and introducer, in his unostentatious way, of the art and religion of the East? For a true and significant relationship between the East and the West can never be established by force, threat, or exclusion, but through deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures. Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow's life was, as the memorial by his Japanese grave put it,

Distinguished by high thoughts
And good deeds, by understanding
And by the gift of sympathy.
He was everywhere beloved
And honored most by those who knew him best.

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⁶² 13 January 1919, Murakata, pp. 455-456.

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