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**Great Earthquake, Great Opportunity:  
International Aid and International Politics in Japan, America, and Japanese America**

The physical devastation of the Great Kantō Earthquake of September 1923, the most destructive natural disaster in Japanese history, was largely restricted to Tokyo, Yokohama, and environs. Yet its reverberations—both seismic and social—radiated out across the globe. For a variety of reasons, these reverberations were felt most strongly in the United States. In the weeks following the Great Kantō Earthquake, widespread public sympathy and horror were channelled into a massive international effort, which raised more than ¥23 million for relief and reconstruction. Of this sum, more than ¥15 million, nearly 70%, came from the United States. Within the US, Japanese immigrants—or, as they often referred to themselves, *dōhō*, meaning countrymen or brethren—were particularly active, donating a full ¥2.7 million. Numbering no more than 250,000, American *dōhō* raised more money for earthquake relief than did any other overseas Japanese community, any formal Japanese colony, or any Japanese prefecture other than Tokyo itself. Had they been an independent nation, they would have ranked third among international donors, behind only the rest of the United States and the British Empire.

In this paper I will examine disaster relief as a window into the tortured three-way relationship between Japan, America, and the Japanese diaspora in America. In particular, I will argue that the parallel American Red Cross and *dōhō* relief efforts were responses not merely to the devastation of the Great Kantō Earthquake, but also to the growing tone of hostility and suspicion that pervaded Japanese-American relations, as well as to the explosive controversy over the position and treatment of ethnic Japanese in America. Various groups active in both relief movements (politicians, diplomats, *dōhō* community leaders, businesses, social commentators) saw the explosion of public sentiment that accompanied earthquake and reconstruction as an opportunity to advance pre-existing interests and agendas. Most notably, *dōhō* and ARC organisers, as well as Japanese and American diplomats, attempted to build the relief movement into a foundation for Japanese-American reconciliation. These attempts were bound to founder, not least because the separate visions of rapprochement they embodied were themselves mutually incompatible. In its conflicts, misunderstandings, and thwarted ambitions, the international relief effort brought into clear focus—even exacerbated—the steady decline of Japanese-American relations, as well as the dilemmas facing American *dōhō*, difficulties that would grow into tragedies in the decades to come.