

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

More than a ‘moment’: Woodrow Wilson and the foundations of twentieth century Japan

Frederick R. Dickinson

University of Pennsylvania

Corresponding author. Email: frdickin@sas.upenn.edu

Abstract

Woodrow Wilson’s name remains forever entwined with the Paris Peace Conference and efforts to transform geopolitics after 1918. Despite recent emphases on the power of this so-called ‘Wilsonian Moment,’ initiatives by the American president remain controversial, and his principal global legacy has come to be defined as the rise of nationalism in the developing world. In the historiography of modern Japan, Wilson and the Paris Conference have long been identified less as opportunities than as challenges, embodied unmistakably in Prince Konoe Fumimaro’s 1918 condemnation of the conference and the proposed League of Nations as beneficial only to the USA and Britain. Reading back from 1931, historians of modern Japan have located in the Versailles settlement seeds of an epic new expansionary effort from the Manchurian Incident to the destruction of Imperial Japan. This paper, by contrast, analyzes the interwar years on their own terms and, in so doing, locates the structural foundations of a dramatic Japanese national departure. Wilson is more than a ‘moment’ in interwar Japan. Embraced at the very moment that a largely agricultural and regional nineteenth-century Japan becomes a twentieth-century industrial state and world power, it is potent enough to withstand the illiberal tide of the 1930s and 40s to blossom again after the Second World War.

Key words: Industrialization; Japan; Kellogg–Briand Pact; League of Nations; Paris Peace Conference; peace culture; Washington Conference; Woodrow Wilson; world power; World War I

‘Japan is no longer the Japan of the East. She is the Japan of the world.’

–Izumi Akira (1923: 8)

It was 2 p.m. on Sunday, 22 June 1919, when the phone rang at the office of Japanese plenipotentiary to the Paris Peace Conference, Saionji Kinmochi, with felicitous news. Germany, declared Makino Nobuaki aide Yoshida Shigeru, had finally agreed to all peace terms. After scurrying upstairs to inform the plenipotentiary, Saionji aide Konoe Fumimaro rushed by car to the headquarters of the Japanese delegation to Paris, the luxurious and well-placed Hotel Bristol at La Place Vendôme. As Konoe approached the Bristol from the Champs-Élysées, he caught the first victory salute from a cannon on the other side of the Seine. Moments later, ‘heaven and earth moved’ as victory volleys erupted throughout the city (Konoe, 1919: 165).

At the Bristol, members of the Japanese delegation and press corps had surrounded Japan’s ambassador to Britain, Chinda Sutemi, to offer hearty congratulations. When plenipotentiary Makino returned from the momentous meeting of the Council of Ten, he, too, was showered with applause. Despite American President Woodrow Wilson’s hesitation, Makino told the crowd, French President Georges Clemenceau had, at the meeting, decided on an immediate sounding of the victory cannons. After a toast and a ‘banzai’ from Makino, the assembly could no longer be contained. Spurred by veteran *Jiji shinpō* reporter Kamei Rokurō, the group, including the Foreign Ministry’s Matsuoka Yōsuke, raced toward the International Press Club on the Champs-Élysées, where they

offered more toasts, banzai's, and speeches into the evening. They did so with such fervor that other foreign diplomats and journalists at the club stared in wonder (Konoe, 1919: 165).

Kamei subsequently proposed an impromptu excursion to the private residence of French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. Arriving via auto convoy around 9 p.m., the 20 some-odd Japanese visitors caused quite a stir, until Clemenceau's security detail realized they had only come to honor the prime minister. Representing the Japanese, Seiyūkai politician Hayashi Kiroku, in fluent French, approached the aide to Clemenceau who had emerged to greet the assembly (Konoe, 1919: 165). As reported the next day on the front page of the French daily, *Le Figaro*, the Japanese 'shouted "Vive la France!, Vive le Japon!, Vive l'Entente"' at the door of the president of the (peace) conference' (*Le Figaro*, 1919: 1).

1. Wilsonian Moment in imperial Japan

Defying most accepted wisdom about the Paris Peace and Japan, this opening vignette hints to a tangible Japanese 'Wilsonian Moment.' Standard histories focus on Japanese trouble at Paris – the relative silence of Japanese delegates; great power rejection of Japan's proposed racial non-discrimination clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations; US–Japan wrangling over Japan's new presence in China's Shandong Province; and frustration by members of the Japanese delegation and press corps over Japan's relative lack of diplomatic savvy (see Burkman, 1976; Shimazu, 1998; Fifield, 1965; Itō, 1978, respectively). Given Tokyo's rejection of the post-World War I peace after 1931, historians find it most expedient to identify World War I as the start of a concerted Western initiative to contain Japanese power. As Walter LaFeber has noted, American Secretary of State Robert Lansing observed at Paris that 'this was the time for us to have it out once and for all with Japan (LaFeber, 1997: 123).'

Most interesting in the scenes of jubilation above is the active participation of both Matsuoka Yōsuke and Konoe Fumimaro. While Japanese leaders at Paris – plenipotentiaries Saionji and Makino Nobuaki, and ambassador to Britain, Chinda Sutemi – are typically associated with the liberal internationalist wing of interwar officialdom, Matsuoka and Konoe are emphatically not. Matsuoka is best known, as head of Japan's delegation to the League of Nations, for his defiant withdrawal from the League in 1933 (see Lu, 2002). Konoe frequently appears as the author, in 1918, of a critique of the upcoming peace as an Anglo-American bid to preserve the international status quo. Such a narrative, of course, establishes a useful foundation for Konoe's bold challenge of the liberal internationalist order as prime minister in the latter 1930s (Oka, 1983: 10–13).

As I have noted elsewhere, however, Konoe's suspicions of Paris quickly yielded to a deep appreciation for Woodrow Wilson and three of his most cherished principles – multilateralism, open diplomacy, and self-determination (Dickinson, 2014: 1174). Japanese scholars have, likewise, recently highlighted Konoe's positive appraisal of Woodrow Wilson. According to Shōji Junichirō, the favorable attitude exemplified a basic flexibility in the prince's approach to the USA (Shōji, 2001: 16–21).

But Konoe's praise for Wilson was *not* an endorsement of the USA. It reflected recognition, rather, of the importance of peace and of the urgency of the postwar peace project. It is less a gauge of the attitudes of one man (Konoe) than a reflection of the zeitgeist of an entire era. Indeed, the above vignette highlights the excitement of an entire group of Japanese journalists and diplomats. The image of Konoe, Matsuoka, and a Seiyūkai politician leading a public celebration of French Prime Minister Clemenceau – one that made front-page French news – clearly marks an extraordinary moment. Historians typically describe the young Japanese diplomatic corps at Paris, after all, as an exasperated community focused on overcoming Japan's many weaknesses at Paris (see Tobe, 2010). And the Seiyūkai would become a leading foe of the liberal internationalist agenda championed by the Minseitō Party in the latter 1920s (see Dickinson, 2013: chp. 8).

2. Wilson as more than a moment in imperial Japan

In highlighting a 'Wilsonian Moment' after the First World War, Erez Manela describes a profound, yet singularly brief, moment in China and India when local statesmen and pundits embraced Wilson's

promise of 'self-determination,' only to realize, by the spring of 1919, that foreign conquest of their states would continue. These dashed hopes would, according to Manela, mark 'a watershed in the rise of anticolonial nationalism' (Manela, 2006: 1328). Not a victim of colonization like her Asian neighbors, Japan does not register in Manela's notion of a 'Wilsonian Moment' (Manela, 2007). Yet, from the brief vignette above, we get a sense of a global appreciation for Wilson much more far-ranging than a singular thirst for self-determination.

Orthodox narratives of interwar Japan in some ways mirror Manela's description of China and India after the First World War. Echoing Manela's tale of a rise and fall of hope in Beijing and Delhi, historians have accentuated a brief flowering of democracy in 1920s Japan, followed by a precipitous descent into 'fascism'.¹ Even the most celebrated authority on interwar internationalism, Akira Iriye, describes Japan and the world as swinging between the two pendulums of internationalism and nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s (see Iriye, 1986).

By contrast, Glenda Sluga has recently accentuated the mutual interdependence of nationalism and internationalism in world politics dating back to the nineteenth century. Dreams of internationalism, according to Sluga, were, from the start, integral to fledgling ideas of the nation. Expressions of nationalism have, in turn, long depended upon contrasting images of the international body politic (Sluga, 2013).

This paper appropriates Sluga's vision of a mutually constitutive nationalism and internationalism to highlight what has hitherto been unthinkable in the history of early twentieth-century Japan: the story of a robust Wilsonian Moment, one not only of impressive power but of surprising longevity. Contrary to popular presumption, liberal internationalism was not only not tenuous in interwar Japan. It became mainstream policy at the very moment that the foundations of twentieth-century Japan were laid. The First World War catapulted Japan, for the first time, to the status of industrial state *and* world power. The power of the Wilsonian Moment in Japan lay in its initial association with the emergence of this powerful new twentieth-century polity.

3. Japan as industrial state

The First World War transformed modern Japan from a primarily agricultural, regional power in the nineteenth-century to a twentieth-century industrial state and world power. An inward-looking war-time Europe spelled economic and political opportunity for Japan. Fueled by persistent allied requests for war assistance and by new trade prospects from the retraction of European power from Asia, Japanese exports expanded almost fourfold between 1914 and 1919.² Textile exports almost tripled, and manufactured goods overall expanded more than threefold.³ By 1916, Japan recorded its first balance of payments surplus, allowing Tokyo, for the first time, to wage influence through international loans (Saraki, 2002: 72).

This new level of global economic integration spurred a transformation of the Japanese domestic economy. Following the conflict with Russia (1904–05), Japan had lagged behind the great powers in productive capacity and remained saddled with 2 billion yen in debt. Between 1913 and 1922, however, the Japanese economy expanded by 5.21% annually, significantly higher than the international standard.⁴ Between 1912 and 1926, rail passenger traffic within Japan more than tripled and freight traffic more than doubled (Hayama and Kojima, 2004: 22). The 28 power plants in Japan in 1912 multiplied to 1,313 by 1925 (Hayama and Kojima, 2004: 24). From 1915 to 1919, the number of incorporated firms in Japan almost doubled, from 17,000 to 30,000. Manufacturing firms increased by more than threefold (Saraki, 2002: 72).

¹For the classic account, see Shinobu (1954).

²From 768 million to 2.896 billion yen. See Table A31 in Ōkawa and Miyoei (1979: 334).

³From 372.7 million to 1.099 billion yen and from 571.7 million to 1.886 billion yen, respectively. See Table A26 in Ōkawa and Miyoei (1979: 316).

⁴According to the Ōkawa Kazushi project cited in Takemura (2004: 13).

With the USA, in other words, Japan was one of only two belligerents that reaped significant economic benefits from the First World War. The war, in fact, marked a critical era of transition for Tokyo – the point at which Japan moved from an agricultural to industrial economy. By 1920, Japan had transitioned from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates – a key demographic indication of change from a pre-industrial to industrial economy (Hayama and Kojima, 2004, 226–33). By 1925, 60.74 million people made Japan the fifth most populous country in the world – behind China, the USA, Russia, and Germany.⁵

4. Japan as world power

If the Great War significantly boosted the Japanese economy, it had an equally dramatic effect on the country's international standing. By militarily defeating Russia in 1905, Japan had established itself as the preeminent Asian regional power. But Japanese activities during the Great War distinguished it for the first time as a world power. Fixated on the drama of Pearl Harbor, historians typically describe Japanese activities between 1914 and 1918 as a prelude to the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. As we have seen, American policy-makers, in particular, worried about the geopolitical implications of the rise of Japanese power.⁶

Viewed within the contemporary context of a world plunging into total war in 1914, however, Japan's wartime activities take on a very different tone. Given the growing power of the Japanese economy and its relative distance from the Western front, Japan was well placed to play a decisive role in World War I. From the initial declarations of war, in fact, belligerents on both sides clamored for Japanese support.

As Japan's ally, Britain was the first to formally request Japanese aid on 7 August 1914, just 3 days after it had declared war on Imperial Germany.⁷ Two days later, German ambassador to Japan, Count Graf von Rex, scrambled for an audience with Japanese Foreign Minister Katō Takaaki. Realizing a Japanese ultimatum to Germany was imminent, von Rex broke the chair upon which he was sitting and almost tumbled to the floor (Matsui, 1983: 79). Despite Japan's ultimate declaration of war on the Central Powers, German and Austrian agents approached Japanese representatives in European capitals about a separate peace several times in the first 2 years of the conflict (Iklé, 1965). In September 1914, Britain formally requested Japanese troops to the Western front (Grey, 1914). By 1915, France informally requested 500,000 Japanese troops to the Balkan Peninsula (Treat, 1918: 8). In July 1918, the US navy declared it a 'matter of vital necessity' that Japanese battle cruisers help protect US troop transports to Europe (Denby, 1921).

Japan did not accede to every wartime request for aid. But Japanese support became critical to the Allied victory. Tokyo declared war on 23 August 1914, several weeks after initial declarations by the principal belligerents (Austria–Hungary, Germany, Britain, Montenegro, Serbia, France, and Russia) but many months prior to such important players as the Ottoman Empire, Italy, and the USA. In September 1914, the Imperial Japanese Navy helped chase the German East Asiatic Squadron out of the Asia/Pacific, enabling a Japanese occupation of German Micronesia (the Marshall, Mariana, and Caroline Islands) and a new Australian, New Zealand, and British presence in German New Guinea and Samoa. Approximately 29,000 Japanese and 2,800 British imperial troops vanquished the German fortress at Qingdao, China, in November 1914, marking the end of German power in Asia and the first great Allied victory of the war (Eguchi, 1989: 20).

⁵These are numbers for Japan proper (Hayama and Kojima, 2004: 238–9).

⁶Orthodox histories of wartime US–Japan ties accent tension over the expansion of Japanese power in China (the 'Twenty-one Demands,' American loans to China, and the Lansing-Ishii Agreement), the unexpectedly robust scale of Japanese participation in the Siberian Intervention in 1918, and turmoil over 'racial equality' and Tokyo's right to China's Shandong Province at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. On the Twenty-one Demands, see Griswold (1938) and Takahara (2006: chp. 1). On American loans, see Israel (1971).

⁷For details of these early negotiations for war, see Dickinson (2003).

Although the war against Germany ended in the Pacific by November 1914, Japan continued to provide critical support to the European war through Armistice day. Japanese naval patrols in the Pacific from September 1914 and along the US west coast through the spring of 1915 enabled the USA to shift all naval strength to the Atlantic long before its own declaration of war (Hashiguchi, 1918: 4–5). Between 1914 and 1918, the British Empire relied on Japan's Third Fleet to escort Australian and New Zealand troops from the Pacific through the Indian Ocean to Aden in the Arabian Sea. In February 1915, Japanese marines helped British and French troops suppress an uprising of Indian soldiers in Singapore (Streets-Salter, 2016: chps. 1, 2). Following attacks on Japanese merchant vessels, three Japanese destroyer divisions and one cruiser joined the battle against German submarines in the Mediterranean from February 1917 (Denby, 1921).

Imperial Japan also offered critical material aid to the allies. The Japanese Red Cross dispatched several nursing corps to allied capitals during the war (Araki, 2014). Between 1914 and 1918, 200,000 tons of Japanese cargo ships regularly traveled between Japan and Europe. One hundred thousand tons of chartered Japanese ships ferried coal and supplies between Britain and France during the war (Togo, 1918: 373). Japan supplied the allies with copper and currency, including over 366 million dollars in loans (Baldwin, 1921: 6).⁸ To Russia, Japan transferred three Japanese cruisers and sold 600,000 rifles.⁹ Japan built 12 destroyers for France and provided direct aid of 1.058 million francs (Hashiguchi, 1918: 7). In 1918, Japan dispatched 72,000 troops to join the Allied effort to check the expansion of Bolshevik power to Siberia.¹⁰

Given the importance of such wartime aid, Japan's international status rose dramatically during the war. American authorities described Japanese military aid to Russia as 'one of the miracles of the war' (Treaty a Result of War, 1916: 4). According to former US President Theodore Roosevelt, 'Japan has played a part of extraordinary usefulness to the allied cause in this war for civilization' (Roosevelt, 1919). In June 1918, British Prince Arthur of Connaught visited Japan for the third and most important occasion, to confer upon the Japanese emperor the baton of a British Field Marshal, the highest military honor in Britain. The Mediterranean, Indian, and Pacific Oceans, he emphatically declared, 'have been kept open to the world's trade by Japanese vigilance' (Prince Arthur on his Mission, 1918: 9).

5. Paris Peace Conference affirms Japan as world power

In the context of the remarkable wartime rise of Japan's global status, the Paris Peace Conference appears less significant as a tale of rising US–Japan tensions, more important as proof of Japan's new centrality on the global stage. Despite their relative detachment from most discussions over European security, two Japanese plenipotentiaries participated in the leadership council of the conference, the Council of Ten, from mid-January through mid-March, 1919. And they would obtain all of Japan's most cherished demands: great power recognition of Japan's new presence in both China (Shandong Province) and the South Pacific (the Marshall, Caroline and Mariana Islands).

Historians highlight Tokyo's failure to introduce a racial non-discrimination clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations as evidence of Japanese diplomatic naiveté at Paris. But successful retention of Shandong, China, on the contrary, confirmed substantial Japanese diplomatic savvy. In return for its sizable military and material aid, Tokyo, had by 1917, obtained written commitments from Britain, France, Russia, and Italy to recognize all Japanese rights acquired in the May 1915 Sino-Japanese Treaty (Elleman, 2002: 22). Despite the clear conflict between Japan's presence in Shandong and

⁸Loan figure from E.T.F. Crowe, Commercial Counsellor of British Embassy in Tokyo. In *Exports to Japan Halved* (1919: 9). Crowe's original figure of £100,000,000 converts to \$366 million in 1919. See also *Exports to Japan Halved* (1919: 9).

⁹Japan had originally captured the cruisers from Russia in the Russo-Japanese War: the Sagami (originally, the Peresviet), Tango (Poltava), and the Soya (Varyag). See Theodore Roosevelt (1919). Reprinted in Shibusawa Eiichi (1920: 25). Information about rifles from Baldwin (1921: 6).

¹⁰Figure from Baldwin (1921: 5).

one of Wilson's most cherished principles – self-determination – in other words, Tokyo had, during the war, laid the diplomatic groundwork that would guarantee success at Paris.

More importantly, Japan's presence at Paris as one of the Big Five victors was, for contemporaries, the most powerful testament to the rise of Japan's global status. Befitting this new station, the Japanese delegation to Paris occupied the entire Hotel Le Bristol, centrally located at La Place Vendôme, facing a 144-foot monument to Napoleon. As veteran diplomat Sawada Renzō later recalled, 'facing the Japanese headquarters were nearly thirty cars proudly bearing the insignia of the Rising Sun. Indeed, it was a sight to catch the eye of the Parisians' (Sawada, 1950).¹¹

Konoe Fumimaro, as we have seen, documented the extraordinary excitement of the Japanese delegation upon Germany's acceptance of the peace. The exhilaration would continue through the actual signing ceremony at the Palace of Versailles on 29 June 1919. Embedded in the endless parade of cars headed from the Arc de Triomphe to Versailles that afternoon, the Japanese relished the enthusiasm of onlookers. Whether inspired by news of the mission's earlier 'banzai's' at the French prime minister's front door, crowds lining the streets greeted the Japanese convoy with shouts of 'Japonais, banzai!' Prepared for the perfect PR opportunity, journalists from the delegation tossed out mini Japanese flags to the delighted crowds (Konoe, 1919: 166).

At the signing ceremony itself, Konoe Fumimaro noted proudly that Japan's plenipotentiaries sat across the table from master of ceremonies, Clemenceau, next to representatives of the British empire. Following the first signature by the vanquished Germans, then by representatives of the four other victorious powers, Japanese delegates signed sixth of the 26 signatory states. The ceremony ended, Konoe proclaimed, with a volley of cannons and the joyous shouts of several hundred thousand onlookers, 'celebrating the emergence of a new world' (Konoe, 1919: 167).

As numerous studies have noted, despite its new world power status, Japan's position at Paris was not quite the equal of the other victors. Japanese delegates occupied the entire Hotel Bristol, but they numbered no more than 60, a mere fraction of the British mission of almost 400 (MacMillan, 2002: xxix). Japanese plenipotentiaries Makino Nobuaki and Chinda Sutemi faithfully attended deliberations of the Council of Ten from mid-January to mid-March. But from the end of March, the governing Council of Ten was superseded by a Council of Four, comprised of the heads of state of Britain (Lloyd George), France (Clemenceau), the USA (Wilson), and Italy (Orlando), without the presence of Japan. Makino and Chinda focused less on creative solutions to guaranteeing lasting peace, more on ensuring Japanese national interests.

As Glenda Sluga has noted, Paris was marked by 'self-interested maneuvering' on all sides. And yet, the imperative of peace and the social and intellectual roots of internationalism were so strong that they propelled a powerful internationalist movement forward (Sluga, 2013: 56). The Japanese, no less than their European counterparts, recognized the horror of total war. As early as September 1914, an editor of the popular Japanese monthly, *Taiyō* (Sun) observed that, over the preceding 40 years, people throughout the world had looked to Europe as 'a model of modern civilization.' But 'the high level of civilized living that they boasted for so long is quickly being demolished, without apology, in the face of the bloodcurdling ferocity of war' (Asada, 1914: 18). Following 4 years of such 'bloodcurdling' conflict, Japanese statesmen, like their European counterparts, also readily embraced the imperative of peace. Tokyo affirmed the Versailles Treaty with the most powerful statement available: an official proclamation from the emperor. The January 1920 Imperial Rescript on the Establishment of Peace described the global 'shock' of the Great War and called upon Japanese subjects 'to realize, in accordance with the international situation, a league of peace (*renmei heiwa*)' (*Heiwa kokufuku no taishō* happu, 1920).¹²

Given the transformation of Japan's international status during the war, Japanese statesmen had a particularly powerful national incentive to embrace the new internationalism after the First World War. As plenipotentiary to Paris Saionji Kinmochi observed upon his return from Paris, 'at the

¹¹Quoted in Burkman (2008: 61).

¹²Reprinted in Watanabe (1978: vol. 8: 24).

Peace Conference, our country did not simply preserve good relations with the powers. The conference was an opportunity to noticeably raise the international status of the Empire. Namely, our country at the conference stood among the group of five great world powers and had a say in the problems of Europe'.¹³ Likewise, Prime Minister Hara Takashi proclaimed that, at Paris, 'as one of five great powers, the empire [Japan] contributed to the recovery of world peace. With this, the empire's status has gained all the more authority and her responsibility to the world has become increasingly weighty'.¹⁴

6. The League of Nations affirms Japan as world power

The strength of Japan's Wilsonian Moment, in other words, derived both from the realization that Japan's pivotal role in the allied victory had catapulted it to world power status and that the new status depended upon Japan's continued commitment to what Saionji described as the postwar 'peace project' (Ritsumeikan daigaku Saionji Kinmochi den hensan iinkai, 1993: vol. 3: 323). A central pillar of this postwar project was, of course, Woodrow Wilson's notion of a 'concert of power.' An open assembly of nations aimed to replace the secretive, bilateral agreements among states that was thought to have invited the calamity of 1914. Thomas Burkman appropriately notes the initial hesitation of Japanese statesmen toward a League of Nations, even before the peace conference (Burkman, 2008: chps. 2, 3). Given the novelty of the idea, however, a similar hesitation characterized the reaction in most other allied capitals (MacMillan, 2002).

In light of the destruction of 1914–1918, in fact, there were in Tokyo, as in other capitals, as many supporters of the League as there were detractors. Prince Konoe observed in June 1919 that, 'it appears that secret, professional diplomacy has finally become a relic and the age of open, people's diplomacy is clearly on its way.' The idea of a League of Nations alone, he declared, would ensure that Woodrow Wilson's name would 'shine brightly in the history of mankind for eternity' (Konoe, 1981: 36–37).¹⁵ Responding to the January 1920 Imperial Rescript on the Establishment of Peace, a young Crown Prince Hirohito wrote in an essay to his tutor, 'I, too, applaud the establishment of the League of Nations. I have a weighty obligation to obey the League Covenant, promote the spirit of the League and establish perpetual world peace' (Itō and Hirose, 1990: 22).¹⁶ Kenseikai MP Ozaki Yukio declared in November 1920 that 'if the Japanese people earnestly recognize these problems and work for the realization of the League... we will be able, for the first time, to fulfill our responsibility as one of the five great world powers and to demonstrate the glory of our nation to all quarters' (Ozaki, 1921b: 32). Even skeptics like Lieutenant General Ugaki Kazushige argued that 'since the trend is for everything to internationalize,' Japan should participate in the League and 'follow world trends' (Tsunoda, 1968: vol. 1: 204).

Japan's commitment to the League is best illustrated by its impressive record of actual engagement with the organization. Despite Woodrow Wilson's aggressive promotion of the League at Paris, the USA, because of Senate objections, would never become a member. By contrast, Japan was not only an original signatory, it joined Britain, France, and Italy as one of only four permanent members of the executive body of the organization, the League Council. Japanese representatives faithfully participated in the four to six meetings of the League Council each year and in meetings of the League's many sister organizations, such as the International Labor Organization, International Court of Justice, and the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs. As historian of the League, Frank Waters, later noted, 'During the long and often uninteresting debates of Council, Assembly, Conference, or Committee, when many of their colleagues might be inattentive or absent, the Japanese delegation would always be there, following the dulllest proceedings with care and concentration' (Burkman, 2008: 115–116).

¹³In an 8 September 1919 speech. Quoted in Ritsumeikan daigaku Saionji Kinmochi den hensan iinkai (1993: vol. 3: 321).

¹⁴Quoted in Kawada (1995: 150).

¹⁵This passage is dated June 1919 in a publication that originally appeared in 1920.

¹⁶The essay was written for Sugiura Shigetake in January 1920.

Japanese support was, in other words, indispensable to the League. In addition to the consistent participation of Japanese delegates in League-related committees, Tokyo remained the League's fourth largest financial backer through 1934, contributing \$300,000 annually to League coffers in the late 1920s. Reduced payments for League humanitarian organizations continued through 1938 (Burkman, 2008: 141). Between 1920 and 1926, one of the most effective spokespersons for the League was former Tokyo University professor, now Undersecretary General of the League, Nitobe Inazō. As Secretary General Eric Drummond noted, Nitobe 'is not only a good speaker, but he gives audiences a deep and lasting impression. In this respect no one in the Secretariat can excel him.'¹⁷

The League received energetic support within Japan throughout the 1920s from the Japan League of Nations Association (JLNA). Founded in November 1920, the JLNA at its peak in 1932 boasted over 11,700 members, including such influential statesmen as Prince Tokugawa Iesato (president), financier and member of the House of Peers, Viscount Shibusawa Eichi (chair), former finance minister and Peers member Baron Sakatani Yoshirō (vice chair), Prince Konoe Fumimaro, and former Tokyo University professor, Nitobe Inazō (Ogata, 1973: 462–463). Through its meetings, sponsorship of special programs and lectures, publication of pamphlets and its own journal, *Kokusai chishiki*, the association became one of the most powerful champions of liberal internationalism in interwar Japan.

7. Interwar disarmament affirms Japan as world power

A second critical pillar of the postwar peace project was disarmament. Like secretive, bilateral agreements among states, competition in arms was considered a key cause of the calamity of 1914. In his celebrated address to a joint session of Congress in January 1918, Woodrow Wilson listed a reduction of national armaments 'to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety' as number four of Fourteen Points (MacMillan, 2002: 166). Wilson would pass away before making headway on the arms race that only gained momentum toward the end of the war.¹⁸ But following 14 million deaths, sentiment for disarmament remained strong. Opposition Republicans under Warren Harding eagerly appropriated the agenda with a bold invitation to eight nations to attend a disarmament conference in Washington in 1921.

Asada Sadao describes this informal invitation of July 1921 as a 'bolt from the blue' in Japan that led to a 'sense of crisis' that 'gripped the nation' (Asada, 2006: 214). Like the idea of a League, however, a major conference on disarmament was a novelty that raised questions all around. As Roger Dingman has chronicled, the prospect of international talks on armaments spurred a heated debate within the British cabinet, legislature, and Admiralty (Dingman, 1977: chp. 10). In a preemptive attempt to steer the agenda, London, in fact, requested a preliminary one-on-one meeting with the US. American Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes rejected the proposal out of hand (Goldstein, 1994: 17–18).

As with the League of Nations, the push for disarmament quickly became mainstream sentiment in Tokyo. In November 1920, Kenseikai MP Ozaki Yukio declared in the journal of the JLNA that, 'until now, the great powers...pursued armed peace...(The result was) unimaginable misery' (Ozaki, 1921b: 2, 5). Two months later, Ozaki embarked upon a 7-month national tour, in which he gave seventy addresses on disarmament to over 100,000 people (Ozaki, 1921a: 1). By 1 January 1921, the daily *Jiji shinpō*, which had hitherto consistently championed naval expansion, abruptly proclaimed support for disarmament and urged that Japan 'be prepared to abandon everything' at the conference, including the newly acquired territories in Shandong, China and German Micronesia (Imai, 1972: 340). The Hara Cabinet formally agreed to participate in disarmament talks on 23 August 1921, just 10 days after the formal invitation from Washington (Iwanami Shoten henshūbu, 1991: 248).

¹⁷Quoted in Burkman (2008: 61).

¹⁸In 1916, the Naval Act authorized a 3-year, \$500 million construction program for the US navy. Between 1916 and 1918, the Japanese Diet and Cabinet authorized four more battleships and four more battle cruisers to meet the 8-8 Fleet target originally outlined in the 1907 Basic Plan of National Defense. In London, the Royal Navy launched their first aircraft carrier, the HMS Argus, in 1918.

Tokyo's agreement to talks rested, in part, on the practical consideration that unfettered military expansion would bankrupt Japan. As early as December 1919, Lieutenant General Ugaki Kazushige confirmed a new national consensus that 'military construction and maintenance hindered the productive development of the nation'. At a press conference in January 1921, Ozaki Yukio argued that, given the dramatic disparity in per capita wealth, any attempt by Japan to outspend the USA and Britain would only weaken Japanese defenses (Ozaki shi to gunbi an, 1921).

Just as critical for Japanese statesmen, however, was the importance of Japanese participation in validating Japan's new global leadership role. As Ozaki Yukio noted in February 1921, Japan had become one of the world's five great powers during the war only through armed strength. By promoting arms reductions, however, he hoped 'we will see a truly long-lasting peace across the globe and that our people will happily forever become a member of the world community' (Ozaki, 1921a: 5). At the outset of the actual conference, Japan's delegates formally announced that, 'On arms reductions, which is a just policy that will eliminate [great power] misunderstanding of Japan and guarantee our security, the Japanese delegation desires to cooperate in whole with the powers' (Nihon no chii o kaiseyo, 1921).¹⁹

As with the League of Nations, Japan's commitment to disarmament is best illustrated by its impressive record of actual accomplishments. With the Five Power Treaty, Japan, the USA, Britain, France, and Italy agreed to restrict the total number of battleships, battle cruisers, and aircraft carriers and to limit the size of all cruisers, destroyers, and submarines to 10,000 tons displacement. The treaty eliminated 66 ships from the collective arsenals of the USA, Britain, and Japan, including plans for 10 new capital ships for the Imperial Japanese Navy (Evans and Peattie, 1997: 197). Despite numerous heated Japanese debates over the treaty, Meiji University professor Izumi Akira in November 1923 articulated the most dramatic significance of the Washington Conference for Japan. 'Japan is no longer the Japan of the East,' he declared. 'She is the Japan of the world. She is one of five great world powers. She is, in fact, becoming one of three great powers' (Izumi, 1923: 8).

In April 1930, despite the refusal of France and Italy to join the final settlement, the USA, Britain, and Japan agreed on a follow-up to the Five Power Treaty. The London Naval Treaty committed the USA, Britain, and Japan to limits on the number and displacement of submarines, the number of heavy cruisers, and the displacement of both light cruisers and destroyers. Japan's striking new status in the company of the three most powerful states on earth was underscored by an unprecedented live radio broadcast of three heads-of-state from three different countries. Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi joined American President Herbert Hoover and British Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald in October 1930 to celebrate the ratification of the London Treaty. 'The Treaty of London,' Hamaguchi declared, 'has opened a new chapter in the history of human civilization...A momentous step forward on the road of international peace and friendship has now been taken' (Three Nations Join in World Broadcast Lauding Navy Pact, 1930: 19).

The powers never formally agreed to limits on ground forces. But just 3 years after the Washington Treaties, the Kenseikai cabinet of Katō Takaaki pared the Imperial Army by four divisions. Reflecting the new priorities, defense expenditures dropped from 65.4% to just 30.4% of the national budget between 1922 and 1932 (Nakamura, 1983: 39). As British Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald declared in the October 1930 live international radio broadcast, 'we have passed another milestone in the long way to peace and security' (Three Nations Join in World Broadcast Lauding Navy Pact, 1930: 19).

8. Interwar culture of peace affirms Japan as world power

The League of Nations and naval conferences were central pillars of a new liberal internationalist order following the First World War. But they stood at the core of an entire web of initiatives for peace in which Japan participated wholeheartedly after 1918. One might argue, in fact, that Japan, throughout the 1920s, was one of the most fervent champions of Wilsonian internationalism.

¹⁹Reprinted in Watanabe (1978: vol. 9: 413).

As we have seen, Woodrow Wilson proposed the League of Nations as an antidote to the secretive, bilateral security agreements that were considered a principal cause of war. The Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria–Hungary, Italy, 1882), Franco-Russian Alliance (1892), Anglo-Russian Entente (1907), and Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia, 1907) all dissolved naturally with the exigencies of the First World War. Japan and Britain terminated the one remaining pre-war pact, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, at the Washington Conference in 1922. Reflecting the ideals of a new internationalist age, the Four Power Treaty that replaced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance called upon the USA, Britain, France, and Japan to maintain the status quo in the Pacific and seek mutual consultation in the event of a territorial dispute.²⁰ Most significant was the fact that this was the first time that two powers had made a formal overture to the new multilateralism by voluntarily dissolving a bilateral alliance. As Japanese legal scholar Hayashi Mutsutake noted about the Washington Conference as a whole, ‘we must advertise the arrival of a new age of peace. We must not forget that the new trend toward international cooperation is now all the more striking’ (Hayashi, 1922: 24).

In addition to arms reductions and the new multilateralism, the Washington Conference was striking for one more distinctive advancement of Wilsonian principles. As we know from Erez Manela, self-determination was more a casualty than an accomplishment at the Paris Peace Conference (Manela, 2006). This was due in large part to Japan’s continued occupation of Shandong, China. At the Washington Conference, however, Japan joined eight other signatories of the Nine Power Treaty pledging to ‘respect the sovereignty, the independence and the territorial and administrative integrity of China.’ At the same time, Tokyo concluded a bilateral pact with Beijing agreeing to restore the former German lease in Jiaozhou to China and to withdraw all troops and gendarmes from surrounding Shandong Province (Elleman, 2002: 161).

Despite Wilson’s promotion of national self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference, both the British and French empires actually expanded between 1919 and 1939, following the break-up and distribution of territories from Imperial Germany, Austria–Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. The Japanese Empire likewise expanded through acquisition of German Micronesia as a League of Nations Mandate in 1920. By contrast, China became the site for an early application of self-determination. Shandong Province had never been a formal part of the Japanese empire. But the withdrawal of Japanese troops from the territory marked a rare instance of a victorious power reducing its imperial reach following the First World War. Given the commotion in the USA over the initial failure to eject Japan from Shandong at the Paris Peace Conference, Americans greeted the conclusion of a Sino-Japanese treaty in 1922 with particular fanfare (Shidehara, 1987: 89).

Among the most maligned conventions of the new liberal internationalism after the First World War, the 1928 Kellogg–Briand Pact has recently been reevaluated as a central pillar of the dramatic transformation of world politics in the early twentieth century (Hathaway and Shapiro, 2017). Indeed, considered together with the activities of the League of Nations and the series of naval conferences through the decade, Kellogg–Briand marks the triumph of the interwar culture of peace initially articulated by Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference. Given its ultimate refusal to join the League, America’s leadership at the Washington Conference and in securing this international pledge to ‘condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies’ was, in fact, seen by contemporaries as a critical affirmation of the trends of the age. ‘The trends of thought and course of the world are set,’ declared man of letters Kiyosawa Kiyoshi in March 1928. ‘They point in the direction of arms reductions and the abolishment of war’ (Kiyosawa, 1928: 42). Despite some concern in Tokyo about the agreement’s effect on imperial sovereignty, Japan’s ratification on 24 July 1929 launched the pact into effect.²¹

²⁰For a classic account of the Four Power Pact, see Nish (1972: chp. 22).

²¹This is because Japan was the last of the original fifteen signatories to ratify the pact (Kellogg Pact Goes Into Effect Today, 1929: 1).

9. Conclusion

Defined as a brief era of hope for liberation for colonized and semi-colonized peoples in Asia after the Great War, Erez Manela's notion of a 'Wilsonian Moment' does not comfortably apply to Japan. Japan's wartime and immediate postwar experience, however, offers a much more dramatic glimpse of the power of Wilsonian principles after the war. Viewed from the perspective of Japan, the Wilsonian Moment is much more comprehensive and significantly more enduring than a fleeting hope for self-determination.

Japan's dramatic wartime economic growth and pivotal contributions to allied victory catapulted Japan from the primarily agricultural, regional power that it was in the nineteenth century to the industrial state and world power that it became in the twentieth. The same economic and political developments became the foundation for a central Japanese role in constructing the complex postwar international infrastructure of peace.

At the Paris Peace Conference, Woodrow Wilson articulated a powerful vision for a new era of open, international discussions for peace, disarmament, and self-determination. Wilson's physical collapse in September 1919 and Washington's failure to join the central pillar of Wilson's vision, the League of Nations, threatened to destroy the new order at its inception. Just as Japan's wartime activities ultimately ensured an allied victory, however, Japan's eager participation in all major initiatives for peace after the First World War – the Paris Peace Conference, League of Nations, Washington and London Naval Conferences, the Five Power Treaty, Four Power Treaty, Nine Power Treaty and the Kellogg–Briand Pact – ensured the longevity of a powerful Wilsonian Moment, at least through the outbreak of hostilities in Manchuria in September 1931.

Tokyo would embark upon a very different national trajectory following the Manchurian Incident. But the tragedy of the 'Fifteen Years' War' should not distract from the formidable transformation of the world after 1918 and from the genuine enthusiasm with which Japanese statesmen and citizens joined the postwar peace project. They did so, first, because, like their contemporaries in Europe and the USA, they understood the importance of preventing another global calamity. Despite Japan's relative distance from the Western Front, Tokyo had, in fact, a particularly strong interest in postwar peace. Alone among belligerents, Japan had dramatically boosted her international status during the war. Japanese statesmen and citizens understood that participation in the postwar peace project was the surest way to sustain Japan's new position as a world power.

As we have seen with the opening vignette, 1919 marked a moment of intense pride for Japan's delegates to the Paris Peace Conference. A disenfranchised minority of the Japanese polity would ultimately plot to destroy the growing momentum of liberal internationalism in interwar Japan. But the excitement of that Wilsonian Moment would continue throughout the 1920s. As Seiyūkai MP Mizuno Rentarō declared on a tour of the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva in 1927, 'I was truly overcome with joy to see that our Empire does, indeed, stand with the world's great powers' (Warera no bunbu daijin, 1927: 1). The excitement of standing with the powers in a global peace project would rise once again, in full force, following the Second World War.

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Frederick R. Dickinson is Professor of Japanese History at the University of Pennsylvania, Co-Director of the Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies, and Deputy Director of the Penn Forum on Japan. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. in History from Yale University and holds an M.A. in International Politics from Kyoto University (Kyoto, Japan). He is the author of *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914–1919* (Harvard, 1999), *Taishō tenno* (Taishō Emperor, Minerva, 2009) and *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930* (Cambridge, 2013). He is currently working on a global history of modern Japan.