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Japanese-German Affinities in U.S.
Political Discourse during the First
World War**

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War

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In a 1905 essay entitled “Autocracy and War,” Joseph Conrad sought the deeper meaning of the “great war” between Russia and Japan, whose “endless, arduous toil of killing surpasses all the wars of history.” The conflict was important because it revealed “the black abyss which separates a soulless autocracy ... from the benighted, starved souls of its people.” It exorcised as well the “dreaded phantom” of Russian military power, which due to its sheer size had long overshadowed “the councils of central and western Europe.” But now on the bloody battlefields of Manchuria, Conrad claimed, the “task of Japan is done; the mission is accomplished; the ghost of Russian might is laid.” What, then, might the future hold? On one level, Russia’s ills would inevitably initiate some sort of internal upheaval – perhaps revolution – as its autocratic order fell. Weightier than the style of the deserved collapse, however, was its repercussions. History might regard the Japanese victory as essential to “the world’s struggle against all forms of evil,” and Japan was capable of managing by itself the new situation it had created in the East. Europe in contrast was ill-prepared to handle the concurrent changes in the West, particularly given its contemporary fascination with war and materialism. That is, states, including democracies, were loath to abandon the pursuits of land, wealth and influence. Action alone allayed “the haunting fear of the future” that stirred national passions, and the actions a state pursued were invariably aggressive. The main “trouble with the civilized world,” Conrad felt, “is the want of a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying point of international action tending towards the restraint of particular ambitions.” If such a principle did not yet exist, it should be “invented” by a sage and propagated by “a solemn prophet full of words and fire.” The decline of Russia had, after all, given greater

freedom to Germany, whose aspirations proved “that no peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests.” Therefore, “so far as a future of liberty, concord and justice is concerned,” he warned, “*Le Prussianisme – viola l’ennemi!*”¹

Conrad appears remarkably prescient given subsequent events, and his points in key ways mesh with the intellectual contours of Wilsonianism and its discontents by 1919. A decade after he wrote, imperial pursuits of power sparked another “Great War,” whose carnage dwarfed its Russo-Japanese precursor, and the ferocious excesses of “Prussianism” and other aspirations were fully exposed. Bolshevik Russia brought a fresh phantom of fatally infectious radicalism for the “Western world” to fear, and U.S. president Woodrow Wilson ascended the world stage to promote democracy as the common principle necessary to unite the world against destructive ambition. Conrad had, in fact, brushed aside democracy for the task in his earlier delineation of the wages of autocracy and war, thinking democracies were similarly prone to pursue material interests. But in simplest terms Wilson knew that democracy and peace were inseparable, since democracies did not “seek or desire war.”² As German violations of U.S. rights grew during the war years, he began to see a strict dichotomy between democracy and autocracy in terms of their respective impacts on world stability. “A steadfast concert for peace,” he told Congress in April 1917, could “never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants.” This was because such governments – “Prussian autocracy” in particular – were led by “little groups of ambitious men” who conducted their “criminal intrigues” with neither the consent nor confidence of their countrymen.³ By 1919, Wilson was convinced the Treaty of Versailles was the means to abolish what Conrad had called the “black abyss” that split autocratic governments from the people. For its tenets of national self-determination, open treaties and the League of Nations promised liberty to the powerless, while limiting “the ambitions ... of all imperialistic

¹ Joseph Conrad, “Autocracy and War,” *The Fortnightly Review* CCCCLXIII (July 1, 1905): 1-21.

² “Wilson’s Third Annual Message (Delivered before Congress in Joint Session, December 7, 1915.),” in Albert Shaw, ed., *The Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 2 vols. (New York: The Review of Reviews Corporation, 1924) 1: 137. Hereafter cited as *MPWW* with volume and page number.

³ “Wilson’s Address to Congress Advising that Germany’s Course Be Declared War against the United States (Delivered in Joint Session, April 2, 1917),” *MPWW* 1: 379.

governments in the world,” and even denying admittance to autocracies.⁴ As we well know, not all Americans shared the president’s faith in the League. But most all agreed that only U.S.-style, open democracy could eradicate the secret machinations of autocrats, thus ending conflict in the world, and that peoples across the globe embraced this premise, too.⁵ The dichotomy between promoting democracy and destroying Prussianism, moreover, was the common currency through which Americans justified their specific versions of the diverse array of policy prescriptions and perceptions that vied for primacy right after the war.

A powerful example of this dynamic at work and the inadequacies of its assumptions in foreign affairs is the fierce debate in the United States over the Shandong cession to Japan in the treaty of Versailles. As noted, competitors in the “treaty fight” framed their arguments in similar phrases, in which faith in their plans to protect U.S. democracy and security counterbalanced fear of a future acquiescence to autocratic evils should their rivals implement theirs.⁶ As we will see, members of the Wilson administration, Department of State and Senate supported their cases by exposing those whom they saw as promoters of “Prussianism” in some form – both at home and abroad. Perceptions of Japan were enmeshed in this larger U.S. debate for a number of reasons. First, since these men and most Americans knew little about East Asian affairs at the time, it was no leap to caricature the distant “Mikado” as another Kaiser (although Emperor Taishō exerted no real political power), particularly for domestic political consumption.⁷ Second, unlike Conrad after the Russo-Japanese War, most U.S. officials of the late

⁴ “An Address in the Oakland Municipal Auditorium (September 18, 1919),” in Arthur Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-1995) 63: 355. Hereafter cited as *PWW* with document title, volume and page numbers.

⁵ For further elaboration of this point, see John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 1-9.

⁶ By “treaty fight,” I include the disagreements over East Asia policy between Wilson and Robert Lansing and other key figures of the foreign policy making elite, together with the traditional definition of the battle between Wilson and his opponents in the Senate over the treaty of Versailles.

⁷ As Noriko Kawamura observes, Wilson’s “knowledge of Japan and East Asia was limited and colored by reports from diplomats and ‘experts’ who shared his universalist zeal for America’s mission in East Asia.” The same might be said for Henry Cabot Lodge, Robert Lansing and the other key officials analyzed here. See Kawamura, *Turbulence in the Pacific: Japanese-U.S. Relations during World War I* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000) 134.

1910s harbored serious reservations that Imperial Japan, given its more recent actions, could be trusted to manage the new situation in East Asia, let alone by itself. The ambiguity of Japanese intentions in China and the Pacific was especially unsettling for U.S. planners of a postwar world. Many filled this void by fitting Japan into the familiar democracy-versus-autocracy framework at a time when, in fact, Japanese representative government was expanding. The rigidity of U.S. hopes for a postwar democratic peace and rancorous domestic politics impeded closer cooperation with Japan, thus the effective implementation of the preferred new order in East Asia.

The strictest American adherents to the democracy-autocracy dichotomy were members of the diplomatic elite who vehemently opposed any acceptance of Japanese claims to Shandong. Paul Reinsch, the U.S. minister at Peking, for example, pleaded directly to Wilson in January 1919 that “a desirable Peace” had to include the “permanent settlement of the Chinese question.” A constant crier of wolf in U.S.-East Asian relations, Reinsch assured the President that he was “to the people of China the embodiment of their best hopes and aspirations,” and that they asked for the “freedom to follow in the footsteps of America.” What had dashed their hopes, however, were “evil influences from without and the attempt of Foreign Military Autocrats to seize control of Chinese resources.” Japan’s “military masters” were the worst offenders, and while Reinsch did not blame “the Japanese people,” he argued that the only thing that would stop their military masters was the knowledge that the world would not tolerate such behavior. Once this happened under U.S. leadership, “the natural propensity of the Chinese to follow liberal inclination would guide this vast country towards free government.”⁸ General Tasker Bliss, in his famous letter to Wilson protesting the Shandong cession, reduced these points to their essentials: if the United States upheld the Japanese claims, it would “abandon the democracy of China to the domination of the Prussianized militarism of Japan.”⁹ As Burton Beers rightly notes, appeals to Wilson such as these were primarily intended to convince the President that defeating Japanese “aspirations was

⁸ “Joseph Clark Grew to Gilbert Fairchild Close, with Enclosure (January 15, 1919),” *PWW* 54: 77-82.

⁹ “From Tasker Howard Bliss (April 29, 1919),” *PWW* 58: 234 (for entire letter); and Burton F. Beers, *Vain Endeavor: Robert Lansing’s Attempts to End the American-Japanese Rivalry* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962) 159.

more important than having Japan in the League,” since the membership of a “Prussianized state” might ruin the organization.¹⁰ They also reveal the conceptual constraints under which U.S. diplomats operated in the making of East Asia policy, especially the simplistic equation of China with U.S. democracy and Japan with German militarism.

Consider, for example, the policy proposals and convictions of Secretary of State Robert Lansing, about which Beers offers two particularly telling observations. Simply stated, Lansing fully subscribed to the democratic peace theory, including its contingent distrust of autocracies, and even advocated taking it a step further. He also believed that U.S. policies might actually aid Japanese moderates in their domestic fight against “the militarists.”¹¹ First, the secretary of state argued privately that only “a League of Democracies” could truly ensure world peace, while any organization “composed of both democratic and autocratic governments and pledged to maintain peace by force would be unreliable.” The United States had to extend democracy to any country that might become “a menace to world peace in the event it should be in the hands of ambitious rulers instead of the people.” More than just making the world safe for democracy, then, the U.S. must “crush Prussianism ... and end autocracy in every other nation as well.”¹² Second, because in his view Japan as then disposed clearly fit the definition of an autocratic “menace to world peace,” Lansing tried to carry out this charge by strongly urging Wilson to block Japanese claims to Shandong. This, he felt, would discredit the militarists within Japan’s domestic arena, bolster the so-called moderates, and make cooperation with the United States much more likely. Beers notes that Lansing regretted what he saw as a lost chance in 1919 to build a coalition to rein in Japanese ambitions in

¹⁰ Beers 159.

¹¹ Beers 153-154.

¹² “Secretary Lansing to Colonel House (April 8, 1918),” Charles Seymour, ed., *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* 4 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1925-1928) 4: 14-15; partially cited in Beers 159-160, n19. For a less bellicose public expression of Lansing’s advocacy of a democratic peace, see “The Power of Democracy [Address by Robert Lansing, Secretary of State of the United States before the regents of the University of the State of New York at their convocation at Albany, October 17, 1919]” *Congressional Record* 66th Congress, 2nd, vol. 58 part 7, (October 20, 1919), 7159-7162. Hereafter cited as *Congressional Record* with session, volume, part, date and page numbers.

China and all the ills attached to them.¹³ It is difficult to understand how such a rigid approach, though, would have helped U.S. interests in East Asia. In fact, the other Great Powers officially supported the Shandong cession, and only the United States really fit his strict definition of democracy. As such, his envisioned “League of Democracies” might at first at least have replaced the “international oligarchy” of the Great Powers with a single member.¹⁴ Lansing, moreover, in effect understood Japanese internal affairs as but a microcosm of how he and others imagined the world situation to be. As we will see, a militarists-versus-moderates construct only superficially captured the complexities of Japanese politics at the time, especially the implication that the moderates identified more with the United States than Japan.

If, as Beers posits, any evaluation of U.S. East Asia policy during World War I rests on whether or not Wilson was right to accept the Shandong cession, the answer is a qualified yes, he was.¹⁵ Much has been made in recent studies about Wilson’s “white supremacist” worldview, and rightly so.¹⁶ His segregationist policies towards African-Americans in particular are well-documented, and the president did, after all, essentially veto the racial equality clause that Japan had proposed at the Paris Peace Conference as a

¹³ Beers 153 and 167. For an additional example of U.S. fears of the “military party” in Japan, see “The Ambassador in Japan (Morris) to the Secretary of State (November 19, 1919),” United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919* 2 volumes (Washington: Government Printing Office) 2: 416-417. Hereafter cited as *FRUS* with document title, volume and page numbers.

¹⁴ Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations: A Personal Narrative* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921) 246. Ironically, Lansing used the term in reference to the Council of Four, to which he believed Japan aspired membership, but was not quite up to the task given its relative weakness. As he understood, this was due mainly to Japanese economic and financial weakness relative to the U.S., which gave the U.S. a substantial advantage over Japan in a conflict. This admitted leverage in turn casts further doubt on Lansing’s proposals. See “Minutes of the Daily Meetings of the Commissioners Plenipotentiary (February 6, 1919),” *FRUS, Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, XI: 21. For a fine study of Japan’s economic situation in the early twentieth century, see Mark Metzler, *Lever of Empire: The International Gold Standard and the Crisis of Liberalism in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Beers 167-169. See his analysis in these pages for an alternate view which stresses subsequent events in Japanese history (rather than the context of Japanese affairs at the time) as evidence and accepts the militarists-versus-moderates model at face value.

¹⁶ See, for example, Lloyd Ambrosius, “Woodrow Wilson, Alliances, and the League of Nations,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 5.2 (April 2006): 159-160; Cooper 88; and Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) 82-107.

way to meliorate its ongoing emigration dispute with the United States.¹⁷ Racist acts like this clearly exacerbated international antagonism. But Wilson generally did not act on the more extreme perceptions of Japan proffered by Reinsch and Lansing, hence he was not precluded from seeking an accommodation with it. Wilson deserves more credit than studies have given him for choosing to engage Japan over the suspect advice he received to isolate it. Kawamura, for example, sees in Wilsonian diplomacy the same flaw that Ambrosius stresses in the President's unyielding handling of the treaty fight at home. That is, his "universalism and unilateralism" helped cause a rise in U.S.-Japan tensions at the time.¹⁸

In fact, this interpretation works far better for Lansing's proposals than actual Wilsonian policy, at least in regards to Shandong. To be sure, Wilson disliked the cession in principle and harbored some suspicions of Japanese intentions in China and the Pacific. He felt satisfied at the time of the settlement, however, in Japanese assurances to restore sovereignty to China, mainly because he felt this was a step towards a future where "all extraordinary foreign rights in China" would end under the mediation of the League of Nations.¹⁹ In defending his decision during a nationwide speaking tour in September 1919, for example, Wilson emphasized that not Chinese but German rights had been ceded to Japan in Shandong, and the cession in fact had momentous import. In the past, many foreign countries had grabbed and still held concessions at the expense of China's sovereignty. None, however, had ever yielded to conditions the way Japan had in the treaty of Versailles. Japan was now pledged to forego such concessions and "with the rest of us, to respect and protect the territorial integrity of China." A key distinction between a selfish past and a League-based world order, as Wilson saw it, was that representatives of the United States were no longer forced to go meekly before Japan and

¹⁷ For Wilsonian treatment of African-Americans, see Nicholas Patler, *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2004). For more on the racial equality clause, see Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁸ The other culprit in her dichotomy is Japanese "particularistic regionalism and pluralism." See Kawamura 133. The work she cites is Lloyd Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: the Treaty Fight in Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For more on the East Asian advice Wilson received from "experts," see Lawrence Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917-1919* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963) 226-272.

¹⁹ "To Joseph Patrick Tumulty (April 30, 1919)," *PWW* 58: 272-273.

“suggest” its actions in China were wrong. Under the treaty and the League, the U.S. instead had the right to say, “it can’t be done,” and if necessary add, “It shall not be done.”²⁰ If engaged in a world organization, in other words, Japan – like the other allied imperialists – might be redeemable after all.²¹ Wilson, then, rightly chose not to exploit U.S. power to isolate Japan as Lansing desired (which, as we will see, would most likely have worsened certain Japanese anxieties), and his approach was more consistent with past U.S. policies, such as the Root-Takahira and Gentlemen’s agreements.

The caveat in a positive appraisal of Wilsonian East Asia policy rests on the President’s refusal to compromise with his rivals in the treaty fight and the venomous public recriminations by both sides this sparked at home. Wilson was willing to negotiate with Japan, albeit to ensure the viability of the League of Nations, and his public comments at least about the Japanese were routinely a model of discretion. At no time did he single out the specter of a Prussianized Japan to justify his policies. The same cannot be said for his denunciation of the “little group of willful men” who opposed him, at whom Wilson leveled the typical damning phrases of the democracy-autocracy binary.²² Nor can it be said for his rivals’ depictions of Wilson or Japan. As Wilson’s main antagonist in the treaty fight, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, said to Theodore Roosevelt, for example, the 1918 congressional elections went to the Republicans “because the country rose up against Wilson’s attempt to establish an autocracy.”²³

²⁰ “A Luncheon Address in San Francisco (September 17, 1919),” *PWW* 63: 314-317. See also, “An Address in the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles (September 20, 1919),” *PWW* 63: 411-413; and “Notes of a Meeting Which Took Place at President Wilson’s House, Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Tuesday, April 22, 1919, at 4:30 p.m.,” *FRUS, Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, V: 145.

²¹ On this point I am in more general agreement with N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America’s Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 236-245, than with Cooper 88, who argues Wilson through the Shandong cession was in effect “bowing to power realities in Asia.” As noted, an additional essential factor to consider is Wilsonian racism and its subtle drag on U.S.-Japan relations. For more on this approach, see Robert G. Kane, “Making Democracy Safe: Race, Representative Government and Rhetorical Authority in the 1913 Japan-U.S. Immigration Crisis,” article manuscript presented to the Midwest Japan Seminar at the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs, Madison, WI, October 21, 2006.

²² Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition* 177 and Cooper 190-191 disagree here, though the record of Wilson’s speeches seems to favor the former.

²³ “Henry Cabot Lodge to Theodore Roosevelt (November 18, 1918),” Henry Cabot Lodge and Charles F. Redmond, eds., *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918* 2 volumes (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971) 2: 544.

Staunch League critic Albert J. Beveridge, meanwhile, worried about what restraints Congress might put on a president who apparently had no self-control at all. Since Wilson was “directly and immediately in charge of foreign affairs and... Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy,” Beveridge asked, “how can Congress throw any obstacles in his way? We all know that he pays no more attention to legal or constitutional restrictions or limitations than he pays to the Koran.”²⁴ For Republicans, Wilson’s presidency, far from making the world safe for democracy, was “endangering constitutional government and the very foundations of American liberty.”²⁵ The President’s critics also charged that he mixed “the instincts of an autocrat with the theories of a champion of democracy,” and that he was, in short, “the Kaiser right over again.”²⁶ To counter what they saw as Wilson’s autocratic turn, the Senate opposition utilized the “Japanese peril” to help make their cases about the folly of such Wilsonian decisions as Shandong and Article X of the League covenant. U.S. domestic political wrangling, then, acted as a brake on the improvement of its foreign relations.

Raising the specter of Japanese militarism tapped a rich vein in the cavernous mines of national security fears among Americans. Whispers or screams of secret maneuverings toward a Japan-Germany alliance had rattled around in U.S. diplomatic and popular discourses throughout most of the war years. Many of the scenarios were German in origin or generally baseless, and were often anchored in no more than an imagined axis of autocracies that was itself premised on the idea that their forms of government, hence goals and ideals, were ostensibly the same.²⁷ The writings of

²⁴ Albert J. Beveridge to Henry Cabot Lodge (October 1, 1919), Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA, reel 57. Hereafter cited as Lodge Papers with title, date and reel numbers (the author wishes to thank the Massachusetts Historical Society for giving permission to cite the Lodge Papers in this paper). For the best study of Lodge in general, see William Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

²⁵ Henry Cabot Lodge to R.M. Washburn (February 10, 1919), Lodge Papers, reel 56.

²⁶ R.M. Bradley to Henry Cabot Lodge (January 10, 1919), Lodge Papers, reel 54; and William Sturgis Bigelow to Henry Cabot Lodge (November 10, 1919), Lodge Papers, reel 37.

²⁷ For an excellent study of this theme, see Ute Mehnert, “German *Weltpolitik* and the American Two-Front Dilemma: The ‘Japanese Peril’ in German-American Relations, 1904-1917,” *The Journal of American History* (March 1996): 1452-1477. See also, Frank Iklé, “Japanese-German Peace Negotiations during World War I,” *American Historical Review* 71 (October 1965) 62-76 (Iklé is often misattributed; he does not show that Japan ever in fact intended to switch sides during the war); and Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese*

Thorstein Veblen and Walter Lippmann typify the public expression of these beliefs. Similar to Lansing, Veblen argued in 1917 that “a neutral peace compact” was simply not viable if Germany and Japan were included, while reaching a world settlement required either “peace by unconditional surrender and submission, or peace by elimination of Imperial Germany (and Japan).”²⁸ Lippmann, meanwhile, saw “three serious trouble-makers in the world, Germany, Japan, and Russia.” He believed that a coalition between them was “the nightmare which today haunts the secret thought of the western world, for it opens up an indefinite vista of armament and dread and agony.” With “Germany and Japan in alliance [and] with all Russia’s resources to organize, the liberal powers would be almost helpless.”²⁹ In private, prominent Republicans relayed related fears and knew where to lay the blame. Elihu Root, for example, said it was the business of the United States to prevent a combination of Germany and Japan from dominating Russia, which “the feeling caused by the Shantung business [was] likely to promote.”³⁰ Lodge confided similar sentiments: the Japanese were “the Prussia of the East. Their culture is German, their ambitions are German.” There was “absolutely no defense for handing over Shantung” to Japan, and this was a view, the Senator noted, he shared with Secretary Lansing.³¹

Lodge and others made the same pointed comparison between Japan and Germany in the long Senate debates over what they saw as the most egregious articles of the treaty. Briefly put, opponents argued that not only did ratification of the Shandong cession make the United States complicit in a crime, Article X might compel the U.S. to

Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) 92-95, for the “Germany of Asia” perception associated with *Sacramento Bee* publisher Valentine S. McClatchy, who promoted the phrase as part of the west coast movement to prevent Japanese emigration to the United States.

²⁸ Thorstein Veblen, *An Inquiry into the Nature of Peace and the Terms of Its Perpetuation* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917) 107-108; 202. See also Veblen, “The Opportunity of Japan,” *The Journal of Race Development* 6 (July 1915) 23-46; and *Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution* (1915; London: Secker and Warburg, 1939) 86 n1, for connections between Germany and Japan.

²⁹ Walter Lippmann, *The Stakes of Diplomacy* (1915; New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917) xiii-xv. See also “The Defense of the Atlantic World (February 17, 1917),” in *Early Writings: Walter Lippmann* (New York: Liveright, 1970) 73. The article was originally published in *The New Republic*.

³⁰ Elihu Root to Henry Cabot Lodge (November 1, 1919), Lodge Papers, reel 58.

³¹ Henry Cabot Lodge to William Astor Chanler (August 18, 1919), Lodge Papers, reel

militarily defend the Japanese theft of Chinese territory should China one day seek to reacquire it by force. Lodge, for one, advised his fellow senators to recall the whole aggressive history of Japanese actions in East Asia since 1894, as well as Japan's "unscrupulous disposition." Japan was "steeped in German ideas" and would eventually exploit the "unlimited man power of China for military purposes," just as Germany had used Slavs "to promote their schemes of conquest." It was an "intolerable wrong," he stated, to hand over to Japan "the territory of a friend who helped us and the other nations in the war against Germany."³² For Robert LaFollette, the question was simple: would the United States be "a party to a gigantic theft of territory and valuable rights from China, a sister Republic, an ally in the late war, for the benefit of the most despotic Government on earth." Lawrence Sherman of Illinois also held up Japan as the logical heir of German excesses. Being "an autocracy," Japan exhibited the motives and ambitions for similar unbridled expansion: "All that the Kaiser was to Europe the Mikado is to the mainland of Asia."³³ To be sure, the primary target of their ire was Wilson's conception of national security and constitutional powers. As Fifield notes, moreover, the Shandong cession offered an economical way for opponents to bash a whole list of ills: "the Senators could denounce Wilson, Japan, and the League of Nations, all in one sentence." While the politics of fear may have had a partisan utility, however, the loud public airing of hyperbolic mischaracterizations of Japan did nothing to benefit bilateral relations.³⁴

Another central issue to consider is how accurately the U.S. perceptions of Japan outlined above reflected the reality of the times. As we have seen, many members of the administration, foreign policymaking elite and Congress assumed Japan was an autocracy, hence it was bound to follow lockstep in the aggressively expansionist boot prints of

³² Remarks by Lodge, *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 2nd session, vol. 58, part 7, (October 14, 1919) 6878 -6879.

³³ Remarks by LaFollette and Sherman, *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 2nd session, vol. 58, part 7, (October 16, 1919), 7011 and 7000, respectively. Usage of such views of Japan was not restricted along simple party lines, nor were all remarks about Japan negative. For a more balanced view of Japan, see Remarks by Townsend, *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 2nd session, vol. 58, part 7, (October 16, 1919), 6993.

³⁴ Russell Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East: The Diplomacy of the Shantung Question* (1952; Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965) 340. See also Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition*, 137; and Roy Watson Curry, *Woodrow Wilson and Far Eastern Policy, 1913-1921* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968) 297.

Germany and Russia. As proof, they held up iniquitous examples of previous Japanese actions against China, particularly Japan's violation of Chinese sovereignty in initiating hostilities against the German possessions there in 1914, the Twenty-one Demands in 1915 and the Shandong cession in 1919. Despite classifying Japan as autocratic, policy makers like Lansing also believed a battle raged in Japanese politics between militarists and moderates. They advocated that the U.S. use its war-enhanced power to block Japanese ambitions in cases such as Shandong, since this would aid the moderates and in turn increase cooperation in bilateral relations. Conversely, U.S. acquiescence would embolden Japanese militarism.

In fact, no autocrat similar to a kaiser or tsar stood atop the political structure of Imperial Japan. What characterized Japanese politics since the Meiji Restoration, rather, was an ongoing competition among an array of different groups to decide who would actually govern the country in practice. Intertwined in this was an equally fierce contest for control of the keywords of Meiji ideology, or to prove whose specific policies promoted the Meiji mission to end the international isolation imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate as well as advance both the prestige of the empire abroad and constitutional government at home. By the 1910s, competitors included the original oligarchs of the Restoration (*genrō*), military-bureaucratic elites, and party politicians, the latter of whom endeavored to establish greater civilian control over Japan's internal and foreign affairs. By advocating democracy and anti-imperialism, Wilsonianism intensified this debate.³⁵ But as leading journalist Tokutomi Iichiro remarked at the time, the "greater part of the Japanese people do not ... make the principles of American democracy their ideals, no more than they do those of German militarism." Instead, they were "striving to the utmost to maintain, display, and develop their own national characteristics."³⁶ These characteristics did not necessarily match American expectations. Consider, for example,

³⁵ I largely accept here the general depiction of Japanese politics laid out by my mentor, Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) and add to it an emphasis on Japanese political keywords. See Robert G. Kane, "Hammering Down Nails: Politics, Diplomacy and the Quest for National Unity in Japan and America, 1912-1919," (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2002). For Meiji ideology, see Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

³⁶ Iichiro Tokutomi, *Japanese-American Relations*, Sukeshige Yanagiwara, trans. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922) 152-153 (both names are listed in western order here).

the case of Katō Takaaki, leader of the minority *Kenseikai* party, and a former diplomat. In January 1917, Katō lambasted the cabinet of General Terauchi Masatake for its “unconstitutional” oligarchic origin and monopolization of political power. “A few men arbitrarily deciding [national] matters and ignoring the popular will,” Katō contended, was just the sort of regressive politics that the country could not allow.³⁷ Yet, as foreign minister, Katō had orchestrated Japan’s entry into the war through Chinese territory and the Twenty-one Demands. Although the *Kenseikai* leader expediently endorsed Wilsonianism in 1919, his earlier inclinations undercut the U.S. belief that civilian government in Japan would necessarily align Japanese policy more closely with U.S. interests. Nor was U.S. analysis correct in assuming that “moderates” and “militarists” were mutually exclusive forces in Japanese politics. Hara Takashi, head of the majority *Seiyūkai* party and Japan’s first “commoner” prime minister, in fact gained office via an agreement with the strongest faction of the military-bureaucratic elite. Though a civilian politician, Hara clamped down in domestic affairs to forestall what he and his allies saw as the dangerous prospects of Wilsonian-style reform at home. Fear of rising U.S. power abroad would likely have led to a similarly conservative response to U.S. efforts to curtail Japanese war time gains. In short, similar to the opposition in the United States Senate, Wilsonian attempts to isolate Japan would have led the Hara cabinet to protect its autonomy.³⁸

Finally, what might we make of this in relation to the proposed link between democracy and peace? In his essay on “Autocracy and War,” Joseph Conrad observed that “it is the bitter fate of [an] idea to lose its royal form and power, to lose its ‘virtue’ the moment it descends from its solitary throne to work its will amongst the people.”³⁹ Such was the case with democracy in the aftermath of World War I, or at least with the ways in which its various proponents viewed it. Effective democracy, in short, requires compromise. The more tightly its advocates grip onto a strict binary between it and its

³⁷ Katō Kō Denki Hensankai, ed., *Katō Takaaki*, 2 volumes (1929; Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1970) 2: 249-250 (translations from the Japanese are mine unless otherwise noted).

³⁸ Dickinson 204-237; and Asada Sadao, “Nichi-Bei Kankei no Imēji – Senzen {Images in Japan-U.S. Relations – the Prewar Period},” in Miwa Kimitada, ed., *Sōgō Kōza Nihon no Shakai Bunkashi*, vol. 7, *Sekai no Naka Nihon* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1974) 308-359 (here, “Prewar” refers to World War II) for an excellent synopsis of Japanese fears at this time of the United States as an economic, military, ideological and racial menace to Japan.

³⁹ Conrad 3.

antithesis, restrict its definition or see something dark and sinister in those who do not exactly share the same views of it, the less likely is accommodation. Chief executives, it seems, play a pivotal role in tempering both the “national passions” and “haunting fears of the future” that, as Conrad noted, swirl around in international relations. If leaders avoid feeding into them, as Wilson and various Japanese diplomats succeeded in doing throughout the 1910s, acrimonious rhetoric need not lead to crisis. However, once an “us-versus-them” mindset becomes state policy and erodes democratic dissent, as with Imperial Japan in the 1930s, conflict becomes dangerously likely.