

 **Article REVIEW**

**Manako Ogawa.** “The ‘White Ribbon League of Nations’ Meets Japan: The Trans-Pacific Activism of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1906-1930.” *Diplomatic History* 31:1 (January 2007): 21-50.

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**M**anako Ogawa presents a deft analysis and interpretation of the actions and rhetoric of the Japanese World’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and its relations with its U.S. counterpart in the early half of the twentieth century. She places her work firmly in the third category of Michael J. Hogan’s typology of diplomatic historians: those who connect diplomacy to domestic politics and international circumstances (21-22, n 2). Her work reveals the ways in which women’s organizations—far from offering alternative visions for how the world should work, or would work, if they were in charge—actually united their strategies quite closely with the key ideological practices, such as imperialism and anti-immigration policies, constructed by governments operating in the nearly exclusively male realm of international relations.

The records and publications of the WCTU offer Ogawa a rich minefield of activism and rhetoric through which to test her hypotheses regarding female international activists. The WCTU, founded in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1874, continued the process of West-to-East cultural and ideological flow begun by Protestant missionaries when it sent Mary Clement Leavitt to Japan to organize a branch of the WCTU in 1886, in an effort to draw Asian women into the WCTU’s “white ribbon league of nations.” But the Japanese women encountered by U.S. reformers quickly began to reverse that unidirectional paradigm, in part by carving out their own agenda. They did so, not coincidentally, Ogawa argues, as Japan became a leading imperial power alongside its Western counterparts after its victory over China in 1895, and over Russia in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War.

Leavitt and other transnational WCTU activists viewed Asian women through Orientalist lenses. Their sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority encouraged them to interpret Japanese women as helpless, passive “daughters” in need of Occidental “mothering,” to “dispel the darkness that now rests upon the Orient,” according to an 1895 World WCTU publication (26). But the Japanese Union did not always succumb to the secondary role its American sisters wished them to play.

In keeping with more recent international relations scholarship, Ogawa uses cultural evidence to reinforce her claims about the hierarchical nature of relations between the Japanese and American WCTU. Repeatedly throughout the three decades under scrutiny, tensions between the two branches erupted over the wearing of the kimono, an article of traditional Japanese clothing that Western women (and men) found exotic and alluring. At international conferences of the World WCTU, Japanese delegates were repeatedly asked to wear kimonos to ceremonies and to pose for photographs dressed in their garb. Often, the Japanese women were the only representatives wearing ethnic “costumes.” By making such requests, Ogawa contends that WCTU leaders, such as American WCTU President Anna A. Gordon, depoliticized their Japanese counterparts, commodifying and objectifying them for Western consumption. To reformers such as Kubushiro Ochimi, leader of the Japanese WCTU, the kimono was

unflatteringly equated with the geisha girl, a stereotypically submissive entertainer purchased for use by men. In its campaign against the wearing of the kimono, the Japanese Union successfully varied the discourse heard among the different nations residing under the World WCTU umbrella.

But the Japanese Union created racial hierarchies of its own, and in this respect it mirrored the practical considerations of realpolitik created and endorsed by imperialists, according to Ogawa. Kubushiro Ochimi, for example, placed her own country at the top of the hierarchy of Asian nations, including China. She interpreted Japan-China relations as involving a shared ethnic and intellectual past, but she regarded Japan as an “elder brother” to its younger brother China, legitimizing Japan’s military aggression against its neighbor as an expression of an elder brother’s responsibility to guide his younger sibling toward enlightenment and civilization.

Manako Ogawa’s work adds a significant counterweight to recent scholarship on women’s transnational organizations. Jo Vellacott, Glenda Sluga, Carol Miller, and others, have explored the relationship between transnational women activists in organizations such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and post-World War I international politics.<sup>1</sup> These scholars have emphasized the degree to which women, as a historically disenfranchised group, sought an avenue to self-determination through international bodies such as the League of Nations. In their efforts, they acted largely in unison. Ogawa demonstrates that at times, the World WCTU also acted in concert, particularly when it responded to an international body of male policy makers. She points to the 1930 London Naval Conference, where, led by the Japanese Union, the WCTU stormed St. James’s Palace uninvited, and presented emissaries with a petition to curb the arms race. WILPF members from diverse nations presented a petition of their own to the all-male delegates meeting at the Peace Conference at Versailles in 1919 (they, too, were uninvited). Yet Annika Wilmers’s work on the WILPF has demonstrated that nationalism in the early twentieth century kept WILPF’s membership more often divided than united.<sup>2</sup> Manako Ogawa’s article underscores the ways in which both the U.S. and Japanese branches of the WCTU acted within the ideological structures of imperialist policies and racial hierarchies that were consistent with the geopolitics of the world in which they operated. Those frameworks frequently kept the WCTU from achieving its goal of binding the world’s women together under the banner of the white ribbon.

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*Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse*

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<sup>1</sup> Jo Vellacott, “A Place for Pacifism and Trans-nationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom,” *Women’s History Review*, 2 (1993): 23-56; Glenda Sluga, “Female and National Self-Determination: A Gender Re-Reading of ‘The Apogee of Nationalism’” *Nations and Nationalism*, 6 (2000): 495-521; Carol Miller, “Geneva—the Key to Equality”: Inter-war feminists and the League of Nations,” *Women History Review*, 3 (1994): 219-245.

<sup>2</sup> Annika Wilmers, “Zwischen Den Fronten: Friedensdiskurse in der Internationalen Frauenfriedensbewegung, 1914-1919” in Davy, J.A., Hagemann, K. and Kätzel, U. (eds) *Frieden—Gewalt—Geschlecht: Friedens- und Konfliktforschung als Geschlechterforschung* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2005).