Wilsonian Idealism and Japanese Claims at the Paris Peace Conference

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According to Ray Stannard Baker, head of the Press Bureau of the American Committee to Negotiate the Peace, the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 was a battlefield of two ideas: the “Old Diplomacy,” practiced by imperialists of the Old World, and the “New Diplomacy,” advocated by idealistic internationalists under the leadership of President Woodrow Wilson. This dichotomy, however, does not fully explain the antagonism between Japan and the United States at the end of World War I. This study explores further possible explanations of President Wilson’s failure to fend off the Japanese challenge to the principles of Wilsonian internationalism as set forth in his Fourteen Points. It argues that Japanese-American differences were more than either simple disagreements over diplomatic principles or particular disputes over economic, territorial, or political concessions. Hidden behind the conflict was another dichotomy—between America’s universalism and unilateralism, on the one hand, and, on the other, an incipient particularistic regionalism and pluralism derived from Japanese leaders’ assessment of

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power relations in East Asia and their strong sense of nationalism and racial identity.

As the United States became engulfed in the Great War in Europe, President Wilson embraced an idealistic internationalism centered around principles of open diplomacy, freedom, self-determination, and international justice. He was convinced that these were universal principles, and he sought to make them the basis upon which every nation conducted foreign relations. Wilson's universalistic idealism stemmed from his unwavering faith in Christianity and in the superior moral values, political sophistication, cultural traditions, and racial characteristics of Western civilization.\(^2\)

Wilson's failure to resolve his disagreements with Japan stemmed to no small extent from his firm belief in the universality of his internationalist ideals: Nations that failed to adhere to his ideals he considered morally wrong. He unilaterally applied his ideals to the East Asian situation without a full comprehension of regional realities. His knowledge of East Asia was limited and colored by reports from diplomats and "experts" who shared his zeal for America's mission in East Asia. By treating Japan as a morally inferior state and turning America's rivalry with Japan in East Asia into a crusade against an uncivilized force, Wilson made it impossible to find a workable compromise. Wilson's inflexible unilateralism was one of the limitations of his idealism.

As a late developer by Western standards, Japan strove to attain equality with the West and join the ranks of the great powers. It emulated rivals by adopting their expansionist and imperialist practices. Because of geographical proximity, Japan was eager to benefit from the treaty port system the Western powers had established in China. Japanese leaders quickly learned to use alliances, secret treaties, and, if necessary, mili-

tary force to further their national interests. They paid due respect to the existing rules and precedents in the imperialist game established by the Western powers. Japan did not take any drastic actions without reaching prior understandings with other major powers, especially its ally, Great Britain. In these ways, Japanese leaders considered their country to be a fair player in the arena of international competition.

Nevertheless, the view of the world that Japanese leaders embraced at the time of World War I was provincial. It focused narrowly on the protection of Japan's security and the enhancement of national interests and prestige. Having established a foothold on the northeastern edge of the Asian continent through wars with China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905), Japanese leaders searched for a more self-assertive foreign policy appropriate for an emerging great power in Asia. The outbreak of hostilities in Europe provided the opportunity to launch a vigorous program of continental expansion, and throughout the war Japanese foreign policy was built upon the selfish purpose of national aggrandizement. However, the diplomatic blunder of the Twenty-one Demands on China—the 1915 treaties in which China agreed to abide by Japanese-German agreements over the disposition of German rights, interests, and concessions in Shandong at the close of the war—triggered a serious debate in Tokyo over the rationale and the method of Japanese continental expansion.

In the course of searching for a comprehensive new policy toward the Asian continent, senior leaders in Japan gradually developed a pluralistic and regionalistic approach to justify Japanese hegemony in East Asia. By focusing on both the geopolitical separation of Asia from the West and the differences between the racial and cultural heritage of Asian and Western states, they moved toward a pluralistic stance, arguing that a nation's conduct could be based on different principles from those laid out by the Western great powers.

Similarly, from the outset of the modernization efforts, many political and intellectual leaders in Japan claimed that a "special relationship" existed between Japan and China. They pointed to obvious geopolitical, economic, and strategic commonalities, and, particularly among powerful senior statesmen known as "genro," to the idea of a "common culture and com-
mon race" (dobun doshu) that the peoples of the two countries shared. Genro Masayoshi Matsukata argued in favor of a special position for Japan in China by using the idea of Japanese “tute-lage” over China. Another genro, Shigenobu Okuma, who served as premier from 1914 to 1916, espoused the idea of the “yellow man’s burden.”

During World War I, Aritomo Yamagata, the most influential genro, emerged as the leading advocate of Sino-Japanese cooperation and articulated a series of famous policy slogans, such as Sino-Japanese “accord” (teikei) and “coexistence and co-prosperity” (kyoson kyoei). Yamagata believed that the Great War was part of an international trend toward “an increasing intensity in racial rivalry.” Pointing to racial discrimination against Asians, such as the anti-Japanese movement in California, he argued that if the colored races of Asia hoped to compete with the culturally advanced white races, “China and Japan, which are culturally and racially alike, must become friendly and promote each other’s interests.” Although he admitted that Japan had specific national interests in Manchuria, he emphasized that Japan must also set its sights on “the self-protection of Asians and for the coexistence and co-prosperity of China and Japan.”

Yamagata and other Japanese leaders exhibited curiously ambivalent attitudes toward China. On the one hand, they believed that their country’s national survival dictated that they secure Japan’s “life-line” to the continent by any means possible, including exploitation of their weak neighbor through intimidation and coercion, so far as the great powers would permit. Simultaneously, as the only non-Western imperial power in East Asia, the Japanese also felt justified in claiming a special pater-

nalistic position in the region on the grounds of geographical propinquity as well as common racial and cultural background. They naively believed that China would accept Japan's tutelage if it understood Japan's true intentions. For example, when Yamagata proposed a Sino-Japanese entente pledging "union and cooperation," his foremost goal was to encourage China's confidence in Japan through persuasion and guidance. In doing so, he took it for granted that China would follow Japan's leadership and consult with Tokyo in its dealings with other foreign countries.

In these respects, the United States and Japan stood far apart in their views of the world when hostilities in Europe came to an end in November 1918. By the time President Wilson and the Japanese delegation assembled for the first meeting of the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference, both sides had diametrically opposite objectives based on incompatible visions of the postwar world.

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The American delegation to the peace conference had as its objective a new world order as envisioned in President Wilson's Fourteen Points. So far as Wilson was concerned, the Fourteen Points were the only possible program for world peace. The realization of such principles as open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, free trade, and the self-determination of states, he declared to Congress in January 1918, hinged on the creation of a league of nations. He reiterated this position in his address on September 27, 1918, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, stating that "the constitution of that League of Nations and the clear definition of its objective must be ... the most essential part of the peace settlement itself." Here and elsewhere, he insisted that "no special or separate interest of any single nation or any groups of nations can be made the basis of any part of the settlement which is not consistent with the common interest of all." Having secured from

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both Germany and the European Allies a pre-armistice agreement that they would, as a matter of principle, embrace the Fourteen Points as the basis of peace, Wilson presumed that the Fourteen Points would shape the peace conference and, in turn, the postwar world.

Wilson gave the lowest priority to questions concerning the disposition of the German colonies. On the way to Paris, he revealed to chief members of the Inquiry (a special commission directed by Colonel Edward M. House to prepare the U.S. government’s program for peace) his belief that the mandate system through the League of Nations would provide a satisfactory solution to the matter. His plan was to make the German colonies “the common property of the League of Nations” to be “given to one of the smaller states to administer as the mandatory” of the League primarily in the interest of the natives. Wilson stressed that the peace conference would not tolerate “arrangements” made in “the old style” and that “only the adoption of a cleansing process would recreate or regenerate the world.”

George L. Beer, an expert on colonial questions for the Inquiry, was disturbed by the President’s suggestion, commenting in his diary that Wilson’s mandatory idea was “a very dangerous and academic type of thinking.” Beer knew that colonial administration required skill and experience in both the governing state and the colony.

Prior to the peace conference, there is little evidence of Wilson’s thinking about German rights and concessions in Shandong. This had been an extremely delicate subject between the Japanese and American governments since the crisis over the Twenty-one Demands in 1915. The crisis aroused Wilson’s suspicion of Japan’s territorial ambition in China. The American government had refused to recognize the treaties signed between the Chinese and Japanese governments on May 25, 1915. In the summer of 1918, Wilson was again upset by the way Japan took advantage of his proposal for a joint military expedition to Vladivostok by dispatching a far larger number of troops than he had expected. Wilson therefore had no intention

7. Diary of William C. Bullitt, Dec. 9 [10], 1918, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, LIII, 351; memorandum by Isaiah Bowman, Dec. 10, 1918, ibid., 355.
of accommodating Japanese interests at the expense of China. In November 1918, when the President had a brief interview with Chinese Minister V. K. Wellington Koo (one of the five Chinese plenipotentiaries at Paris), he expressed his willingness to support China’s case at the coming peace conference.  

Prior to the Paris conference, the Inquiry offered little advice about the Shandong question because the organization lacked “qualified, trained scholars” capable of dealing with Asian problems. Lawrence E. Gelfand has suggested that the Inquiry’s reports on East Asian issues, which were unsympathetic toward Japanese aspirations in Asia, were produced by nonexperts. Some thirty years after the conference, Charles Seymour recalled that even Stanley K. Hornbeck, Chief of the Far Eastern Division of the Inquiry since September 1918, was inadequately prepared, saying that “Hornbeck knew something about the Far East but he learned most of it from 1919 on.”

While the American Embassy in Tokyo offered little insight into the thinking of the Japanese leadership to the end of formulating American policy, alarming reports from the American minister to Beijing, Paul S. Reinsch, had a significant influence on Hornbeck and other East Asian advisers just before the opening of the conference. Reinsch, who had been Hornbeck’s mentor at the University of Wisconsin, was the embodiment of Wilsonian universal idealism and unilateralist internationalism. After alerting the State Department to Tokyo’s attempts to silence Chinese opposition to the Japanese claims at Paris, Reinsch made an unusual request to Washington, asking the State Department to transmit his telegram directly to President Wilson in Paris. In his message, Reinsch indicted Japan’s wartime actions in China and appealed for Wilson’s personal intervention, because the President had become “to the people of China the embodiment of their best hopes and aspirations.” Reinsch said, “I have been forced through the experience of five years to the conclusion that the methods applied by the Japanese military masters can lead only to evil and destruction.” He argued that “only the refusal to accept the result of


Japanese secret manipulation in China during the last four years, particularly the establishment of Japanese political influence and privileged position in Shantung" could prevent China from becoming a dependent of Japan. He said that German rights in Shandong "lapsed together with all Sino-German treaties upon the declaration of war" and that a succession of treaty rights from Germany to Japan was therefore impossible.¹¹

Hornbeck gave unqualified support to Reinsch's plea from Beijing. He believed that his mentor's observations on the East Asian situation were "uniformly and absolutely accurate" and "worthy of the most careful consideration of the Peace Commissioners." Edward T. Williams, the other Far Eastern technical expert of the American Mission, concurred. He commented that "the spirit of Japan is that of Prussia, whom [sic] Japanese leaders openly admire and whose government they deliberately chose for a model." Throughout its history, he continued, Japan’s objective had been to dominate Asia, and the present cabinet of Takashi Hara was no exception. Employing Wilsonian rhetoric, Williams concluded that "Japan must be restrained if justice is to prevail or liberty survive in the Far East."¹²

The recommendations President Wilson received in the early stage of the peace conference clearly reflected the anti-Japanese sentiments of the East Asian "experts" of the Inquiry. Their reports insisted that Japan should be prohibited from control over the port of Qingdao and that the entire German-leased territory in Jiaozhou and the Shandong Railway should be restored to China. With a view to freeing China from obligations under the Twenty-one Demands, the Inquiry recommended that all Sino-Japanese agreements concluded during the war involving the transfer or allocation of territory, special rights, or privileges should "be subject to screening for ap-


proval, revision, or rejection by the peace conference." The Inquiry went so far as to suggest that the peace conference review the Sino-Japanese treaties with regard to Japan's sphere of influence in South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia. The recommendation also included a rather unrealistic proposal to internationalize all railroads in Manchuria. In order to pacify Japanese expansionist zeal but, apparently, without careful consideration, the Inquiry simply proposed that Japan be allowed to have the Russian maritime provinces.  

There is no evidence to suggest that Wilson and his advisers, prior to their arrival in Europe, knew that Tokyo had secretly secured British and French agreement to support Japanese claims to German rights in Shandong and the German islands in the Pacific north of the equator. In the spring of 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour had provided Colonel House with the text of various secret treaties that Great Britain had concluded with the Allies, but he had not enclosed the agreement with Japan over Shandong and the German islands in the Pacific. In the fall of 1917, Japan's special envoy, Kikujiro Ishii, had told Secretary of State Robert Lansing that England had practically agreed that Japan would retain the German Pacific islands north of the equator and that England would keep those south of the equator.  

When Wilson had met with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George on December 30, 1918, for "an informal interchange of views" on the issues to be discussed at the peace conference, the prime minister revealed that his government "had definitely promised to Japan the Islands in the Northern Pacific." Wilson responded that "he was by no means prepared to accept the Japanese Treaty" and hinted that he meant to act "as a buffer to prevent" the Japanese from retaining those islands. Curiously, Lloyd George made no mention of his support for Japan's claims to the German concessions in Shandong. Several months earlier,
in late October 1918, after the Japanese and Chinese governments had concluded an agreement regarding joint operation of the Shandong Railway, the Japanese embassy had informed the State Department of the substance of the agreement, but the question of the postwar disposition of Shandong was never discussed between Tokyo and Washington until the two countries' delegates met at Paris in 1919.15

In contrast to America's global peace program, Japan was concerned with the issues that affected its interests in East Asia and the Pacific. Japan's objectives at the peace conference concentrated narrowly on three areas: 1) succession to the German rights and concessions in Shandong, 2) acquisition of the German islands in the Pacific north of the equator (the Carolines, Marshalls, and Marianas), and 3) securing safeguards against racial discrimination in the event that the conference decided to establish the League of Nations.

In September 1918, a few days before his resignation, Premier Masatake Terauchi, protégé of Genro Yamagata, had further fortified Japan's claims to the Shandong Railway by concluding three new agreements with the Beijing government under Duan Qirui. Terauchi, who shared his mentor's vision of Sino-Japanese cooperation (teikai) and "the coexistence and co-prosperity of China and Japan," had worked during the war to instill in Chinese leaders a reliance on the Japanese Empire through financial assistance known as the Nishihara Loans. Terauchi had used part of these loans to strike a deal with the Duan government on the Shandong Railway. In the Sino-Japanese agreement signed on September 24, 1918, the two countries agreed to place the Shandong Railway (between Jiaozhou and Jinan) under their joint management and to share police duty along the railway. One of the provisions, which later became controversial at the peace conference, stipulated that the "Japanese are to be employed at the headquarters of this police force, at the main stations, and at the police training school." In two other agreements (signed on September 28), the Duan government accepted a loan of 40 million

yen from the Japanese government: 20 million yen for military purposes and 20 million yen for the construction of four new railroads in Shandong, Manchuria, and Mongolia.16

On the following day, September 29, 1918, a moderate, Takashi Hara, became the first party politician to assume the premiership. While Hara modified Japan’s China policy somewhat, the new government did not alter Japanese objectives at the peace table. Hara opposed the aggressive military-oriented policy toward the Asian continent followed by the Terauchi government in collaboration with the army, Japanese financiers, and the Duan government in Beijing. He also opposed the Siberian expedition and advocated cordial relations with the United States. However, as an astute political survivor, Premier Hara was fully aware that giving up Japan’s foothold in Shandong would cost him his political career. Japan’s policy throughout the war had focused on the acquisition of the German concessions in Shandong. For senior statesmen, the military, and the civilian bureaucracy, a reversal in that policy on the eve of the peace conference was unthinkable. Hara ultimately swam with the current, embracing the policy of the two preceding cabinets.

When the Japanese government learned that President Wilson’s Fourteen Points were to become the basis of the peace settlement, the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations (gaiko-chosakai, the highest level foreign policy body during the war) convened to discuss Japan’s response. Members of the Advisory Council were concerned mainly with two issues. First, Wilson’s principle of self-determination seemed to pose a serious problem for the disposal of the German colonies. Although the council members had no idea of Wilson’s specific views on Shandong and the Pacific islands, they were determined to press Japan’s claim regardless of the American position.17 By December 2, 1918, both the Advisory Council and the Hara
cabinet formally decided that the Japanese government would return the territorial rights of Jiaozhou Bay to China only after Germany ceded the leased territory to Japan unconditionally. This would avoid the possibility of a direct restitution of the territory from Germany to China. The council and Hara also decided to insist on Japan’s authority to settle the issue of retrocession directly with China without outside interference.18

What the Japanese really wanted to acquire, through the two-step procedure described above, were the railway and the coal mines in Shandong Province. War Minister Giichi Tanaka bluntly reminded Advisory Council members that, should Japan fail to obtain the Shandong Railway, it would lose control of Shandong Province as a whole, thereby losing “the artery that extends the power” of the Japanese Empire to the Asian continent. The council overwhelmingly supported specific instructions to Japanese delegates at Paris, directing them to do their “very best” to secure the railway and the mines. In demanding the cession of these economic interests from Germany, the Japanese delegates were to set forth “a plain and straightforward political argument based on the rights of a victor.”19

Senior Japanese statesmen shared a self-indulgent belief that China would accept Japan’s tutelage if they could make China understand Japan’s true intentions. When the Japanese foreign minister learned from Beijing that Chinese Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang intended to visit Tokyo on the way to Paris and make careful “preliminary arrangements” on the matter of Chinese peace terms with the Japanese authorities, he interpreted the report as the Chinese foreign minister’s willingness to reach an understanding with Tokyo on the Shandong issue. Accordingly, the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations adopted a resolution to the effect that, upon the Chinese foreign minister’s arrival in Tokyo, “we will explain our decision [on the retrocession of Jiaozhou] and make him understand our just attitude and clear away misunderstandings;

and we must take measures so that Japan and China can keep in step with each other in the coming peace conference.\textsuperscript{20}

Leaders in Tokyo believed that Japan and China should take care of matters by themselves and were not prepared to tolerate Western intervention in Sino-Japanese affairs, which they saw as a threat to Japan’s prestige in the eyes of the Chinese. The Shandong controversy at Paris turned out to be one of those occasions that the Japanese feared most. At the close of the Advisory Council’s December 1918 meeting that forged Japan’s official position on Shandong, Miyoji Ito concluded uneasily: “Our national prestige will be impaired should we demand permanent retention of Qingdao and later be forced to withdraw that demand because of America’s protest.”\textsuperscript{21}

The second and equally important question that the Advisory Council considered was President Wilson’s proposed League of Nations. Documents from the Foreign Ministry and from the Advisory Council indicate that Japanese leaders were genuinely concerned about the possibility that racial prejudice might jeopardize Japan’s position in the League of Nations. Draft guidelines prepared by the Foreign Office for the Japanese delegation at Paris urged indefinite postponement of plans to create a League of Nations, on the grounds that “racial prejudice among nations” was widespread and that Western powers’ control of the League threatened grave disadvantages to Japan. At the same time, the Foreign Office also concluded that, “in case the League of Nations is to be established, the Empire cannot remain isolated outside the organization.” Therefore, should the establishment of the League become unavoidable at the peace conference, the Foreign Office proposed “appropriate safeguard[s] against disadvantages which the Empire may suffer because of the racial prejudice.”\textsuperscript{22}

The Advisory Council, too, expressed deep apprehension about the League of Nations. Council members were afraid that unless the principle of equality were absolutely guaranteed by the League, “the United States and the top-ranking nations in Europe” might use the League “to freeze the status quo and

\textsuperscript{20} Kobayashi, ed., Suiuso nikki, 316.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 317.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 286.
hold in check the development of second-rate and lower-ranked nations.” Accordingly, the council unanimously supported a resolution that at the peace conference 1) Japan would try to postpone the creation of the League of Nations; and 2) in case the peace conference decided to organize the League, the Japanese delegation must seek a safeguard against racial discrimination.23

In this way, Japanese objectives at the Paris Peace Conference challenged Wilsonian principles at two levels. Japan’s territorial claims tested the Wilsonian ideal of self-determination and its unilateral application to German concessions and colonies. Japan’s efforts to secure safeguards against racial discrimination in the League of Nations questioned the effectiveness and fairness of the principle of international federalism embodied in the League of Nations. Japanese regional and racial identities questioned the universality of the Western-oriented solution to international conflicts.

Once the peace conference began, the Japanese delegation discovered that the disposition of the German islands in the Pacific was the least divisive issue separating them from President Wilson. After Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa demanded annexation of the German colonies under their occupation, the Japanese simply asked for equal treatment in the Pacific north of the equator. While British and American negotiators tried to work out a compromise, Japan’s delegates remained silent. President Wilson, who was determined to approve nothing less than a system of mandates under the supervision of the League of Nations, clashed with Prime Minister William Hughes of Australia. Eventually Wilson prevailed, and Hughes agreed to accept the provisions of the “C-Mandate,” which stipulated that the German islands were to be “administered under the laws of the mandatory states as integral portions [of the mandatory states] ... in the interests of the indigenous population.”24

The Hara government in Tokyo did not have much difficulty in accepting the provisions for mandatory status, including regulations for nonfortification and the open door in the

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23. Ibid., 308–310.
islands. Indeed, Nobuaki Makino, the leading member of the Japanese delegation at Paris, strongly urged his government to approve the mandatory proposal. After learning from Lloyd George that Australia and New Zealand were expected to accept the mandatory principle, Makino advised Tokyo that it would be unwise for Japan alone to oppose. He explained that the mandatory idea appeared to be intended as a face-saving gesture to Wilson by upholding the mandatory principle and at the same time guaranteeing the virtual annexation of the German islands by the British Dominions.\(^{25}\) To Makino, the deal was a realistic compromise.

Wilson expressed some uneasiness about granting the northern islands to Japan. On January 30, 1919, the day the decision was reached on the mandate system, he told David H. Miller that “these islands lie athwart the path from Hawaii to the Philippines and... they could be fortified and made naval bases by Japan.” Referring to the Japanese government’s breach of faith with regard to the Siberian intervention, the President confided that he would not trust the Japanese again. He had also written to Colonel House earlier that “a line of islands in her Japan’s] possession would be very dangerous to the U.S.” However, his concern was mitigated later when Tokyo accepted the provisions for a “C-Mandate,” which prohibited the construction of naval bases or fortifications on these islands.\(^{26}\)

More problematic for Japan was the issue of race and the League of Nations, for Japan’s attempt to include a racial equality clause in the League of Nations covenant was thwarted by unforeseen circumstances. Some contemporaries (and some later historians) have held that Japan used the racial equality proposal as a bargaining chip to obtain the German concessions in Shandong.\(^{27}\) The Japanese concern about racial discrimination, however, was genuine; Tokyo’s instructions on this issue were explicit from the very beginning. Certainly, Tokyo may have weighed the racial issue against Japanese interests in


\(^{26}\) Diary of David Hunter Miller, Jan. 30, 1919, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, LIV, 379; ibid., 347, note 2.

Shandong when both claims met with strong opposition at Paris. But Japan’s decision to withdraw the proposal for racial equality was a result, primarily, of adamant objection from the British Dominions.

At the outset of the conference, the Japanese delegation worried that the United States might be the major obstacle to Japan’s racial equality proposal. Makino knew how politically troublesome the racial issues could be for President Wilson on the West Coast of the United States. In 1913, Makino, as foreign minister, had negotiated in vain for the repeal of alien land legislation in California. However, when Makino and Sutemi Chinda opened informal negotiations with Colonel House, they found him surprisingly supportive of the Japanese proposal and learned from him that even Wilson might approve a milder declaration on racial equality.28

The true stumbling block turned out to be staunch opposition from Australia’s Prime Minister Hughes. By mid-February Japanese delegates realized that the British would not agree to the proposal unless the Dominions changed their minds. In light of the British attitude, Tokyo was told, “evidently, it is going to be difficult to fulfill our wish.” After negotiations with Colonel House and Lord Robert Cecil of Britain, Japanese delegates proposed a compromise that included in the preamble of the Covenant an endorsement of the principle of racial equality. When the prime ministers of the British Dominions deliberated on this proposal on March 25, 1919, all but Hughes agreed to accept it. Hughes rejected repeated requests by the Japanese to discuss the proposal. Jan C. Smuts of South Africa, who tried to mediate between Hughes and the other Dominion representatives, told Makino that, if Japan insisted upon bringing up the race question at the plenary session and if Hughes opposed it, “I shall have to fall in line and vote with the Dominions, like a

28. Matsui to Uchida, Feb. 15, 1919, *Nihon gaiko bunsho, 1919*, III, 443–444. House Diary, Feb. 4, 5, 1919, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, LIV, 485, 500. President Wilson considered the following compromise proposal to be acceptable: “The equality of nations being a basic principle of the League, the H.C.P. agree that concerning the aliens in their territories, they will accord them, so soon and so far as practicable, equal treatment and rights in law and in fact, without making any distinction on account of their race or nationality” (*Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, LIV, 500).
Thus, by the end of March, Japan's efforts to negotiate with the British Dominions had proved futile.  

In Tokyo, the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations met on March 30 to discuss how Japan could withdraw the racial equality proposal without losing its dignity. The foreign minister insisted that the delegates keep the record straight as to Japan's position on the race issue. Premier Hara thought that some nominal manifestation of the principle would suffice as a face-saving gesture. He did not think the issue warranted Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

Following Tokyo's instructions, with a view to leaving Japan's position in a written record, Makino and Chinda asked the League of Nations Commission to vote on their amendment to the preamble. Eleven out of seventeen present voted in favor of the amendment. The United States abstained. President Wilson ruled that the amendment was not adopted since it had not received the unanimous approval of the commission. Makino asked to record in the minutes the number of votes cast in favor of the Japanese amendment.

Although the reasons why President Wilson abstained from voting on the racial question are not entirely clear, it is obvious that he did not fight for the principle of equality. At the meeting on April 11, he simply suggested that the wisest course for the United States would be not to press the matter. There are at least two possible explanations for Wilson's inaction and silence on this matter.

First, Wilson was well aware of strong opposition to the principle of racial equality in his own country. He feared that its adoption by the League might allow Asians to demand the repeal of laws banning or restricting Asian immigration. Wilson's opponents at home might claim that the League was in-
The truth is that the American commissioners were reluctant to accept even the modified Japanese proposal for racial equality. As Dr. Cary T. Grayson put it, “it was not necessary for the United States openly to oppose the suggested amendment because Australia and New Zealand through the British representatives had taken the position of positive opposition.” Because of the outright objection of the British Dominions, the Japanese even felt grateful to Colonel House, on whom they called almost every day to work out a compromise. House wrote in his diary: “It has taken considerable finesse to lift the load from our shoulders and place it upon the British, but happily, it has been done.”

Second, caught in the crossfire between Japan’s proposal and the opposition of the British Dominions, Wilson did not want a heated debate or publicity on this sensitive issue outside the conference room. He was so preoccupied with the establishment of the League of Nations that he did not want the question of race to become a divisive issue. “My own interest,” Wilson said to the commission, “is to quiet discussion that raises national differences and racial prejudices. I would wish them, particularly at this juncture in the history of the relations with one another, to be forced as much as possible into the background.” One of the limitations of Wilson’s idealist approach to the League of Nations seems to have been his decision to let racial prejudices “play no part in the discussions connected with the establishment of this League.” To achieve his noble goal, he chose to close his eyes to one of the most serious factors contributing to political fragmentation in the world.

The settlement of the German rights and concessions in Shandong, Japan’s primary objective at Paris, turned out to be one of the most controversial issues at the peace conference. It surprised and frustrated all the parties involved, especially the Japanese and Americans. As the conference unfolded, Japanese delegates who had not anticipated much difficulty in securing their claims to Shandong met with formidable oppo-

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33. Ibid., LVII, 240; House Diary, Feb. 13, 1919, ibid., LV, 155.
34. Remarks upon the Clause for Racial Equality, April 11, 1919, ibid., LVII, 268–269.
sition from both the Chinese and Americans. At the Council of
Ten on January 27, Makino presented Japan’s case for the un-
conditional cession to Japan of all German rights and conces-
sions in Shandong, with the understanding that Japan would
eventually return the territorial rights to China. Makino de-
clared that Japan intended to keep Sino-Japanese negotiations
strictly between the two countries and outside the peace con-
ference. The Japanese were caught by surprise the following
day when Chinese Minister Koo demanded the direct restora-
tion to China of the leased territory of Jiaozhou, the Shandong
Railway, and all other rights Germany had possessed in Shan-
dong Province prior to the war. Following Reinsch’s earlier pro-
posal to President Wilson, Koo argued that China considered
the agreements concluded during the war as provisional and
subject to revision by the peace conference.\(^{35}\) The Japanese felt
betrayed by the Chinese, for they had relied on Chinese For-
eign Minister Lu’s promise that the Chinese delegation would
act in concert with the Japanese.

The question of Shandong deeply troubled President Wil-
son. According to Ray Stannard Baker, “the Japanese crisis,
while shorter and sharper, troubled the President more than
any other—and the result of none, finally, satisfied him less.”
On one occasion Wilson told Baker that “he had been unable
to sleep on the previous night for thinking of it.”\(^{36}\) He had
great sympathy for China’s plight and considered the Shan-
dong question to be a prime case for self-determination. More-
over, his own experience with the Japanese government during
the war had convinced him not to trust it easily. His American
advisers on East Asia, as well as Secretary of State Lansing, were
united in opposition to the Japanese claims. The other Ameri-
can commissioners, except Colonel House whom the Japanese
considered their “friend,” also had little sympathy for Japan.

While the Council of Ten was making arrangements to de-
liberate the Sino-Japanese treaty and agreements of 1915 and
1918 concerning Shandong, China’s anti-Japanese press cam-
paign further aroused Wilson’s suspicion of Japan and caused

\(^{35}\) Council of Ten, Jan. 27, 28, 1919, Paris Peace Conference, III, 737–740,
749–757.

much bitter feelings on the part of the Japanese. When the Japanese foreign minister instructed his country’s minister in Beijing to warn the Chinese government not to publish the secret agreements without consulting with Japan, the anti-Japanese faction within the Beijing government seized the opportunity to spread negative charges against Japan. On February 4, Wilson received a report that the Japanese intended to retain “the whole of Shang-Tung permanently” and were threatening “military intervention” and “the immediate withdrawal of all financial support” from China. Wilson ordered Reinsch to advise the Chinese government to stand firm; at the same time he instructed the American ambassador in Tokyo to express “our distress that there should be these indications that the Japanese government is not willing to trust to the fairness and justness of the Peace Conference.”

Diplomatic exchanges between Tokyo and Beijing reveal the surprise and indignation felt by Japanese officials over the Chinese accusations. While the acting Chinese foreign minister later corrected the press reports, his action received little attention. In the end, China’s anti-Japanese press campaign and its attempt to enlist the help of the United States in forcing Japan to abandon its claims served only to harden Japanese determination. In Beijing Minister Yukichi Obata told the Chinese Foreign Office that to succumb to the Chinese demands because of Western pressure would undermine Japan’s international prestige and national self-respect; furthermore, the Japanese people could not bear such a “humiliation.”

On this point, Edward T. Williams mistakenly commented that the publicity given to the activities of Obata in Beijing “did lots of good” and that “there’s nothing like public criticism to control the Japanese.” The American experts at Paris did not fully grasp the psychology of Japan’s relations with China. Fact-
ing a hostile challenge from China and the United States, the
Japanese no longer saw the Shandong settlement merely as a
matter of expanding national interests; they regarded it as a
matter of national prestige in the broader context of East Asian
politics.

When the Council of Four began the final deliberation of
the Shandong question in mid-April 1919, Japanese delegates
realized that President Wilson was the major obstacle to the ful-
fillment of their goal. Wilson clearly stated his position in the
council: “My sympathies are on the side of China, and we must
not forget that, in the future, the greatest dangers for the world
can arise in the Pacific.” Not knowing the specifics of the Sino-
Japanese treaty and agreements, Wilson insisted that the coun-
cil must first study them because, in his own words, “I know by
experience that they [the Japanese] are very clever in the inter-
pretation of treaties.”40 Makino and Chinda met privately
with Wilson on April 21 and explained that some of the provi-
sions of the treaty and the agreements in question were already
in effect and that the Shandong problem was only a matter of
implementing them. They told Wilson that, “if the already ex-
isting and clearly stated treaty was disregarded and the problem
was decided by a completely different mechanism for settle-
ment, it was difficult to say whether in the end the plenipoten-
tiaries would be able to sign the preliminary treaty or not.”
They also pointed out that, because of a breach of faith on the
part of China and its hostile propaganda against Japan, the
Shandong problem was no longer just a matter of leased terri-
tory but had become “a grave issue in the general political sit-
uation in the Far East.”41

On the same day in Tokyo, the Advisory Council on For-
eign Relations reached a crucial decision. Calling China’s ac-
tions at Paris a “betrayal,” Miyoji Ito argued that, should Japan’s
claim be defeated at the conference, “China would treat Japan
with contempt” and Japan would totally lose its prestige in the
East. Ito, therefore, proposed that the government should be
prepared to withdraw from the League of Nations. The rest of
the council members fell in line with his opinion, including

41. Matsui to Uchida, April 22, 1919, Nihon gaiko bunsho, 1919, III, 244–247
(English translation in Papers of Woodrow Wilson, LVII, 581–585).
Premier Hara, who stated that his government could put up with neither direct restitution to China nor trusteeship by the League of Nations.\textsuperscript{42} That same day, Foreign Minister Kosai Uchida cabled to the Japanese delegation at Paris not to sign the Covenant of the League of Nations should Japan’s Shandong claims be repudiated. He added: “in order to maintain our government’s dignity there shall be no room for conciliatory adjustment.”\textsuperscript{43} Tokyo’s firm instruction gave the Japanese delegates no way out.

The following day, April 22, after having heard the Japanese and Chinese cases separately, the Council of Four was leaning toward a decision in favor of Japan. First, both Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau made it clear that they had definite wartime agreements with Japan. Second, Japanese delegates declared that they were under an explicit order from their government not to sign the treaty “unless they were placed in a position to carry out Japan’s obligation to China.” Although the Chinese delegation urged the council to undo the Sino-Japanese treaty of 1915 and the agreements signed in 1918, not only the British and French prime ministers but also President Wilson defended the “sacredness of treaties.” Wilson had serious reservations about the Sino-Japanese treaty of 1915, but he could not question the validity of the British and French commitment to Japan’s claim. Lloyd George stated that his country’s engagement with Japan was “a solemn treaty” and that “Great Britain could not turn round to Japan now and say ‘All right, thank you very much. We wanted your help, you gave it, but now we think that the treaty was a bad one and should not be carried out.’” Ironically, Wilson had to tell the Chinese delegation that “sacredness of treaties had been one of the motives of the war” and that “it had been necessary to show that treaties were not mere scraps of paper.”\textsuperscript{44}

Convinced that Japan’s threat to withdraw from the peace conference was not a bluff, Wilson chose to compromise. This, he hoped, would provide an “outlet to permit the Japanese to save their face and let the League of Nations decide the matter

\textsuperscript{43} Uchida to Matsui, April 21, 1919, \textit{Nihon gaiko bunsho, 1919}, III, 242.
\textsuperscript{44} Council of Four, April 22, 1919, \textit{Paris Peace Conference}, V, 139–148.
later.” As he put it to Lloyd George and Clemenceau, he believed “it is necessary to do everything to assure that she [Japan] joins the League of Nations.” He was afraid that “if she stands aside, she would do all that she could want to do in the Far East.” He apparently believed that the League of Nations would police Japan’s behavior in East Asia once it became a member, so that Japan would not violate China’s territorial integrity and political independence.

The gist of the compromise the Japanese and President Wilson agreed upon was that, after the German rights had been ceded to Japan, it would return the Shandong Peninsula in full sovereignty to China, retaining only the economic privileges granted to Germany and the right to establish a settlement in Qingdao. Being jealous of protecting Japan’s power and prestige in East Asia, the Japanese delegation asserted that this declaration must be “a voluntary expression of the Japanese delegates’ interpretation” of the restitution of Shandong stipulated by the treaty of 1915 and that no impression should be given that this decision had been forced upon Japan.

The Shandong compromise was a means to keep the influence of Wilsonian idealism alive in East Asia. It demonstrated Wilson’s firm faith in the League of Nations and the universality of the international system and morality that his League represented. When he said, “I am above all concerned not to create a chasm between the East and the West,” he did not mean to create a federalism that would accommodate the hegemony of a regional power in the East. He was thinking, instead, of an international mechanism that would unilaterally enforce his universal values as League members saw fit. The problem was that Japan was apprehensive about, indeed repelled by, an international body dominated by Western powers.

45. Papers of Woodrow Wilson, LVIII, 113; Council of Four, April 22, 1919, ibid., LVII, 622–626; Paris Peace Conference, V, 145.
46. Council of Four, April 22, 1919, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, LVII, 626.
47. Obviously, the Chinese government had a considerably different perspective on these events; see Stephen G. Craft, “John Bassett Moore, Robert Lansing, and the Shandong Question,” Pacific Historical Review, LXVI (1997), 231–249. Interestingly, President Wilson managed to antagonize both Japan and China in this controversy, leaving both sides feeling betrayed and suspicious of American motives.
In the end, the Shandong compromise at Paris did not settle the differences between Wilson and the Japanese with regard to details of the future disposition of Shandong. Both sides simply shelved the problem for the moment and signed the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919. Thus, the picture that emerges from Wilson’s response to the Japanese claims at the Paris Peace Conference reveals the inadequacy of his idealistic policy toward East Asia. Wilson’s absolute faith in the universality of his ideals, and his unyielding determination to turn his vision of a new world order into a reality, prevented him from understanding what was driving an emerging non-Western country like Japan to expand at the expense of weaker neighbors. His unilateral attempt to impose a new order, however righteous his intentions, was doomed to a disappointing outcome.

Japanese leaders, who took advantage of the European war to the end of expanding Japan’s foothold in East Asia, considered Wilsonian opposition to Japanese claims at Paris as another attempt by Western powers to block the growth of an Asian regional power. Forgetting the blemishes in their conduct on the Asian continent, the Japanese felt that President Wilson’s interference in Sino-Japanese negotiations over Shandong was humiliating and that his failure to support the principle of racial equality unjust. They viewed Wilsonian universal internationalism simply as hypocritical rhetoric that hindered the advancement of their country. Baron Makino, who later served Emperor Hirohito as Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, commented in his memoirs about Wilson’s unilateral approach at the peace conference. According to Makino, it was hard to associate Wilson’s personality with democracy. The President seemed to him to be “a politician best suited to a dictatorship.”