

THE PEACE OF PARIS (1919) AND THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE 1921-22: TWO EXERCISES IN BIG POWER PROPAGANDA MANAGEMENT

**1. THE CONGRESS SYSTEM:** Arguably, the system of big multi-power conferences, or summits, began with the Congress of Vienna of 1815, in which Britain, Italy and the German states met in Vienna to deal with the legacy of the French Revolution and Napoleon's overturning of pre-revolutionary Europe. At Vienna, the powers made some attempt to return to the situation of pre-revolutionary Europe and Metternich (▶), the leading politician of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, devised a system of espionage and of using the soldiers and civil servants of one part of the Empire to control the peoples of another. Subsequent conferences in the 'Congress System' failed to recognise the realities on the ground, usually attempted to punish the loser ("Après moi la deluge" / "Victor's justice") in the war that had just ended, to return to the borders that had existed before the war or to deprive the losers of some of their controversial pre-war borders, and to make them pay for the war with 'reparations', as happened to Germany at the Peace of Paris (Versailles) in 1919.



The realities of Chinese and Korean nationalism were ignored in Paris, at the Washington Conference of 1921-22 and at the League of Nations. However, at the League of Nations, China's representatives no longer sat on the sidelines but spoke in the Council Chamber and had voting rights (unfortunately, China's main backers, the United States, stayed outside the League). In other ways, the League of Nations of 1919-45, and today's United Nations, were the 20th century equivalent of the 19th century Congress System. Interestingly, they have the same name in Japanese: Kokusai Renmei (国際連盟), today usually abbreviated as "Koku-ren" (国連).

However, just as in the 19th century Congresses, the real deals were made in smaller, more private meetings between the most powerful nations. The less powerful nations were either ignored or threatened or bought off to ensure their agreement. There always was and always will be an inner circle of 'great' powers or 'superpower' nations and an outer circle of lesser powers. And one medium of communication between these groups and their populations was propaganda or (in the days when it was mainly conducted in newspapers) "journalistic discourse". Hence propaganda's other names: "public diplomacy" as opposed to private diplomacy, and "informal diplomacy" as opposed to formal diplomacy.

## 2. PROPAGANDA, PUBLIC OPINION AND FOREIGN POLICY

A COMMON RATIONALE FOR PROPAGANDA is that the foreign policy of a state will respond to the public opinion of its people. Before beginning hostilities, the propagandizing state may try to persuade a potential enemy state that a war is not in its national interest. If people are already 'war sick' or 'isolationist', the propagandists have a foundation of opinion to build on. As the nation which has made so much of its democratic nature and its mission to 'spread' democracy, the United States government feels bound to demonstrate sympathy with public opinion. In reality, no matter how successful the foreign propagandist or lobbyist may be in influencing American public opinion against US intervention in a war, the Government can still go ahead with it. In other words, no matter how democratic it may be, public opinion is not the key factor in a state's decision to go to war.

However, having decided to go to war, a state needs to get public opinion on its side if it is to win. The state will use counter-propaganda: claiming that theirs is the just cause. A government may ignore public opinion and launch a war without trying to justify it, and this can make the work of propagandists and lobbyists on both sides look pointless, but the enemy state can also stop trying to 'persuade' by propaganda and go ahead with war, and this makes peace less likely.

Alternatively, the war-making state can back down. At this point a vital aspect of international relations enters the picture: national integrity. Except in total military defeat, no nation can afford to back down and submit to the loss of its integrity. No nation can admit, "Yes, we lied. Yes, we are the aggressors" because there is usually too much at stake in its domestic political life, or for its leaders individually, or its war plans may be simply too far advanced..

## 3. JAPAN AT THE PEACE OF PARIS 1919: STRATEGIC SUCCESSES, PROPAGANDA DISASTERS



Between 1913-1918, before and during the First World War, a number of propaganda failures damaged Japan's international reputation. These were: the Siemens Scandal of 1913-14, the Twenty-One Demands issue of 1915, Terauchi Masatake's *Outlook* interview of May 1918, and the 'White Rainbow' and *Kōbe Herald* incidents of 1918. These important early skirmishes in Japan's battle to gain international credibility reflected



badly on its propaganda machinery at the time: the Siemens Scandal made Japan look corrupt. The Twenty-One Demands made Japan look like a bully and, just as important for Chinese propaganda, made China look like a victim. The *Outlook* affair made Japanese foreign policy look opportunistic and raised question marks about Japan's loyalty to her ally, Britain. Government handling of the White Rainbow and *Kōbe Herald* incidents made Japan look unstable and undemocratic.

These incidents weakened Japan's national integrity when it was most needed. In late November 1918, Japanese representatives left Yokohama for the Peace Conference in Paris, there for the first time to sit at the top table and to be treated as an equal by the victorious powers:

Britain, France, and the United States ( The “Big Four” at Paris: Lloyd George, Orlando, Clemenceau, Wilson (where were Saionji Kinmonchi and Makino Nobuaki?)

Encouraged by ‘Wilsonian principles’, the Conference tried to reshape the world through open diplomacy and according to the principle of self-determination, but of course, as ever, most of the arrangements were made behind closed doors.

Japan’s Conference publicity team was headed by Matsuoka Yōsuke (above), with John Russell Kennedy and Gō Satoshi, both editors of the *Japan Times*, as press managers. One problem for Japan’s image was the formality of the Japanese delegates, not least Saionji Kinmochi. Kennedy and Matsuoka were keen to break the ice, but Kennedy’s involvement in the issues listed above made him ‘part of the story’ and lost him credibility. One British diplomat described Kennedy as “notorious in the F.E. [Far East] as being practically in Japanese pay. ...Kokusai [Kokusai Tsūshinsha] stinks in the nostrils of the F.E., & as their manager is also Reuters’s correspondent, the position is pretty clear, 1920). Being paid by ‘the enemy’ never looks good: this is a problem many propagandists have to get round.

Japan’s performance at the Conference from 1919-20 was undermined by negative publicity over news reports of Japanese brutality in suppressing the ‘Mansei’ Independence movement in Korea, and by the decision to allow Japan to retain leases in Shandong. The consultants to the Chinese delegation – G.E. Morrison, W.H. Donald, Thomas Millard and George Bronson Rea – and interested onlookers such as Charles R. Crane, worked with the ‘Young China’ faction among the Chinese delegates, in particular V.K. Wellington Koo (Gu Wei-Jun), to develop effective propaganda campaigns against the retention of Japanese leases in China. Japan was also conducting a campaign for a Racial Equality clause to be inserted in the Covenant of the League of Nations, but Kennedy and Matsuoka failed to anticipate the negative fallout from Japanese brutality in Korea, which reached the Conference in press reports and Korean propaganda. Kennedy organised explanations and rebuttals in the *Japan Times* and *Seoul Press* but the Racial Equality clause failed to win the unanimous approval that would have made it part of the Covenant.

Japan’s publicity failures in Paris caused some Foreign Ministry staff to campaign for a new approach to propaganda and led the Prime Minister, Hara Kei, to establish the Foreign Ministry Information Bureau (*Gaimushō Jōhōbu*) in August 1921, Japan’s first institutionalized effort in propaganda and news management, which operated until 1945. Undeterred by his record, the Gaimushō hired Russell Kennedy with to open branches of the Information Bureau in China, the USA, England, Australia, Russia and elsewhere. Of the ¥5 million secret funding (*kimitsu hi*) set aside for the new agency, about ¥400,000 went through Kennedy’s hands.

In bringing together Kennedy and Matsuoka, the Paris Conference may also have marked the beginnings of Matsuoka’s association with an internationalist circle of business and political interests around the *Japan Times*. In his meteoric career, Matsuoka kept his lines open to internationalist circles around the *Japan Times* and in the Foreign Ministry network in China and Japan: the South Manchuria Railway [SMR] journalist George Gorman, the British M.P. Reginald Pickering and the publicist Gō Satoshi, whose career Matsuoka promoted at the SMR and *Japan Times*. Matsuoka’s relationship with these people affected the policies he tried and failed to pursue as Japan’s Foreign Minister in the late 1930s.

#### **4. JAPAN AND CHINA AT THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE 1921-22: STRATEGIC FAILURES AND PROPAGANDA VICTORIES**

**FROM 1900-21, FOREIGN MINISTRY ARCHIVES** record numerous initiatives by Japanese based in North America to recruit local opinion leaders to Japan's cause, often on generous terms. News bureaux were established on both coasts, each with an associated journal: the Pacific News Bureau headed by Karl Kiyoshi Kawakami in San Francisco, and the Oriental Information Bureau, staffed by a series of Japanese journalists, including such notables as Zumoto Motosada, Honda Masujiroh, Yamagata Isoh and Baba Tsunego, and producing the *New York Japan Review*, (later *The Oriental Review*).

Through the *Kokusai* news agency (1913-1926), approved journalists supplied the Japan correspondence of a handful of American local and national newspapers. Friendship societies, such as the Japan Society of New York and (aided by the *Advertiser's* B.W. Fleisher) the America-Japan Society, and the Japan-America Association (*Nichiboshikai*) were also inaugurated. These beginnings helped the Foreign Ministry Information Bureau hit the ground running when it began operations in 1920-21. Even with little time to prepare, Japan made a far slicker presentation of its case at the Washington Conference than at Paris three years earlier. With an affable, capable master of ceremonies in Shidehara Kijirō, the ambassador to Washington, the Washington Conference showcased Japan's sparkling new media professionalism, in sharp contrast to the dowdy silence of Saionji Kinmochi's delegation to Paris.

Japan's new professionalism did not occur by accident but partly in reaction to PR disasters received at the hands of Chinese and Korean propaganda projects unveiled in Paris. It was also a studied response to the shift of global strength and responsibility among the great powers that came in the wake of the First World War, from Britain to the United States, a shift that was recognised as much by siting the 1922 Conference in Washington as by the abrogation of Britain's Alliance with Japan in that year.

Like China, Japan hoped that bringing about shifts in public opinion would lead to shifts in foreign policy, but again like China, Japan was largely mistaken in this belief. No matter how well known China's plight became, no matter how brilliant her propaganda, public sympathy seldom translated into political or diplomatic change. China received very little benefit from arousing the sympathies of Western publics to the iniquities of the Treaty Port system or from Japanese political and economic manoeuvres after 1906, and military incursions after 1931.

Although it can be seen as a propaganda coup for China, the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance at the Washington Conference in 1921-2 did not result in any increased appreciation of Chinese aspirations. The Chinese delegates were still on the sidelines of the Conference, consulted but not really heard, just as they had been at Paris, despite the success of their propaganda there. And despite the failure of Japan's campaign to maintain the Alliance with Britain, the Japanese delegates were still at the high table at Washington, just as they had been at Paris despite Chinese and Korean propaganda victories there, and the failure of Japan's Racial Equality clause campaign.

Japan took away from Paris and Washington a heightened belief in propaganda as an effective way of addressing the concerns of foreign policy makers. This belief was strong enough for Japan to maintain its propaganda programmes between 1921-45. In this, its policy differed from the US and Britain propaganda institutions were closed down in peacetime.

## 5. GERMANY CALLING: 'LORD HAW-HAW' AND GERMAN PROPAGANDA **LISTEN 2**



Japan's peacetime propaganda programme resembled that of Germany, where Goebbels began to build a ground-breaking propaganda machine in the early 1930s, initially from outside government, and after 1933, from within. Goebbels was extremely successful in promoting the Nazi Party and gaining mass support for the supremacy of Adolf Hitler, presenting his ideas and policies in terms that appealed to the German people and persuaded opinion leaders in other nations, that included not only Germany's Axis Allies, Italy and Japan, but also appealed to important movements and opinion leaders in the US and Britain.

Lord Haw-Haw, William Joyce (◀), was a broadcaster and political theorist. Initially, Joyce joined the 'Black and Tans', the violent British semi-criminal military force sent to Ireland to put down the nationalist movement in the 1920s. He was strongly attracted by Fascism and anti-semitism and joined Oswald Mosley's Fascist movement in Britain before going to Germany and becoming its best-known propaganda radio broadcasters to Britain, where he gained the nickname 'Lord Haw-Haw' because of his upper-class accent. Here's his prison photograph (▶)



Listen to this speech by William Joyce, made as the Allied armies advanced on Hitler's stronghold, on 30 April 1945. Joyce has clearly fortified himself with a stiff drink or two before making this broadcast, but he is still defiant, still convinced that the Nazi mission was the right one and that theirs was the 'just cause'. He was a convinced believer: the best and most effective propagandist, probably, not merely a mercenary hack, writing or broadcasting to pay the rent. In 1945, the British government executed Joyce for treason.