

早稲田大学国際教養学部	HISTORY OF JOURNALISTIC DISCOURSE: WEEK 6
EX313: P.A.C. O'CONNOR	Matsuoka Yōsuke and the Axis powers in early Shōwa: Japanism or Fascism? Also: <i>Japan News-Week</i>; Japan's dual image; postcard propaganda & the <i>War of the Worlds</i> broadcast of 30th October 1938.
<p>1. This week we'll discuss one of the great contradictions in diplomatic history: the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan concluded on September 27 1940. The Pact was part of the 'Matsuoka Cyclone': the dramatic changes in personnel and policy that took place during Matsuoka's tenure as Japan's Foreign Minister between July 22 1940 and 11 March 1941.</p> <p>The Tripartite Pact recognised Japan's role in establishing a "New Order" (<i>Tōa Shinchitsujo</i> 東亜新秩序) in East Asia, and provided for mutual assistance should any one of the three powers be attacked by another country not already involved in the European conflict or the war in China. The Germans and Italians wanted the Pact to send a clear message warning the US that if it entered the war in Europe on Britain's side it would face war with Japan. Thus the Pact became strongly focused on the US although Matsuoka's original intentions had been less specific.</p> <p>There were strong military-industrial and potential geopolitical benefits in the Pact for Germany and Italy (Japan had access to raw materials needed for German munitions). There were tactical and ideological similarities: Japan's abundant right-wing societies shared the European fascists' hostility to communism and yearned for a <i>Shōwa Isshin</i> to purify the nation and would stop at nothing to bring it about. And they looked similar: some Japanese right-wing groups also adopted black- and brown shirt outfits in the European style.</p> <p>But there were considerable differences. Japan never became a fascist nation in the sense that Germany and Italy did. Japan had no transcendent leader with the power of Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini, but rather shadowy <i>kagemusha</i> such as Tōyama Mitsuru, and popular, erratic figures like Konoe Fumimaro and Matsuoka, both of whom favoured the 'Hitler' moustache and were tempted by absolute power, and the man most identified in the West with Japanese 'fascism', Tōjō Hideki. The power of all three leaders was constrained by the transcendence of the emperor, whereas Hitler and Mussolini bowed to nobody.</p> <p>Hitler viewed the Japanese, as he viewed all Asians, as inferior races to be colonised or removed just as Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill and communists were to be removed in Europe. His views on Japan were expressed in his memoir, <i>Mein Kampf</i>, (<i>My Struggle</i>, 1925), and translated into Japanese in 1926 by Hirano Ichiroi (<i>Waga toso kan'yaku</i>: わが闘争: 完訳) but excised from the version translated by Zumoto Motosada in 1940 (<i>Main kamupu</i>: dokufutsuba: マイン・カムプ: 独仏版). The major ideological difference was that in semi-official texts such as the 1925 <i>Kokutai shinron</i> (国体新論) and 1937 <i>Kokutai no hongi</i> (国体の本義), Fascism was described as a crude system incompatible with Japan's <i>Kokutai</i>.</p>	



In September 1940, Japan, Italy, and Germany sign the Tripartite Pact. Photo: AP/Wide World



2. AMERICAN REACTIONS TO THE TRIPARTITE ALLIANCE: JAPAN NEWS-WEEK & THE AXIS

Founded in November 1938 and published in Tokyo by H.R. 'Bud' Wills, *Japan News-Week* became the last organ of the *Japan Advertiser* network in Japan to be closed down. Thus it became the last expression of Western opinion in Japan's public sphere. *Japan News-Week*'s weekly editorials did not mince their words and were especially critical of Matsuoka's foreign policy pronouncements.¹ After the sale of the *Advertiser* (discussed last week), the subscription list of *Japan News-Week* showed a considerable increase, a mixed blessing given, first, the difficulty of obtaining paper and printer's ink and secondly, the fact that profits did not come from sales but from advertising. News-stand sales were also on the up, an increase Wills put down to the reluctance of many Japanese readers to appear on the subscription list.

By February 1941, the magazine had received numerous encounters with the censor, several sharp warnings from the police, and repeated protests from the German embassy over the consistently anti-Axis tone of the magazine. In August 1940, Wills was offered 'a relatively large sum' to sell up by the local, German, D.N.B. news agency. Wills turned them down, less on patriotic grounds than because he learned that it was no longer possible to transfer payments abroad. *Japan News-Week* remained strongly pro-American and anti-Axis but consistently opposed the application of embargoes and sanctions by Washington. In the absence of other sources, *Japan News-Week* became so reliant on the Dōmei agency that the British embassy tried to redress the balance by bringing in a British correspondent, Vere Redman. After the *Advertiser* was sold, the optimistic Wills nourished hopes of replacing it as the organ of choice for the American community. To this end, and keenly aware of the importance of having at least one 'American' voice publishing in Japan, US ambassador Joseph Grew encouraged local US businesses to take advertising space in *Japan News-Week*.

However, in March 1941, Wills received an offer from the Cabinet Information Board to purchase the paper. When he refused, fearing that it would then become a propaganda sheet (and upon learning, again, that he would not be able to take the money out of Japan), Mitsui, Mitsubishi and other Japanese firms failed to renew their advertising contracts. The British Embassy Information Bureau (also staffed by Vere Redman) then offered to defray Wills's advertising losses but he refused their help, again for fear of losing his independence.²

In March 1941, *Japan News-Week* published some outspoken editorials. The first of these drew a comparison between the aims and ideals of Britain and the United States and other 'Democracies' and the 'Totalitarian Powers', drawing on recent speeches by President Roosevelt and Chancellor Hitler and referring retrospectively to an interview given by Matsuoka Yōsuke to the *Japan Advertiser* in July 1940 which, although intended 'for background only', showed Matsuoka in unequivocal pro-Axis mode, predicting that 'In the battle between democracy and totalitarianism, the latter adversary will without question win and will control the world. The era of democracy is finished and the democratic system bankrupt'.³ *Japan News-Week* referred to Matsuoka's views in order to highlight the irreconcilability of the two systems. The magazine maintained that the US could not object to any nation adopting any system of government, even a totalitarian one, but that the US would surely oppose any power that imposed its will on others.

The second March 1941 editorial took the form of a reply to criticisms of the first received from a Japanese reader who wanted *Japan News-Week* to acknowledge that 'in attacking one of the Triple Allied Nations' they were attacking the other two as well. This reader took the earlier editorial to task for including the regime of Chiang Kai-shek among the Democracies. In replying to the first

point, *Japan News-Week* noted that the terms of the Tripartite Alliance did not provide for the subordination of the will and destiny of the signatories of the Alliance to the direction and dictates of a single entity. It was 'incredible' that Japan should relinquish its own autonomy and national personality for the sake of two distant countries, or 'depart so far from its traditional course as to acquire the complete membership in that type of superstate under Nazi domination which Germany now envisages', particularly since 'the Japanese statesmen have frequently emphasized that the changes and reforms they contemplate are not to be based on Nazi or Fascist models'.⁴

Similar distinctions between the national polities of Japan and Germany and Italy had in July 1937 in the pages of the *Kokutai no hongii* and other semi-official texts, so *Japan News-Week* may have felt that it was on safe ground. However, after Japan, Italy and Germany signed the Tripartite Pact in Berlin on 27 September 1940, it seemed unlikely to most staff members that *Japan News-Week* would be tolerated much longer. Indeed, for about two months after the Pact, 'the customary greeting of Tokyo foreign residents to the staff of *Japan New-Week* was: 'What! Not in Jail yet?' (Argall 1945: 187-190). Indeed, the paper's continued existence led to rumours that it was receiving Japanese support.

In mid-April, W.R. Wills was summoned to the Cabinet Information Board for a dressing-down for publishing anti-German material, to which he replied that his paper was not so much anti-German as pro-Japan-American friendship. The Bureau spokesman then told Wills that the Japanese Navy regarded *Japan News-Week* as 'an important channel for Japanese-American relations' and that both the Information Bureau and the Navy wanted it to continue. With this in mind, the Information Bureau told Wills that it could offer the paper ¥10,000 to help meet its financial difficulties. Rather than turn down this offer outright, Wills said that it would be more useful if Japanese companies that had previously withdrawn their advertising contracts would renew them. Within a few weeks Mitsui and Mitsubishi had taken him at his word.⁵

In late April, *Japan News-Week* published another controversial editorial disputing current Japanese thinking regarding US assistance to Britain in the war against Germany. *Japan News-Week* clearly supported the spirit of US assistance and rejected any possibility of Britain's 'surrender to Nazi domination'. However hopeless Britain's position might appear to some in Japan US aid was not predicated on opportunism but on upholding fundamental principles and ideals against the 'Nazifascist conquerors of Europe'.⁶

In early September, an editorial challenging Hitler's infallibility and scorning his plans for world conquest was pre-released to foreign correspondents in Tokyo and summarised in reports in the US. Upon its publication in *Japan News-Week*, Wills was summoned to the Cabinet Information Board and informed that in addition to showing an unfriendly attitude towards Japan for the last three months, his latest article represented 'an attack on Japan's fundamental policy' (i.e. the Kokutai) and that if he persisted in such attacks the authorities 'would have to let the law take its course'. The Bureau told Wills that if a Japanese newspaper had published such material its editor would have been jailed. Board officials told Wills that they had been flooded by enquiries from Japanese missions abroad asking if the fact that the editorial had been published represented a change in Japanese foreign policy. Brushing aside his assertion of the rights of an American newspaper to express impartial opinion, the Bureau told Wills that he would have to conform to Japan's policy. Nevertheless, Wills got the impression that the Board wished to avoid the permanent suppression of *Japan News-Week*.⁷

The end came for *Japan News-Week* at the last possible moment, on the morning of 8 December

1941, when the journalist Phyllis Argall and her editor W.R. Wills were arrested.⁸ Forty-three other Americans and a number of Britons were also rounded up, including the Briton Vere Redman, J.R. ("Reggie") Price of the *Japan Chronicle*, Robert Bellaire, Jasper Bellinger and Richard Tennelly of the *Advertiser*, Reuters and NBC, Relman Morin, Max Hill and Joseph Dynan of AP, Frank Hawley of *The Times* and Vere Redman's second-in-command at the British Information Bureau in Tokyo, Robert Guillain of Havas, Ray Cromley of the *Wall Street Journal*, and Otto Tolischus of the *New York Times*. Even such veterans of semi-official journalism as John Russell Kennedy's old Kokusai Tsūshinsha protégé Percy Whiteing, who had succeeded James Young at the International News Service, and one of the Foreign Ministry network's most faithful operatives, George Gorman, were incarcerated.

3. JAPAN'S DUAL IMAGE IN BRITAIN: AMBIVALENCE AND TIRED RACISM

The historian Antony Best has written:

...from the time of the Great War onwards, British policy in East Asia was characterized by a profound ambivalence about Japan and especially its potential threat to British interests. This arose because the policy makers within Whitehall held a double-sided image of Japan. On the one hand it was portrayed as a nation bent on regional domination, but on the other was seen as a backward power that lacked the resources necessary to achieve its goals. This dual image had its foundations in the Foreign Office's day-to-day experience of Japanese diplomacy and the observations made by the embassy in Tokyo about the political, economic and social life of Japan. In addition, it was influenced by commonly held racial assumptions about the inability of non-white nations to confront the modern Western states. The effect of this dual image was that Britain did not seek Japan's friendship, but at the same time did not view it as an irreconcilable enemy. This in turn helps to explain why Britain was prepared to see the end of the alliance in 1921, why it prevaricated about appeasing Japan in the 1930s, and finally why it underestimated the Japanese threat in 1940–41 (Best 2002: pp.3–4).

Few ordinary Japanese saw their nation as anything like the aggressive power pictured in the West, and the Foreign Ministry did its best to counter the impression that Japan represented a threat, (a 'Menace'), to Western interests in East Asia. However, although few ordinary Japanese agreed with the idea of Japan as a backward nation, little effort was made to correct this self-image through propaganda at home, although Japan's image as the modern leader of a new independent Asia was stressed in propaganda on Manchoukuo. At home, Japanese postcard propaganda highlighted the threat from abroad and Japan's weakness compared to the West (▼ see below), fostering a sense of national emergency. This combination of a sense of domestic weakness and power and dynamism in East Asia crept into writings on Japan by foreign observers, reinforcing the dual image that Anthony Best discusses.

At the same time, Japanese nationalism and an unapologetic militarism both merged

successfully with this image of backwardness and tradition and cancelled out the ‘modern Asian leader’ propaganda. Thus British, American and Japanese foreign policy and Japanese propaganda allowed their diplomatic perspectives to get stuck in the ruts or ‘parameters’ of this dual image. Thus, far from helping Japan and the West to understand each other’s position, propaganda helped Japan and the West to paint themselves into a corner.

4. POSTCARDS AT HOME: DEVELOPING A SENSE OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY



Japanese propaganda postcards often showed Japan lagging behind the other powers in terms of military readiness, coming off worst in international relations and running the least productive colonies, possessing the lowest merchant shipping tonnage and the paltriest commercial aircraft strength. The Japanese were often shown as weaker than the other races (◀), and as



more prone to wasteful expenditure, such as expensive weddings.

Combined with a strong emphasis on the threat from abroad (above left), these invidious comparisons helped foster a sense of national emergency among the Japanese people, the main target of postcard propaganda, but the subtext of national weakness crept into writings on Japan by some foreign observers and publicists.



5. THE ALIENS OF HALLOWEEN: OCTOBER 30 1938: THE WAR OF THE WORLDS [LISTEN 1](#) [LISTEN 2](#)



Perhaps the most effective propaganda appeals to human fear: particularly to the fears we all nurture, privately or publicly, of what is strange, unknown, or foreign. In Germany, Dr. Goebbels claimed that the Allies sought the extermination of the German people, a message reinforced by the Allied bombing raids, particularly those over Dresden. In October 1938, what Walter Lippman called 'the bewildered herd' demonstrated their susceptibility to fear during a broadcast of H.G. Wells's novel 'War of the Worlds', set in Grover Mills, New Jersey, near Princeton University and directed by Orson Welles. As the voice of the newscaster Carl Phillips, the actor Frank Readick gave a convincing performance as a bewildered reporter, culminating in the exclamation, "Good Lord! They're turning into flame!" followed by screams, whereupon an announcer cut in, "Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control..." Broadcast live, without a hitch, by a cast of about a dozen people standing before a single microphone with SFX triggered bang on time, and musical cues including orchestras and solo instruments, the performance was a

sensation and a disaster rolled into one. At this time, radio listeners were acutely aware of world events and radio was the most powerful medium of the day. Hitler had just occupied the Sudetenland and rolled into Austria, and they may have been wondering, "What next?"

Around 8.12 on October 30, Halloween, listeners began 'dial twisting' (the 1930s equivalent of programme-hopping), between radio stations. Initially, only a few tuned into Welles's broadcast of what sounded like a live newscast of a 'landing at Grover's Mill' of a meteorite, and heard an on-the-spot report from Readick as Carl Philips, who stated in a worried tone, "...doesn't look much like a meteorite to me. At least, not the meteors that I've seen. Looks more like a huge cylinder." From there the object rapidly took on a terrifying life of its own, screams and gasps were heard, tentacles 'seen', and the broadcast soon had the CBS switchboard overwhelmed and an estimated 6,000,000 listeners nationwide, of whom about 1,000,000 took the programme for a real newscast and left their home with a handkerchief over their head for protection from 'poison gas', while others prayed for divine intervention. Word went round that the Germans had invaded.

We have only to recall the flight from New Orleans before the recent hurricane disaster to visualise the packed highways, buses and trains heading out of New Jersey and other areas across the United States. Next day's newspapers reported legal suits by some infuriated listeners. The following year, Hadley Cantrill published "The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic" (1939, Princeton UP, appropriately). A year later, when the same script was performed in Ecuador and listeners realised it was a hoax, they attacked the radio station, killing 15 people.

Newspaper reproduction: *Trenton Evening Times*, Trenton New Jersey, October 31 1938.

¹ The following *Japan News-Week* editorials were considered inflammatory at the time: “Inconsistency”, 21 December 1940; “Looking Forward” 4 January 1941; “Fish and Fowl” 25 January 1941; and “Japan’s Obligation” 15 February 1941.

² USDS 894.911/74: Grew to State Dept., 17 March 1941.

³ JA: 21 July 1940.

⁴ “Grim Contrast”: *Japan New-Week* 22 March 1941; “Autonomous Japan”: JN-W, 29 March 1941. Discussed in USDS 894.911/75, Grew to State Dept., 8 April 1941.

⁵ USDS 894.911/76: Grew to State Dept. 30 April 1941.

⁶ “No Compromise”: JN-W 26 April 1941. Discussed in USDS 894.911 [document no. not given], Grew to State Dept., 7 May 1941.

⁷ “Two Year Plan”, JN-W, 6 September 1941. Discussed in USDS 894.911/85: Grew to State Dept., 11 September 1941.

⁸ According to Phyllis Argall, ‘the entire editorial staff of Japan News-Week was under arrest’ (Argall 1945: 205).