

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE 1

The Wilsonian moment: Japan 1912–1952

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Abstract

The aim of this special issue is to give a new spin to the study of the impact of the liberal Wilsonian moment on Japan, with a focus on the interwar period in a broader historical span. The Wilsonian liberal international order encompasses its fledgling (1914–1945), formative (1945–1952), competitive (1952–1989), and maturity (1989–2018) periods. In this special issue, the four articles deal with the first and second periods. Yutaka Harada and Frederick Dickinson adopt this longer perspective – not just President Wilson’s moment of Fourteen Points – each focusing on (1) the vigor of Japan’s industrialization and open economic policy in 1914–1931 and (2) the basic continuity between the prewar and postwar periods in terms of normative and institutional commitments with the fledgling, if volatile, liberal international order such as those with the Versailles and Washington treaties after World War I, the war prohibition treaty of 1928, and the naval disarmament treaty of 1930. Ryoko Nakano and Takashi Inoguchi take up the re-examination of two tiny minorities of liberal academics, Yanaihara Tadao and Nambara Shigeru, who at most kept their integrity. Nakano recasts Yanaihara’s academic life with its intellectual agony of believing in a national self-determination policy for Japanese colonies. Inoguchi underlines Nambara’s stoic self-discipline under wartime dictatorship and active political involvement under US occupation regarding the newly drafted Japanese Constitution. An emphasis is placed on the considerable positive influence of Wilsonian ideas on Japan, an influence that faded in the late 1930s, but re-emerged with considerable vigor after 1945.

Key words: Normative and institutional continuity with Wilsonian liberal international order; Wilsonian moments in prewar and early postwar Japan; Wilsonian moment writ large

The concept of the Wilsonian moment derives from US President Woodrow Wilson’s speech in 1918 used for peace negotiations after the devastation of World War I (Macmillan, 2003). It left legacies on the peace treaties of Versailles and Washington and the establishment of the League of Nations and subsequent multilateral treaties in the inter-war period (Iriye, 1965, 2013). No less important is the legacy of nurturing the notion that ‘colonial powers were answerable to institutions and mechanisms higher than themselves, a notion that would evolve in the postwar decades into a powerful tool for undermining the legitimacy and therefore the viability of the arrangements of empire.’ (Manela, 2007, pp. xi–xii). After the World War II, it had major impacts on the establishment of the United Nations and the steady increase in international organizations and multilateral treaties under the US-led liberal international order beyond World War I, World War II, and the Cold War (Ikenberry, 2001, 2011, 2018; Hale *et al.*, 2013; Le *et al.*, 2014; Inoguchi and Le, 2016; Hale *et al.*, 2017).

Content-wise, the Wilson’s Fourteen Points cover the wide range of points that Wilson regarded as the possible basis of enduring peace. They consist of: five general principles for enduring peace, eight principles on territorial issues, and one point on the League of Nations: (1) open covenants of peace through frank diplomacy in the public view; (2) freedom of navigation in peace and in war; (3) establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and its

maintenance; (4) guarantees that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety; (5) all colonial claims should be adjusted on the basis of strict observance of the principle of national self-determination; (6)–(13) territorial issues deal with Russia, Belgium, France, Italy, Austro-Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey, and Poland; (14) the last point deals with the League of Nations. In this special issue, the following topics will be examined: (1) vigorous economic engagement with the world economy (Yutaka Harada), (2) robust diplomatic engagement with League of Nations and multilateral treaties (Frederck Dickinson), (3) colonies and national self-determination (Ryoko Nakano), (5) the new Japanese constitution and its continuity with multilateral treaties (Takashi Inoguchi).

Since the special issue covers only few number of topics, it is necessary to register some major scholarly works that analyze this concept more broadly. The intellectual history of the Wilsonian moment covers the wide terrains of American foreign policy (Bacevich, 2012; Cohen, 2013–15), liberal international order (Ikenberry, 2001, 2011, 2018), international organizations (Macmillan, 2003; Iriye, 2004; Burkman, 2007), major power competition (Iriye, 1965, 2013), colonies and national self-determination (Manela, 2007; Duara, 2003), enduring peace and its conditions (Russett, 1994; Deudney, 2008; Perry, 2015).

It is Arno Mayer (1959) who first examined the origins of the new diplomacy by Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin, and it is Iriye Akira (1965) who gauged the Wilsonian moment – and the Bolshevik moment – and their impact on international relations across the Asia-Pacific in the inter-war period (1918–1937). The book of the latter academic is titled: *After Imperialism*, whereby he is referring to an old-style imperialism that can be distinguished from what would be called the liberal world order. Iriye (2013) masterly articulates and details the limit of the Wilsonian moment, placing it in a global and long historical context. After thoroughly tracing and examining the US-led liberal international order since World War I and II (Ikenberry, 2001, 2011), G. John Ikenberry (2018) characterizes it as follows: ‘the liberal internationalism of the Woodrow Wilson era was built around civilizational, racial and cultural hierarchies. It was a creature of the Western white man’s world. It was a narrow type of principled internationalist. Wilson-era liberal internationalism did not challenge European imperialism or racial hierarchies’ (p. 14–15).

Woodrow Wilson, who was elected president of the USA in 1913 and re-elected in 1921, is often portrayed as someone who made bold international initiatives with his proposal on the Fourteen Points and a League of Nations, but who was not necessarily strong enough to carry out domestic reform (Iriye, 2013). Wilson was a southerner born in Virginia and raised in Georgia and South Carolina. The period of his presidency was full of optimism. ‘The runaway optimism of the age drove up stock prices by 250 percent between 1920 and the peak in 1929.’ (Sharma, 2016, p. 258). This optimism in the economic future was held in the last phase of long-term deflation, registering 1% global average annual inflation rate between 1910 and the 1930s. The USA was not an exception to this observation (cf. Iguchi, 2018, for a more nuanced and positive interpretation of American politics in the 1920s).

Yutaka Harada (2018) starts with one striking point: the global exposure of the Japanese economy in the 1910s through 1930s was much greater than that in the 1950s and 1960s. In Japan, the economy slowly recovered after the stress associated with waging a difficult war against Russia in 1904–1905. The advent of World War I and Japan’s participation therein terminated its deflationary economy by facilitating industrial productions of steel, railways, warships, and military weapons along with the manufacturing of silk and cotton clothes and shoes. The half-century-long lack of tariff autonomy was terminated in 1911. Globalization permeated. Internationalism flourished (cf. Sluga, 2013 for political development and geopolitics during the period.)

Frederick Dickinson (2018) highlights a robust Japanese diplomatic engagement with Japan itself constituting a liberal world order along with the West during the inter-war period (Dickinson, 2014). In tandem with an economic opening up and an industrial spurt, political liberalization was achieved (Banno, 2017). Replacing the oligarch-dominant politics present since the Meiji Restoration with a more political-party-focused system that emphasized liberal economic trade and currency policy

and democratization, the era known as Taisho democracy (1912–1925) ushered in universal suffrage and the alternation of governing parties.

During the following early Showa period (1925–1936), two pronounced socio-economic streams manifested themselves. First, Japan's vigorous trade and investment abroad assisted Japan's economy positively to give rise to a middle class on a modest scale. The middle-class income level moved up and liberal ideas of freedom, democracy, entrepreneurship, and rule of law permeated it. Second, those peasants and workers who were left alone without benefits accruing to industrialization and globalization were struggling to survive. In the rural agricultural sector, labor productivity was continuously declining since the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905.

Japan's Wilsonian impact remained alive and kicking. Amid the fervent rise of nationalism, internationalism in Japan triggered by World War I and the policies pursued by Woodrow Wilson steadfastly permeated Japan as well (Macmillan, 2003; Sluga, 2013; Dickinson, 2018). Yet the age was also a period of transition of hegemony. Britain was in slow decline after a century-long hegemonic position in Europe and the world. Germany was on the rise. So was Japan in the East. The USA had a quasi-hegemonic position in currency, trade, and investment abroad, masterly characterized as the Diplomacy of the Dollar (Feis, 1966). The USA wanted the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1919) to elapse in light of Wilson's Fourteen Points Declaration, which abhorred old style arms and alliances. The inevitable instability of transition manifested itself, especially in the international monetary system (from the gold standard system to the managed gold standard system) and naval disarmament (the USA and Britain held the lion's share despite reductions of tonnage) in a most pronounced fashion at least to Japan. Calamitous to Japan in the longer term was the global policy change in both domains.

Japan's decisions on returning to the gold standard in 1928 and on promulgation in the naval disarmament treaty in 1931 are a case in point. They reflected the mainstream thinking of predominant businessmen and politicians well versed with Western international law and diplomacy. The former hit hard the business sector when Japan's international payments were still done primarily in silver, not in gold. The latter hit hard the navy and nationalists who increasingly held the sentiment that the West's treatment of Japan in Washington, London, and in other multilateral treaties was unfair and racist-tinged (Kato, 2017).

Multiplying the call against what is taken as racist injustice were: (1) early stage of democratic expansion to peasants and workers since 1925 into the 1930s when left-wing political parties made substantial advances in the imperial parliament and (2) those army-recruited soldiers, many of whom were from poverty-stricken rural areas, were mobilized by army faction's military coup attempts at assassinating politicians and elite bureaucrats.

The 1936 abortive military coup d'état triggered the direction in which the military's control of politics was further consolidated into a military dictatorship. Japan's military interventions in China further aggravated this trend. Japan dragged into the China quagmire served to reinforce the anti-Japanese economic sanctions led by the USA, thereby leading Japan to the option of an all out war a few years after the 1936 abortive coup.

The Wilsonian moment writ large laid the ground for the unfolding course of international relations from 1921 through the construction of the US-led liberal world order with some ups and downs. Not only the Wilsonian thread is manifested in the body politic of Japan after 1952 but it also has become the embodiment of the liberal world order as far as Japan's external engagement since 1945 is concerned (Inoguchi, 2014). It is all for peace and prosperity through self-restraint and principled pragmatism. That is why the Wilsonian moment writ large is the key theme. The ensuing articles portray those states pursuing their respective notion of liberal thought and individual expression of it during hard times.

This thread of the Wilsonian moment writ large is spelled out by Harada (2018) and Dickinson (2018) in their articles on the Japanese economy in the 1920s and 1930s. Japan prospered under the liberal international order (Fukao *et al.*, 2017; Ishii and Haraguchi, 2017). A sceptical view of Japan as a late-comer state, a la Gerschenkron, see Kasza, 2018. Yet the people at the time believed

that the country needed more land overseas to feed its increasing population (Harada, 2018). When the steadily growing main economy gave jobs to most of the Japanese population, the benefits the colonies conferred were not great, so argued. That is why Ishibashi Tanzan, as a noted liberal prewar business journalist and postwar prime minister (23 December 1956 to 25 February 1957) argued for ‘Little Japanism’ (as contrasted to continentally expanded Japan). Some Japanese, especially the military and civil personnel in the colonies, were major beneficiaries of overseas expansion. Japan was among the first to recover from the Great Depression. By the mid-1930s, Japan had full employment. Japan did not need to export its population to other countries nor to acquire territories through military action. The military expansion into China and the shift to a more tightly regulated economy in Japan and the Manchukuo benefitted those who supplied goods to the military and obeyed the authorities. Such benefits, though, came at the expense of Japanese taxpayers and consumers, who were oppressed and were unable to criticize the military. The benefits gained from the military clamp down and the economic regulations were very visible, whereas the benefits accrued to the liberal international order could not be clearly seen. The Wilsonian moment was lost by the end of the 1930s. Ishibashi’s argument echoes Professor Watanabe Tetsuzo’s argument in the 1946 *War Study Report* by the Japanese government led by Prime Minister Shidehara Kijuro (Inoue, 2017), that is, Japan was not isolated in the world economy and implemented free trade vigorously. Harada argues that the Japanese economy in the 1920s and 1930s was in general in full swing despite the transitional volatility of the world currency regime and despite the possible policy mistake on the timing of adoption and termination of the gold standard.

Dickinson in this issue spells out the thread of the Wilsonian moment writ large in Japanese politics as follows. Woodrow Wilson’s name remains forever entwined with the Paris Peace Conference and efforts to transform geopolitics after 1918. Despite a recent emphasis on the power of this so-called Wilsonian moment, initiatives by the American president remain controversial, and his principal global legacy has come to be defined as the rise of nationalism in the developing world. In the historiography of modern Japan, Wilson and the Paris Conference have long been identified less as opportunities than as challenges, embodied unmistakably in Prince Konoë Fumimaro’s 1918 condemnation of the conference and the proposed League of Nations as beneficial only to the USA and Britain. Reading back from 1931, historians of modern Japan have located in the Versailles settlement seeds of an epic new expansionary effort from the Manchurian incident to the destruction of imperial Japan. Dickinson’s article, by contrast, analyzes the inter-war years on their own terms and, in doing so, locates the structural foundations of a dramatic Japanese national departure. The Wilsonian moment is more than a period in inter-war Japan. A liberal international thrust defines many institutions of the new industrial world power that emerges on the Japanese archipelagoes by 1919. Japan’s promulgation in all the major multilateral treaties concerning war and peace in the inter-war period, that is, the Versailles and Washington Treaties, the League of Nations in which Japan was one of the four key members providing its Under Secretary General, the Treaty of Prohibiting War, and the Naval Disarmament Treaty, attest to the continuation of this thread (see more details of Japan’s diplomatic engagement in the liberal international order both in the prewar and postwar periods in Shinoda, 2012, 2016).

Ryoko Nakano (2018) gives a more nuanced reading of the Wilsonian moment thread through the experience of Professor Yanaihara Tadao who was an economist at the Imperial Tokyo University, specializing in Japan’s colonial policy in Taiwan, arguing for the equal treatment of educational and legal rights for colonials. In the wake of anticolonial nationalist and the Taisho democratic movements of the late 1910s, he advocated the principle of autonomy for the Japanese empire to transform itself into the core of a liberal international order. His argument reflected the idea of national self-determination, democracy, and multilateralism in the Wilsonian moment. He articulated that the combination of colonialism and unfettered capitalism has detrimental effects on the colonized, and advocated for a Japanese empire that reflected the voice of its people, similar to the British dominion system. However, Yanaihara’s line of liberal internationalism did not have the state’s anchor and public support from civil society movements and self-rule in Taiwan and Korea. He increasingly saw Japanese

pan-Asianist ideas in the 1930s as a facade. Abandoning his earlier ideas about empire as a multiethnic society, he criticized Japan's military venture as economically unprofitable, and politics toward Manchuria as stoking the rise of Chinese nationalism. He advocated the normative framework advanced by the Mandate System of the League of Nations as a way toward the universalization of sovereignty, and protection of state-less populations. The receding of the Wilsonian moment forced Yanaihara out of Tokyo Imperial University but also strengthened his initiation toward liberal internationalism. In the increasingly authoritarian government of the 1930s, he was forced to resign from the university for his non-patriotic statements, such as 'Japan should be buried' at the Christian meeting in October 1937 and his sharp criticism of Japan's policy direction against China in his article on *Chuo koron*, a monthly magazine, published shortly before the Christian meeting. The thread of the Wilsonian moment writ large is exemplified beautifully when Yanaihara assumed the office of university presidency in 1956. His academic rectitude and religious conscience were highly respected throughout his life, from prewar to wartime to postwar periods.

Inoguchi (2018) gives another reading of the Wilsonian moment thread as experienced by Professor Nambara Shigeru. He was a political scientist at the Imperial University of Tokyo from 1926 through the prewar period, the war period, and the postwar period. He specialized in the political philosophy of Immanuel Kant and, more generally, Western political philosophy. He is noteworthy for three actions. The first is that as late as in 1944, during the war, he published his *magnum opus*, Western political philosophy since ancient Greece in which he argued that the German Nazi philosophy was totally in disharmony with the long tradition of Western political philosophy. The second is that as dean of the law faculty during the war, he complied with the government's order on the war deployment of university students as the last resort of the military. The third, as president of the University of Tokyo, he was active in politics. In late 1945 and early 1946, when the US Occupation Authorities drafted a new Japanese Constitution in consultation with the Japanese government and citizens, Nambara was opposed to two parts of the new constitution: (1) The emperor should not be merely symbolic but substantive. (2) The sovereign state should not be devoid of war rights. Both views were expressed eloquently in his 1944 book and represented the majority view of the Japanese government in late 1945 and early 1946. Also, in late 1949 and early 1950, he visited the USA and gave a speech in which he said he believed the United Nations collective security chapter was a good step toward peace and that if Japan was to be admitted to the United Nations, the armed forces Japan may have in future would be deployed as part of the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations. All of which was very harmonious with his previous academic works published prior to 1945.

Although this special issue does not cover much about Japanese domestic politics and foreign policy, let alone US domestic politics and foreign policy, the theme that the Wilsonian moment and thread continued beyond Wilson and beyond World War II will be understood and the nuanced diversity of views and actions manifested in the three periods will be appreciated.

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