Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918–1922: The Washington System and the Origins of Japanese-American Rapprochement*

The period from the end of World War I to the Washington Conference of 1921–22 was a great turning point in Japanese-American relations. Leaders of both nations, especially of Japan, were quite conscious of the contrast between the Old Diplomacy and the New. During the war, President Woodrow Wilson emerged as the champion of the New Diplomacy, repudiating military alliances, the scramble for colonies, and the arms race—evils associated with the Old Diplomacy. He spelled out his vision of international idealism in his address on the Fourteen Points in January 1918, which proclaimed self-determination, removal of economic barriers, reduction of armaments, peaceful settlement of disputes, and, above all, the League of Nations. More concretely, the emerging Wilsonian world order was predicated on the vision of “liberal-capitalistic internationalism” to be led by the United States and supported by cooperation among the leading industrial nations.

For analytical purposes this essay uses the paradigms of the Old Diplomacy and the New Diplomacy. Attempting to eschew simple dichotomies, the essay shows the complex manner in which the Old Diplomacy and the New interacted with each other and within each nation, both prior to and during the Washington Conference. There was no linear progression from the Old Diplomacy to the New; as the title says, it was between the Old Diplomacy and the New.

Initially Wilson’s ideological offensive was directed at Europe, but his call for international democracy inevitably had a universalistic appeal to Japanese lead-

---

“This paper is adapted from my “Kyū gaikō to shin gaikō no hazama, 1918–1922: Nichi-Bei detanto to Washinton taisei no seiritsu,” Ryōtai senkan no Nichi-Bei kankei: Kaigun to seisaku kettei katei (Tokyo, 1993), 95–148. In accordance with the established convention in academic works Japanese names appear with the family name preceding the given name.

3. Robert L. Beisner in his From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865–1900, 2d ed. (Arlington Heights, IL, 1986) uses a similar paradigm in a totally different context.
ers. One of the first to respond was Yoshino Sakuzō, the intellectual leader of the democratic movement in Japan, who "greatly admired" the Fourteen Points. He wrote that Japan must join the new peaceful order in which "the rule of morality" was to replace "the rule of naked power." Hasegawa Nyozekan, an influential liberal journalist, understood the great transformation of the world in terms of the Old Diplomacy versus the New Diplomacy. Now that Wilson’s cooperative policy was prevailing over the Machiavellian forces of "exclusive, militant nationalism, militarism, and imperialism," Hasegawa contended that only democratic nations were allowed to participate in the new moral world order.

Some government leaders enthusiastically responded to Wilson’s New Diplomacy. Hara Kei, prime minister from 1918 to 1921, believed it vitally important to cooperate with the United States, the nation he considered the leader of the democratization of the world. Makino Nobuaki, a former foreign minister and a liberal, was more emphatic in his support of Wilsonianism. In December 1918, before his departure as one of the delegates to the Paris Peace Conference, he spoke at the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations (the highest foreign-policy advisory organ), urging that Japan must abandon the Old Diplomacy and embrace the New:

The so-called Americanism is unanimously advocated all over the world. The situation has completely changed since the days of the Old Diplomacy. . . . The New Diplomacy aims at fair play, justice, and humanity. Now that the New Diplomacy is gaining a complete victory, I conjecture that the peace conference in Paris will attach greatest importance to eradicating the Old Diplomacy.

Makino insisted that Japan must forsake the Old Diplomacy of intimidating and coercing China.


Those who supported Makino’s advocacy of the New Diplomacy were, however, a small minority. The majority of leaders clung to the old habits of thought. Itō Miyoji, who was left behind by the march of internationalist thought, was a captive of the Old Diplomacy. A powerful member of the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations, he scathingly attacked Makino. According to Itō, the League of Nations was “nothing more than a stratagem in the hands of the strongest powers to suppress the second-rank countries like Japan.”9 Gotō Shinpei, foreign minister from 1916 to 1918, called Wilson’s diplomacy that of “moralistic aggressiveness”; “It is nothing but a great hypocritical monster under the cloak of justice and humanity.”10 In a similar vein, Lieutenant General Ugaki Kazushige wrote in his diary that Japan must be on guard against “America’s real designs that are masqueraded under the name of peace and justice.”11

The best known and most thoroughgoing attack on Wilsonianism came from future prime minister Konoe Fumimaro, then twenty-seven years old, who published a powerful treatise titled “Rebutting Pacifism that Only Serves the Interest of the Anglo-American Powers.” He claimed that the gospel of peace preached by their leaders was simply a rationalization of “the status quo that favors only the Anglo-American powers.” He saw Japanese-American relations in terms of a conflict between a “have” (the United States) and a “have-not” (Japan), protesting that American “economic imperialism” was threatening Japan’s right to survive.12 (When he became prime minister in 1937, he set out to actualize his vision in his China policy.)

Meanwhile, Japanese advocates of the Old Diplomacy had come to fear that Wilson’s ideological offensive would undermine Japan’s national polity. Ugaki wrote in his diary:

Recently Americans are vehemently attacking the Japanese people as militarists and aggressors. They used precisely this ruse to destroy Germany’s national spirit and bring about the collapse of the monarchical polity of Germany and Austria. Now, Americans are using this same tactic against us in order to destroy our Empire’s strength and essential character.13

All this time Wilson had been mounting a series of diplomatic offensives. He bombarded Japanese leaders with protests against the occupation of Siberia and North Sakhalin, fought a pitched diplomatic battle at the Paris Peace Conference over Shandong, and attempted to contain Japan’s China policy through a new four-power financial consortium. In the end, Wilson was forced to retreat

---

9. Tatsuo, Suiusô nikki, 310, 339.
10. Ibid., 309.
because America had neither power, interest, nor commitment to enforce his views. But it is important to note that Japanese leaders keenly felt the pressure of Wilson’s New Diplomacy. He had directed world public opinion against Japan and censured its militaristic policy, trying to coerce the Japanese government into a more moderate China policy. From this time on, Japan’s foremost task was to extricate itself from diplomatic isolation. At the same time the escalating naval arms race in the Pacific brought about a crisis in Japanese-American relations, even a war scare.

This was the background of the Washington Conference. The conference brought an across-the-board détente by redirecting naval confrontation to a new order of peaceful cooperation. Arguably, after Wilson had left the scene, some of his principles (arms reduction, peaceful settlement of international disputes, cooperation, etc.) were partly realized at the Washington Conference by the more pragmatic Harding administration. The conference succeeded in creating in East Asia a neo-Wilsonian order of cooperation under a liberal-capitalist system. The resulting international order, the Washington System, was to consist of naval limitation in the Pacific and a regime of political cooperation in East Asia. This study concentrates on the latter questions because I have extensively published on the naval aspects. The two were interrelated, as we shall see.

The American invitation to the Washington Conference, arriving on 11 July 1921, came to Japan as a “bolt from the sky.” A sense of crisis gripped the nation. Its shock can be gleaned from the headline of the Tokyo Asahi: “The Day of the

14. See Hosoya Chihiro and Saitō Makoto, eds., Washington taisei to Nichi-Bei kankei [The Washington System and Japanese-American relations] (Tokyo, 1978). Ian Nish argues that the Washington treaties, resulting from a series of hasty compromises, hardly amounted to a “masterpiece,” and that each power had a different perception of what had been accomplished at Washington. But the fact that the phrase “Washington system” does not appear in the British archives does not mean that such a perception did not emerge between Japan and the United States. As I demonstrate in this article, the United States and Japan definitely shared the view that the Washington Conference gave birth to a new international system (regime or order) in the Asia Pacific based on across-the-board adjustment of major issues and cooperation between Japan, the United States, and Britain. Ian Nish, Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942: From Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka (London, 1977), 141–42.


Final Accounting of Far Eastern Questions; Japan in Grave Difficulties.” There was a fear that the United States and Britain were “colluding” to use a naval conference to drag Japan to an international court, to roll back its wartime expansion in the Far East, and even to deprive it of its special interests in Manchuria. Alarmist sentiments were so prevalent that Prime Minister Hara wrote in his diary that such “panic” was “jeopardizing Japan’s national dignity.”

The alarm can be explained by Japan’s deepening sense of isolation. A widespread view held that due to the cataclysmic changes in Japan’s international environment—the Russian Revolution, defeat of Germany, and dissen-sion among the victorious powers—the emerging world order would be Pax Americana. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which since 1902 had been the “pivot” of Japanese diplomacy, seemed destined to disappear because of American opposition. As far as Washington was concerned, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, an exclusive military alliance recognizing and guaranteeing spheres of influence, was a symbol of the Old Diplomacy that must go.

From the outset the Japanese government assumed that the United States would dominate the Washington Conference. Matsudaira Tsuneo, chief of the Europe-America Bureau of the Foreign Ministry, wrote that prevention of war with the United States was “the pressing need of the moment.” A Foreign Ministry memorandum crisply stated: “Necessity to turn around our policy. Otherwise the fear of total isolation and a Japanese-American war.”

The government leaders hoped that “by seizing an opportunity at the coming conference Japan can remove the fear of Japanese-American war.” For the forces of the New Diplomacy, the invitation to the conference was welcome as an occasion to reorient Japan’s policy, assert cooperative stance, and save the nation from isolation. Foreign Ministry files bulge with policy papers to the effect that “we must opt for a liberal policy and turn the conference to our advantages to improve our Empire’s international position.”

---

21. See, for example, Memo on the fundamental policy [toward the Washington Conference], decided on 16 July 1921; Asia Bureau’s memo on policy . . . centering on the China question; Memo on the fundamental policy.
Shidehara Kijûrō, ambassador to Washington, soon to become a delegate to the Washington Conference, was a foremost advocate of cooperation with the United States; he pleaded for a “constructive” policy to stabilize the Asia-Pacific. It simply would not do to defend past policy or cling to the status quo. This was a clarion call for the New Diplomacy. Accepting such a counsel, the Foreign Ministry worked out a policy of “taking the initiative to propose exactly what other powers are about to.” Its Memorandum on Fundamental Policy (16 July 1921) stated that “Japan must turn this occasion to its good advantage by rectifying the past mistakes of dual diplomacy [military intervention in diplomacy], militaristic politics, and diplomacy dominated by military cliques.”

Underlying such a policy turnabout was the idea of economic diplomacy. There was a conviction that the only course open to Japan was peaceful economic development. For this purpose it was necessary to maintain friendly relations with both the United States and China, the two major importers of Japanese products. Japan must therefore adhere to the Open Door and territorial integrity of China. Close economic relations with the United States became vitally important, because from World War I to the postwar years trade with that power had rapidly increased, Japan’s export by fourfold and its import by sevenfold.

Shidehara clarified his thinking as he proceeded with preparation for the conference. And as he did so, basic differences between him and Foreign Minister Uchida Yasuya came to the fore. Shidehara opposed Uchida’s regressive policy of trying to exclude “problems of sole concern to Japan and China” and “faits accomplis” from the conference agenda. These problems included, specifically, the Shandong question. He asserted that insofar as the Washington Conference was aimed at general détente in the Pacific, “it would naturally require revision of the status quo” in East Asia.

Shidehara’s forward-looking policy, leaning toward the New Diplomacy, was tentatively approved by the cabinet on 22 July, but it had to contend with the forces of the Old Diplomacy. Even Prime Minister Hara, who had accepted the tenets of Shidehara’s diplomacy and wanted to remake China policy, had difficulties overcoming an “insurmountable historical obstacle,” namely the traditional claim to special interests in Manchuria. Foreign Minister Uchida, who was a captive of the Old Diplomacy, had long been convinced that “the keynote

22. Shidehara to Uchida, 27 and 30 July 1921; Shidehara Heiwa Zaidan, Shidehara Kijûrō (Tokyo, 1955), 225–26, 238–41; Shidehara, Gaikô 50-nen [Fifty years of my diplomacy], (Tokyo, 1951), 84–85; Documents cited in notes 18 and 19; Memo on Sino-Japanese relations and Japanese-American relations.
23. Foreign Ministry memorandum on fundamental policy, 16 July 1921.
25. Shidehara to Uchida, 17, 24, and 26 July; 1 August 1921.
of our Manchurian-Mongolian policy is to plant our influence there.” In the summer of 1914, he reasserted his belief at the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations that Manchuria was not part of China proper and hence must be “controlled” by Japan. 28 Had Japan not received a “firm recognition” of its special interests there in the Lansing-Ishii Agreement of 1917? Had Japan not obtained from three powers an agreement “to exclude Manchuria and Mongolia” when the new China consortium was established by Japan, the United States, Britain, and France in 1920? 29

But it was not just Uchida who tried to maintain “the special position and interest in Manchuria.” The Hara ministry in the cabinet decision of May 1921 had reconfirmed the traditional claim that special interests in Manchuria were “required for our national defense and economic necessities of our people,” and that Japan must “endeavor to expand them in the future.” 30 As we shall presently see, Uchida’s position on the special interests in Manchuria was to come to clash with Shidehara at the Washington Conference. Devoted to the Open Door principles, Shidehara tried to minimize the importance of Japan’s claim to special interests. Uchida, not known for strong leadership, was simply not capable of bringing together these two conflicting approaches to the China question.

The Foreign Ministry began to formulate its conference strategy with utmost caution in stages. First, as stated, it tried to remove from the agenda faits accomplis and “problems of sole concern to Japan and China,” but this effort failed because Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes opposed it on the grounds of general principle. Second, the ministry endeavored to limit the agenda through preliminary negotiations with Washington but again met Hughes’s refusal. (Japan’s demand would have meant excluding from the conference the Manchurian question, the Shandong question, troubles stemming from the Twenty-One Demands of 1915, and the Siberian expedition.) As a last desperate resort, the ministry came up with a “counteroffensive plan” in case Japan’s special interests should be attacked. It was after Hughes presented his conference agenda on 8 September that Japan’s counteroffensive plan came to be seriously discussed at cabinet meetings and the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations. 31 The American agenda looked like a shopping list of all the issues that were to the detriment of Japan. Though not revealed to Japan, even more thoroughgoing was the plan drawn up by John V. A. MacMurray, chief of the

State Department’s Far Eastern Division. It foresaw an indictment of Japan: spheres of influence (South Manchuria, Guandong, Shandong, Fujian); the status of the South Manchurian and Shandong railways; rights obtained by the Twenty-One Demands; and troops stationed in China that were not supported by international treaties.32

To prepare for the worst contingency, the Japanese government deliberated on its trump card, “The Open Door in the Pacific.” Japan was to demand that the Open Door must be applied not only to China and Siberia but to the whole Pacific region, where Western powers possessed colonies. The plan included motley questions such as “the economic and commercial Open Door” (complete removal of economic barriers and free access to resources) in the Pacific, especially Southeast Asia, and the “freedom to immigrate to the United States, Canada, and Australia.” If these proposals were not enough to deter the United States, Japan would denounce the Central American policy of the United States, namely its Panama policy and intervention in Mexico. If this did not suffice, the Foreign Ministry would assert “the independence of Hawaii and the Philippines” and “restoration of conditions in the Orient (Pacific) as they existed one hundred years ago.”33 This was a counsel of despair and shoal upon which the whole conference would have been wrecked. That such a plan was considered in all seriousness is clear from the memoirs of Sugimura Yōtarō, a member of the delegation, who shortly after the conference wrote, “If the United States censured Japan’s past deeds, we were determined to counter it by raising the question of American annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines.”34

Prime Minister Hara was aware that introducing the immigration question would alienate the United States, so he hoped it would not be necessary to raise this question. Hanihara Masanao, an expert on American affairs who was soon to join the delegates, warned that in case the immigration question was raised, Japan would have to fight all the participating powers.35 Despite these caveats, the substance of the “counteroffensive plan” was retained. The instructions to the delegates and Shidehara (13 and 14 October) directed them as follows in anticipation of the worst contingency:


33. Memo on fundamental policy; Memo on policy to cope with the Washington Conference; Memo on the agenda on Pacific questions. See other memoranda prepared by the Asia Bureau, Foreign Ministry, cited above.

34. Sugimura Yōtarō, Hatashite kyōkoku wa sametariya [Have great powers awakened?] (Tokyo, 1922), 65.

35. The Third Section of the Europe-America Bureau, “Opinion regarding the immigration question that might be proposed at the Washington Conference”; Draft telegram to Ambassador Shidehara, 10 October 1921; The 6th meeting of the Foreign-Army-Navy Ministry consultation, 9 December 1921.
The problem [of the Open Door in the Pacific] is a strong weapon in our hands to defend our Empire's position at the conference and to bring about a thoroughgoing realization of our demands, while it is also meant as a means of restraining [the Anglo-American powers] from raising and discussing problems of China and Siberia.\textsuperscript{36}

That the Japanese government was grimly prepared, if necessary, to resort to such an extreme course attests to the tenacity with which it held to special interests and faits accomplis. The Open Door in the Pacific, ostensibly purporting the language of the New Diplomacy, was in actuality the last gasp of the Old Diplomacy. The policymaking process described above shows that the initial steps for “positive” and cooperative foreign policy—the New Diplomacy—were compelled to retreat because of standpattism on special interests in Manchuria—the Old Diplomacy. It was fortunate for the success of the Washington Conference that American policy at the conference turned out to be so “friendly” that there never arose the occasion to raise the Open Door in the Pacific.

In deciding policy toward Japan, Secretary Hughes assumed unusual leadership. The Republican administration, with ties to business interests, was concerned with economic relations and desired international cooperation with Japan. Hughes frankly told Shidehara, “The United States desires to eliminate all the sources of conflict and misunderstanding in the Far East in a fresh and friendly spirit.”\textsuperscript{37} Shidehara trusted Hughes and cabled home, “Hughes is not the kind of person whose judgment is easily swayed by what his subordinates say.” He would come to his own conclusions based on broader political considerations.\textsuperscript{38} Justice Louis Brandeis is said to have once called Hughes “the most enlightened mind of the eighteenth century.” Hughes brought his rationalist and legalistic approach to bear on his policy. In this respect, his policy may be said to have partook of the New Diplomacy. His view of world order was basically Wilsonian in that it sought internationalist cooperation among liberal-capitalist nations and considered Japan an important partner. Thus, he came to harbor a friendly sentiment toward Japan. Unlike Wilson’s policy, however, Hughes’s diplomacy was realistic in the sense that it pursued “concrete and achievable goals” and aimed at reasonable settlement of disputes through compromise. This augured well of adjustment with Japan at the conference.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{38} From Shidehara to Uchida, 14 August 1921.

\textsuperscript{39} For Hughes’s foreign policy, see Betty Glad, \textit{Charles Evans Hughes and the Illusion of American Innocence: A Study in American Diplomacy} (Urbana, IL, 1966); John Chalmers Vinson,
Hughes’s views were in many ways similar to those of Shidehara. Shidehara also believed in economic internationalism; the road to peace lay in an interdependent economic order. Shidehara aimed at peaceful cooperation through a policy of “live and let live.” This fundamental identity of views between the two protagonists reinforced their mutual trust and became an important human factor in the settlements achieved at the Washington Conference.

On the American side, a crucial factor for rapprochement with Japan was a partial retreat from Wilsonian New Diplomacy and a partial return to the realist tradition of Theodore Roosevelt, a master of the Old Diplomacy. Hughes’s primary aims were to reconfirm the Open Door principles and write them into a multilateral treaty, but he faced the problem of how to handle Japan’s anticipated opposition. He had been warned by State Department officials that Japan would strenuously demand that its special interest in Manchuria be recognized. It was an old conflict between America’s “milieu goal” (the Open Door principles) and Japan’s “possessive goal” (special interests in Manchuria). Washington’s aim was to establish rules of conduct, the equality of commercial opportunity, and to create an international environment that would allow China to establish a stable, unified, and autonomous government free from fear of foreign intervention—the principles that accorded with the New Diplomacy. The U.S. government feared that this “milieu goal” would come into conflict with Japan’s “possessive goal,” its special interests in Manchuria—in short, the Old Diplomacy.

Cables from Far Eastern posts as well as memoranda prepared by the Far Eastern Division had been warning Hughes that because Japan regarded as “vital” the protection of resources and economic control of Manchuria, it might take forceful measures to defend its “paramount position.” In a perceptive memorandum to the American delegation, Edwin L. Neville, a Japan specialist in the Far Eastern Division, pinpointed America’s weak position: “Our Open Door policy . . . cannot be sustained without force.” “The United States has never been willing to supply force [to defend the Open Door]. . . . Besides, we have at different times openly acknowledged the status quo, when we knew what that involved, and even recognized the special interests of Japan.” Neville was referring to the Lansing-Ishii Agreement of 1917. Charles P. Anderson, former counselor of the State Department and a member of the American delegation,
handed Hughes a copy of a letter President Theodore Roosevelt had written to his successor William H. Taft in 1910 when the latter provoked Japan by a proposal to neutralize Manchurian railways:

It is peculiarly our interest not to take any steps as regards Manchuria which would give the Japanese cause to feel, with or without reason, that we are hostile to them, or a menace—in however slight a degree—to their interests. And as regards Manchuria, if the Japanese choose to follow a course of conduct to which we are adverse, we cannot stop it unless we are prepared to war.43

This realist legacy of the past master of the Old Diplomacy must have been a powerful reminder to Hughes. Paying attention to these recommendations, Hughes forged a policy of his own. He was sensitive to public opinion and the polls showed that the American people overwhelmingly demanded naval limitation, while few had interest in Far Eastern issues. It followed that he could not afford to antagonize Japan for fear of jeopardizing naval limitation. On the other hand, the U.S. Senate might not approve a naval treaty if Far Eastern issues were left unsolved. Hughes had to strike a balance.

Recommendations pointed to a cautious approach. Hughes would oppose, in his words, Japan’s “aggressive” policy of “political domination or a discrimination in her favor” but he was willing to recognize “natural and legitimate economic opportunities for Japan.”44 Regarding Japan’s “legitimate interests,” there were differences among the American delegates and representatives. Herbert Hoover, secretary of commerce and a member of the advisory committee with whom Hughes conferred on the China question, emphasized that given dependence on Chinese resources, “Japan certainly had legitimate reasons” for its continental policy. Having lived in China as an engineer, he had doubts about China’s potential for westernization. On the other hand, he admired the Japanese and sympathized with their plight. He felt that faced with the chaotic condition in China, Japan needed to protect its special interests.45

Elihu Root, one of the American delegates and the genro of the Republican party, was outspoken in defense of Japan’s “legitimate interests.” He was a masterful practitioner of the Old Diplomacy, having served as Roosevelt’s secretary of state. In 1908 he concluded the Root-Takahira Agreement, which implicitly recognized Japan’s special interests in Manchuria. He regarded Japan

44. FRUS, 1922, 1:1–2 (italics added).
as a peacekeeping power in the Far East. He sympathized with Japan’s feeling that the powers had thwarted its legitimate claims. And he felt Americans must graduate from their sentimental attitude of protecting China and recognize the cold logic of Japan’s position in East Asia. As Richard W. Leopold, Root’s biographer, has written, he “hoped . . . that Japan would become the England of the Orient, with a constitutional form of government, a freedom from excessive territorial ambition, and a desire to promote stability and equality of commercial opportunity in a troubled area.” Believing that “moderate” and “liberal” elements were in control of the Tokyo government, Root advocated a manifestly friendly policy calculated to give strength to these elements. Root’s pro-Japanese views were not entirely shared by Hughes and State Department officials. On his part, Root, a throwback to the days of the Old Diplomacy, did not fully appreciate the changes that had taken place in American policy during the Wilson era. He often negotiated personally with the Japanese delegates or through his intermediaries without telling his American colleagues or State Department specialists.

The most comprehensive recommendation was presented by J. Reuben Clark, special counsel to the State Department and Hughes’s assistant. He injected Rooseveltian realism, and here is a synopsis of his lengthy memorandum:

1. America’s “only prime and great concern” is the “security” of the United States in the Pacific region. While the problem of naval limitation is of vital importance, Far Eastern questions are only secondary.
2. Balance of power must be maintained in the Pacific and the Far East. If one power (Japan) becomes overwhelmingly dominant, it will threaten the American territories (the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, etc.).
4. “The doctrine of special relationship must be agreed upon. Japan is right in her claim that she has a special relationship in China.” He added that it was important that the conference “not busy itself with an attempt to expose and punish the individual wrongs of the past.”
5. Every effort must be made to remove Japanese suspicion and fear of the United States.

In giving priority to America’s security in the Pacific and frankly calling for recognition of Japan’s special interests, Clark’s memorandum was clearly in line with Roosevelt’s realism. This memorandum appears here because most of the points were incorporated in Hughes’s policy at the conference.

However, one point, Japan’s special interests, baffled Hughes. He tended to relate issues simply because of his legal approach and was prone to ignore ambiguity not easily defined in international law. He opposed reconfirming or even bringing up in the negotiations Japan’s special interests. For the moment, he would proceed on the basis of the status quo. He gave his views in his instructions to the American delegation:

That the only real yellow peril lay in the exploitation of China by an imperialistic Japanese government; that he had gone along on the theory always that this country would never go to war over any aggression on the part of Japan in China, and that consequently the most that could be done would be to stay Japan’s hand, and that . . . nothing should be done in such a way as to offer a pretext for Japan to enter upon any further acts of aggression. 48

Such was the extent of Hughes’s Far Eastern policy. Like Root, Hughes also rejected a hard-line policy that might provoke Japan’s “military party”; instead he would pursue a friendly policy that would bolster its liberal-moderate elements and promote Japanese-American cooperation.

On 12 November, at the opening session of the Washington Conference, Hughes resorted to the technique of the New Diplomacy. Dramatically in his initial address he presented the famous “bombshell proposal” stipulating a drastic naval limitation. To many present there, it seemed like an adventure in Wilsonian diplomacy (“an open covenant openly arrived at”). 49 Sugimura, a member of the Japanese delegation, wrote with some exaggeration: “Court diplomacy and bureaucratic diplomacy have become things of distant past. The new age is no longer satisfied even with people’s diplomacy; it demands public diplomacy.” 50 What Hughes, and fellow American delegates, too, calculated was that his thoroughgoing proposal for naval limitation would instantly receive such overwhelming support—not only of the American people but of world public opinion—that Japan would have no choice but to accept it. Hughes also linked the naval question with Far Eastern issues. If naval limitation should be jeopardized by Japan’s obstructionism regarding Far Eastern problems, it would be condemned by the whole world, so Japan would perforce have to take a conciliatory position. On both counts Hughes proved correct, as a look at the Japanese side of the picture would show. The most urgent and important task for the Japanese delegates was to wipe out the stigma of a “militaristic” and “aggressive” nation and salvage it from diplomatic isolation. They did their very best to

48. Minutes of the 13th meeting of the United States Delegation, 7 December 1921, Papers of the American Delegation to the Washington Conference, 500.A41/12, SDA.
persuade the Tokyo government time and again to accept compromise solutions in the interest of a successful conference.\textsuperscript{51}

Hughes’s design was to start the whole process of Pacific détente. For this purpose the United States would take the initiative by demonstrating its friendly attitude toward Japan. Root secretly apprised the Japanese delegate Hanihara that the United States had proposed drastic naval limitation at the outset to assure Japan that it had no hostile intentions. Hughes was careful to avoid any threat; he would rely on persuasion and moral force of public opinion.\textsuperscript{52} This relieved the Japanese enormously.

Hughes liberally sprinkled his opening address and public discussions with the rhetoric of the New Diplomacy—that of peace and liberal democracy—but his secret negotiations on Far Eastern problems were none too different from the give and take and mutual compromise that characterized the Old Diplomacy. With regard to Asian-Pacific questions he avoided public appeals, which could have only clashed and exacerbated relations with Japan. Instead, he would reach compromise solutions through quiet behind-the-scene negotiations.

Root kept close liaison with his friend Hanihara, one of the Japanese delegates, and played a crucial role. A veteran of the Old Diplomacy, Root told Hanihara that he saw Japan’s China policy as similar to America’s “big stick” diplomacy in Central America. He told Hanihara, “I fully understand that Japan’s expedition to China, like American expeditions to Cuba and Haiti, had some good reasons, but it is difficult to make the American people understand this.” He advised withdrawing soon, handling the matter adroitly. (Hughes, not to mention the Far Eastern Division of the State Department, would have been surprised to hear what he was confiding to Hanihara.) Root counted on the statesmanship of enlightened leaders in Japan who appreciated the interrelatedness of nations. He told Hanihara that he was “willing to offer as much sympathetic assistance to Japan as possible.” He was sympathetic that every one of the Japanese delegates ran a risk of assassination when they returned if they agreed to anything that might be regarded as inimical to the interests of Japan.\textsuperscript{53}

But there was a limit beyond which Root could not go as an American delegate, so he employed Stanley Washburn, a secretary of the American delegation and a pro-Japanese journalist, as a confidential go-between. Hanihara told Washburn that Japan would absolutely oppose any attempt to undermine the status quo in Manchuria or weaken Japan’s special interests and influence there.\textsuperscript{54}


\textsuperscript{52} Hanihara Masanao to Uchida, 5 December 1921, FMA; Anderson Diary, 26 November 1921.

\textsuperscript{53} Hanihara to Uchida, 5 December 1921 and 24 January 1922.

The resolution that Root introduced to the Far Eastern Committee of the conference on 21 November became the nucleus of the Nine-Power Treaty relating to China, so it is necessary to examine its genesis. A. Whitney Griswold in his classic study, *The Far Eastern Policy of the United States*, wrote that the Nine-Power Treaty was “the most dynamic and the most comprehensive attempt” to confine “the hungry expansionism of Japan.” However, Japanese archival evidence shows that the treaty was nothing of the sort: it represented yet another example of ambiguous Japanese-American compromise in the tradition of the Root-Takahira Agreement and the Lansing-Ishii Agreement—with one important difference: this time the Open Door principles were written into a multilateral treaty.

While drafting his resolution, Root anticipated that the Japanese “would undoubtedly insist upon maintaining their hold on Manchuria,” and he admitted that “a good deal was to be said” in favor of Japan’s attempt to strengthen its position there.56 With this in mind, Root phrased the fourth clause of his resolution that pledged the signatories to refrain “from countenancing action inimical to the security of [signatory] powers (italics added).” Whose “security” could be threatened in China? As we have seen, it had been Japan’s traditional contention that its special interests in Manchuria were vital to its “national defense and economic existence.” The “security clause,” then, is to be understood as America’s implicit recognition of Japanese claim to special interests. This impression was reinforced by Root’s having lifted the clause from the American note to Japan of 16 March 1920 at the time of formation of the four-power China consortium. This note stated in part:

> There would appear to be no occasion [for Japan] to apprehend on the part of the Consortium any activities directed against the economic life or national defense of Japan. It is therefore felt that Japan could with entire assurance rely upon the good faith of the United States and of the other two Powers associated in the Consortium [Britain and France] to refuse their countenance to any operation inimical to the vital interests of Japan.57

One detects here a thread of continuity running from the Root-Takahira Agreement of 1908 through the Lansing-Ishii Agreement of 1917 to the Nine-Power

---

57. *FRUS, 1920*, 1:1512–13 (italics added). This note was in response to the Japanese demand of 2 March 1920: “In matters . . . relating to loans affecting South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia which in their opinion are calculated to create a serious impediment to the security of the economic life and national defense of Japan, the Japanese Government reserves the right to take the necessary steps to guarantee such security” (*FRUS, 1920*, 1:500–503, italics added). For a detailed treatment of formation of the new four-power China consortium, see Asada, “Japan and the United States,” 83–109.
Treaty of 1922 so far as Japan’s “special interests” were concerned. It was hardly an instrument of the New Diplomacy. No wonder that Root assured Japanese delegates through a secret channel, “There will be no change whatsoever in Japan’s present position in Manchuria.”

Not satisfied with an *implicit* recognition contained in the “security clause,” Foreign Minister Uchida instructed Shidehara to rephrase the Root Resolution “so that it would not restrain Japan’s rightful actions accruing from its special interests based on its geographic propinquity to China”—frankly Japan’s “possessive goal.” This instruction, calling for a public reconfirmation of the “Manchurian-Mongolian reservation” (read “exclusion”), seemed like another attempt to write the Lansing-Ishii Agreement, a document of the Old Diplomacy, into a new treaty. Shidehara protested that such a demarche would run counter to the Open Door principles (America’s “milieu goal”) to which the Japanese delegates had already and openly subscribed “without condition or reservation.” He cabled, “It is not the guiding principle of our diplomacy to establish a definite exception to the principle of the Open Door and equality of opportunity.” If Japan demanded the “Manchurian-Mongolian reservation,” Shidehara warned, the United States and China would denounce it as an attempt to reassert monopolistic and exclusive rights and establish a sphere of influence in Manchuria and Mongolia. The conflict between the Old Diplomacy and the New, never resolved in pre-conference days, reappeared at the Washington Conference and a clash seemed imminent between Shidehara’s policy of cooperating with the United States and Uchida’s policy of having special interests acknowledged. However, Shidehara adroitly persuaded Uchida by assuring that the Root Resolution’s security clause would serve the same purpose as an explicit reference to special interests. On his part, Root, who never thought much of his resolution, said that this would have “the advantage of making the Nine-Power Treaty look as if the Conference had accomplished something.”

Other Far Eastern questions need to be briefly sketched. The Shandong question, according to Japan’s original position, was “a problem of sole concern” to Japan and China—Old Diplomacy. Japan opposed any American interference or mediation. Root was aware of the strong stand Japan had taken on Shandong. Shidehara, however, cabled Uchida that the question had become a Japanese-American issue “because of the Senate controversy over the ratification of the Versailles treaty.” Secretly, Hanihara warned Washburn forcefully: “If Japan should succumb to American pressure, the Japanese government would collapse.

---

59. Uchida to the Delegates, 3 December 1921.
60. Delegates to Uchida, 22 January 1922.
61. Anderson Diary, 27 December 1921 (italics added).
within twenty-four hours.” In reporting to Root, Washburn emphatically stated that Japan must be “helped to extricate itself from the present difficulty.” It was all-important to give Japan an opportunity to withdraw with honor. Above all, the conference must avoid provoking or isolating Japan.63

The Republican party had attacked the “rape of Shandong” during the Senate controversy over the ratification of the Versailles Treaty, so the settlement of this question was a political imperative for the Harding administration, without which the ratification of the naval treaty was in doubt. It was fortunate that at this juncture both Hughes and Shidehara could put themselves in the other’s shoes. Shidehara understood that the Shandong issue was more important politically to the United States than to Japan. Keenly aware of the American government’s predicament and to help it out, he urged Tokyo to make one compromise after another.64 Like Hughes, Shidehara linked Shandong with naval limitation and tried to solve both in the context of Japanese-American détente.

During the last stage of the Japanese-Chinese negotiations, after the Japanese made their “final concession,” Hughes turned to put pressure on China, siding with Japan. When Stanley K. Hornbeck, a pro-Chinese and anti-Japanese member of the Far Eastern Division, protested, Hughes retorted, “Japan has felt the full pressure that the situation admits. It should be remembered that she has her own opinion and the prestige and position of her Government to consider. . . . There are certain limits beyond which she will not go.”65 Hughes ruled that Japan should withdraw from Shandong with honor and on its own initiative. And this Japan faithfully did after the conference, in late October 1922. Whereas Wilson, the champion of the New Diplomacy, had fought a diplomatic feud with Japan and lost at Paris, the more pragmatic Harding administration carefully avoided confrontation with Japan and obtained a settlement that satisfied the Senate.

One remaining question was withdrawal of troops from Siberia. Members of the Russian Division of the State Department urged Hughes to apply “strong moral pressure” but Hughes, just as he had regarding the Shandong question, rejected this recommendation, saying that there was no means of “driving the Japanese troops out of Siberia without going to war.”66 He quietly settled the matter with Shidehara so that Japan would pledge the troop withdrawal on its own initiative, a pledge that was honored in October 1922.

Abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance—a prime symbol of the Old Diplomacy—was a prerequisite for a treaty of naval limitation, but it would have

63. Washburn to Root, 30 October 1921; Washburn’s memo for Root, 26 November 1921, Washburn Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University.
64. Delegates to Uchida, 20 and 31 December 1921, and 9 January 1922.
65. Hughes’s memo for information of E. T. Williams and Stanley K. Hornbeck, 26 January 1922, 793.04/1265, SDA.
66. DeWitt Poole’s memo for Hughes, 10 and 11 January 1922; Hughes to Root, 31 January 1922, Hughes Papers; Delegates to Uchida, 25 January 1922.
been delicate for a third party to demand termination. Working on the drafts presented by Shidehara and British delegate Arthur Balfour, Hughes transformed them into “a general and harmless international agreement.” First, he limited the scope of its application to the Pacific islands, so that it would guarantee the status quo of the Pacific, which meant the security of the Philippines. Second, he made it a four-power treaty by including France. This was intended to remove any impression of an exclusive political pact with Japan and Britain which the Senate might construe as in the nature of an alliance, the Old Diplomacy in new form. The result was the Four-Power Treaty. For the United States it was a diplomatic triumph, in that it terminated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the hated symbol of the Old Diplomacy, and demilitarized the western Pacific. Japan and Britain accepted the new treaty because they gave priority to naval arms limitation and good relations with the United States. Although Japan lost the alliance, it was saved from diplomatic isolation and had its security and economic development assured by the new system of interrelated treaties—the Washington System—that consisted of the Five-Power Treaty of naval limitation, the Four-Power Treaty, and the Nine-Power Treaty.

All in all, the Japanese government positively responded to America’s détente diplomacy and gladly joined the Washington System. Peaceful economic cooperation, embodied in Shidehara diplomacy, became the mainstream of Japanese foreign policy. This turnabout could be noted in the remarkable improvement in the Japanese attitude toward the United States. Japanese delegates were relieved at the unexpectedly “sympathetic attitude” of American delegates and appreciated American efforts “not to hurt our feelings or honor.” The delegates reported: “American attitude toward Japan is surprisingly friendly and favorable when compared with the Japanese-American confrontation at the Paris Peace Conference.” “We have ascertained,” the delegates happily reported toward the end of the conference, “that the policy of the American government is on the whole pro-Japanese.” Shidehara declared, “There is no doubt that Hughes has respected Japan’s position as much as possible.”

Chief delegate Katō Tomosaburō, who as head delegate masterfully handled the naval negotiations, cabled: “Here in Washington we delegates have hardly imagined any such thing as Anglo-American oppression.” He especially wanted to emphasize this point, for upon return to Tokyo he publicly declared: “I hear that some people are prejudiced and think that Japan was subjected to Anglo-American coercion at the conference, but as one who directly participated in the negotiations, I can categorically state that this was not the case.”

68. Delegates to Uchida, 2 December 1921.
69. Delegates to Uchida, 5 December 1921; Shidehara to Uchida, 26 January 1922.
70. Navy Minister Katō to Vice-Minister Ide, 16 January 1922; Asahi (Tokyo), 13 March 1922.
It is clear that both Shidehara and Hughes held a broad and long-range vision of cooperative relations that went beyond individual treaties and agreements of the conference. What was important, they believed, was trust, rapport, and mutual confidence that alone could ensure treaties and agreements. Hughes proclaimed the conference had dissipated war clouds with a “new atmosphere” of peace and harmony, which he called “the spirit of the Washington Conference.”\(^71\) For the Japanese, the conference became the starting point of “Shidehara diplomacy.” When appointed foreign minister in June 1924, he explained his diplomatic position in the following words:

Machiavellian stratagem and aggressive policy are now things of the past. Our diplomacy must follow the path of justice and peace. . . . In short, Japan hopes to adhere to and enlarge the lofty spirits that are shown both explicitly and implicitly in the Paris Peace Treaty and the treaties and agreements of the Washington Conference.\(^72\)

Admiral Katō, known for his reticence, spoke eloquently about the New Diplomacy:

The conference succeeded because the participating nations agreed on the pressing need to establish world peace and alleviate the burden [of armaments]. And these two aims can be accomplished only by freeing ourselves from the old world of exclusive competition among the powers and by creating the new world of international competition.\(^73\)

The Japanese leaders of the democratic movement blessed the Washington System in hyperbolic terms. The leading Wilsonian thinker, Yoshino Sakuzō, wrote: “The Four-Power Treaty was concluded as the result of complete change in men’s minds. The important thing is this renovation of the spirit, in comparison with which individual treaties are not important.” He saw the Washington Conference as “an irrepressive manifestation of international democracy.”\(^74\) There were abundant expressions of conviction that the era of New Diplomacy had arrived. Hayashi Kiroku, a diplomatic historian who accompanied the delegation, wrote, “We must be resolved to conduct the New Diplomacy in accord with the new era.”\(^75\)

As stated, the platform of Wilsonian New Diplomacy had included reduction of armaments and it was successfully achieved at the Washington Conference in the form of the Five-Power Treaty. For Admiral Katō Tomosaburō, navy min-

\(^{71}\) Memo of Hughes’s interview with Charles Addis, 30 March 1922, Hughes Papers; Charles Evans Hughes, *The Pathway of Peace* (New York, 1925), 575–83.


\(^{73}\) *Asahi* (Tokyo), 13 March 1922.


\(^{75}\) Hayashi Kiroku, “Kafu kaigi to waga teikoku” [The Washington Conference and our Empire], *Gaikō jibō* (1 May 1922): 2.
ister and head delegate, the overriding aim was to improve relations with the United States. This dictated acceptance of a compromise, the battleship ratio of 10:6 vis-à-vis the United States. In making this decision, he took into consideration Japan’s limits in national power and assumed “a large view” of naval security that embraced economic, political, and diplomatic factors. However, within the Japanese navy there were forces vehemently opposed to the Washington treaty from the beginning. Vice-Admiral Katō Kanji (no relation), chief naval adviser, violently opposed it, absolutely demanding a 10:7 ratio as a strategic imperative. Admiral Katō, with his towering and charismatic leadership, quashed Kanji’s spirited resistance. He could scold, overrule, and silence Kanji but he could never persuade him about the 10:6 ratio. Kanji’s star rose with Tomosaburō’s untimely death in August 1923, then prime minister. What followed was a gradual erosion of the Washington System as far as the Japanese navy was concerned. But it is well to remember that despite internal discontent, Japan held fast to the Washington System of naval limitation for fourteen years—until 1936, but this is a subject which I have examined in the context of naval history.

In conclusion, during the period under review, Japanese policy moved from the Old Diplomacy of the World War I era to the New Diplomacy represented by Shidehara, while American policy receded from Wilsonian New Diplomacy in the direction of the Old Diplomacy in Theodore Roosevelt’s tradition. The Washington System emerged when the two movements intersected.

---

Copyright of Diplomatic History is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.