

“Nanyō” in the Rise of a Global Japan, 1919–1931

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“The history of world civilization, which began in the Mediterranean and passed through an Atlantic era is now moving to a Pacific Age (*Taiheiyō jidai*).”

—Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, 1928¹

Monday, April 16, 1923, marked a giant step for Japan’s imperial family. After four days of rough seas, Crown Prince Hirohito disembarked into the comfortable 75-degree climate of the “land of perpetual summer.”² Although Taiwan had been incorporated in 1895, this was the first time that an heir to the Japanese throne had set foot in the southernmost reaches of the formal Japanese empire. Befitting the magnitude of the occasion, the prince was welcomed by a 21-gun salute, a hundred fully dressed ships and a throng of native peoples.³ From April 16 to 27, Hirohito visited schools, factories, military installations, and shrines throughout the island. On April 18, he met with over 500 aborigines, including 45 tribal leaders, and enjoyed an animated display of native dance.⁴ As the headline of the pictorial coverage in Japan’s most popular bi-weekly, *The Sun* (*Taiyō*), read, “Taiwan Overjoyed.”⁵

Just four years earlier, Japanese delegates had sat at the victors’ table at the Paris Peace Conference, an irrefutable affirmation of Japan’s rise, for the first time in history, to the rank of world power. At the same time, Japan had been entrusted with the Marshall, Mariana, and Caroline Islands in the South Pacific as League of Nations mandates for its robust support of the Allied cause during the First World War. The new status as world power and Pacific empire had a significant impact on Japan’s previously unwavering attention to the Asian continent. Some statesmen even came to consider the southern reaches as Japan’s natural arena of association. Accompanying Hirohito on his tour, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Makino Nobuaki highlighted the remarkable similarities between native dances in Taiwan and Japan. Women’s steps in Taipei resembled those in Japan’s *obon* dances, and the men’s movements reminded Makino of Kagoshima dances. “I cannot but feel,” declared the lord keeper, “that some of our ancestors shared their origins with the people of this solitary island.”⁶

¹ Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, “Taiheiyō mondai,” *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, Feb. 3, 1928, p. 6.

² Hatano Sumio, et al., eds., *Jijū bukanchō Nara Takeji nikki kaisōroku*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 342–43 (diary entries of Apr. 12–16, 1923). “Sassōtaru goeishi o haishite kanki ni moyuru zentōmin,” *Ōsaka asahi shinbun*, Apr. 17, 1923; reprinted in Katō Hidetoshi et al., ed., *Shinbun shūroku Taishōshi*, 15 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō Shuppan, 1978), vol. 11, p. 140.

³ “Sassōtaru goeishi o haishite kanki ni moyuru zentōmin,” p. 140.

⁴ “Prince Regent,” *The Japan Weekly Chronicle*, Apr. 19, 1923, p. 551.

⁵ “Kanki afururu Taiwan,” *Taiyō* 29, no. 7 (June 1, 1923), front.

⁶ Itō Takashi and Hirose Yoshihiro, eds., *Makino Nobuaki nikki* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1990), p. 75 (diary entry of Apr. 18, 1923).

Changing Standards of Empire in Japan

Mark Peattie and Komatsu Kazuhiko have vividly described the long tradition of Japanese individuals who turned their attention to the South Seas from the latter nineteenth century.⁷ But the powerful feeling of affinity with southern peoples articulated by a man of Makino’s stature—at the center of Japan’s ruling circle—was no more possible before the Great War than Japanese visions of a modern empire in Asia before the latter nineteenth century. The arrival of great power imperialism had, in the latter nineteenth century, produced an entirely new conception of foreign affairs in Japan—a vision of modern conquest on the Asian continent. Similarly, the First World War dramatically transformed conceptions of Japan’s place in the world.

The First World War did not intrude directly on Japanese shores as had American Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853. But the war, like Perry, marked a fundamental repositioning. The founders of Imperial Japan had pursued continental empire as an expression of Japanese “wealth and strength.” Similarly, Japanese statesmen after World War I revised their notion of empire to conform to the new post-Versailles vogue of economic expansion and peace. As Prime Minister Hara Takashi declared in 1920, “it goes without saying that, from now on, there is no alternative but to rely upon international trade to promote our national strength.”⁸

The Japanese empire clearly assumed a new character in the decade following the First World War. By 1922, the empire retracted for the first time in history with the withdrawal of troops from Shandong (China) and Siberia. Between 1919 and 1936, civilian administrators replaced military authorities in the administration of Japan’s first formal colony, Taiwan. By 1923, strategic attention shifted from the continent to the oceans; the United States replaced Russia as the principal potential enemy in the Basic Plan of National Defense. The cabinets of the Kenseikai and its successor Minseitō followed an unmistakable path of non-intervention in China in the latter half of the decade (1924–1927, 1929–1931). Japanese trade more than quadrupled between 1910 and 1929. And the United States far outstripped China as Japan’s principal trading partner throughout the 1920s.⁹

Pacific Islands and a New Imperial Japan

The most fundamental shift in the Japanese empire in the interwar era was a dramatic redirection of geographic attention in Tokyo. In 1853, Commodore Perry had compelled Japanese statesmen

⁷ Peattie names Minister of Communications (1885–1889) Enomoto Takeaki, co-founder of the South Seas Assembly Yoko’o Tōsaku 横尾東作, writer Shiga Shigetaka, Tosa journalist Hattori Tōru, Foreign Ministry employee Suzuki Tsunenori, farmer and trader Mizutani Shinroku, journalist and politician Taguchi Ukichi and trader Mori Koben. See Mark R. Peattie, *Nanyō: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia, 1885–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1988), chap. 1. For more recent coverage, with special attention to Mori Koben, see Komatsu Kazuhiko, “Nanyō ni watatta sōshi Mori Koben ‘Nanyō guntō’ izen no Nihon mikuroneshia kōryūshi no ichidanmen,” in *Kindai Nihon no tashazō to jigazō*, ed. Shinohara Tōru (Tokyo: Kashiwa shobō, 2001), pp. 195–233.

⁸ “Rikken Seiyūkai Tōkai taikai ni okeru enzetsu (Dec. 5, 1920),” in *Hara Takashi zenshū*, 2 vols., ed. Hara Takashi Jisshū Kankōkai (Tokyo: Hara shobō, 1969), vol. 2, p. 931; quoted in Kawada Minoru, *Hara Takashi: Tenkanki no kōsō* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1995), p. 174.

⁹ For in-depth coverage of these developments, see Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 6.

to replace their vision of a Japan-centric trade regime with a continental empire based on European models of expansion. As foreign minister in the 1880s, Inoue Kaoru had declared that Japan aimed to “establish a new, European-style empire on the edge of Asia.”¹⁰ Similarly, the First World War redirected Japan’s focus from the Asian continent to the globe. No longer did Tokyo aspire simply to be the “leader of civilization in East Asia,” as proclaimed by celebrated man of letters Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1882.¹¹ “Isn’t there a need,” Yoshino Sakuzō observed in 1919, “to revise the Japanese peoples’ ideal of continental development?”¹² Future Japanese Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, who accompanied the Japanese delegation to Paris in 1919, described a new Japanese responsibility to “look out for countries without any shared interests (with ourselves).”¹³

Japan amply lived up to this new spirit of internationalism by fully participating in the array of treaties concluded in the 1920s aimed to preserve the postwar peace: the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations Covenant, the Four-Power Treaty, the Five-Power Treaty, the Nine-Power Treaty, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, to name a few. Konoe and his peers willingly supported this change of focus because it was the key to unprecedented lofty status on the international stage. A Japanese hand in constructing the new global infrastructure of peace after 1918 was the surest way to maintain Japan’s newfound status as world power. As plenipotentiary to Paris Saionji Kinmochi noted in 1919, “at the Peace Conference, our country did not simply preserve good relations with the powers. The conference was an opportunity to noticeably raise the international status of the Empire.”¹⁴

But the redirection of geographic attention in Tokyo also had a more tangible, local impulse. In the brief military engagement against Imperial Germany at the outset of the Great War, Japan had acquired territory in an area far from her traditional continental focus: the South Pacific. A new national discussion on Pacific affairs was a natural outgrowth of Japan’s new physical presence in the Marshall, Mariana, and Caroline Islands after September 1914. And it offers one of the most concrete demonstrations of a change of imperial focus in interwar Japan.

The Asia/Pacific at Paris and Washington

The shift of priorities from the Asian continent to the Pacific is vividly illustrated in the change in focus of discussions on Asia at the Paris (1919) and Washington Conferences (1921–22). The disposition of Shandong province, China, loomed large in discussions between the United States and Japan in 1919. Bilateral wrangling over Shandong, in fact, played a decisive role in U.S. Senate

¹⁰ Quoted in Marius B. Jansen, “Modernization and Foreign Policy in Meiji Japan,” in *Political Development in Modern Japan: Studies in the Modernization of Japan*, ed. Robert E. Ward (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 175.

¹¹ Quoted in Miwa Kimitada, “Fukuzawa Yukichi’s ‘Departure from Asia:’ A Prelude to the Sino-Japanese War,” in *Japan’s Modern Century*, ed. Edmund Skrzypczak (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1968), p. 12.

¹² Yoshino Sakuzō, “Jinshuteki sabetsu teppei undōsha ni atau,” *Chūō kōron* 34, no. 3 (Mch. 1919), p. 72.

¹³ Konoe Fumimaro, *Sengo Ōbei kenbunroku* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981), p. 48.

¹⁴ Speech of September 8, 1919. Quoted in Ritsumeikan Daigaku Saionji Kinmochi den Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Saionji Kinmochi den*, 6 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), vol. 3, p. 321.

rejection of the Treaty of Versailles, and it is frequently described as a prelude to subsequent bilateral tensions over China.¹⁵

Shandong appeared on the agenda again at Washington in 1921. But Tokyo and Beijing quickly came to terms over the territory when Japanese plenipotentiary Shidehara Kijūrō formally pledged to withdraw Japanese troops. As Kenseikai party orator Ozaki Yukio observed on the eve of the naval conference, Shandong was a “minor concern” (*sho mondai*) in 1921 in the context of the many issues that now loomed in the Pacific.¹⁶

For many contemporaries, the Washington Conference represented the ascendance of the Pacific in world affairs. Although he had led the movement against the League of Nations in the U.S. Senate in 1919, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge enthusiastically promoted the Four-Power Pact at Washington because it would form the foundation of a “Pan-Pacific League of Nations.” As he had informed director of the Pan-Pacific Union Alexander Hume Ford three years prior, a truly effective League of Nations would have to begin in the Pacific, “where the traditions are traditions of peace. Europe is not the place for the start to be made.”¹⁷ In 1927, British civil servant Sir Frederick Whyte confirmed that “it has become a commonplace in recent times to say that the future of peace and war lies in the Pacific.”¹⁸

Talking Pacific in Imperial Japan

While the Washington Conference turned the eyes of the world ever eastward, a new vogue for all things Pacific consumed life in Tokyo. Three private organizations dedicated to matters of the Pacific emerged in Tokyo in the early 1920s: the Pacific League (*Taiheiyō renmei*) under Prince Tokugawa Iesato, the Pacific Club (*Taiheiyō kurabu*) led by Viscount Inoue, and the Japanese Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations (*Taiheiyō mondai chōsakai*), headed by financier Inoue Junnosuke.¹⁹ While the first two of these were principally local assemblies for periodic discussions of Pacific affairs, the Japanese Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations was, as the title indicates, the Japanese branch of a major new international organization. As such, it accentuates Japan’s serious commitment to the new postwar infrastructure of peace.

To celebrate the new era of peace, Tokyo hosted a massive Peace Exposition in Ueno Park from March through July 1922. Beginning the day of the Japanese delegates’ return from the Washington Conference, the four-month extravaganza was the largest Japanese expo to date, featuring fifty pavilions, a 110,000 square meter natural lake, a “peace tower” and a “peace bell.”²⁰ According to the

¹⁵ See, for example, Russell H. Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East: The Diplomacy of the Shantung Question* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1965).

¹⁶ Ozaki, “Gunbi shukushō kaigi ni saishi Nihon kokumin no kakusei o unagasu,” *Kokusai renmei* 1, no. 7 (Oct. 1921), p. 4.

¹⁷ “Four-Power Pact Foundation of Pan-Pacific League,” *The Japan Times & Mail*, Feb. 10, 1922, p. 7.

¹⁸ Sir Frederick Whyte, “Opening Statement for the British Group,” in *Problems of the Pacific: Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 15 to 29, 1927*, ed. John B. Condliffe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 23–9. Quoted in Pekka Korhonen, “The Pacific Age in World History,” *Journal of World History* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), p. 61.

¹⁹ Kiyosawa Kiyoshi makes special mention of these three organizations in Kiyosawa, “Taiheiyō mondai,” p. 6.

²⁰ “Kazoekirenai fushimatsu: hanashi no hazure no heiwahaku,” *Hōchi shinbun*, Mch. 16, 1923; reprinted in Katō et al., ed., *Shinbun shūroku Taishōshi*, vol. 10, p. 112.

monthly, *Jitsugyō no Nihon*, the face of a New Japan (*atarashii Nihon*) was evident in the names of the geographically disparate pavilions on display—a Hokkaido Pavilion, Karafuto Pavilion, Korea Pavilion, Taiwan Pavilion, even a South Seas Pavilion.²¹

Visitors to the Peace Exposition encountered a Japan like never before. The South Seas Pavilion was decorated inside and out with palm trees, and guests marveled at the live gorilla and two peacocks on display.²² They also enjoyed dances performed by island natives. These performances were so popular that they appeared in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's novel, *Chijin no ai* (A Fool's Love), serialized in the *Ōsaka asahi shinbun* between March 1924 and July 1925. At one point, the novel's heroine, Naomi, proposes to her friends to “do ‘honika ua wiki wiki,’” the “Hawaiian hip dance.” Naomi's companion, Seki, is best at the dance because, he boasts, he had been to the “International Pavilion” at the Ueno Peace Exposition ten days in a row.²³

If the Peace Exposition brought a flavor of the Pacific to Japan, the Third Pan-Pacific Science Congress invited an international discussion of the Pacific in Tokyo. The idea for a Pan-Pacific Science Congress had originated with two Americans in Hawaii: director of the Pan-Pacific Union Alexander Hume Ford and Yale geologist Herbert E. Gregory, who had assumed the directorship of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu in 1919. Both men viewed the Pacific as the ideal arena for the United States to establish scientific credentials distinct from the centers of world scientific culture in Europe. But following the first congress in Honolulu in August 1920, the association assumed a life of its own.

Each new venue imprinted its own stamp on the new congress. The second assembly took place in Melbourne and Sydney in August 1923 and led to the permanent establishment of a Pacific Science Association. The 1923 Congress also aided Australia's efforts to establish a national identity distinct from the British empire.²⁴ Similarly, the third congress had a dramatic effect on Japan's international position and standing. Between October 30 and November 11, 1926, over four hundred Japanese academics welcomed one hundred and fifty foreign scholars from the United States, Britain, France, Holland, Russia, Peru, Chile and China in the halls of the Lower House in Tokyo.²⁵ As Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō declared at the opening banquet on October 31, given Japan's important contributions to both the advance of science and to the peace of the Pacific, it was a great honor for Japan to now host the assembly. “The countries of the Pacific are now so intimate,” he proclaimed, “that one country's advantage is the advantage of all.”²⁶

Japan's centrality in the construction of a new Pacific era was confirmed when, just three years later, another Japanese city played host to another major international conference. Between October 28 and November 9, 1929, the third international assembly of the Institute of Pacific Relations took place in Kyōto. Like the Pan-Pacific Science Congress, the IPR was originally founded in Honolulu in

²¹ Kei Senshō, “Hakurankai shuppin ni arawaretaru shin Nihon no shokuminchi,” *Jitsugyō no Nihon* 25, no. 7 (Apr. 1, 1922), p. 33.

²² “Yokyō daininki: Nanyōkan de settai no kōcha wa tachimachi ni urikire,” *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, Mch. 3, 1922, evening edition, p. 2. “Heihaku samazama,” *Yomiuri shinbun*, Mch. 23, 1922, p. 5.

²³ Anthony H. Chambers, trans., *Naomi*, by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), pp. 141–42.

²⁴ Roy Macleod and Philip F. Rehbock, “Developing a Sense of the Pacific: The 1923 Pan-Pacific Science Congress in Australia,” *Pacific Science* 54, no. 3 (2000), pp. 209–25.

²⁵ “Kyō kara iyoiyo hon butai ni hairu, han Taiheiyō gakujujutsu kaigi,” *Ōsaka asahi shinbun*, Nov. 1, 1926, p. 1.

²⁶ “Kagaku saishū no mokuete ki wa jinrui seikatsu kaizen ni ari,” *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, Oct. 31, 1926, p. 2.

1925, this time to foster a “Pacific community” of equals. But as the Japanese host in Kyōto, former undersecretary general of the League of Nations Nitobe Inazō noted in his opening address, Japan was delighted in 1929 to take center stage yet again in this Pacific project. “The thalassic civilization which blossomed on the borders of the Mediterranean, long ago gave place to the oceanic civilization of the Atlantic coasts. Now the Pacific lands are to be the stage where shall meet all the races and cultures of the world.”²⁷

Japanese in the South Pacific

The acquisition of new territories naturally led to a steady stream of Japanese nationals to the South Pacific. Naval commanders had moved swiftly after the German defeat at Qingdao, China in November 1914 to establish a permanent presence in German Micronesia.²⁸ And two Japanese cruisers, the *Tsushima* and *Otowa*, helped ally Britain quell the Sepoy Mutiny in Singapore in February 1915.²⁹ But Japan’s presence in the Pacific was still so new during the Great War that, from December 1917, the Japanese government leased a Chinese steamship, the *Hwa Ping*, to operate the sole regular passenger service from Japan to the southern territories.³⁰ Tokyo subsequently contracted with Japanese shipping giant NYK (Japan Mail Steamship Company) to service regular routes to Micronesia.³¹

Thanks to NYK, a succession of dignitaries made their way to the Marshall, Mariana and Caroline Islands after 1917. This included members of the imperial family, military aides to the emperor, Japanese nobility, Japanese MPs, and naval officers.³² In 1922, Japanese entrepreneur Matsue Haruji founded the South Seas Development Company (*Nanyō kōhatsu*, or *Nankō*) and began developing the sugar industry in Micronesia. Thanks in large part to *Nankō*, 7,000 Japanese lived in the southern territories by 1925. Five years later, 20,000 Japanese occupied the islands.³³ “It seems,” observed the journal of the Japanese League of Nations Association in December 1926, “that there was a slogan for Japanese overseas development twenty some odd years ago directing attention northward to Manchuria/Mongolia...we have not heard this in recent years.”³⁴

South Pacific and the Pacific War

Historians typically describe early Japanese interest in Pacific affairs as a prelude to the Pacific War. Japan-Hawaii linkages in the nineteenth century, John Stephan suggests, constitute an important

²⁷ Nitobe Inazō, “Opening Address at Kyoto,” *Pacific Affairs* 2, no. 11 (Nov. 1929), p. 685.

²⁸ Francis X. Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Century of Colonial Rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press), chap. 4.

²⁹ See Heather Streets-Salter, *Southeast Asia and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chap. 2.

³⁰ Shikama Kōsuke, *Jijū bukan nikki* (Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō, 1980), p. 123 (diary entry for Apr. 29, 1919).

³¹ Peattie, *Nanyō*, pp. 120–21.

³² Hezel, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, p. 153.

³³ Peattie, *Nanyō*, p. 155.

³⁴ “Minami e chakumoku seyo,” *Kokusai chishiki* 6, no. 12 (Dec. 1926), p. 1.

backdrop for Japanese plans to conquer Hawaii in 1941.³⁵ Tōmatsu Haruo's meticulous recent study features Japan's South Pacific Mandate as a perpetual arena of great power rivalry from the First through the Second World Wars.³⁶ Indeed, as we have seen, by 1923, Japanese military planners replaced Russia with the United States as Japan's greatest military threat.³⁷

It is tempting to see a direct link between this 1923 revision of the Basic Plan of National Defense and Pearl Harbor. But the shift in strategic priorities was less a harbinger of future international conflict than source for new turbulence in Japanese domestic politics. The 1923 revision strongly affected the precarious political balance between the Imperial Army and Navy. Despite initially targeting Imperial Navy ships and budgets, the disarmament craze after World War I dealt a particularly devastating blow to the army. Just four days before Japanese delegates signed the Washington Naval Treaty (Five-Power Treaty) in February 1922, Kokumintō Party president Inukai Tsuyoshi submitted a resolution in the Imperial Diet demanding a halving of the Imperial Army's standing division strength.³⁸ As journalist cum politician Tagawa Daikichirō wryly observed, "army reductions have now become a type of craze (*ryūkō*). Even cats and wooden ladles call for army reductions."³⁹

The most serious problem for the Imperial Army, however, was the destruction of service parity, which had been institutionalized in the 1907 Basic Plan of National Defense. Despite characterizing national defense as a "joint" army-navy effort, by defining the United States as Japan's principal military threat, the 1923 revision of the Basic Plan signaled a bold new priority toward the Imperial Navy. And such challenges became increasingly common in the public debate. Former Army First Lieutenant Matsushita Yoshio argued in April 1923 that the army could be pared to half of its size. In an age where foreign intervention was no longer permissible, Matsushita argued, Japanese military capabilities could be confined purely to self-defense. And to protect its territories in Korea, Taiwan, and the South Pacific, Japan needed only a navy and six army divisions.⁴⁰ By May 1925, Tokyo pared the Imperial Army by four complete infantry divisions.⁴¹

Growing Japanese interest in the Pacific in the 1920s, in other words, marks less a prelude to the Pacific War than an interwar departure from continental empire. Indeed, Japanese statesmen most wedded to continental expansion viewed the turn to the Pacific with alarm. In 1929, respected man of letters Tokutomi Iichirō decried the number of Japanese "who have completely lost sight of the Japanese empire (*Nihon teikoku*)."⁴²

³⁵ John Stephan, *Hawaii under the Rising Sun: Japan's Plans for Conquest after Pearl Harbor* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985), chap. 1.

³⁶ Tōmatsu Haruo, *Nihon teikoku to inin tōchi: Nanyō guntō o meguru kokusai seiji, 1914–1947* (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2011).

³⁷ Shimanuki Takeji, "Dai-ichiji sekai taisen igo no kokubō hōshin, shoyō heiryoku, yōhei kōryō no hensen," *Gunji shigaku* 9, no. 1 (June 1973), pp. 65–67.

³⁸ "Renshi hekichō," *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin*, no. 828 (Feb. 1, 1922), p. 133.

³⁹ In an April 14 speech. Tagawa Daikichirō, "Kokusai kyōchō no kokoro," *Kokusai renmei* 2, no. 6 (June 1, 1922), p. 4.

⁴⁰ Matsushita Yoshio, "Gunshuku ni taisuru rikugun tōkyoku no taido," *Kokusai chishiki* 3, no. 4 (April 1923) p. 88.

⁴¹ Leonard A. Humphreys, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword: The Japanese Army in the 1920s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 89–95.

⁴² Tokutomi Iichirō, "Nihon teikoku ni kaere," *Kingu* 6, no. 1 (Jan. 1930), p. 102.

Japanese Trade in the South Pacific

While Japan’s new global posture appeared most conspicuously in a redirection of official attention from the continent to the South Pacific, it was also evident in an enormous shift in trade patterns following the First World War. The sheer volume of new trade transformed the structure of the Japanese economy. Between 1910–14 and 1920–24, Japanese exports tripled. And in the 1920–24 interval, manufactured goods came to comprise over 90 percent of Japanese exports.⁴³ Japan underwent a demographic transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates during the Great War, indicating movement from a pre-industrial to an industrial economy.⁴⁴ By 1925, the population of Japan proper stood at 60.74 million, the fifth largest behind China, the United States, Russia and Germany.⁴⁵

Equally important was the direction of trade. A fundamental legacy of the Great War was the displacement of Europe by the United States as the vanguard of global leadership. Pivotal to this shift was a new American centrality in world trade. Until 1914, Japan had relied upon Britain for the majority of its machinery and consumer goods. From 1914 to 1939, Uncle Sam claimed the top spot among Japanese suppliers.⁴⁶ In exports, while the United States had already taken the lead with silk purchases in the 1890s, the world war opened new markets for Japanese textiles and small consumer goods in European colonies in Asia and beyond.⁴⁷ Trade with the U.S. continued to dwarf that with China throughout the 1920s.⁴⁸

Tōyō keizai shinpō editor Ishibashi Tanzan is often celebrated for his public renunciation of empire in 1921. In place of territorial gains in Asia, he envisioned a nation thriving through trade with Britain and the United States and global moral authority garnered for respecting the rights of the weak.⁴⁹ Such a dramatic rethinking of empire rested in large part on the practical observation that Japan traded more with Great Britain than with either Korea, Taiwan or Guandong. Japan’s commerce with the United States outstripped that with all of these territories combined.⁵⁰ *Japan Weekly Chronicle* editor A. Morgan Young captured the remarkable new global scale of Japanese trade after the war by observing that, for the first time, Japanese goods “were in the most eager demand in every country in the world.”⁵¹

Trade was, in fact, everyone’s concern following the Great War. As the president of the monthly *Jitsugyō no Nihon*, Masuda Giichi, informed his readers in April 1922, in addition to commemorating peace, the principal aim of the Peace Exposition just opened in Tokyo was “to advance national culture (*kokumin bunka*) by promoting industry and spreading practical knowledge.” It was particularly

⁴³ W. G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism 1894–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 126, table 2.

⁴⁴ Hayami Akira and Kojima Miyoko, *Taishō demogurafi: Rekishi jinkōgaku de mita hazama no jidai* (Tokyo: Bunshun Shinsho, 2004), pp. 226–33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–39.

⁴⁶ Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism*, pp. 127, 211, tables 3, 9, respectively.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 127, table 3 for export figures to the United States.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127, table 3.

⁴⁹ Editorial, “Issai o sutsuru no kakugo: Taiheiyō kaigi ni taisuru waga taido,” *Tōyō keizai shinpō*, July 23, 1921; reprinted in Matsuo Takayoshi, ed., *Ishibashi Tanzan byōronshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), pp. 101–21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵¹ A. Morgan Young, *Japan under Taishō Tenno 1912–1926* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 16.

important that Japanese products have a distinct identity across the globe.⁵² According to Japanese MP and Waseda University professor Uchigasaki Sakusaburō, “the most important thing in today’s society is economic life. And because economic life requires multiple and subtle relationships with the world’s powers, we cannot disturb these (relationships).”⁵³ In 1926, the Wakatsuki cabinet sponsored a South Seas Trade Conference committed to facilitating both official and private trade with the South Pacific and India. At the opening convocation, Foreign Minister Shidehara proclaimed international trade and Japanese foreign investment as “today’s urgent business (*kokka no kyūmu*).”⁵⁴ The editors of the Japanese League of Nations Association journal, *Kokusai chishiki*, argued that if Japan invested one tenth of the money in South Seas trade that it had sunk into the Siberian Intervention, “the effect would ultimately be many times that of the intervention.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

The history of the Pacific War has had an enormous effect on our perception of the Japanese empire in the early twentieth century. Looking back from the Manchurian Incident (1931), scholars focus on Japanese policy in China to locate hints of aggressive future continentalism. They agree that the tenor of Japan’s China policy may have changed following the Washington Conference. But, they argue, discrimination and oppression of Chinese subjects persisted.⁵⁶

China, however, attracted only a limited part of Japanese attention between the wars. From 1919 to 1931, the Japanese empire underwent three fundamental changes that reoriented what had defined the national trajectory through the First World War. First, for the first time since the latter nineteenth century, Japan *withdrew* a substantial military and political presence from the continent—from Shandong province and Siberia in 1922. Second, administrative changes from 1919 significantly enhanced the civilian character of the formal empire. Third, in diplomatic, strategic and economic terms, Japanese attention turned decisively away from the Asian continent outward toward the Pacific and beyond.

The shifting geographic attention of Japanese subjects after World War I had a profound impact on the imagined character of the Japanese nation. Best known is Ishibashi’s complete renunciation of empire in 1921. But more representative of the general mood was Waseda Professor Uchigasaki’s idea of a Japanese “maritime culture.” “Japan’s mission,” declared Uchigasaki in July 1926, “lies in sufficient recognition of our distinctiveness as a maritime nation—in our privileged island-nation culture.” This pedigree ensured the “perpetual vigor of the progressive and innovative spirit of the Japanese.” In an age of vibrant international intercourse and respect for foreign nations, Japan could “contribute to world culture by constructing an ideal national culture. . . We must protect and guide this island

⁵² Masuda Gi’ichi, “Hakurankai no mikata,” *Jitsugyō no Nihon* 25, no. 7 (Apr. 1, 1922), p. 2. For Masuda’s comments on developing a distinctive Japanese identity, see p. 4.

⁵³ Uchigasaki Sakusaburō, “Kaiyō bunkakoku toshite no Nihon,” *Kingu* 2, no. 7 (July 1926), p. 87.

⁵⁴ “Kanmin nihyaku yomei o tsurane: Nanyō bōeki kaigi kaikai,” *Hōchi shinbun*, Sept. 14, 1926; reprinted in Katō et al., ed., *Shinbun shūroku Taishōshi*, vol. 14, p. 320.

⁵⁵ “Minami e chakumoku seyo,” p. 1.

⁵⁶ This is the argument, for example, in Inoue Kiyoshi’s classic, *Shinpan, Nihon no gunkoku shugi*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Gendai Hyōronsha, 1975), vol. 3, pp. 217–18.

culture and fashion a superior maritime cultural nation.”⁵⁷ Japan’s new presence in Nanyō after the Great War, in other words, played a pivotal role in fashioning the Pacific state and global power with which we are very familiar today.

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⁵⁷ Uchigasaki, “Kaiyō bunkakoku toshite no Nihon,” pp. 85–87.

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