
In the early twentieth century, the numberless, nameless people of Japan and the United States suddenly found a "crisis" between them and began worrying about a possible, or even probable, war. Beginning in October 1906 many newspapers on both sides of the Pacific warned of war between the two nations. The Tokyo stock market fell on account of "consistent and strong rumors of war." A landlord in Seattle became worried about war and reportedly told a Japanese renter that, if a war should break out, the contract would be canceled. In early December of that year, California Representative Everis Hayes asserted that war with Japan was "inevitable." Asked when he thought the first gun would be fired, Hayes fixed the date within five years: "The Japanese immigrant is not an immigrant in the ordinary sense of the word... They came to learn... our weaknesses and defects so as to turn that knowledge to their own advantage. Before Japan went to war with China she had an army of spies and observers in Manchuria. The Japanese knew more about the Russian army than the Russians themselves. They are doing the same thing now in the United States," said Hayes. Another Representative from Alabama, Richmond Hobson, similarly declared that he had already seen Japan's "ultimatum."

In September 1907, amidst these war scares, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt sent William Howard Taft, Secretary of War, to Tokyo with a special mission to lower the tension. Despite the cooling of the previously warm relationship between the two countries and prevalent rumors of war, Taft...
remained blithely optimistic. In a speech at a banquet, Taft said: “[N]ow for a moment, and a moment only, a little cloud has come over the sunshine of a fast friendship of fifty years. A slight shock has been felt in the structure of amity and good will that has withstood the test of half a century. How has it come about?” He insisted that the war scares were merely products of newspaper publishers’ desires to “sell their papers” as well as their political calculations “to embarrass an existing government.” From Taft’s viewpoint, nothing was really wrong; both governments had been cooperating in dealing with political, military, and economic relations through their diplomatic channels. In a purely “diplomatic” sense, the two countries’ national interests were not colliding at this time. Nevertheless, the crisis over the Pacific in the early twentieth century was more fundamental than the momentary “little cloud” the secretary described.

In retrospect, the relationship between the two countries had been largely amicable until the turn of the century; the Japanese referred to the United States as a “sacred land of liberty,” viewing it as a benefactor, and Americans described Japan as the “Yankee of the East,” viewing it as a model of a young nation heading for modernization. It was during the period between 1905 and 1913 that such amicable relations began to change. How did this change come about?

The crisis in U.S.-Japanese relations in the early twentieth century has been researched and explained in various ways. Because of these weighty studies, we have been presented with many reasons for the deterioration of American-Japanese relations: immigration disputes, racial prejudice, labor conflicts, international geopolitics, policymakers’ manipulations, economic interests, cultural differences, and newspaper owners’ desires to sell papers. Yet, how do these fit together? Why did they all come together at that time? As Kristin Hoganson put it with respect to a different conflict, “Why did so many reasons for a war converge at once?” To answer this question, we need to explore contingent factors that commonly underlie the above-mentioned problems.

Most scholars, however, have provided explanations that are overly clear-cut and neat by emphasizing either the roles of policymakers or the influence of deeply rooted culture. Many diplomatic historians have viewed policymakers as autonomous agents that manipulate people and their communities in order to achieve their political goals. According to this perspective, people and society only react to decisions that are imposed on them. These scholars’ arguments have largely concentrated on how elites have made critical decisions. Thus, when scholars ask “why” questions, they sometimes offer overly neat explanations, based upon individual characteristics and personal beliefs. On the other hand, scholars who examine the role of culture—particularly racism—have tended to describe it as an ineradicable structured force, which is almost predestined. In this perspective, too, people and society only obey arrangements that are imposed on them. This interpretation, however, underestimates the contingent and contested nature of culture. In fact, nothing can be inherent; “culture” is not given phenomena but the results of social construction. More specifically it is the product of everyday exercises of social discourse. In other words, “cultural tradition” is allowed to maintain its prestigious seat only while the “tradition” is reproduced in every generation.

Thus, “deeply imbedded culture” is not a strong explanation, either.

What the “administration-centered perspective” and the “culture-centered perspective” have both often underestimated are the proactive roles of popular

5. William Howard Taft, America’s Far Eastern Policy as Pronounced by the Honorable William H. Taft, Secretary of War, at the Banquets Tendered to Him at Tokio [sic], by the Chamber of Commerce, and at Shanghai, by the American Association of China (Shanghai, 1907), 4.
8. One of the earliest studies on this topic, published in 1973, Thomas Bailey’s Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crisis: An Account of the International Complications Arising from the Race Problem on the Pacific Coast (Stanford, CA, 1934), spotlights a social dimension with detailed accounts of the immigration disputes in California. Carey McWilliams’ Prejudice: Japanese-American Symbol of Racial Intolerance (Boston, 1944) puts more stress on deeply rooted cultural hostility—racial prejudice that had “become deeply imbedded in the mores of the West Coast.” Postwar historians, on the other hand, have preferred detailed actions of individual policymakers who had a direct impact on the policymaking process. Charles Neu’s An Uneven Friendship: Theodore Roosevelt and Japan 1906–1909 (Cambridge, MA, 1967), for instance, investigates how Roosevelt skillfully managed to control the U.S.-Japanese crisis in the early twentieth century, paying significant attention to geopolitics in the international arena. Roger Daniels’s The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion (Berkeley, CA, 1977 [1983]), on the other hand, gives minor attention to international aspects, and provides an indispensable account of the domestic development of American-Japanese tension, focusing on the rise of anti-Japanese political movements driven by influential individuals and pressure groups in California, such as Governor Hiram Johnson and the Asiatic Exclusion League. See also Elden R. Penrose’s California
political culture, as well as those of the carriers of them—people. The relationship among political leaders, culture, and people is not a clear-cut case of top-down relations, with leaders or culture at the top and people at the bottom. The negotiations among them are more complicated, interactive, and spontaneous.

Between 1906 and 1913, considerable antagonism arose. Racism flared up. Newspapers and magazines carried rumors of war. And novels began to imagine possible wars between Japan and the United States. These phenomena cannot be explained by simply pointing to “deeply rooted culture” or “politicians’ calculations” or a “labor dispute over the Japanese immigrants’ low wages” or a “newspaper publisher’s desires.” My examination shows that policymakers often shifted, changed, or reemphasized their political beliefs and goals depending on contingent local politics and popular political culture. As political scientist Richard Bensel points out, although popular attitudes are certainly influenced by the exercise of elites’ leadership, the reproduction of culture through time mostly depends on preferences and choices made by numberless, nameless people, who are often unaware that they are responsible for maintaining, choosing, and changing the culture to which they belong.10

This article argues that in the era of globalization in the early twentieth century, global events quickly reached the other side of the earth and influenced local people’s way of thinking, which in turn swayed local politics and, by extension, influenced national and international politics. This was possible due to the recent development of mass circulation newspapers and telegraphic communications. Popular sentiments were readily felt across borders, regardless of the intentions of respective governments. In short, this article maintains that during the early twentieth century the direction of foreign and domestic politics was subject to internal social unrest, popular emotions, and contingent domestic politics. More specifically, I suggest that anti-Japanese attitudes on the West Coast and anti-American feelings in Japan, which were not the result of “deeply imbedded culture” but products of contingent events and thoughts at that time, became important factors that limited and justified the course of possible foreign policy for each country. Before discussing the shift in American-Japanese relations, however, we first need to look at a major event that surprised the world: the Russo-Japanese War.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR, 1905

The victory of Japan over Russia was one of the most striking events of the early twentieth century.11 It had a great impact not only in Russia and Japan but also in China, India, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and other colonized states in Asia, as well as in all Western countries, particularly on the West Coast of the United States. While heightening admiration of Japan in some areas, the unexpected Japanese victory exacerbated anxiety about Japan in other places, which foreshadowed the emergence of the “Yellow Peril” and anti-Japanese feelings on the American West Coast. The new development of mass circulation newspapers and telegraphic communication made it possible to quickly deliver war news to the masses almost every single day.

For anticolonialist leaders in Asia and the Middle East, Japan’s triumph—the first case in which an Asian country defeated a Western power—became a model for efforts to get rid of colonial powers. Thousands of Asians came to Japan to learn the “secret” of Japanese modernization. The North China Herald, an English newspaper in Shanghai, reported that the number of Chinese students in Japan jumped from 541 in 1903 to 2,466 in January 1905, and 6,920 in November 1905.12 Nor were the aftereffects of the Russo-Japanese War limited to East Asia. A journal in Calcutta, the New India, claimed that the Japanese success provided evidence of the physical and military capabilities that were latent in other Asian populations, notably those of British India.13 The India Times similarly wrote that the result of the war awakened people in other states in Asia.14 It reported that, during the Russo-Japanese War, many Indians volunteered as soldiers and nurses at the Japanese embassy in India.15 Furthermore, a quarterly review published in Rangoon of British Burma declared:

The victory of Japan might well result in a great advantage to the peace and prosperity and true religiousness of the world. . . . It would . . . be no great wonder if a few years after the conclusion of this war saw the completion of a defensive alliance between Japan, China, and not impossibly Siam,—the formulation of a new Monroe Doctrine for the far East, guaranteeing the integrity of existing states against further aggression from the West.16

These voices reflected many Asians’ longing for the ousting of colonial powers. After the Russo-Japanese War, Indian students in Tokyo reportedly published an address appealing to India to heed the call of “Asia for the Asians” and to “rise and cast off the British yoke.” Also, it was rumored that the anti-British movement in India was receiving “much encouragement from Japan.”17 Japan was

11. Many scholars have argued about the significance of the Russo-Japanese War. See, for instance, Bailey, Theodore Roosevelt and the Japan-U.S. Crisis; Iriye, Pacific Estrangement; LaFeber, The Clash; Neu, An Uncertain Friendship.
17. “Japan’s Power Felt in India,” San Francisco Chronicle, October 18, 1906.
praised in Asia, and from this moment, many Japanese people openly, and even arrogantly, began to think of themselves as "a teacher to the rest of Asia."18

For the majority of the Japanese people, the victory in the war finally gave them the sense that Japan had joined the ranks of the world's first-class nations. Thus Yano Ryukei, a notable publisher and politician, asserted in 1905 that Japanese influence in Asia should be like American influence in Latin America.19 A prominent journalist, Tokutomi Soho, wrote an editorial in January 1906, entitled "the Yellow Man's Burden," which he named in reference to Rudyard Kipling's famous poem. "Even though Japan does not have a will to be a leader of Asia, practically Japan has been looked up to as a leader by yellow races in Asia," Tokutomi wrote. "Isn't it our responsibility, as a vanguard, to help their development?"20 As Tokutomi described it, after the victory of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan's "nationalistic internationalism" began to spread. Not only military officials, but also many ordinary Japanese began to believe that they now had "the ability to whip any country in the world."21 The surprising results of the war established Japanese self-confidence, even haughtiness.

Westerners, on the other hand, received the news of Japanese success with more complex feelings. From the beginning of the war in February 1904 to early 1905, international popular sentiment mostly supported Japan's cause in the war. American researchers in the 1930s concluded that the American public generally supported Japan throughout the Russo-Japanese War.22 However, the actual situation was more complex. During the war, particularly after Japan's victories in the spring of 1905, a different opinion began to appear. For example, there was a quick and radical change in the image of Japan during the war, represented in the Philadelphia Inquirer. In January 1905 the Inquirer depicted Japanese General Oyama [Iwa], carrying a lantern of "truth," chasing Russian General [Alexei N.] Kuropatkin (Figure 1).23 In March 1905, after the Japanese victory in Mukden, on the other hand, the same Inquirer portrayed General Kuropatkin as caught tightly by a huge snake labeled "Jap Army," with six heads, each representing a Japanese general (Figure 2).24

This change in Japan's image—from a truth man to a six-headed snake—symbolized an emerging wariness about Japan. Journalist Thomas Millard declared that Japan's victory over Russia inspired notions of "self-determination in Asia" as well as the consequent decline of Western "prestige."25 A similar example of wariness about Japan can be seen in a small, local newspaper, the Bellingham Herald, immediately after the complete triumph of the Japanese Navy in the Battle of the Japan Sea. The Herald warned:

If we are lax, Japan may soon become mistress of the Pacific. She is our friend now, but the friendship of nations is fickle... [N]ow she is in a position to menace our position as a world power... Just now our position is a palpably weak one and hard to maintain. What we need is a naval base in the Pacific... To inspire respect we must be prepared for war, and the time to prepare is now.26

Such warning voices against the winner quickly grew. The Bellingham Herald reprinted an article from the German press that called for the unity of the white race against the "yellow victor," insisting that the Battle of Tsushima should be seen "not only as a death blow to Russian prestige in Asia, but also as a crushing

26. Bellingham Herald (Bellingham, WA), editorial, June 8, 1905.
disaster to the entire white race."17 Amid the Russo-Japanese War, this version of the "Yellow Peril" was renewed and launched in American popular sentiment, especially on the West Coast where Japan was seen as a threat, even a challenge to Western civilization.

The Western states already had a long history of racism toward Asians beginning with the first substantial waves of Chinese immigrants after the Gold Rush in 1849. By the 1870s the virulent anti-Chinese movement gained strength, and the Chinese were viewed as an "inferior type" of humanity, bringing "paganism, incest, sodomy, and the threat of miscegenation to America’s shores."8 Politicians did not invent the anti-Chinese movement; in the words of Lucille Eaves, "it sprang from the people."9 In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act passed Congress, and then the shortage of cheap labor prompted the bringing in of Japanese immigrants. The Japanese were originally differentiated from the Chinese. One newspaper noted, for example, "the objections raised against the Chinese... cannot be alleged against the Japanese. They have brought their

wives, children and... new industries among us."10 Although, the first anti-Japanese cries sprang up in 1892, the San Francisco Education Board’s attempt to exclude Japanese students from public schools was unsuccessful at this time. The San Francisco Chronicle, which later became a vocal anti-Japanese voice, remained sympathetic to the Japanese. While the number of Japanese immigrants increased by about twelve thousand to twenty thousand each year11 in the early twentieth century, only sporadic anti-Japanese movements were observed before 1905.

Japan’s military success in East Asia inflamed anti-Japanese sentiments in California. Though seemingly unrelated at first glance, the two were interconnected because Japan’s victories in Asia and Japanese immigration into the United States were both considered expressions of Japan’s challenge to the West. On February 23, 1905, when the Japanese army had begun to storm Mukden, the San Francisco Chronicle launched an anti-Japanese campaign, declaring in front-page headlines, "The Japanese Invasion, The Problem of the Hour." The Chronicle insisted that at least one hundred thousand of the "little brown men" were already in California and warned, "once the war with Russia is over, the brown stream of Japanese immigration will become a raging torrent" on the West Coast.12 In March, when the last and largest battle between Japan and Russia occurred near Mukden, the California legislature unanimously passed an anti-Japanese resolution that expressed its opposition to Japanese immigration. In May, when the Russian Baltic fleet was approaching the East China Sea for the last battle, a group of people—later known as the Asiatic Exclusion League—met in San Francisco for the first time.

A Japanese immigrant, Nisuke Mitsumori, who landed in San Francisco in the spring of 1905, observed a sudden change in Americans' attitudes after the Russo-Japanese War:

There was fear among Americans—particularly among government officials and the press—since such a small country as Japan successfully fought against a big country, Russia, and even took the impregnable Port Arthur. One Los Angeles paper... suggested that the United States should not let such dreadful people enter the country. This must have been the very beginning of the anti-Japanese movement.

As Mitsumori noted, many Californians considered Japan's victory as an expression of a future threat, even the "yellow race’s challenge to them."33

17. “Panic Over Yellow Peril,” Bellingham Herald (Bellingham, WA), June 8, 1904.
18. Roger Daniels, Not Like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890–1924 (Chicago, 1997), 7–10. In 1870, a statewide anti-Chinese referendum passed by 154,618 to 883 (99.4 percent), and California’s Constitution forbade the Chinese from public employment.
19. Ibid., 10.
Although racism against Asians had a long history, going back to the middle of the nineteenth century, the unexpected outcome of the Russo-Japanese War fanned the existing racism in California. In fact, anti-Japanese movements gained a permanent foothold in California for the first time; after 1905 the state legislature submitted anti-Japanese bills in every session for the next four decades without exception. This atmosphere was crystallized in San Francisco in the following year.

THE SCHOOL SEGREGATION PROBLEM AND THE FIRST WAR SCARES, 1906–1908

The San Francisco earthquake on April 18, 1906, followed by three days of fire, completely destroyed most sections of the city. Even though mass attacks or mass hysteria did not arise, law and order broke down. In that situation, physical attacks and boycotts against Japanese and their stores increased in frequency. One of the victims, G. N. Tsukamoto, a laundry owner, reported:

Soon after the earthquake the persecutions became intolerable. My drivers were constantly attacked on the highway, my place of business defiled by rotten eggs and fruit; windows were smashed several times. I was forced to hire . . . two special policemen at great expense, and for fully two weeks was obliged to maintain the service. The miscreants are generally young men, 17 or 18 years old. Whenever newspapers attack the Japanese these roughs renew their misdeeds with redoubled energy.

Some others were more violently assaulted. As Tsukamoto said, the attackers were mostly boys and young men around fifteen to twenty-five years old. These sorts of assaults on individuals soon developed into organized boycotts.

Meanwhile, rumors had it that “two thousand” Japanese students, mostly adults, were “dominating” public schools in San Francisco. The San Francisco

polices in San Francisco, particularly focusing on the Irish influence in the city during the San Francisco Segregation Problem.

34. Daniels, The Politics of Prejudice, 27.
36. After the 1913 Great Kanto Earthquake in Japan, for example, a false rumor of Korean riots spread, provoking the massacre of a large number of the Koreans and the Chinese residents.
37. Victor H. Metcalf, Japanese in the City of San Francisco: Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting the Final Report of Secretary Metcalf on the Situation Affecting the Japanese in the City of San Francisco, California (San Francisco, 1921 [1906]), 14.
38. Secretary of Commerce, Victor H. Metcalf, who was sent to San Francisco to investigate the school problem, collected nineteen testimonies of Japanese immigrants who were attacked. Also a robbery of Japanese people and the murder of a Japanese banker were reported in the same period. See San Francisco Chronicle, for example, October 16, 1906 and October 20, 1906.

Board of Education had begun to hear many protests from residents who were against the Japanese being permitted to attend the schools. On October 11, 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education issued a small piece of paper, ordering that Japanese and Korean students would be segregated from all public schools. In the beginning this decision did not provoke any significant reaction in San Francisco, let alone outside of California.

A vocal cry of protest, however, boiled up on the other side of the earth, in Tokyo and other cities in Japan. Newspaper correspondents, who had already been reporting on anti-Oriental agitation in San Francisco, now noted the Board of Education’s decision. A correspondent for the Washington Post commented on October 22 that in his nineteen years’ residence in Japan he had “never seen the Japanese press so agitated against Americans.” Mainichi Shinbun, for instance, wrote:

Stand up, Japanese nation! Our countrymen have been humiliated on the other side of the Pacific. Our poor boys and girls have been expelled from public schools by the rascals of the United States, cruel and merciless like demons. At this time we should be ready to give a blow to the United States. Yes, we should be ready to strike the Devil’s head with an iron hammer for the sake of the world’s civilization . . . Why do we not insist on sending ships?

Faced with such a surge of popular sentiment, Foreign Minister Hayashi Tadaru responded quickly to the local San Francisco issue. On October 18, when Foreign Minister Hayashi Tadaru received Consul Ueno Kizaburo’s telegram from San Francisco, he replied within a few hours, ordering Ueno to send details as soon as possible. On October 20, having not yet received another telegram from San Francisco, Hayashi again pressed Ueno, saying, “The Japanese newspaper correspondents in San Francisco have sent telegrams one after another, and the quarrel in the papers here [Tokyo] is becoming clamorous. Therefore, send a telegram about details of the incident as soon as possible.” Hayashi’s telegram shows that the formation of popular political cultures in society was much faster than the attempts of policymakers to manipulate it. Meanwhile, the 1910 census of population in the United States remained unaware of the segregation issue in San Francisco. Even Washington officials remained uninformed until October 21, when Luke Wright, ambassador to Tokyo,

40. Metcalf, Japanese in the City of San Francisco, 4.
42. Ambassador Wright translated Mainichi’s article into English and sent it to Washington on October 22, 1906. See Bailey, Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crisis, 50.
43. Telegram, Hayashi to Ueno, September 21, 1906, Nihon Gakushu Bunbo (hereafter NGB), 1906, no. 2 (Tokyo, 1906), 40. Even before the Education Board’s order on October 11, 1906, Hayashi ordered Ueno to investigate anti-Japanese movements in San Francisco, which had been already reported in Japanese daily newspapers.
44. Telegram, Hayashi to Ueno, October 18, 1906, NGB, 1906, no. 2: 411.
noticed furious responses in Japan and reported to the Department of State. Washington responded quickly. At the end of October President Theodore Roosevelt sent Secretary of Commerce Victor H. Metcalf to investigate the school problem, and his research revealed that only ninety-three Japanese students were attending the public schools with twenty-five thousand other students. Among them, fifty-nine students were less than fifteen years old, and twenty-five were American born. Metcalf's research demonstrated that the number of Japanese was not anywhere near "two thousand," nor were half of them "adults."46

Metcalf's report angered Roosevelt. He blasted the "idiots" in the California legislature. He even called the segregation decision a "wicked absurdity."47 The eastern newspapers similarly held a critical tone regarding San Franciscans' attitudes and decisions (Figure 3). Nevertheless, anti-Japanese sentiments in San Francisco did not cease. This gap occurred because Roosevelt and other Easterners did not share the popular political culture that many San Franciscans took part in at that time (Figure 4). In a letter to Roosevelt, Metcalf said that he had no hope of repealing the Board of Education's decision through legal discussion and that he was moreover pessimistic about popular attitudes in California: "[W]hile a number of the thinking minds within the state are alive to the significance and consequence of the matter, many of the people of this state are, with a narrow provincialism, fomented and fostered by their newspapers, practically as hostile to the Japanese as to the Chinese."48

Other observers seconded Metcalf's observation about California's popular political cultures. The Washington Star, for example, asserted that "The school board's action is not merely the deed of a narrow-minded, politically subservient body. It represents the feeling of a vast majority of the population, regardless of party affiliations."49 The Board of Education's decision was not something artificially stirred by particular politicians or groups, but a reflection of popular attitudes. The Washington Post was even clearer on this point: "That San Francisco and the Slope in general is influenced to some extent by the unparalleled strength of the union labor element cannot be denied. But the feeling against the Jap is wider and deeper than that."50

The common feeling underlying anti-Japanese sentiments was, in fact, widespread fear that had been rising since Japan's victory over Russia. The New York Sun, for instance, observed:

"Behind this entire case lies the fact that San Francisco has the entire approval of not only California, but the whole Pacific Slope. There is no dissenting voice worth considering. The slope is as unanimous on this point as is the solid South regarding separate schools and conveniences for negroes ... At all events, the Californian most heartily dislikes the Japanese, and, what is more, he fears him."51

"The Slope believes and frankly says," the Sun continued, "that Japan's success against Russia has turned her head. 'They are getting too blamed cocky,' is the

46. Metcalf, Japanese in the City of San Francisco, 4–5.
rumor of “two thousand” Japanese students dominating the schools was groundless, as the true number of them was, in fact, tiny. Scholars have explored several factors behind the school problem, such as racism in California, local policymakers’ and newspapers’ manipulations, and labor disputes. These explanations certainly have merits but are not sufficient. First, although conventional racism explains the rise of antagonism to some extent, anti-Orientalism had already been in the minds of many people since the nineteenth century, while perpetual, powerful, widespread anti-Japanese feelings appeared only after 1905. Second, local political leaders and newspaper owners certainly had some influence on the formation of anti-Japanese sentiments, but their early anti-Japanese campaign in the 1890s was unsuccessful. Further, politicians and newspapers changed their attitudes depending on reception in order to maintain credibility or to avoid criticism, as this article will discuss later.

Lastly, labor disputes played a particularly significant role in the development of anti-Japanese movements, yet hatred and fear of the Japanese found a much wider scope at that time. Although labor issues were used as plain, symbolic examples, many of the antagonistic voices did not solely argue about immigrants’ lower wages. What the anti-Japanese proponents were concerned with was the protection of their way of life and, by extension, their identity and culture. Such anxiety was suddenly “problematized” after the defeat of Russia in the war. In other words, in the early period of globalization in the early twentieth century, numberless, nameless individuals unintentionally began fearing an earlier version of “clash of civilizations.”

“They [the Japanese] have openly and publicly shown their antipathy to American institutions,” argued an editorial in the San Jose Mercury, “by making much of their own holidays and ignoring the holidays of the country in which they are making their living.” Such a sentiment seems trivial, but it was by all accounts deeply and widely felt. The Oakland Tribune was even clearer: “Out here we are face to face with a condition not a theory. We do not desire the population of the Pacific Coast to be Mongolized, Orientalized, or Mongrelized. We shrink from the fate of Hawaii. We admire the bravery and skill of the Japanese. ... But with all that, ... we prefer Japanese in Japan to the Japanese in California.” The paper continued concerning the crux of the issue:

The people of the extreme West are not to be persuaded or driven. The sentiment that controls them lies deeper than the ordinary prejudice of the ignorant against foreigners or the antagonism aroused by competition for wages and employment. It is racial, and represents the resistance of one civilization to being amalgamated with another from which it shrinks by natural law."

53. Ibid.
54. San Jose Mercury, editorial, December 10, 1906.
56. Ibid.
In retrospect, such anxiety over a “clash of civilizations” looks like a groundless fantasy. Yet, as Akira Iriye points out, an increase in the Japanese population was viewed as Japan’s “eastward expansion.” Since the image of Japan’s victory over Russia was almost always associated with any issue related to the Japanese at that time, the school problem in San Francisco was quickly replaced with talk of “war” between races and between civilizations.

Beginning in November 1906, war scares further intensified in America. The San Francisco Chronicle declared in a headline, “Japanese Arming—She Will Seek War with Us.” The San Francisco Examiner announced that “Japanese Ex-Army Men to Hawaiian Islands” and warned that Japanese troops were already in America “in the guise of coolies.” In early December California Representative Evers Hayes warned of “inevitable war” with Japan and won praise for doing so from the Oakland Herald: “Mr. Hayes is wise—very wise. He knows what he is about, and he knows about the Japanese; he knows that they cannot be trusted in any emergency involving an advantage to Japan.”

Yet war between Japan and the United States did not occur, despite this belligerent tone on the West Coast, especially in northern California and Washington. During 1906–1907, eastern elites and newspapers still maintained a scornful view on the West Coast “prejudice.” Roosevelt, in particular, did not hide his contempt, once even mentioning the possibility of “naturalization” of the Japanese, which exaggerated the Japanese people’s expectations, as well as pushing down his high popularity in California. Although the president never repeated his comment about the naturalization of the Japanese after learning about the political situation in California, Roosevelt solved the school problem through political bargaining between the Japanese government and the city of San Francisco. In the middle of February, Roosevelt invited the members of the school board, as well as Mayor Eugene Schmitz, to the White House. The president persuaded the school board members to repeal their decision, while assuring them that the Japanese government would voluntarily restrict immigrants to the continental United States. In March, Japan accepted this barter, and the two governments made a so-called gentlemen’s agreement. On the surface, the international crisis was settled peacefully through Roosevelt’s skillful management.

Nonetheless, nothing was solved because the core of the problem was not on the level of diplomacy but in the minds of millions of people in both societies. From the beginning, local papers described Mayor Schmitz’s visit as a “political show” to demonstrate his resistance to local people in order to improve his “damaged reputation.” He was, moreover, harshly criticized upon his return. In the then Republican paradise of California, Roosevelt was for the first time harshly denounced by local people and papers, and this gave Democrats an opening.

Regardless of the peaceful agreement between the two governments, on the night of May 20, 1907, a mob of about fifty residents in San Francisco, none of whom were identified, attacked a Japanese restaurant and bathhouse, broke windows, and chased away the customers. This San Francisco riot again awoke a sleeping sentiment in Japan, although it was not received as seriously as the school segregation. As in the case of the school problem, neither Washington nor the East Coast newspapers knew about the San Francisco riot until ambassador Luke Wright wired Washington after he was surprised by the growing excitement in Japan. He reported on May 25 that Japanese papers were publishing “sensational cables” about America’s “repeated attacks on Japanese stores and their customers.” On June 12, the ambassador again detailed popular responses in Japan: “[L]eading papers have expressed surprise, dissatisfaction, annoyance or apprehension, while journals of the second and lower ranks have gone to absurd extremes.”

These Japanese popular responses were soon reported in America. At the same time, many American papers began to pay more attention to Japan’s ability to wage a war. Some again began to publish rumors of war. Takahashi Sakue, a professor of international law at the Tokyo Imperial University, who happened to travel to America in 1907, kept a detailed record of these sudden American responses. According to his note, on June 4, for example, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported on the “Naval and Military Program of Japan;” on June 8, the Houston Post referred to “Japan’s Growing Military Strength;” on June 14, the Denver Post printed an article on “Japanese Hostility;” on June 16, the Washington Post reported on “The Possibilities of War with Japan;” on June 17, the New York Financier Age carried “War with Japan;” on June 21, the Manchester Mirror in New Hampshire issued “War and Conquest—Japan’s Strange Idea;” and the Washington Post offered “The Logic of War.” As these ample examples of headlines show, the sentiments of distrust and wariness about Japan were not

---

62. “Mayor Afraid of Local Opinion,” San Francisco Bulletin, February 11, 1907 and February 18, 1907. Mayor Schmitz had been criticized for the corruption scandal in the city. He was found guilty of extortion in June 1907.
64. London Times, May 27, 1907.
66. Ibid., 200–201.
necessarily limited to the West Coast. Yet, significant numbers of newspapers and magazines maintained calm attitudes and critical views toward the San Franciscans.68

Nonetheless, rumors of war became prevalent. Many Americans took to their pens to report suspicious Japanese activities. In June and July 1907, government officials and the White House received a flood of such letters.69 One typical rumor had it that a Japanese boy was spying on a U.S. battleship disguised as a servant.70 Although these letters did not change policy by themselves, they were important because such voices can be seen as reflections of a grassroots shift in popular political culture. Combined with the existing disputes over Japanese immigration on the West Coast, as well as the expansion of Japan’s navy in the Pacific, war scares in 1906–1907 began to affect policymaking.

Social Anxiety and Roosevelt’s “Big Stick,” 1907

At the White House, Theodore Roosevelt was angered by the development of war scares in both countries. He rebuked the “San Francisco mob,” saying that it had cropped up to create a new difficulty with the Japanese “that may at any time bear evil result.” Even worse, Roosevelt wrote, “the Japanese jingoists are in their turn about as bad as ours.”71 The president was continuously frustrated by popular jingoists, whom he often referred to as “the infernal fools in California,” or even “the worse than criminal stupidity of the San Francisco mob.”72 In a letter to Secretary Elihu Root, Roosevelt complained:


Everything we can do must be done to remedy the wrongs complained of... Undoubtedly these irritating articles in the newspapers and irritating actions may arouse a bitter feeling in Japan which will make the Japanese people feel hostile to us and predispose them to war should the occasion arise.73

A similar anxiety was shared on the Japanese side. Admiral Yamamoto Gonbei [Gon’nohyoe], a future prime minister of Japan, was visiting the United States in the early summer of 1907 and happened to observe the war scare when he arrived in New York. Yamamoto soon realized that some anti-American articles in Japanese newspapers were being translated and reprinted in local newspapers in America, provoking “undesirable effects.”74 As Roosevelt’s and Yamamoto’s apprehension show, policymakers were deeply concerned about antagonistic popular sentiments, and their uneasiness increased as public hostility rose in both countries.

In the midst of the crisis, on June 14, Roosevelt asked the Undersecretary of War what plan had been made “in case of trouble arising between the United States and Japan.”75 The Navy and Army Departments had already been studying this question for some months. Within two weeks, the Joint Army and Navy Board finished revising the so-called War Plan Orange, the first strategic military plan against Japan. The plan warned of the vulnerability of the Philippine Islands and recommended sending the U.S. fleet to the Pacific as soon as possible. It also advised deploying the U.S. military in the Philippines immediately to protect existing naval bases.76 As recommended, Roosevelt ordered Secretary of War Taft to report on the defense of the Philippines, Guam, Hawaii, and the West Coast.77 As Roosevelt confessed, the Philippines was becoming America’s “heel of Achilles.”78

Even though Roosevelt was skeptical about the possibility of war over the Pacific, he still worried about it because not only the “yellow press” but also his own dependable sources began warning of it.79 On July 26, 1907, the president wrote that he did not believe that Japan would attack the United States. “But,” he emphasized, “there is enough uncertainty to make it evident that we should be very much on our guard and should be ready for anything that comes.”80 On the very same day Roosevelt wrote to Admiral Willard H. Brownson, straightforwardly asking about how long it would take to have possible military

68. The Nation and Independent were particularly critical of Californians’ prejudice. Also, according to the Japanese Embassy’s internal survey of American public opinion, 146 newspapers were against anti-Japanese legislation, 55 were for the legislation, and 10 remained doubtful. Takahira Kogoro, ambassador to Washington, commented that the only newspapers that sympathized with anti-Japanese legislation were the Hearst papers and those on the West Coast and in the South, which already had racial discrimination against blacks. Letter, Takahira to Komura, February 25, 1909, NGB, 1909-42, no. 2: 574-88.

69. Iriye, Pacific Estrangement, 158-59.

70. Tonituri Shinbun (Tokyo), January 16, 1907.


72. Letter, Roosevelt to Kermit Roosevelt, October 17, 1907, ibid., 475-76; Letter, Roosevelt to Henry Cabot Lodge, July 10, 1907, ibid., 709-10.

73. Letter, Roosevelt to Elihu Root, July 26, 1907, ibid., 729-30.


76. Ibid., Akira Iriye, Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-Japanese Relations (New York, 1987), 120.


78. Letter, Roosevelt to William Howard Taft, August 21, 1907, in The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, vol. 5, ed. Elting E. Morison, 762. Also, the commanding general of the Philippines Division, Leonard Wood, shared a similar concern. He had been suspicious of Japan’s intentions in the Far East. Wood wrote in his diary, “I believe, without exception, conditions are worse now than before the Spanish-American War.” See Neu, An Uncertain Friendship, 83, 139-40.


80. Letter, Roosevelt to Root, July 26, 1907, ibid., 729-30.
build-ups. Roosevelt’s correspondence in this period is important because it clearly demonstrates that his concern increased as hostile sentiments in America and Japan grew and that anxiety in society confirmed the president’s determination to expand military capacity.

The rumors of war further contributed to another big project: the dispatch of the “White Fleet.” At the height of the war scares in the summer of 1907, Roosevelt began seriously considering a world cruise by the U.S. fleet. He had three purposes in mind: (1) a demonstration to deter Japan from thinking about a possible war with the United States; (2) a practical military exercise to test the ability of the fleet; and most importantly, (3) a performance to convince and impress his domestic audience. After the administration announced the plan in July 1907, war scares were reaching their peak. Although the White House mentioned only San Francisco as a port of call, some papers speculated that the real purpose would be different, asserting that “The Navy is going to the Pacific Ocean for war with Japan, and Japan recognizes that fact and is energetically preparing for it.”

Amid the growing tension, sixteen battleships steamed out of Hampton Roads, Virginia, on December 16, 1907. By the time the U.S. fleet entered the Pacific, rumors of war amplified suspicion. In January 1908, the Japanese ambassador in Madrid reported that quite a few Spanish, who remembered their humiliating defeat in the Spanish-American War, offered financial aid to Japan, and the ambassador actually suggested that Japan should release a loan in Spain in the case of war against the United States. Rumors of war were so widespread that, according to the Japanese ambassador in Paris, Japanese bonds in the Paris market tumbled in early January 1908. By February, the rumors were said to affect Wall Street as well.

The war did not come. While the San Francisco school segregation problem and subsequent war scares had shocked many Japanese people, they seemed to view these as local issues and continued to hold the general favorable images of the United States that had been prevalent since the nineteenth century. The American fleet arrived safely at Yokohama on October 18, 1908, and was welcomed by thousands of Japanese waving American flags. A torchlight procession of fifteen thousand people was originally planned to welcome the thirty-five hundred Americans, but the turnout far went beyond expectations. A myriad of spectators took part in the parade “nile after mile.” At Yokohama, three hundred pupils visited the flagship Connecticut and sang American national airs in English. “No two countries,” declared Admiral C. S. Sperry, “ever clasped hands across the sea closer than on this occasion. Both countries may rest content that intelligent, friendly sympathy has drawn the ancient friendly ties closer than ever before.”

Just a month later, in November 1908, in a mood of relief, the two governments concluded the Root-Takahira Agreement, in which they consented to maintain the status quo in the Asia-Pacific region and recognize equal opportunity in China; in other words, both governments forestalled potential, international oppositions to each other. On the surface, Roosevelt’s diplomacy triumphed, again. Nonetheless, the trend toward the deterioration of American-Japanese relations accelerated, rather than decelerated, by 1913. Why did the amicable diplomatic relationship not last? What happened? The shift came not from overseas but from within. What happened between 1908 and 1913 was social selection of political choices in local communities through the process of domestic politics: local and national elections.

ELECTIONS AND CONTINGENT LOCAL POLITICS, 1908–1913

Despite his success in diplomacy, President Roosevelt’s skillful, yet coercive management had frustrated tens of thousands of people in California. Such a popular attitude was reflected in the San Francisco Examiner and the Daily News, which criticized “Roosevelt’s mistake.” Even the Republican-inclined San Francisco Chronicle censured the president. The San Francisco Journal of Commerce similarly observed that the president’s reputation was “waning” and asserted, “[T]he bright sun of Theodore Roosevelt’s popularity is waning down the west. It passed the zenith some time ago, and its afternoon warmth has been perceptibly lessen[ing].” Even though Roosevelt still maintained high popularity, criticism toward him was growing, and the Democrats tried to take advantage. A heavyweight Democratic politician, William Jennings Bryan, for instance, realized that the Japanese exclusion issue was an “all-absorbing topic for discussion” on the West Coast. As early as December 1906, he appealed to Californians, “I want to hear voices of Californians on Japanese Exclusion.”

81. Letter, Roosevelt to Willard Herbert Brownson, July 26, 1907, ibid., 730.
83. Bailey, Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crisis, 256.
84. Telegram, Inagaki to Hayashi, January 3, 1908, NGB, 1908-41, no. 1: 150-51.
85. Telegram, Kurino to Hayashi, December 19, 1907, NGB, 1907-40, no. 3: 787; Telegram, Kurino to Hayashi, January 3, 1908, NGB, 1908-41, no. 1: 152.
86. “Rumors of War and Stocks,” Yomiuri Shim bun, February 15, 1908.
91. In this agreement, Japan pledged to recognize America’s possession of Hawaii and the Philippines, while the United States implicitly accepted Japan’s “preeminence” in southern Manchuria and Korea. See Irving, Pacific Estrangement; LaFeber, The Clash; Neu, An Uncertain Friendship.
94. San Francisco Examiner, January 18, 1907. It is interesting to note that Bryan’s attitude in 1906 shows a clear contrast with his attitude seven years later when he became secretary of
In the 1908 presidential election, the “Japanese question” became for the first time one of the major pillars of the Democrats’ campaign strategy in California. During the campaign in August 1908, the ex-mayor of San Francisco, James D. Phelan, a Democrat, introduced a letter from William Jennings Bryan, in which he said that “the argument [for the Asian exclusion] is unassailable because these people are not assimilable, and because they can never be welded into the mass of the American people, but must always remain a foreign element in our body politic; and they would not be admitted to this land if there were a government in Washington which had a proper concern for the Caucasian civilization of this Western continent.” Phelan further recommended that this idea “must be developed by the Democratic party in this campaign, because the Republican platform has ignored it.” Phelan’s suggestion was clearly accepted; the Democrat’s platform in 1908 clearly insisted that they were “opposed to the admission of Asiatic immigrants” and that they deprecated Roosevelt’s message that recommended the naturalization of the Japanese.

Although ex-mayor Phelan was surely a loud voice of anti-Japanese sentiment, his attitude seemed to be more a product of contingent popular political culture than that of his own rooted belief. Between 1908 and 1910, Phelan continued to use his anti-Japanese stance in his political campaign strategy against and again. For instance, in his senatorial campaign in 1914 he emphasized the “exclusion of coolie immigration” as his major achievement during his mayoralty. Nevertheless, Phelan in reality did not put such a strong emphasis on the anti-immigration issue at the time of his mayoralship. In 1911, for example, Phelan said, “I have, in common with you all, lived here probably during the entire anti-Chinese campaign, but I do not go back, perhaps, as far as many of you.” He simply suggested that the Asian immigrants should be assimilated or, otherwise, should be barred. The tone in 1901 was far milder compared to his statement in 1908, in which he warned of the Japanese “occupation” of land, saying that “this land will be invaded insidiously... by Orientals... unless restrictive measures are adopted.” This sort of pungent tone against Asian immigration was generally well received in California. For example, a man who listened to Phelan’s speech subsequently wrote him:

I was very vividly impressed with the remarks you made at that time. Your statement that schools, theatres and churches in some of the fertile valleys of California... have practically disappeared since the intrusion of the Japanese, seemed to me to picture most clearly the result of Asiatic immigration into this country, both as respect to [sic] its influence upon the white race generally, and the laborer particularly.99

When a certain discourse is developing in a society, those who most typically embody such discourse can be leading figures. In other words, people with unique, unparallel ideas can be discovered by historians in a later age but not by contemporaries. In the years between 1908 and 1913, anti-Japanese sentiment was one of the most popular political discourses in California, and no politicians, either mayors or senators, could ignore it. Although the number of Japanese immigrant workers decreased,100 and although the number of Japanese residents was tiny in comparison to that of immigrants from Italy and Russia at that time,101 anti-Japanese sentiments in California had not abated. Rather, the “Japanese question” grew to a political campaign issue.

In the presidential campaign of 1912, Woodrow Wilson made it clear that his position was to prohibit Japanese immigration. On May 3, 1912, for example, Wilson wired Phelan, his strong supporter in California, explaining his stance on the immigration problem. Wilson wrote:

In the matter of Chinese and Japanese coolie immigration I stand for the national policy of exclusion... We cannot make a homogeneous population out of a people who do not blend with the Caucasian race. Their lower standard of living as laborers will crowd out the white agriculturalist and is, in other fields, a most serious industrial menace. The success of free democratic institution demands of our people education, intelligence and patriotism and the state should protect them against unjust and impossible competition.102

100. Because of the revision of the new “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” the number of Japanese immigrants to the United States radically decreased; for instance, in 1908, 1,522 laborers left Japan for the United States, and 5,186 laborers returned to Japan; in 1909, however, 629 laborers left Japan for the United States and 4,248 returned. See “The Japanese Scare,” Independent, April 14, 1910.
102. The immigration issue was used in a presidential campaign for the first time in 1908. Some Democrats used the slogan, “Labor’s choice Bryan—Jay’s choice Taft.” In a state election in 1911, the California Democratic party, which urged voters to “Keep California White,” vastly increased their seats in the state legislature. See Daniels, The Politics of Prejudice, 46.
Wilson further stressed that “Oriental coolieism will give us another race problem to solve and surely we have had our lesson.” Wilson’s message went over well and was published in several newspapers in California. Moreover, his message was printed on thousands of small cards with Roosevelt’s statements in favor of naturalizing Japanese immigrants on the reverse. These cards were widely distributed in California in the summer of 1912.

Even though Wilson eventually lost California in November 1912, the result was extremely close: Progressive Theodore Roosevelt gained 283,610 votes, Democrat Wilson 283,436, and Republican William Howard Taft 3,914. This was the best result in California by the Democrats since 1892. Hiram W. Johnson, Roosevelt’s running mate, complained that the Japanese exclusion question cost the Progressive party “at least ten thousand votes.” On the other hand, leading Democrats were convinced that they would need to support some kind of restrictive land law. After the 1912 election, Wilson recognized the intensity of anti-Japanese sentiment and took a different stance from that of his predecessors—that is, a “hands off” policy. While some historians have explained Wilson’s hands-off policy through pointing out Wilson and Bryan’s personal belief in states’ rights, in fact, more explanation is needed. In the spring of 1913, when the California legislature was discussing the Alien Land Law, which aimed at prohibiting “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from possessing land, Wilson tried to stop it, yet remained reluctant to forcefully block its passage. Even though there were various opinions in California, Wilson was keenly aware of ardent anti-Japanese feelings.

VOICES OF THE PEOPLE, POPULAR POLITICAL CULTURE, AND POLICYMAKERS’ ADAPTATIONS, 1913

“I am only a private and practically unknown citizen, but I am one of the people who make up this state and who have a vote and voice in its affairs,” wrote a man from Los Angeles to Governor Hiram W. Johnson. “[T]he Alien Land bill,” continued the man, “is un-American, unfair, unwise, unnecessary, unpopular, unrepresentative of the sentiments of the people of this state.” Although many newspapers simply stated that the “unanimous” opinion on the West Coast was agreement on the “Japanese question,” there were significant dissenting opinions. A woman from Florin, California, for instance, sent a letter to Johnson, explaining that the Japanese bought or rented land, where “the whites have spurned for fruit farming,” and that “the grain farmer found too worn out to be profitable,” and transformed it “by his amazing industry into the fairest of vineyards and strawberry patches.” She continued, “We, who live among them, find them better neighbors—minding their own affairs, but ready to oblige at any moment—than the average white neighbor.” The same woman sent a harsh criticism to James Phelan a month later:

I know the difference between facts and falsehood. Your statements were falsehoods. . . . If you did spin through this section in an automobile, you saw nothing that did not redound to the worthiness of the Japanese unless your race hatred distorts your vision and the naked truth.

Similarly, a letter with five signatures reached Johnson, which stated that “California is big enough” to accept the Japanese owning land. Another woman wrote, “From nearly five years as constant missionary here among [the Japanese] I know their grievances are already many and real. They would make the worst of foreign enemies but good intelligent loyal citizens of America.” As these letters show, there were some voices of dissent and quite a few intellectuals still opposed to the anti-Japanese legislation.

Nonetheless, such dissenting voices were too faint compared to the ardent, fierce anti-Japanese sentiments. Wrote a woman from Oakland:

[The Japanese are] trying to buy all farming land, which will in time choke the small American farmers out, also their sons and mine. If this is not stopped there will come a day when we Americans will be obliged to kneel to the Japs. . . . California is over crowded with Japs who take many a good portion from poor girls and men. . . . Keep California clean.

Governor Johnson received hundreds of letters and petitions of such kind. One of the characteristic developments of anti-Japanese feelings in 1913 was the spread of attention throughout the nation. More importantly, the “Japanese

104. Telegram, Wilson to Phelan, May 3, 1913, ibid., 393.
106. Letter, HJ to Roosevelt, June 21, 1913, Box 44, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.

109. Letter, Alice M. Brown to HJ, April 5, 1913, ibid.
110. Letter, Alice M. Brown to JDP, May 20, 1913, folder 5, Box 120, JDP Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
111. Letter, Hoskins and four other, CA. to HJ, 25 25, 1913, Box 38, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
112. Telegram, Mrs. L. M. Cannamack to HJ, April 21, 1913, Box 37, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
114. Letter, Louise Rey to HJ, April 18, 1913, Box 39, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
115. Letter, 128 Residents in Burstown to HJ, April 24, 1913, ibid; Letter, Eight students of the Elk Grove Union High School to HJ, May 15, 1913, ibid.
question" became a nonpartisan issue. "I am not of your political faith, but in questions of this kind I do not believe that there should be any party lines," said one New Yorker. One Minnesotan disappointedly commented, "I regret that Mr. Roosevelt for whom I voted last fall, goes wrong on this question." A man of Washington, DC, wrote to Johnson, "Although I'm a Taft Republican, . . . I cannot refrain from advising you of my hearty approval of the Alien Land legislation." Another Nebraskan wrote, "Though I did not approve of your political course a little bit in 1912 and would not vote for Roosevelt for President . . ., yet I will say that I do approve of your course in the Japanese muddle." A letter from Iowa was more critical of Wilson, stating:

I have been a Democrat practically all my life and voted for our President who now seems to have so far forgotten his duty to his country as to give ear to the impudent demands of an alien people. Such sickly sentimentality is beneath the dignity of an American citizen. California is right in her protest against the Japanese and the time to stop their intrigues is now; in fact it should have been done years ago.

Many letters of this kind praised Johnson regardless of the party lines.

Another underlying sentiment that appeared in many letters was one of extreme dislike for political interruption from a foreign power—voices that can be seen as indications of the notion of self-reliance or unilateralism. Quite a few people expressed their frustration with Washington for acceding to the Japanese government's request, instead of California's wish. A person from Ohio asserted:

I hope your legislature will pass all these laws. . . . Don't let Japan or the powers at Washington bulldoze you. Judging from the sentiment from this neck of the woods, the people of the whole country will sustain you in your fight for local self-government, without dictation from Japan, Washington or any where else.  

---

116. Letter, Robertson, Jr. to HJ, May 10, 1913, Box 39, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
117. Letter, W. E. Culkin to HJ, April 28, 1913, Box 37, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
118. Letter, Heal to HJ, April 26, 1913, Box 38, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
119. Letter, Frank A. Agnew to HJ, April 26, 1913, Box 37, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
120. Letter, G. E. Severs to HJ, June 11, 1913, Box 39, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
121. Letter, W. A. Davis to HJ, April 16, 1913, Box 37, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
123. Letter, F. J. Chase to HJ, April 18, 1913, ibid.
As Wilson’s exchanges and comments show, domestic politics were almost always bound hand and foot. More specifically, the president had to keep his eyes on popular attitudes, and his concern regarding public leadership led to his reluctance to intervene in the “Japanese question.” Further, the spread of attention across the nation further complicated Washington’s politics; the issue was no longer just California’s problem. Wilson did not want to incur the wrath of the people—not just in California, but across the nation.

Across the Pacific, the Japanese government, led by the new Prime Minister, Yamamoto Gonbei, was faced with a similarly troubling situation. Formed in February 1913 amid one of the most important periods of modern Japanese history—the so-called Taisho Political Crisis—the Yamamoto cabinet maintained only a shaky political balance among rivaling parties. Trying to avoid any mistake that would cause public criticism, the government tried to pursue a cautious approach to the California issue until early in the spring of 1913. By mid-April, however, Tokyo’s problem was getting deeper. Wilson would not extend a helping hand anymore. In addition, the Yamamoto administration had to deal with nationalistic feelings at home—ardent hostility toward America and, by extension, harsh criticism toward the “weak-kneed” Japanese government, which Foreign Minister Makino Nobuaki described as “boiling” sentiments.

Between April 16 and 19, a crowd of approximately twenty thousand Japanese gathered in Tokyo, demanding that the government protect Japanese residents in California and the nation’s “face.” The hall was fully packed, as were the trains to the site. “Thousands of the crowd flowed from every direction like a tide,” reported one paper. One of the speakers in the mass meeting pointed out that the problem was not about economic interests but about the “Japanese nation’s dignity.” The tone of the speeches increased in intensity day by day. On the first day, speakers appealed for a boycott of American goods, but, gradually, orators turned more passionate and nationalistic, criticizing the irresoluteness of the Foreign Office as a thing “worse than useless.” Some even demanded that the Japanese fleet be sent to California, and a flood of protesters crowded around the U.S. embassy in Tokyo.

Many newspapers quickly reflected the popular political culture in society. Asabi Shinbun, for instance, printed several political cartoons that blamed Californians’ unreasonable behavior for the crisis; Mainichi Shinbun similarly declared that the Japanese fleet was no toy and that if discriminatory legislation in Sacramento rendered such a step necessary it could be used for the vindication of Japanese honor. Yomuri Shinbun also wrote, “The California dispute is not only a problem for the Japanese living there, but also a significant issue for our national dignity.” It further pointed out that the root of the California dispute was “racial discrimination,” and this was not just a problem in California. Likewise, most of the popular magazines, such as Nihon oyabi Nihonjin, Chuokoron, and Taisho, kept step and problematized “racism” in California.

Even a pro-American publisher, Tokudomi Soho, began using strong words in his newspaper, Kokumin Shinbun. Its headlines declared an “unreasonable Japanese exclusion problem” (April 13) and “immoral hypocrisy under the mask of Christianity” (April 14). It declared, “We should not bear this national disgrace” (April 19) and “they are the bellissimo race,” and called this crisis “a rupture of Japanese-American relations” (April 21). Tokudomi’s turnaround was symbolic, since previously he had tried to minimize such antagonistic arguments. The rise of nationalism and anti-American sentiments appeared even in a magazine for teenagers, Boken Sekai [Adventure World], which printed two anti-American stories in June. These stories harshly criticized the California situation and condemned Christians and missionaries in Japan, calling them “spies and betrayers.” One of the articles thundered, “We the Japanese are not a warlike nation, but are not reluctant to fight for justice. America’s hired troop is nothing to get upset about. For a start, send our fleet to the US continent and not only protect our people, but also show the nation’s determination.”


132. Having been born in the popular political turmoil, the Yamamoto cabinet was particularly vulnerable to public criticism because it “had not solidified its foundation in Japanese politics.” See Jun Fujiy, “Gentlemen’s Disagreement: The Controversy between the United States and Japan over the California Alien Land Law of 1913” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1989), 1, and 120-23.

133. Telegram, Makino to Chinda, April 10, 1913, NGB, 1913 (Taisho 2), no. 3: 45-46; Telegram, Makino to Chinda, April 11, 1913, NGB, 1913 (Taisho 2), no. 3: 54.

134. Asabi Shinbun (Tokyo), April 18, 1913.


138. Yomuri Shinbun (Tokyo), April 15, 1913.

139. Yomuri Shinbun (Tokyo), April 20, 1913. For similar articles in other newspapers, such as Chuokoron, Yoruzu Chosho, Fujin Shinto, Japan Times, and Japan Advertiser, see Link, Wilson, vol. 2, 292-93.

140. Nihon oyabi Nihonjin, vol. 604 (April 15, 1913) and vol. 605 (May 1, 1913); Chuokoron, vol. 191 (May 1913); Taisho, vol. 196 (June 1913). Katayama Sen, a socialist and proponent of the settlement movement, who was educated and worked in the United States, wrote one of the few articles in this period that criticized chauvinistic "jingoism" in Japan and asserted that the Japanese in California did not want to problematize the issue as an international dispute. See Taisho keizai shinbun, vol. 651 (April 25, 1913). Also see Yamamoto Shiro, Yamamoto Naikaku no kantetsu kenyō [The Basic Studies of the Yamamoto Cabinet] (Kyoto, 1992), 332-46.

141. Kokumin Shinbun (Tokyo), April 13, 14, 15, 19, and 21, 1913.

142. Boken Sekai 6, no. 6 (June 1913): 87-95. Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan [the National Diet Library], Tokyo, Japan.
Reflecting such a “boiling” mood, the opposition parties and various political and economic groups, including the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Tokyo, condemned the Yamamoto cabinet for being weak-kneed toward the U.S. government. In particular, the Foreign Ministry was criticized for their “carelessness” and “slackness.” Foreign Minister Makino Nobuaki received several letters from colleagues, including one from a influential senior statesman, all of which expressed deep worry about the California situation and the extreme sentiments at home. Makino replied that the cabinet was acutely concerned about the rise of such antagonistic popular sentiments. Remembering his own trip to the United States during the war scare of 1907, Prime Minister Yamamoto Gonbei too appealed to the public that “popular political campaigns [against the Alien Land Law] should be temperate and must not be extreme in a way that might offend Americans’ feelings.” Yet vehement popular sentiments at that time went far beyond the intentions of political officials.

Despite Yamamoto’s concern, the antagonistic tones in Japan were quickly translated and widely reported in America. Not only so-called yellow papers, but also respected newspapers like the New York Times charged that the “irresponsible newspapers of Japan are stirring the lower class of the people into a passion,” and warned that “Japanese hawks’ tough talk will merely ossify Americans.” Indeed, many Americans’ perceptions of the Japanese stiffened, and Governor Hiram Johnson’s office was inundated with a flood of letters from all over the country. “Just a line to say that I hope you will see that the Alien Land Bill is passed,” wrote a Colorado man, “even if it throw[s] this country into war. . . If we back down to that little upstart of a Japan we will be made the laughing stock of the world.” An old forty-niner and a Mexican War veteran from Oakland praised Johnson’s “manly” stand and declared:

Now we are confronted with an Asiatic invasion and the menacing attitude of the would-be Masters of the Pacific Ocean, the most arrogant people on earth, the Japanese. . . If we have to fight, to protect ourselves, we will do it, let California stand firm on the everlasting principles of law, justice and right.

A Minnesota man similarly asked, “Who will save [California] from the Japanese seeking its conquest by an adroit policy of pacific penetration?” Another letter warned that Japan had been preparing for war by sending their men in the guise of immigrants.

Many letters were wary of Japan’s expansion over the Pacific and viewed Japanese immigration as Japan’s “penetration” and “invasion.” The association between immigrants and “invasion” seems irrelevant, yet some believed it in view of Japan’s alleged policy in Korea since 1905. James Phelan, for instance, later observed Japan’s policy as “silent penetration” for ten years,” finding a parallel between Tokyo’s conduct in Korea and that in California. According to this view, immigration was a security issue, even though it had not been previously. This example implies that a “crisis” gets problematized, or discovered, often depending on the social development of discourse in the context of popular political culture.

In the war scares of 1913, the image of the Russo-Japanese War was still powerful. By this time, Japan had gradually come to be seen as a possible cunning, formidable enemy. An anonymous letter wrote, for instance, [Japan] was friendly with Russia, up to a certain period momentous in history. And then, what did Japan do? She gave Russia a ‘body-blow’ before (metaphorically speaking) the latter could get her hands up; smashed her Navy to pieces; and whipped (geographically speaking) the biggest country on earth—that’s what she did.

Then the letter ominously warned, “Suppose Japan (in her own way) should declare war to-morrow.” Such opinion was not alone in terms of the judgment of Japan’s military capability; as appeared in a cartoon in the Wasp, Japanese ability to wage war was often exaggerated at that time (Figure 5).

Some people strongly believed that the military power of Japan, which was “demonstrated” against China, Russia, and Korea, would surpass that of the United States. A man from New Hampshire frankly appealed to Johnson to veto the Alien Land Law because the passage of it would give Japan “an excuse.
outset [sic], although we would calculate to win—in the end.” In retrospect, these kinds of sentiments might be seen as groundless fear, but they were at least discussable discourse in the context of the contemporary discourse about Japan—especially about the result of the Russo-Japanese War.

In such a popular mood, one man even suffered from nightmares, which he reported to Johnson:

I wanted you to know of a dream I had about the Japs... I dreamed I was in Cal with my son 9 yrs old, was on a farm; the next thing I remember I was tied hand and foot by Japs; my boy was with me... and the Japs killed him and cut his tongue out, and said that was the way they intended to do with all Americans.  

Although this letter does not explain about the direct impact on policymaking processes, it does highlight the intensity of anti-Japanese popular attitudes—fear and antagonism—that limited the range of political choices leading figures could choose.

Although newspapers might have had some influence, social formation of popular attitudes was simply beyond the calculations and intentions of political leaders and newspaper editors. Michael De Young's *San Francisco Chronicle*, for instance, had been famous as a fierce anti-Japanese organ since 1905, yet it took a different stance in 1913. The paper opposed the Alien Land Law and made an agreement with the Japanese government to publish advertisements that advocated Japanese immigrants' rights. The paper's turnaround, however, did not change the tide of popular attitudes at all; it was simply criticized. One reader sent a letter to the *Chronicle*, saying:

Your opinion on the Legislature with its many freak bills is very good but when it comes to the 'Alien-land Bill' you seem to favor incoming of the Japanese which is contrary to the many anti-Japanese articles of the *Chronicle* a few years ago, your readers cannot understand that from an Anti Japanese Journal you have become a pro-Japanese advocate and your article in yesterday's paper is misleading and untrue.

---

158. Ibid.

159. Letter, Harry Armstrong to HJ, April 28, 1913, Box 37, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.

160. Tokyo's effort was seen in several telegrams. For instance, see: Telegram, Makino to Chinda, April 21, 1913, NGB 1913 (Taisho 2), no. 3: 999; Telegram, Makino to Numano, April 25, 1913, NGB 1913 (Taisho 2), no. 3: 124; and Telegram, Numano to Makino, April 25, 1913, NGB 1913 (Taisho 2), no. 3: 133. The *San Francisco Chronicle* published some all-page advertisements, "The Status of Japanese Immigrants in California" on April 27, 1913 and "Some More Facts Relative to Japanese Immigrants" on April 28, 1913. They were published along with Stanford President David S. Jordan's letter.

161. Letter, John Smith to the San Francisco Chronicle, April 11, 1913, Box 39, Part II, HJ Papers, The Bancroft Library, UCB.
This example suggests that media, as well as political figures, get to lead only when followers decided to follow them.

On May 3, 1913, the Alien Land Law passed the California Senate and Assembly, and only awaited the governor’s signature to be enacted. Immediately after the passage of the bill, the Japanese ambassador met Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan and handed him the Japanese government’s formal protest, which harshly condemned the legislation in California. For Tokyo, the protest had to be strong. The government had been criticized as weak-kneed. Given the mood of resentment at home, the “formal protest” against the United States was widely anticipated by the public, and newspapers had already been discussing its contents and timing. The Yamamoto cabinet had to avert nationalist criticism from its domestic foes. The shift in Tokyo’s attitudes, from an initially cautious one to the latter, tougher one, signifies the influence of populist political trends of the Taishō period on governmental diplomacy.

Along with the escalation of war scares at home and abroad, Japan’s “urgent and explicit protest” made Washington officials acutely concerned. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels recalled that the words of the protest were too strong, stronger than the circumstances seemed to warrant. The cabinet meeting on May 13 discussed the possibilities for war with Japan. Particularly, they were worried that Japan might take the Philippines and possibly land an army in California. The military circles were particularly worried. In particular, the Navy believed that “war is not only possible, but even probable.” Thus it was not surprising that, in mid-May, a naval staff completed revised “War Plan Orange,” the strategic military plan against Japan, which was first written in 1907 when the first war scare emerged after the school segregation problem in San Francisco. Likewise, the Army War College prepared a paper insisting that Japan “has several open diplomatic questions which she can raise at any time, such as immigration, school and land law.” The paper concluded, “Japan is fully prepared to wage an aggressive war against a Trans-Pacific Power as far as her army is concerned.” Written amid war scares, both the navy’s and the army’s studies were clearly influenced by social discourse regarding Japan at that time.

162. Telegram, Chinda to Makino, May 9, 1913, NGB 1913 (Taishō 2), no. 3: 191-97.
163. Aichi Shinbun (Tokyo), April 21, 1913, and May 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 15, 1913.
164. Nihon Shinbun (Tokyo), May 12, 15, and 21, 1913.
166. Daniels Diary, 13 May 13, 1913, The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921, 53-54.
167. Rear Admiral Bradley Fisk, “Possibility of War with Japan,” May 14, 1913, in Daniels Diary, Ibd., 64.

**Conclusion**

The American-Japanese dispute, which began from the school and immigration problems, eventually caught the attention of masses of people across borders and resulted in war scares. Even though such talk was laughed at as local prejudice in 1906, the situation changed; eventually, Collier’s acknowledged in 1913, “It is the local outcropping of the greatest of world problems—the riddle of the intermingling of races. It is a world question. It is a problem of all races.” The London Times similarly concluded:

The ultimate point in dispute does not affect the U.S. alone, still less the State of California. It is essentially a world question. That Japan’s claim should first have become an acute case of trouble in California is due to the accident of propinquity. California is now the frontier line of white races, beyond which are the teeming population of Asia.

Both editorials now interpreted the “Japanese question” as not a local topic but a universal issue. The passage of the Alien Land Law in California left deep scars on people’s memories for the future. The Baltimore American was right to lament during the crisis: “California has opened the Pandora box and the world will have to bear with the ills it let loose.”

This article has examined the deterioration of U.S.-Japanese relations between 1905 and 1913, when their relations began to change fundamentally. Several key events and phenomena have been observed: the worldwide psychological impact of Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War; the inflaming of anti-Japanese sentiments and the school segregation problem in San Francisco; the spread of war scares in both societies; the dispatch of the U.S. fleet and the renewal of U.S. military strategy; the politicizing of the “Japanese question” in various elections; and the passage of the California Alien Land Law, which caused Japan’s formal, strong protest toward the U.S. government.

Through these events and phenomena, we can see that the decline in U.S.-Japanese relations mostly resulted from a shift in popular political cultures in societies—anger and antipathy among the people—rather than from critical failures in “high politics.” The administrations in both countries during this period attempted to soothe volatile racism and antagonism in their respective societies, as long as domestic politics would allow. Due to the recent development of mass circulation newspapers and telegraphic tools, however, popular political cultures were readily felt across borders and directly affected the hearts of the thousands of people in Japan and the United States, regardless of high-ranking officials’ calculations.

168. Collier’s, May 31, 1913.
The series of events and phenomena in this period suggest one of the typical formative processes of international crisis, which can be roughly divided into four stages: (1) the spread of news, ideas, and emotions among numberless people worldwide regarding foreign affairs; (2) the symbolic association of foreign affairs with domestic issues in the context of local popular culture; (3) social selections through the process of domestic politics and local/national elections; and (4) high-ranking policymakers’ choices and adaptations in the making of domestic/foreign policies.

Although the traditional approach to diplomatic history often focuses heavily only on the last stage, this article suggests that studies of international relations history cannot be contained in the study of governmental relations. This is because governmental foreign policy is, as this article has demonstrated, often subjected to and tilted by social pressures and politics at home. More specifically, popular political culture in society increasingly becomes an important factor that affects the two nations’ foreign relations. This discussion involves four arguments and emphases of this article. First, while political leaders’ control may have some influence, popular political culture develops beyond their manipulation; and further, as this article describes, leaders change their stances depending on their political, social, and cultural environments. We need to look carefully into how they adapt themselves, in addition to what they believe. This was especially the case after the discovery of mass society in the early twentieth century. In this period, “leaders” of state suddenly found themselves in need of becoming skillful “readers” of society and popular sentiments. Thus we need to examine not just policymakers’ personal characteristics and beliefs but also society, culture, value, and norms, with which they regularly have contact. Policymakers’ decisions, after all, are shaped through interactive, spontaneous communications with such environments.

Second, however, no environments are inherent and everlasting. President Wilson’s “hands-off” policy was, for example, largely caused by his judgment regarding popular political culture and domestic politics. But such cultural and political environments were not deeply rooted, ineradicable traditions; rather, as this article shows, they were products of socially constructed discourse at that time. In fact, a “crisis” of American-Japanese relations in the early twentieth century was recognized only when it was interpreted and accepted as such by numberless people. In this view, American-Japanese relations were not just diplomatic relations but also malleable products of social construction between two societies through the languages the people use and accept.

Third, and following from the above, instead of labeling “traditional ideology” or “racism” as decisive, everlasting factors of foreign relations, this article tried to listen to contemporary voices of nameless, numberless individuals in societies as symbolic representations of contingent, popular political culture. Measuring individuals’ attitudes is difficult, especially in a period without opinion polls. In addition, existing sources are limited, and they might be biased at the time of gathering. Nevertheless, the use of individual letters and diaries still seems useful because they so vividly express the air of the era in which leaders lived and with which they had to deal.

Last but not least, the deterioration of American-Japanese relations in the early twentieth century demonstrates that the process of globalization developed no less importantly through the spread and interaction of news, ideas, and emotions across borders than through the transfer and high mobility of humans, goods, and capital. Due to the then recent development of mass circulation newspapers in American and Japanese societies, news, ideas, and emotions regarding global events were permeated quickly throughout the world, became associated symbolically with local issues, and contributed to shaping listeners’ worldviews, which in turn played significant roles in limiting and conditioning courses of governmental policy at home and abroad.

The harsh disputes over immigration and race in the early twentieth century left a bitter residue in U.S.-Japanese relations. Although anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiments in America and Japan respectively in 1905–1913 were for a time largely forgotten, they were abruptly and vigorously reconstructed in the mid-1920s and again in the early 1940s when the people of the two countries faced their crises, culminating in all-out war after 1941. Once remembered, those memories were used again and again. As John Dower describes, such antagonistic popular sentiments in both countries later contributed to the psychological distancing that facilitated merciless killing in the battlefields.

This research sheds light on the domestic, social development of racism and hostility among peoples, which contributed to a worsening of U.S.-Japanese relations. Even though fear and antagonism of this period neither triggered a sudden collapse of their relations, nor originated their ultimate war, it did change their relations in the decades to follow. In a sense, the crisis between the two countries in 1905–1913 was not merely a momentary “little cloud” as William Howard Taft described it in Tokyo in 1907. What Taft, who made most of his brilliant diplomatic career without experiencing major elections, characteristically underestimated were the effects of domestic politics and popular political culture. The American-Japanese crisis in the early twentieth century underscores an awakening of grassroots, popular sentiments in societies, which signaled the beginning of the relative decline in the role of diplomacy and, at the same time, signified the increasing weight of the roles of contingent domestic politics and popular political cultures in international relations. This trend has continued throughout the twentieth century to the present. A pattern that appeared a century ago—an international crisis facilitated by fear, antagonism, and rumors of war at home—seems far from old news for us today.