



CAPTAIN WILSON: Hullo! What about India?
PASSPORT OFFICER (Lloyd George): No passport, Captain.

FRONTISPIECE: In the immediate wake of the First World War, many in India and China expected that with U.S. president Woodrow Wilson at the helm, the peoples of the "East" would soon win self-determination. This illustration depicts a diverse group of "Oriental" figures, including two who appear to be Chinese (*at center back*), boarding the SS *Self-Determination*, which "Captain Wilson" is about to pilot to "freedom." Only India, shown as a young, sari-clad woman, is held at the dock by a passport officer in the image of the British prime minister, David Lloyd George. From *Self-Determination for India* (London, 1919), enclosed in B. G. Tilak to Woodrow Wilson, January 2, 1919, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Series 5F, Reel 446, Library of Congress.

Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire in 1919

EREZ MANELA

Imagination fails to picture the wild delirium of joy with which he [Woodrow Wilson] would have been welcomed in Asiatic capitals. It would have been as though one of the great teachers of humanity, Christ or Buddha, had come back to his home.

Srinivasa Sastri¹

WHEN WOODROW WILSON LANDED in the harbor of Brest on the French Atlantic coast on Friday, December 13, 1918, the city's mayor met him at the dock and greeted him as an apostle of liberty, come to release the peoples of Europe from their suffering. The next morning, Wilson drove along the streets of Paris through cheering throngs, and the French press across the political spectrum hailed him as "the incarnation of the hope of the future." The U.S. president met similar receptions in England and Italy over the next several weeks.² H. G. Wells captured the essence of popular sentiments a few years later, when he noted the intense yet fleeting nature of Wilson's apotheosis: "For a brief interval, Wilson stood alone for mankind. And in that brief interval there was a very extraordinary and significant wave of response to him throughout the earth . . . He ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah."³ Despite such high passions, however, the story of the ecstatic reception accorded the U.S. president in Europe is remembered today as little more than an ironic footnote to the history of the Great War. Most of the hopes and expectations associated with Wilson were quickly disappointed, and the widespread reverence of

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¹ *Woodrow Wilson's Message for Eastern Nations, Selected by Himself from His Public Addresses*, Foreword by the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri (Calcutta, 1925), iv–v. Sastri (1860–1946) was a leading liberal intellectual and politician in pre-independence India. See Ray T. Smith, "V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and the Moderate Style in Indian Politics," *South Asia* 2 (1972): 81–100.

² "Two Million Cheer Wilson," *New York Times*, December 15, 1918, 1; Charles T. Thompson, *The Peace Conference Day by Day: A Presidential Pilgrimage Leading to the Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1920), 6, 55–56, 67–68. Also Arthur Walworth, *Woodrow Wilson*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1978), 2: 221–234.

³ H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (New York, 1933), 82.

the U.S. leader in Europe and elsewhere quickly turned into bitter disillusionment.⁴ The terms of the Treaty of Versailles, signed on June 28, 1919, fell far short of the expectations that Wilson had inspired, and it was repudiated by most of his former admirers around the world, and also by the U.S. Senate and the American public, who were eager to return to the comforting embrace of “normalcy.”⁵

There is, of course, voluminous historiography on the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and the U.S. role in it, but it has remained rather single-mindedly focused on Europe, and specifically on the policies, decisions, and leaders of the Great Powers.⁶ Much of the literature, in fact, seems to follow closely the Great Power agenda at the negotiation table, with the volume of writings on specific issues and regions often matching the attention that the major Allied leaders paid to them at the time. This is hardly surprising, since many of the issues debated in Paris were indeed of momentous import, both for the immediate shape of the peace settlement and, in some cases, for the subsequent history of Europe. International historians, however, have tended to leave in the shadows the very same issues that were marginalized or ignored, whether by design or neglect, by the Great Power leaders themselves in their deliberations. Foremost among these issues were the demands for self-determination of representatives of peoples outside Europe, most especially in those cases—China, Korea, Egypt, Tunisia, India, Indochina, and others—in which the interests of one or more of the victorious Allied powers stood to be compromised if the demands were entertained. The spring of 1919 saw the launching of revolts against empire in numerous non-European societies and the expansion of anticolonial nationalism to unprecedented intensity and scope, and a few international historians have indeed noted in passing the significance of 1919 in the world outside Europe and identified it as a watershed in the rise of anticolonial nationalism as a broad, international phenomenon.⁷ However, these movements and the goals and perceptions that drove them, though of course prominent in their respective national and regional histories, have received little sustained or detailed attention in the international histories of 1919.⁸

⁴ Wilson himself seems to have foreseen this, telling his adviser George Creel that the expectations of the United States were so unrealistic that they would inevitably lead to a “tragedy of disappointment.” Creel, *The War, the World and Wilson* (New York, 1920), 161–162. Another instance showing Wilson to be “very nervous” that the inflated expectation would lead to “revulsion” when people discovered that he could not do all they had hoped is recorded in the Diary of Edith Benham, February 2, 1919, in Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* [hereafter *PWW*], ed. Arthur S. Link et al., 69 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1966–1994), 54: 432–433.

⁵ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge, 2001); Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁶ Leading works include Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York, 2002); Manfred F. Boemeke et al., eds., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge, 1998); Erik Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916–1920* (New York, 1991); Arthur Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (New York, 1986); Marc Trachtenberg, “Versailles after Sixty Years,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (1982): 487–506; Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York, 1967); Seth P. Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Princeton, N.J., 1961).

⁷ Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (New York, 1964), 151–155; Henri Grimal, *Decolonization: The British, French, Dutch and Belgian Empires, 1919–1963* (Boulder, Colo., 1978), 17–18.

⁸ Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, devotes more attention than previous accounts to some of the demands for

Once we remove the Eurocentric lens through which the international history of 1919 is most often written, it becomes clear that the significance of the “brief interval” of Wilson’s ascendance far transcended the confines of Europe. An examination of how the ascendance of Wilson and the United States during this period was interpreted by leading intellectuals and refracted in public discourses in Asian societies would expand our view of the international history of 1919; at the same time, it would illuminate the connections between the transformative events that took place in Asian societies during this period, which have typically been studied within historiographical disciplines that have remained separate and distinct,⁹ and the wider international context of the period. Though no single essay could capture the full story of Asian responses to Wilson, there is nevertheless a strong argument for a transnational approach, since an inquiry limited to a single Asian society, however valuable, would still produce a narrative confined within the enclosure of national history, one that would have persisted in naturalizing the nation “as the skin that contains the experience of the past.”¹⁰ By examining responses to Wilson’s rhetoric and the construction of his image within two major Asian societies—China and India—we can better capture the broad scope of the “Wilsonian moment” in Asia.

There were, of course, myriad differences in the historical experiences and circumstances of these two societies in 1919, not least in the specific characters of their respective relationships with empire. India had long been the crown jewel of the British imperial edifice and, despite some minor political reforms in the years immediately before the war, continued to be ruled directly and autocratically by a British-led bureaucracy. China, on the other hand, was recognized as an independent state in theory. In practice, however, China existed in a state of semicolonial subjugation, severely limited in the exercise of its sovereignty by a web of “unequal treaties” with the major powers; and Chinese intellectuals in 1919, like their Indian counterparts, viewed their struggle for self-determination as part of a broader revolt against imperialism.¹¹ Thus, the war and its immediate aftermath saw similar developments in China and India. Both societies at the time had emergent nationalist

self-determination ignored by the conference, but even so, the topic takes up no more than a few pages in the book (see 322–325, 339–341, 402–403). Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007, forthcoming), aims to begin closing this historiographical gap.

⁹ E.g., on China see Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), and Andrew J. Nathan, *Peking Politics, 1918–1923* (Berkeley, Calif., 1976). On India, see Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi’s Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915–1922* (Cambridge, 1972), and DeWitt C. Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan, eds., *India and World War I* (New Delhi, 1978). On Indochina, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). On Korea, see Michael Edson Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle, Wash., 1988).

¹⁰ Prasenjit Duara, “Transnationalism and the Challenge of National Histories,” in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 25. A number of leading international historians have written on the importance of eschewing what Akira Iriye has called a “unilateral” approach to international history. See, e.g., Iriye, “Internationalizing International History,” in Bender, *Rethinking American History*, 47–62; Michael H. Hunt, “Internationalizing U.S. Diplomatic History: A Practical Agenda,” *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 1 (1991): 1–11.

¹¹ Madeleine Chi, “China and Unequal Treaties at the Paris Conference of 1919,” *Asian Profile* 1, no. 1 (1973): 49–61. For China’s place in the prewar international system and its impact on intellectual developments there, see Zhang Yongjin, *China in the International System, 1918–1920: The Middle Kingdom at the Periphery* (Oxford, 1991), 15–38.

movements and leaders that were engaged in a search for a greater measure of sovereignty in domestic and international affairs. In the heady months from the fall of 1918, when Allied victory was in sight, to the spring of 1919, when the actual terms of the peace began to emerge, leaders and publics in the two societies paid close attention to the shifts in the discourses of international power and legitimacy that Wilson's rise appeared to herald, and strove to interpret and shape the significance of these shifts for their specific circumstances.

Historians have often noted how the spectacle of material destruction and moral degeneration that was the Great War helped launch a broad critique among Afro-Asian intellectuals of the West's claim to superior civilization.¹² This insight, important as it is, elides the widespread if short-lived adulation in Asia of that quintessential product of the "West," Woodrow Wilson. The war itself, to be sure, brought dislocation and suffering and showcased European savagery, but it also inspired great expectations for a postwar transformation in which a chastened Europe would change its ways, and for a new international order that would accord non-European peoples their rightful place among nations. The war could be seen as evidence for the degeneracy of Europe, but Europe did not encompass the "West" in its entirety; the United States could still appear as a rising force that would salvage and fulfill the promise of "Western civilization." Indeed, it is arguable that during the 1918–1919 period, the United States appeared to Chinese and Indians to hold greater promise than at any time before or since.¹³ The disappointments of the peace, rather than the devastations of the war as such, sealed the postwar indictment of Asian intellectuals against the West.

Another artifact of the Eurocentric lens through which the international history of 1919 is often viewed is the common conceptualization of that moment as a clash of two opposing visions of world order: liberal internationalism vs. communist internationalism, or "Wilson vs. Lenin," to use Arno Mayer's memorable phrase.¹⁴ Mayer, however, coined the phrase specifically to describe the wartime struggle between Bolshevism and Wilsonian reformism over the hearts and minds of the European left, and in the context of the world outside Europe, that parallel opposition is less applicable.¹⁵ At least until the spring of 1919, when evidence of Wilson's failure to implement his vaunted principles began to emerge from Paris, it was Wilson, not Lenin, who loomed far larger in the imaginations of Asian intellectuals, both as an inspiration for expectations and rhetoric and as a putative source of practical support for self-determination. It was only after the collapse of the Wilsonian moment in mid-1919 that Lenin and Russian Bolshevism began to gain importance as a potential model and ally for many movements for self-determination in Asia.

While the moment lasted, however, many in Asia believed that President Wilson had both the intent and the power to construct a new mode of international relations

¹² Michael Adas, "Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 31–63. Such critiques of Western modernity were, of course, also common in the West itself in the postwar period.

¹³ The American pursuit of a revised Wilsonian program in the wake of World War II was much more circumspect, and could not replicate the sense of possibility of 1918–1919. See Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

¹⁴ Arno Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New York, 1967).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 245–266.

predicated on the principles of “self-determination” and “the equality of nations,” in which the prewar imperial arrangements, with Asian nations consigned to various forms of subjugation and subordination, would be rendered illegitimate. Along with the millions in Europe who cheered Wilson upon his arrival there, Indians and Chinese saw Wilson’s wartime rhetoric as a blueprint for a more peaceful and inclusive international order, one in which Asian nations could achieve a greater measure of equality and sovereignty. Asian intellectuals pondered not only the responses that Wilson’s arrival on the continent would have elicited, as Srinivasa Sastri did, but also, much more importantly, how his plans for the postwar world, as they understood them, might mediate the chasm in international relations between “East” and “West” and allow Asian peoples to put their relationships with the West on a footing of equality and mutual respect. In order to better understand that transformative juncture in international history, historians must imagine Woodrow Wilson in Asia, just as many of his contemporaries there did.

DESPITE THE PERCEPTION OF WILSON in the minds of many at the time and later as the leading champion of a postwar order based on a right to “self-determination,” it was the Russian Bolsheviks, not Wilson, who introduced this term into the wartime international discourse. The principle of “national self-determination” and its relationship to socialist revolution had long been a staple of debate among European socialists, and some saw nationalism as a barrier to class solidarity and a dangerous diversion from the revolutionary mission. For Lenin, however, support for colonial liberation was an important tool for undermining the capitalist-imperialist world order.¹⁶ Even before his return to Russia in April 1917, Lenin declared that when the Bolsheviks came to power, their peace plan would include “the liberation of all colonies” and of “all dependent, oppressed, and unequal nations.” Shortly thereafter, the Provisional Government in Russia, under pressure from the Bolshevik-controlled Petrograd Soviet, became the first among the belligerent governments to call officially for a peace settlement “on the basis of self-determination of peoples.”¹⁷ After the Bolsheviks took control of the revolution in November, the newly appointed commissar of foreign affairs, Leon Trotsky, immediately demanded that the Allied powers “give the right of self-determination to the peoples of Ireland, Egypt, India, Madagascar, Indochina, et cetera.” Otherwise, their claim to be fighting the war for the freedom of small nations would be little more than “the most naked, the most cynical imperialism.”¹⁸

The Bolshevik calls in late 1917 for a settlement based on national self-deter-

¹⁶ V. I. Lenin, “Theses on the Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” in Lenin, *Collected Works*, 45 vols. (Moscow, 1960–1970), 22: 143–156. This essay, completed in March 1916 and first published in October 1916, expressed ideas that Lenin formed in 1915–1916, in the course of writing his treatise *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. For a detailed analysis of the early socialist and Bolshevik debates on the national question, see Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–1923* (London, 1999), 3–22.

¹⁷ V. I. Lenin, “Fourth Letter from Afar,” March 25, 1917, in Lenin, *Collected Works*, 23: 338; “Statement by the Provisional Government regarding the War,” April 9, 1917, in C. K. Cumming and Walter W. Pettit, eds., *Russian-American Relations, March 1917–March 1920* (New York, 1920), 9–10.

¹⁸ Address from the Bolsheviks “To Peoples and Governments of Allied Countries,” December 31, 1917, *PWW*, 45: 412–413. See also John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace* (Princeton, N.J., 1966), chap. 1.

mination found great resonance within the anti-imperialist left in Europe. In Britain, it helped inflame the dissatisfaction of the Labour Party opposition with the vagueness of their government's war aims, a sentiment already stoked, after the American entry into the war in April 1917, by Wilson's repeated calls for a postwar settlement based on "the consent of the governed." Prime Minister David Lloyd George, concerned that the enthusiasm of the left in Britain and other Allied countries for the rhetorics of Wilson and Lenin would compromise popular support for the war effort, moved quickly to redefine British war aims in more progressive terms.¹⁹ Speaking before the British Trades Union League on January 5, 1918, Lloyd George performed an act of rhetorical legerdemain, merging the divergent discourses of Wilson and Lenin into one: the peace, he said, must be based "on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed."²⁰ By equating the Bolshevik call for "national self-determination" for ethnic minorities to Wilson's notion of a peace based on the principle of popular consent, Lloyd George managed to obfuscate the differences between the revolutionary agenda of the former and the liberal reformism implied in the latter.

Wilson himself completed this conflation in the following months. Although he had never before uttered, or perhaps even encountered, the term "self-determination," he quickly adopted it as his own, with growing fervor and emphasis. Despite popular conceptions to the contrary, the term itself was nowhere to be found in the Fourteen Points address. Several of the points, however—the resurrection of Poland, the evacuation of Belgium, and his call for the "autonomous development" of the peoples of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires—seemed to imply that peace depended on the rollback of imperial rule and conquest, at least in some cases.²¹ The following month, Wilson spoke explicitly for the first time of a right of "self-determination" in international affairs. The coming world settlement, he said in another address to Congress, must respect the voices of the people: "national aspirations must be respected; people may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent." Although he was introducing a new phrase into his political vocabulary, he was quite emphatic in advocating it: "'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril."²² Wilson, then, did not present this principle as a theoretical construct that he wished to implement, but as an independent force already at work in world politics, one that must be recognized and accommodated.

In Wilson's usage, however, the meaning of "self-determination" was far vaguer and more elastic than it was in Lenin's. For the Bolsheviks, who almost always preceded the term with the adjective "national," it was a call for the revolutionary overthrow of imperial rule through an appeal to the national identity and aspirations of subject peoples. Wilson, on the other hand, rarely if ever uttered the specific term

¹⁹ Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin*, 385–387; Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations*, 26; George W. Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations: Strategy, Politics and International Organization, 1914–1919* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 57–59.

²⁰ David Lloyd George, *British War Aims: Statement by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable David Lloyd George, on January 5, 1918* (London, 1918). See also Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York, 1992), 143.

²¹ Address to a Joint Session of Congress, January 8, 1918, *PWW*, 45: 534–539.

²² Address to Congress, February 11, 1918, *PWW*, 46: 321.

“national self-determination”; he used the more general, vaguer phrase “self-determination,” and usually equated the term with popular consent, conjuring an international order based on democratic forms of government. He did at times advocate redrawing borders along ethnic lines, as in the cases of Poland and Italy, but he saw the independence of ethnic or national units as only one among several ways to implement self-determination. In the case of the peoples of Austria-Hungary, for example, Wilson supported autonomy rather than full independence as compatible with the principle of self-determination until the collapse of the Vienna government made that option impractical. If Lenin saw self-determination as a revolutionary principle and sought to use it as a wrecking ball against the reactionary multiethnic empires of Europe, Wilson hoped that self-determination would serve precisely in the opposite role: as a bulwark against radical, revolutionary challenges to existing orders. If revolution, as Wilson and other Progressives believed, was a reaction to oppression by autocratic, unaccountable regimes, then the application of self-determination, defined as government by consent, would help to remove the revolutionary impulse and promote change through gradual reforms.²³

Wilson, then, grafted the new term onto his old ideas, and used it in his addresses as essentially synonymous with the notions of popular sovereignty and government by consent, which had long been central in his wartime rhetoric, and indeed in the tradition of Anglo-American political thought. If he saw any distinction between the new principle of “self-determination” and the old one of government by consent, the documentary record gives us no such clue. And like his old notions of consent, this new principle was phrased in universal language; theoretically, at least, it applied to all peoples everywhere. But if Wilson, in his speeches, did not explicitly limit the application of the principle to Europe, it is clear that as a practical matter, he saw it as immediately relevant only to the European territories of the defeated empires—German, Austrian-Hungarian, and Ottoman. Eventually, he imagined, it might apply in other colonial situations, but if so, it would be through gradual processes of tutelage and reform such as he himself had initiated in the U.S. colonial administration of the Philippines—not, if he could help it, through the violent overthrow of colonial rule.²⁴

In the final months of the war, calls for a peace based on “self-determination” recurred regularly and with increasing emphasis alongside references to the “consent of the governed” in Wilson’s public rhetoric. In his Independence Day address in July 1918, the U.S. president described the war as an epic struggle between oppressive regimes whose time had passed and the progressive ideals to which the future belonged. In the aftermath of the struggle, he said, American ideals of government by

²³ For more extended discussion of Wilson’s usage of “self-determination,” see Michla Pomerance, “The United States and Self-Determination: Perspectives on the Wilsonian Conception,” *American Journal of International Law* 70 (1976): 1–27; Betty Miller Unterberger, “The United States and National Self-Determination: A Wilsonian Perspective,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (1996): 926–941; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, “Dilemmas of National Self-Determination: Woodrow Wilson’s Legacy,” in Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York, 2002), 125–143; William R. Keylor, “Versailles and International Diplomacy,” in Boemeke et al., *The Treaty of Versailles*, 475 and n. 12.

²⁴ N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America’s Response to War and Revolution* (New York, 1968), 247–251. The literature on Wilson’s policy in the Philippines is surprisingly sparse, but see William Christopher Hamel, “Race and Responsible Government: Woodrow Wilson and the Philippines” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 2002), esp. chap. 6.

consent must extend over the entire globe, encompassing people of many races and regions. The postwar settlement must include “the settlement of every question, whether of territory, of sovereignty, of economic arrangement, or of political relationship, upon the basis of the free acceptance of that settlement by the people immediately concerned.”²⁵ In the end, Wilson’s incorporation of Bolshevik rhetoric may not have significantly altered the essence of his vision in his own mind, but it lent his pronouncements a more radical tone, amplifying their impact on the imaginations of colonial peoples worldwide who heard them.

Once Wilson adopted the rhetoric of “self-determination” as his own, it spread quickly around the world, and by the time of the armistice it was intimately identified with the figure of the U.S. president. Wilson’s proclamations were carried across Asia on the infrastructure for the production and dissemination of news about international events that was in place across much of the globe by the time of the war. It included the cable and wireless telegraph networks that disseminated the information,²⁶ but also, no less importantly, the global press agencies that often provided the content of the news and the local newspapers that carried it. As early as 1905, India already had more than 1,300 newspapers in English and in Indian languages, which were estimated to reach 2 million subscribers and an unknowable number of additional readers.²⁷ In China, the popular press, launched in the coastal cities in the 1890s, also burgeoned in the first decades of the twentieth century. Those with access to such information remained, to be sure, a small minority; nevertheless, by 1918 there had emerged in both societies nationally aware, articulate publics who were interested in and informed about international developments.²⁸

By the last year of the war, the U.S. president’s words were widely available in the print media across Asia, echoing far beyond the American and European audiences to whom they were primarily addressed. Partly, this was due to the global propaganda campaign, entirely unprecedented in its scale and purpose, that the Wilson administration had launched after the United States entered the war. The campaign, carried out by the Committee for Public Information (CPI) that Wilson established in 1917, aimed “to drive home the absolute justice of America’s cause, the absolute selflessness of America’s aims.” CPI propaganda, reported its chairman, made use of the recent advances in communication and media technologies, such as

²⁵ Address at Mount Vernon, July 4, 1918, *PWW*, 48: 515–516.

²⁶ On the expansion of telegraphy into Asia, see Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945* (New York, 1991), esp. chap. 4.

²⁷ On the rise of the popular press in India, see S. Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India* (Bombay, 1962), 147–225; Nadig Krishna Murthy, *Indian Journalism: Origin, Growth and Development of Indian Journalism, from Asoka to Nehru* (Mysore, 1966), chap. 8; Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1994), 139.

²⁸ Leo Lee and Andrew J. Nathan, “The Beginnings of Mass Culture,” in David Johnson et al., eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985), 368–378; Stephen R. MacKinnon, “Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period,” *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (1997): 3–32. Benedict Anderson famously identified mass print media as agents of national identity construction, delineating the boundaries of the nation while at the same time locating it within the context of a wider world of structurally equivalent and morally equal national entities. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 1991), esp. chaps. 2–3. For a development of these ideas in the specific context of the rise of nationalism and of global historical consciousness in early-twentieth-century China, see Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C., 2002); and Karl, “Creating Asia: China in the World in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *AHR* 103, no. 4 (October 1998): 1096–1118.

wireless telegraphy and moving pictures, in pursuit of that goal: “The printed word, the spoken word, the motion picture, the poster, the signboard—all these were used in our campaign.”²⁹ Wilson’s public addresses and declarations, from the Fourteen Points on, were the linchpin of CPI propaganda, especially in its foreign operations. Although the focus of the committee’s work abroad was Europe and Latin America, it also opened a branch in China, where CPI agents distributed news summaries, posters, and newsreels.³⁰

But the impact of the CPI in creating and disseminating Wilson’s image in Asia was not nearly as decisive as its boosters imagined. Far more important was the role of the global commercial news agencies, especially the British agency Reuters. In both China and India, indeed in most of Asia at the time, the “foreign news” sections of mainstream newspapers, which usually lacked the funds to employ foreign correspondents of their own, consisted primarily of copy from pro-Allied news services.³¹ News and analyses sympathetic to the Allied cause dominated the global flows of information, and Wilson’s wartime addresses and proclamations were widely and favorably reported in Asia. In India, where no significant American propaganda machinery existed, knowledge of Wilson’s words spread no less rapidly than in China, and his major addresses were prominently featured in the press, often verbatim. Interest among educated Indians and Chinese in the U.S. president and his plans for the postwar world, as reflected in press reports and editorials, grew steadily during the first part of 1918, and then increased exponentially in the last months of that year, as Allied victory began to appear imminent and news spread that the peace would be based on Wilson’s principles.³²

Nationalists in Asia quickly recognized the potential utility of Wilson’s rhetoric for their causes, even if its scope and intent remained unclear. A leading nationalist paper in Calcutta, commenting in February 1918 on the address in which Wilson first used the term “self-determination,” immediately probed the possible application of his words to India. The American president, it noted, had declared that the “whole

²⁹ George Creel, *Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information* (Washington, D.C., 1920), 1–2. For accounts of the CPI and its activities during the war, see Gregg Wolper, “The Origins of Public Diplomacy: Woodrow Wilson, George Creel, and the Committee on Public Information” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1991); James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917–1919* (Princeton, N.J., 1939); and Creel’s own celebratory account, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information That Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York, 1920).

³⁰ Carl Crow, “The Great War on the China Front,” unpublished typescript, Carl Crow Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri-Columbia. Also Hans Schmidt, “Democracy for China: American Propaganda and the May Fourth Movement,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (1998): 1–28; Kazuyuki Matsuo, “American Propaganda in China: The U.S. Committee on Public Information, 1918–1919,” *Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 14 (1996): 19–42.

³¹ On the role of Reuters as the main supplier of international news across the British Empire and East Asia during this period, see Donald Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1999), chaps. 3–6.

³² See, e.g., “America Asks for War,” *Amrita Bazar Patrika* [hereafter *ABP*], April 5, 1917; “President Wilson’s Speech and Needed Change in British Policy,” *Mahratta*, October 6, 1918, 473–474. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was a major nationalist daily, published in Calcutta but read widely across India. See Murthy, *Indian Journalism*, 81. *Mahratta* was a weekly magazine published in Pune by the scholar, journalist, and nationalist leader B. G. Tilak. The *New York Times* boasted at the time: “Extracts from President Wilson’s speeches are being quoted by villagers in the remotest part of India,” and his words “have gripped their hearts as nothing else has done since the war began.” See “Wilson’s Words in India,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1918, 12.

world” was affected by the issues at hand, but it remained unclear whether India, and the rest of Asia and Africa, was to be included in the postwar reconstruction of world order. The real cause of wars was the condition of “the helpless and unprotected regions and peoples of Asia and Africa,” and peace would not come “until Asia and Africa have secured full national autonomy.”³³ In China, too, the publication of Wilson’s important speeches was accompanied by commentary that related his rhetoric to Chinese concerns. A major Shanghai daily accompanied the text of the Fourteen Points with an editorial comment noting that the U.S. president’s ideas for peace were “a beacon of light for the world’s peoples.” They were credible, too, the editorial added: the United States already had enough resources to become the most powerful nation in the world, and therefore Wilson could not be suspected of ulterior motives in promoting these ideals.³⁴

Shortly after the armistice, Ganesh, a prominent nationalist press in India, published a collection of the U.S. president’s addresses under the rousing title *President Wilson: The Modern Apostle of Freedom*. In numerous ads that ran in the Indian press in early 1919, the book prominently headlined Ganesh’s list of patriotic publications. The text of the ads described the U.S. president as “the most striking personality in the world” and a “man of destiny,” whose speeches, “one of the finest and sweetest fruits of the deadly war,” would “bring solace to a war-weary world and hope to small and weak nationalities.”³⁵ Such glowing copy was surely, at least in part, an adman’s pitch, but the publisher clearly believed that it would strike patriotic Indians as plausible. Indeed, one reviewer exclaimed that “the eloquent addresses of this great inspiring apostle of Modern Freedom . . . must find a place in every household of a true patriot,” and would enormously help the “itinerant Home Rule propagandist to advocate, in sober but clear and emphatic terms, the cause of liberty before his countrymen.”³⁶ In Shanghai, the venerable Commercial Press published a similar volume that compiled the texts of Wilson’s wartime speeches. The book was published in two editions: one in Chinese translation only, and a second, more costly edition containing the original English texts with their Chinese translations alongside. This collection, too, was widely advertised in the press and became something of a bestseller, going through several printings.³⁷ (See Figure 1.)

³³ Wilson’s speech, made on February 11, was reported with extensive excerpts by Reuters and carried in “President Wilson, Address to Congress, Situation Reviewed,” *ABP*, February 14, 1918; the paper’s editorial analysis appeared two days later, “Dr. Wilson’s Peace Pronouncement,” *ABP*, February 16, 1918. See also Natarajan, *Press in India*, 183.

³⁴ “Mei zongtong zhi yihe tiaojian,” *Shibao*, January 11, 1918, 2. Also see “Mei zongtong yanshuo heping tiaojian,” *Dagongbao*, January 11, 1918, 3. *Shibao* was a major Shanghai daily; on its emergence and impact, see Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: “Shibao” and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford, Calif., 1996). *Dagongbao* was a major daily published in Tianjin.

³⁵ The advertisement appeared numerous times in January and February 1919, e.g., in *New India*, January 6 and 11, 1919; *ABP*, February 18, 1919. Other books advertised in the same list, below the Wilson collection, included volumes by such luminaries of the national movement as C. R. Das and Sarojini Naidu and a biography of Mahatma Gandhi. *New India* was published daily in Madras and associated with Annie Besant’s India Home Rule League.

³⁶ “Reviews and Notices,” *Mahratta*, February 2, 1919, 59.

³⁷ “Meiguo zongtong Wei-er-xun canzhan yanshuo chuban,” *Shibao*, November 16, 1918, 1; the advertisement appeared several more times in this newspaper over the next weeks. Also in *Shenbao*, November 21, 1918, 1. *Shenbao* was a major daily published in Shanghai but read across China. On its reach into the countryside during this period, see Henrietta Harrison, “Newspapers and Nationalism in Rural China 1890–1929,” *Past & Present* 166 (2000): 181–204.

When Wilson arrived in Europe to great fanfare in December 1918, he appeared easily as the most imposing and influential figure among the gathering world leaders, a man of almost transcendent significance whose travels and utterances were closely followed in Asia, as they were in Europe and America. Newspapers in India and China featured daily items that reported in colorful detail on the president's whirlwind tours through the major Allied countries. Readers in China, for example, could learn that Wilson had received an honorary degree at the Sorbonne, and that in the streets of London, as in Paris, he was greeted by cheering crowds that numbered in the millions. Indians could follow the details of Wilson's pilgrimage to his mother's birthplace in Carlisle, in the north of England, where his maternal grandfather had served as Presbyterian minister, and read all about his triumphant visit to Italy and his historic meeting with the pope in Rome.³⁸

Wilson's rhetoric and his stature on the world stage, however, were not merely sources of entertainment or topics of speculation among Asian nationalists; they were calls to action. In October, a leading nationalist magazine implored the Indian National Congress, the main nationalist organization, to make a direct plea to Wilson for his support for Indian self-determination, since the president "has exactly voiced the issues at stake in India and he has given an unequivocal answer to them." If Wilson's principles were to be the basis of the peace conference, then the British would have to govern India in accordance with them; if they did not, then Indians would ask Wilson to compel them to do so.³⁹ When news of the armistice came, editorial writers in Indian newspapers hailed the Allied victory as meaning nothing less than "the freedom of nations, their right of self-determination." It would be "a sin," declared one, "if India does not lay her ailments before Dr. Wilson."⁴⁰ Another editorial was even more emphatic:

If Poland, Belgium, Servia [*sic*] and even the African colonies are to be given the right of 'self-determination,' will not there be the same standard of right and privilege for India? . . . We appeal to India to rise to the occasion. Nations are not granted such opportunities often. The salvation is at hand and it can be affected now or never. Let India bestir herself and move heaven and earth to get a hearing at the Peace Conference.⁴¹

This sense of unprecedented opportunity, punctuated with religious terminology of "sin" and "salvation," pervaded the nationalist press in India in the weeks leading up to the conference.

Chinese writers also called on their compatriots to seize the opportunity that Wilson appeared to represent. They exhorted political leaders to abandon their struggle for personal power and gain and instead open a new era of a society ruled by law, and held hopes that Wilson's leadership could bring about a real improve-

³⁸ See *Shibao*, December 24, 1918, 1, on the degree from the Sorbonne; *Shibao*, December 29, 1918, 1, on the welcome in London. Also "Yingwang yu Mei zongtong zhi yanshuo," *Shenbao*, December 30, 1918. In India, "President Wilson Visits His Mother's Birthplace," *ABP*, January 3, 1919; "Wilson's Address to Italian Parliament," *ABP*, January 7, 1919.

³⁹ "President Wilson's Speech," *Mahratta*, October 6, 1918, 473-474. For the impact of the war on the Indian nationalist movement, see Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, esp. the essays by Brown, Barrier, Bose, and Wolpert.

⁴⁰ "The Lesson of the War," *Tribune* (Lahore), December 20, 1918, L/R/5/201, 3; "India after the War," *Kesari* (Pune), n.d., L/R/5/200, 596. India Office Records, British Library, London.

⁴¹ "India and the Peace Conference," *Mahratta*, December 1, 1918, 559.

中華民國七年十一月十六日即舊曆戊午年十月十三日

時報

THE EASTERN TIMES

號六十六百一千五第

分三洋大售紙三天午

號零二一電六街望上海開本館
號一百千話號第平海設館

廣告刊例
封面二行起碼第一日每行一元
第一至第七日每行五角
第八日以後每行二角五分
每字四厘

全年十八元半年九元
（報費先惠郵費不取）

外埠寄費
每日寄費一元
每月寄費三元
全年寄費十二元
半年寄費六元

西歷一千九百十八年十一月十六日 星期六

本報今日日本隨報附送衛生月報如有遺漏請向送報人索閱

美國總統威爾遜參戰演說出版

蔣夢麟先生譯

▲漢文單印本二角半（業已出版）
▲華英合璧本五角（不日即出）

- ▲諸君欲知美國參戰之主義乎？
- ▲諸君欲知世界種種問題之解決方法乎？
- ▲諸君欲知吾國對於參戰之地位乎？
- ▲諸君欲知吾國應盡之責任如何而後可以參與此次議和大會乎？

- ◎戰事已停
- ◎和議將始
- ◎凡關心時勢者
- ◎不可不讀是書

商務印書館

FIGURE 1: These advertisements announced the publication of collections of Wilson's wartime addresses in China and India, respectively. The Chinese advertisement (*above*), from the November 16, 1918, issue of the Shanghai daily *Shibao*, called the volume a "must-read book" for anyone who wanted to know "how the world's most important problems are to be settled." The Indian advertisement (*facing page*), from the January 11, 1919, issue of the Madras daily *New India*, billed the book as "a welcome addition to the world's classics." Although the praise was designed to sell copies, it also reflected a widespread perception at the time of the significance of Wilson's words for the peoples of Asia. Harvard University Library.

President Wilson :

The Modern Apostle of Freedom

Dr. Woodrow Wilson is the most striking personality in this world at present time. He has been described as the "Man of the Hour," or the "Man of Destiny" by the admiring world which he has aroused with a remarkable message of peace and freedom. President Wilson's speeches are surely one of the finest and sweetest fruits of the deadly war, and it is universally hoped that his ideals will be realised as far as practicable at the Peace Conference. The speeches which Dr. Wilson delivered since American entry into the war have been collected and published in a single volume by the enterprising publishers, Messrs. Ganesh & Co., Madras, who have thereby done a service to civilisation. These speeches bring solace to a war weary world and hope to small and weak nationalities. They bring out indeed a new spiritual vision of human progress, and are not of an ephemeral or territorial interest. The book is therefore a welcome addition to the world's classics. It includes a spirited foreward by Dr. S. Subramania Iyer and an excellent character sketch of the President by Mr. K. Vyasa Rao. The get up of this book is splendid. Price Rs. 1. Ganesh & Co., Madras --W. C. Reformax.

India for Indians

(Second Edition revised and enlarged.)

This is a collection of the speeches delivered by Mr. C. R. Das on Home Rule for India wherein he has also tellingly exposed the fallacy of Anglo-Indian Agitation against Indian aspirations. The book opens with an introduction by Babu Motilal Ghose, Editor, Amrita Bazar Patrika. Price Rs. 1/2

India's Claim for Home Rule

New India writes:--The growth of political literature in India is, in recent times, becoming very rapid and remarkable, and with the great National awakening in this land also has arisen a keen and fervent desire to spread it by means of cheap and useful books. Messrs. Ganesh & Co., the enterprising publishers of Madras, stimulated by this desire, have brought out many popular books on Indian problems and their recent venture is India's Claim for Home Rule. This book contains a comprehensive collection of speeches and writings of eminent Indians and veteran English publicists, with an attractive appendix and an exhaustive index. Price Rs. 2

The Soul of India

A vision of the past and future, by MRS. SAROJINI NAIDU. Price Rs. 4

The Indian Nation Builders

This is the only publication which gives the biographies and speeches of thirty six eminent Indians, with their portraits in three comprehensive volumes at such a cheap cost of Rs. 18, (Volume I, Rs. 1-8, Volume II, Rs. 1-4; Volume III, Rs. 1-6). Each Volume contains the biographies and select speeches of 12 eminent Indians with their portraits and is bound in cloth. Revised and enlarged edition.

Heroes of the Hour

This is a collection of exhaustive biographical studies of Mahatma Gandhi, Tipu Maharaj and Dr. B. Subramanya Aiyar whose life gives a pious account of the various activities of those three heroes in building up the Indian Nation. Price Rs. 1-8

GANESH & Co., Publishers

MADRAS

ment in China's international position, framed as a question of "human rights." A leading journalist wrote that the U.S. president, respected both abroad and at home, was "the best qualified statesman to assume the role of champion of human rights generally and of the rights of China in particular." And he was equal to the task, known as a "wonderful man" with "a firm grasp of the world situation," who was "kind hearted in dealing with a weak and oppressed nation; just in his relationship with a strong power; and extremely severe in his treatment of predatory countries."⁴² Their degree of accuracy aside, these images of the United States and its leader were widespread and influential in Chinese public discourse at that time.

When the war ended, enthusiasm for Wilson and his promise of a new world order reached new heights among Chinese intellectual and political elites. The adoption and implementation of the president's ideals, ran the common view, were crucial to improving both China's domestic political situation and its international status. Chen Duxiu, one of the most influential intellectuals of the period, the dean of letters at Beijing University and a future co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, said in December 1918 that the triumph of Wilson's principles in the war meant the victory of right over might, both in relations between states and in relations between peoples and their governments. For this, Chen concluded, the U.S. president should be seen as the "number one good man in the world."⁴³ Hu Shi, another influential intellectual, who had recently returned to China with a Ph.D. in philosophy from Columbia University, had already concluded that Wilson's success in combining high human ideals with practical politics made him a model of the Confucian ideal of the scholar-administrator as well as "the supreme product of Western civilization."⁴⁴ In the U.S. president's person, Hu could imagine the contradictions between East and West beginning to dissipate.

AS CHINESE AND INDIANS SOUGHT TO USE the postwar flux in international affairs to advance the cause of their national dignity and sovereignty, many of them saw Wilson as an appealing and powerful ally who might be capable of bridging the yawning gap that, in prewar international society, separated the peoples of the "East" from those of the "West." Prior to the Great War, and certainly after it, many Asian intellectuals, such as the influential scholar and journalist Liang Qichao and the poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, framed the problems of international society in terms of the differences between East and West, the aggression of a materialist West against the materially weaker but spiritually more refined societies of the East. The solution, it seemed, was to combine the best aspects of both Western and Eastern

⁴² "Cejin yongjiu hepinghui xuanyan shu," *Shibao*, December 16, 1918; Hollington K. Tong, "What Can President Wilson Do for China?" *Millard's Review*, November 16, 1918, 431–434. This article was reprinted in Chinese translation as "Zhongguo yu heping huiyi," *Shibao*, December 18, 1918.

⁴³ Editorial in *Meizhou pinglun*, December 22, 1918, in Chen Duxiu, *Duxiu wencun* (Hefei, 1987), 388. On Chen, see Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party* (Princeton, N.J., 1983).

⁴⁴ "Jielu Wei-er-xun 'xunci,'" in Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji* (Changsha, 2000), 334. On Hu Shi and his role in the May Fourth movement, see Jerome B. Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917–37* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).



FIGURE 2: A crowd celebrating the armistice in Beijing in November 1918, carrying signs with Wilsonian slogans. The one on the left reads "THE WORLD MUST BE MADE SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY," famous words taken from Wilson's address to Congress on April 2, 1917, asking for a declaration of war on Germany. The Chinese-language sign at the center of the photo reads "shijie datong," which might be rendered as "global harmony." The term *datong*, a vision of utopian peace in Confucian thought, was commonly used at the time to refer to Wilson's idea of a League of Nations. Photograph from the Sidney Gamble Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

“civilizations” in the pursuit of global harmony.⁴⁵ In the immediate wake of the war, therefore, many Asian intellectuals, for a brief but significant time, read in the U.S. president’s rhetoric a universalist message capable of transcending the East-West chasm and thus auguring a new era of universal human brotherhood. Hu Shi, for example, wrote of Wilson as the ideal ruler in Confucian philosophy, one who could “make philosophical ideas the basis of politics, so that although he enters into the political arena, he maintains his uprightness and stresses humane principles in all things.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Tagore, despite his critical attitude toward the West in general and his ambivalent impressions of the United States during his visits there, still saw the U.S. as the potential “meeting place” of East and West. The poet also held Wilson in “great admiration” for “introducing idealism in the domain of politics,” and even wanted to dedicate the U.S. edition of his 1917 book *Nationalism* to him.⁴⁷

The celebrated reformer and philosopher Kang Youwei viewed Wilson’s plan for the League of Nations in similar terms, as a potential bridge between the ideals of East and West. The League, he thought, would unite all of humanity under its covenant, and thus constitute the realization of the traditional Confucian notion of *datong*, a vision of universal harmony on which Kang had elaborated in a manuscript he had written some years earlier.⁴⁸ Kang believed that through Wilson’s global leadership, the ideal of *datong* could be on the verge of fulfillment. America, he wrote, “achieved a great victory, and sponsored a peace conference based on right and justice,” where it “would support the weak and small countries.” China should consider itself fortunate to participate in the peace conference, where it would have the opportunity “of one thousand years” to recover its lost sovereignty and achieve equality and freedom among nations. “I have never dreamed of the good luck to see the formation of a League of Nations in my own days,” Kang wrote to his son-in-law in early 1919. “The impossible is about to

⁴⁵ Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 126–143.

⁴⁶ Hu, “Wei-er-xun,” July 12, 1914, and *Hu Shi liuxue riji*, 208.

⁴⁷ Tagore to Wilson, May 9, 1918, and Tagore interview with Gertrude Stevenson, *Boston Journal*, December 2, 1916, cited in Stephen N. Hay, “Rabindranath Tagore in America,” *American Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1962): 449, 451. Tagore’s publisher, Macmillan, wrote the president requesting his permission for the dedication, but Wilson’s adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, counseled against it because his British contacts had warned him that Tagore was involved with Indian revolutionaries living in the United States. When news of this reached Tagore, he wrote Wilson a long, outraged letter of protest against such “lying calumny.” The letter was shuffled around at the Department of State; Wilson probably never saw it. Woodrow Wilson to Macmillan and Company, April 9, 1917, *PWW*, 42: 21; Rabindranath Tagore, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. Sisir Kumar Das, 3 vols. (New Delhi, 1994–1996), 2: 770–771; Hay, “Tagore in America,” 451–452.

⁴⁸ The phrase “League of Nations” was commonly rendered into Chinese at the time using the term *datong*, e.g., as “wanguo datong meng” or “guoji datong meng.” Like other terms in Confucian philosophy, *datong* has no single accepted translation into English. Laurence G. Thomson, who translated Kang’s book, rendered it as “One World,” but noted more than a dozen other possibilities. Jonathan D. Spence translated it as “Great Community,” and Kang Youwei himself rendered the term into English literally as “Great Concord.” See Kang Youwei, *Ta Tung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-wei*, trans. Laurence G. Thompson (London, 1958), esp. 29–30; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution* (New York, 1981), 64–73; Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 97–98 and note n there. For more on Kang and his ideas, see Prasenjit Duara, “Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900–1945,” *AHR* 102, no. 4 (October 1997): 1034–1035; Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World: Kang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858–1927* (Seattle, Wash., 1975), esp. pt. 4; Jung-pang Lo, ed., *K’ang Yu-wei: A Biography and a Symposium* (Tucson, Ariz., 1967), esp. 341–354.

happen. You can't imagine my happiness."⁴⁹ What for Kang had been until recently a vision for the distant future now seemed, for a brief moment, to be on the verge of realization.⁵⁰

The credibility of Wilson's pronouncements among Indians and Chinese was underpinned by a common image of the United States as the first nation to emerge from a successful revolt against empire, and one that, although born of the West, represented a more benign version of Western modernity when compared with the habits of imperial aggression and exploitation associated with the European powers. Tagore, an eloquent critic of European imperialism, gave expression to this view even before the war, as he completed his first visit to the United States: "Somehow, I have an impression that America has a great mission in the history of Western civilization," he wrote to a friend. Unlike other Western nations, the U.S. was "rich enough not to concern itself in the greedy exploitation of weaker nations," and was therefore "free and perhaps it will hold up the torch of freedom before the world."⁵¹ A few years later, upon his second sojourn to the United States, he repeated the same theme, declaring that "America is unhampered and free to experiment for the progress of humanity . . . Of course she will make mistakes, but out of this series of mistakes she will come to some higher synthesis of truth and be able to hold up the banner of Civilization. She is the best exponent of Western ideals of humanity."⁵² Chinese intellectuals, intensely engaged during this period in a quest to remake China into a modern nation, also commonly saw the United States as a model and pioneer of the popular democratic government to which they aspired.⁵³ The future lay with democracy, wrote Luo Jialun, a prominent intellectual of the May Fourth era, and Chinese therefore had to adopt democratic rather than autocratic leaders as role models: "Instead of admiring Peter the Great, we should admire Washington; instead of admiring Bismarck, we should admire Franklin," he admonished his compatriots.⁵⁴

Moreover, the millenarian, quasi-religious imaginings of Woodrow Wilson that were common among Asian intellectuals—as "Christ or Buddha," an agent of "salvation," or the purveyor of *datong* utopia—reflected a powerful if fleeting sense, widespread in the immediate wake of the war, that a moment in history had arrived in which humankind might transcend the straitjackets of Darwinian competition and of long-established power relationships and bring forth an international community in which all nations would enjoy sovereignty and dignity. Wilson, as the leading icon of the moment and its possibilities, appeared to Chinese and Indians as a figure who could refashion the relationship between Europe and Asia to transcend the usual

⁴⁹ "Cu Nan Bei su yihe yi ying Ouzhou heju dian," *Shibao*, December 30, 1918, reprinted in Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei zhengun ji*, ed. Yang Zhijun, 2 vols. (Beijing, 1981), 2: 1061–1063; Hollington Tong, "Kang Yu-wei as Chinese Advocate of League of Nations," *Millard's Review*, February 8, 1919, 342–345.

⁵⁰ In 1919, Kang noted that when he had written his book on *datong* in the 1880s, he had hoped that its principles would be realized "in the century to come," and was surprised to see them realized so soon. Lo, *K'ang Yu-wei*, 238.

⁵¹ Tagore to Rothenstein, April 1(?), 1913, in Mary M. Lago, ed., *Imperfect Encounter: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore, 1911–1941* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 106–107.

⁵² *Portland Telegram*, September 26, 1916, cited in Hay, "Tagore in America," 447.

⁵³ E.g., "Mei zhi duli jinian," *Shenbao*, July 4, 1918, 11, which emphasized the United States' "democratic spirit" and its commitment to "uphold justice and humanity in the world."

⁵⁴ Luo Jialun, "Jinri shijie zhi xinzhao," *Xinzhao* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1919): 19–23.

dichotomies of East vs. West often employed to represent it: powerful vs. weak, imperialist vs. colonized, advanced vs. backward, material vs. spiritual, might vs. right. Hu Shi's view of the president as someone who could remain uniquely pure and unworldly even while wielding political power in the world depended on imagining Wilson as at once bridging and transcending these poles, which in the past had seemed all but inescapable.

Such views of Wilson, of course, hardly reflected the man himself. As a prominent public intellectual at the turn of the century, Wilson had been an ardent supporter of the U.S. conquest of the Philippines, arguing that the native population required a period of American "trusteeship" before they could be allowed to govern themselves.⁵⁵ Indeed, this remained his basic approach to the question of self-government for non-European peoples: although his wartime rhetoric did not explicitly exclude them from self-determination, he never articulated how precisely that principle would apply to them beyond a vague promise, perfectly compatible with the reigning theory of colonial trusteeship, to take into account the "interests of the populations concerned."⁵⁶ Moreover, Wilson, who was born and raised in the American South and who, as a politician in the Democratic Party, drew much of his support from that region, never challenged the racial assumptions and practices of his time and place. Although his reformist credentials initially attracted the support of some prominent African American leaders, they were quickly disillusioned after his election in 1912. The Wilson administration did nothing to advance racial equality, and instead introduced racial segregation in the U.S. federal government.⁵⁷

Many Chinese and Indian intellectuals, moreover, were well acquainted with U.S. racial prejudice and often criticized the United States for its racist practices as well as its imperialist conduct in the Philippines and elsewhere. The Indian nationalist leader Lala Lajpat Rai, who spent the war years in the United States, carefully documented the state of American race relations in a 1916 book, and Tagore himself, during his tour of the U.S. that same year, warned Americans that their treatment of Asians was "one of the darkest sides" of their society.⁵⁸ In China, the ill-treatment and exclusion of Chinese immigrants to the United States had long excited protest, including a movement to boycott U.S. goods in 1905, and Chinese intellectuals often condemned U.S. imperialism in the Philippines.⁵⁹ Even within such critiques, however, there was often embedded a perception of the United States as exceptional among the Western powers in its anticolonial origins, in its creed of liberty, and in

⁵⁵ Woodrow Wilson, "Democracy and Efficiency," *Atlantic Monthly* 87 (March 1901): 289–299.

⁵⁶ Address to a Joint Session of Congress, January 8, 1918, *PWW*, 45: 537.

⁵⁷ The Wilson administration's policies on race and their broader context are explored in Michael Dennis, "Looking Backward: Woodrow Wilson, the New South, and the Question of Race," *American Nineteenth Century History* 3, no. 1 (2002): 77–104; Nicholas Patler, *Jim Crow and the Wilson Administration: Protesting Federal Segregation in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, Colo., 2004). For the encounters with Wilson of two prominent African American leaders at the time, see Christine A. Luardini, "Standing Firm: William Monroe Trotter's Meetings with Woodrow Wilson, 1913–1914," *Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 3 (1979): 244–264; Kenneth M. Glazier, "W. E. B. Du Bois' Impressions of Woodrow Wilson," *Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 4 (1973): 452–459.

⁵⁸ Lala Lajpat Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and a Study* (Calcutta, 1916), 77–172; Tagore quoted in "Rabindranath Tagore in America," *Modern Review* 21, no. 6 (1917): 663.

⁵⁹ On the boycott, see Guanhua Wang, *In Search of Justice: The 1905–1906 Chinese Anti-American Boycott* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001). On Chinese views on U.S. conquest and rule in the Philippines, see also Karl, *Staging the World*, chap. 4; Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (New York, 1996), 90.

the enormity of its domestic resources, which made overseas conquests less necessary. In 1911, when Kang Youwei criticized the U.S. conquest of the Philippines in an essay in which he contemplated how China could escape complete dissolution under the pressures of imperialism, he noted that if even the United States, with its long traditions of “equality” and “justice,” could engage in such acts, what could one expect of other imperialist powers?⁶⁰

During the height of the Wilsonian moment, many Asian intellectuals were willing to overlook or downplay the deficiencies of the United States and its president as they sought Wilson’s support for their struggles for self-determination. Wishing to see the United States as the one world power that could lead international society away from imperialism and toward the brotherhood of humanity, they often took a forgiving view of even the most glaring American iniquities. Wilson’s apparent assault on the imperial order, it seemed, could redeem his record of support for colonialism and segregation. Moreover, his advocacy of international cooperation made him an attractive figure not only to nationalists, who saw his League as a way for their nations to find their rightful place within a reconstructed international society, but also to those, such as Tagore, who opposed nationalism as an obstacle to the unity of humanity. Thus, even as he criticized American racism, Tagore could still believe that the United States had a “unique” role in the journey of humanity, engaged as it was in the project of “taking the people of all countries and harmonizing them into one people.” Eventually, he thought, it would succeed in solving “the problems of the human race, national, political, religious,” and help give rise to “the nationality of man.”⁶¹ And U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines, rather than undermining Wilson’s credibility, was instead commonly held up in the Indian press at the time as an example of successful and benevolent imperial rule, which the British would do well to emulate.⁶² Similar themes appeared in contemporary Chinese analyses of the world situation: the United States, although a colonial power, had far fewer colonies than other powers, ruled them more liberally, and did not depend on them economically; therefore, it could remain a plausible champion of colonial freedom.⁶³

Some Asian intellectuals did doubt the president’s intentions and his importance for the struggle against empire even at the height of his acclaim. The Indian revolutionary M. N. Roy, who would become a leading figure in the Comintern in the 1920s, spent much of the war years in exile in Mexico, where he had close contacts

⁶⁰ Kang Youwei, “Jiu wang lun,” in Kang, *Kang Youwei zhenglun ji*, 2: 653.

⁶¹ “Greatest Living Poet of Hindustan Arrives,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1916, 11. Tagore laid out his opposition to nationalism in the book *Nationalism* (New York, 1917), which he unsuccessfully attempted to dedicate to Wilson (see n. 47 above). Since Wilson understood his advocacy of “self-determination” as a step toward international cooperation rather than as a call to ethnic exclusivism, Tagore’s wish was perhaps not as ironic as it might initially appear.

⁶² See, e.g., “Educational Policy in the Philippines,” *Mahratta*, June 11, 1916, 281; “America’s Work in the Philippines,” pts. 1 and 2, *Modern Review* 21, no. 3 (March 1917): 328–336, and no. 4 (April 1917): 455–460; “Parallel between India and the Philippines,” *ABP*, February 22, 1919; Lajpat Rai, *The United States*, 296–325. In its favorable review of the latter book, the *Mahratta* (December 17, 1916) noted that the chapter that dealt with U.S. rule in the Philippines should be studied by every Indian, and especially by “our rulers,” but that the topic was so well-known to readers that it need not be elaborated.

⁶³ Zhi Fei, “Zhimin de wenti,” *Guominggongbao*, December 6, 1918, 5. *Guominggongbao* was a major Beijing daily and considered a venue for “liberal opinion”; see Hu Shi, “Intellectual China in 1919,” *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* 4, no. 4 (December 1919): 345–355.

with Mexican revolutionaries. Roy noted the hostility of his hosts to their overweening northern neighbor—Wilson himself, after all, had ordered a months-long U.S. military occupation of the Mexican port city of Veracruz in 1914—and remained therefore highly skeptical of the president's commitment to self-determination outside of Europe.⁶⁴ In China, Li Dazhao, the chief librarian at Beijing University and future co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, was perhaps the first prominent Chinese thinker to note the gap between Lenin's call for world revolution and Wilson's notions of international reform. China, he wrote, should celebrate Lenin, not Wilson, since the defeat of militarism by socialism was the true harbinger of the new "dawn of humankind."⁶⁵ But Li's perspicacity was unusual, and at least until mid-1919 his view remained at the far margins of the Chinese public discourse about the potential significance of the peace for China.

For the time being, Wilson and Lenin could hardly have appeared as comparable figures in terms of their international renown or their perceived power to influence international affairs. Indian and Chinese intellectuals had long been interested in socialist thought, and the events of the Russian Revolution were widely reported in the press there. But the initial collapse of the tsarist regime in Russia in March 1917 was commonly viewed as part of the emergence of the new, democratic world order that Wilson's rhetoric had conjured.⁶⁶ After the Bolshevik takeover of the revolution in November, moreover, much of the news on the Russian situation available in China and India turned bleak, even ominous. The Bolsheviks, most often represented in the Chinese and Indian press through the Reuters lens (or that of the French Agence Havas), were usually presented in a singularly unattractive light, especially after they capitulated to the Central Powers in March 1918 with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and left the war. Reports on developments in Russia often warned of the "Bolshevist peril" spreading "destruction," and at the same time depicted the Bolsheviks as standing on the verge of defeat. In stark contrast to Wilson's ubiquitous presence and the great acclaim he received in news items and editorials on international affairs, Lenin was commonly described in reports as a "mysterious" and shadowy figure.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Open letter to Wilson, written in late 1917, in M. N. Roy, *Selected Works of M. N. Roy*, ed. Sibrarayan Ray, 4 vols. (Delhi, 1987), 1: 67–83.

⁶⁵ Li Dazhao, "Bolshevism de shengli," *Xin qingnian* 5, no. 5 (November 1918): 442–448. The word "Bolshevism" appeared in English in the title of the piece. Li nevertheless noted elsewhere Wilson's "deep love of world peace," praised the United States as the leading example of a successful federal system, and described the League of Nations as leading toward the ideal of world federation. Li Dazhao, "Wei-er-xun yu pinghe," February 11, 1917, in Li Dazhao, *Li Dazhao wenji*, 5 vols. (Beijing, 1999), 1: 271; Li Dazhao, "Lianzhizhuyi yu shijie zuzhi," *Xinchao* 1, no. 2 (February 1, 1919): 151–156. On Li's role as a pioneering Chinese Marxist, see Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Li Danyang, "Makesi xueshuo yanjiuhui yu Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi zuzhi de qiyan," *Shixue yuekan* 6 (2004): 51–59.

⁶⁶ "Pining for the Perfect Day," *Mahratta*, April 22, 1917.

⁶⁷ For India, see, e.g., *ABP*, July 6, 1918, 3, where a laudatory report of Wilson's July Fourth address sat next to headlines announcing "Further Bolshevik Submission to Germany" and reporting on the march of White forces on Moscow. *ABP*, January 16, 1919, "Reuters Telegrams" section, reported on "Bolshevik Destruction" in Poland and losses in Estonia; a separate item associates the spread of Bolshevism in Germany with riots and criminality. *New India*, January 15, 1919, also reported on the "Bolshevist Peril" in numerous items on p. 9. In China, see similar themes in "Eguo geming xiaoxi," *Shibao*, January 8, 1918, 2, and January 15, 1918, 2; and items on the Russian Bolsheviks in *Shibao*, December 17, 1918, 1; December 30, 1918, 1; and January 7, 1919, 2. *Shenbao*, January 13, 1919, 6, reported on the "miserable conditions" of Chinese laborers in Russia who were being conscripted into the Red Army.

Moreover, for Chinese and Indian leaders who wanted to make a bid for self-determination at the peace conference, the crucial distinction between Wilson and Lenin lay in their perceived power to support such demands at the peace table and to shape a postwar settlement that would take them into account. The Bolsheviks, excluded from Paris and, at least until late 1919, widely thought to be close to defeat in the civil war against the White forces and their foreign supporters among the great powers, were hardly in a position during this period to lend much succor to movements in Asia that pursued self-determination.⁶⁸ With the other major powers present at the peace negotiations—Britain, France, Japan—clamoring for the reconstruction and expansion of the prewar imperial order in international relations, Wilson remained, at least until the spring of 1919, the only major figure in the international arena who appeared to have both the will and the power to promote the implementation of self-determination as a central principle of the new international order.

When the Indian National Congress convened in Delhi for its annual session in December 1918, it called on the peace conference to apply the principle of self-determination to India and urged that elected delegates represent India at the peace table.⁶⁹ B. G. Tilak, a renowned Hindu scholar and one of the leading figures in the national movement at the time, was already in London, orchestrating a broad public campaign designed to bring the Indian demand for self-determination before the conference.⁷⁰ At his urging, dozens of local and provincial organizations in India dispatched petitions to the peace conference carrying the same message: India wanted self-determination in accordance with President Wilson's principles.⁷¹ Tilak also wrote Wilson directly, telling him that "the world's hope for peace and justice"

See also "Full Story of How China Is Menaced by the Bolsheviki; Horrors in Russian Turkistan," *Peking Leader*, July 12, 1918, 3. On Lenin as a "mysterious" figure, see Sudhindra Bose, "The Russian Situation," *Modern Review* 25 (1919): 131; "Lenin," *Mahratta*, February 3, 1918, 60.

⁶⁸ Michael Weiner, "Comintern in East Asia, 1919–39," in Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, eds., *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London, 1996), 158–163. Weiner notes that at the First Comintern Congress in March 1919, "very little time or discussion was devoted to the 'colonial' question," and that Asian representation there was insignificant. By the Second Comintern Congress in the summer of 1920, however, the failure of the European revolutions, on the one hand, and the eruption of mass anticolonial protests in Asia, on the other, gave Asian communists a more substantial role, which was reflected in M. N. Roy's forceful contestation of Lenin's views on the colonial question. On the Roy-Lenin debate, see John P. Haithcox, "The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1963): 93–101. Although many Indian and Chinese intellectuals had some general familiarity with socialist ideas before the war, specific interest in Marxist-Leninist doctrine and its potential relevance for India and China began to develop only in late 1919, after expectations for the peace conference collapsed and the Bolsheviks began to consolidate their regime. See Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (Oxford, 1989), 23–25; Sankar Ghose, *Socialism and Communism in India* (Bombay, 1971), 8–16.

⁶⁹ Thirty-third Indian National Congress Session, Delhi, December 1918, All-India Congress Committee Papers [hereafter AICC], File 1, pt. 2, p. 347, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi [hereafter NMML].

⁷⁰ Memorandum, dated London, December 11, 1918, enclosed in Tilak to Khaparde, December 18, 1918, G. S. Khaparde Papers, File 1, pp. 1–2, National Archives of India, New Delhi [hereafter NAI]; Tilak to D. W. Gokhale, dated London, January 23, 1919, Khaparde Papers, File 1, pp. 4–7, NAI.

⁷¹ Burma Provincial Congress Committee [hereafter PCC] to secretary of AICC, January 15, 1919, AICC Papers, File 7, pp. 3–5; secretary of Bihar & Orissa PCC to secretary of AICC, February 1, 1919, AICC Papers, File 6, p. 171; secretary of Bengal PCC to secretary of AICC, February 7, 1919, AICC Papers, File 6, p. 183; secretary of Madras PCC to AICC, February 13, 1919, AICC Papers, File 6, p. 193, all in NMML.

was “centered in you as the author of the great principle of self-determination,” and asking that the principle be applied to India.⁷² Wilson, however, ignored the Indian pleas, as he did in other cases in which demands for self-determination conflicted with the interests of one or more of the victorious powers. While there is little direct evidence about what the president thought of the Indian demands, it is clear that he considered it neither possible nor desirable for the peace conference to become a forum for challenging the established empires of the Allied powers. Such questions, he hoped, would be resolved in due course by the League of Nations.⁷³

While Indian nationalists were excluded from Paris, China did have official representatives there, and the Chinese delegates believed that with President Wilson on their side, China might obtain the abrogation of the “unequal treaties” and full recognition of its sovereignty—most especially over the former German-controlled enclave in Shandong Province, which Japan had captured during the war and was now claiming a right to keep.⁷⁴ The two leading Chinese delegates, Gu Weijun (V. K. Wellington Koo) and Wang Zhengting (C. T. Wang), were young and American-educated—Gu had a Ph.D. from Columbia University, and Wang was a Yale graduate. Both were nationalists who wanted to see China emerge from its state of weakness, disunity, and humiliation, and both were also cosmopolitans, acculturated and accomplished in both the Chinese and the Western worlds, who wanted to see China accepted fully into the “family of nations.” In a co-authored pamphlet published to promote the Chinese cause in Paris, Gu and Wang—like Kang, Tagore, Hu, and Sastri—depicted Wilson as a figure of global significance who could bridge the divide between East and West, and even a direct heir of the ancient Sage: “Confucius saw, just as the illustrious author of the present League of Nations has seen, the danger to civilization and humanity involved in the continued existence of [war], and therefore spared no effort in emphasizing the need of creating and preserving a new order of things which would ensure universal peace.”⁷⁵ Wilson’s project of fashioning a more harmonious international order, they suggested, was nothing less than the culmination of thousands of years of Confucian teachings, and the establishment of a League of Nations would thus fulfill the best traditions of both East and West.

When the conference decided in late April to award the former German concessions in Shandong to Japan, Chinese around the world were shocked.⁷⁶ On May 4, after students in Beijing learned of the decision, they took to the streets in protest.

⁷² Tilak to Wilson, January 2, 1919, Series 5F, Reel 446, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Wilson’s personal secretary acknowledged receipt of this missive and implied that the president had seen it, but upon receiving word of the exchange, an official at the British Foreign Office commented: “not much attention need be paid to Pres. Wilson’s acknowledgement.” Still, in the Indian press, Wilson’s terse acknowledgment was a topic of much hopeful discussion and speculation. Close to Tilak, January 14, 1919, cited in Foreign Office memo, February 12, 1919, FO 608/211, fol. 124–125, UK National Archives, Kew; “India before the U.S.A. Senate,” *Mahratta*, October 19, 1919, 499; “International Forum,” *Mahratta*, November 9, 1919, 518.

⁷³ See, e.g., Wilson to Tumulty, June 27, 1919, *PWW*, 61: 291. Other claims for self-determination that Wilson and the peace conference ignored include those of Koreans and Egyptians, but also of Irish and Catalan nationalists. The story is recounted in detail in Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁷⁴ “Ouzhan hehui yu woguo guanxi,” *Shenbao*, November 22, 1918, 6; Wunsz King, *China at the Peace Conference in 1919* (Jamaica, N.Y., 1961), 3.

⁷⁵ V. K. Wellington Koo and Cheng-ting T. Wang, *China and the League of Nations* (London, 1919), 2.

⁷⁶ For the Supreme Council discussions on Shandong, see Paul Mantoux, *The Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24–June 28, 1919): Notes of the Official Interpreter*, trans. and ed. Arthur S. Link, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1992), 1: 399–408, 425–427.

The students, who not long before had hailed Wilson as a hero, now denounced him as a liar, his promise of a new world exposed as an illusion. Protests and strikes spread throughout the country over the next several weeks. One student recalled that he “at once awoke to the fact that . . . we could no longer depend upon the principle of any so-called great leader like Woodrow Wilson . . . we couldn’t help feel that we must struggle!”⁷⁷ In the ensuing months, the May Fourth protests reverberated far beyond the specific grievances that had initially ignited them, galvanizing the emerging strands of political, social, and cultural discontent among Chinese intellectuals into a broad movement that marked a defining moment in the evolution of the modern Chinese nation.⁷⁸ In India, too, the surge of high hope in the winter of 1918–1919 gave way by early spring to disillusion and anger. In March 1919, when the British Parliament passed a bill that extended the government of India’s emergency powers, Indians were livid. Mahatma Gandhi, a staunch supporter of the empire throughout the war, now realized that his hopes for equality for Indians within the empire had been in vain, and he called for a national campaign of passive resistance. The British response was violent, most infamously the killing on April 13, 1919, of nearly four hundred protesters in the city of Amritsar. Like the May Fourth protests in China, the Amritsar Massacre quickly became a symbol of the oppressive nature of British rule and marked a new stage of resistance to it.⁷⁹

These simultaneous upheavals, which were widely reported, also cemented among nationalists in Asia a sense of kinship with others who felt betrayed by Wilson.⁸⁰ In China, the twenty-five-year-old Mao Zedong, in some of his earliest published political commentary, noted that China was hardly alone in having entertained high hopes for a new era only to be thoroughly disillusioned. “India,” he wrote, “has earned herself a clown wearing a flaming red turban as representative to the Peace Conference”—Mao was referring to the Maharaja of Bikanir, selected by the British to represent the Indian princely states—but “the demands of the Indian people have not been granted . . . So much for national self-determination!”⁸¹ In India, the twenty-nine-year-old Cambridge-educated Jawaharlal Nehru lamented that the war, which “was to have revolutionized the fabric of human affairs,” had “ended without bringing any solace or hope of permanent peace or betterment . . . The ‘fourteen points,’ where are they?”⁸² But as Wilson stood defeated, both Mao and Nehru detected another force rising to rally the newly mobilized peoples of Asia: Bolshevism

⁷⁷ From an interview with a student at Beijing University, quoted in Tsi C. Wang, *The Youth Movement in China* (New York, 1928), 161–162.

⁷⁸ On the central role of the May Fourth movement in the history of modern China, see Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World* (New York, 2004).

⁷⁹ On the impact of the events of the spring of 1919 on the course of the nationalist movement in India, see R. Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (Oxford, 1971), esp. 1–16.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., *Shibao*, April 23–26 and 29, 1919, for numerous reports of “riots” and “chaos” in India, as well as in Egypt and Korea. In India, see, e.g., *Mahratta*, October 19, 1919, which reports on “President Wilson’s Betrayals” of numerous nations, including Korea, Ireland, and Egypt.

⁸¹ Mao Zedong, “Afghanistan Picks Up the Sword” and “So Much for National Self-Determination!,” *Xiangjiang pinglun*, July 14, 1919, reprinted in Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949*, 7 vols. (Armonk, N.Y., 1992–), 1: 335, 337. Mao added with characteristic sarcasm that he “felt sorry” for “poor Wilson,” who was in Paris “like an ant on a hot skillet,” and “could not speak his mind.” Mao Zedong, “Poor Wilson,” *Xiangjiang pinglun*, July 14, 1919, reprinted in Schram, *Mao’s Road to Power*, 1: 338.

⁸² Incomplete and unpublished review of Bertrand Russell, *Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism*,

was making headway in Asia, Mao wrote, and its ideas must now be taken seriously. Nehru, too, noted that with the decline of Wilson, “the spectre of communism” now appeared on the horizon in Asia.⁸³ No longer obscured by millennial visions of Wilson, Lenin now came into focus as a potential champion of colonial liberation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WILSON’S RHETORIC for Chinese and Indian intellectuals during the “brief interval” of 1918–1919 did not stem primarily from the novelty of the U.S. president’s ideas or from their theoretical appeal. Indeed, although it was Wilson who popularized the term “self-determination” in the international discourse of the period, the idea behind it—government by popular consent—was hardly new or original, and had long been the subject of philosophical and political debates in Europe and elsewhere.⁸⁴ Before 1919, however, it was consigned to the realm of theoretical speculation, at least with regard to much of the non-European world; the notion that the practices of international relations outside Europe would be bound by it seemed utopian, or at best deferred to an indeterminate, distant future.⁸⁵ The Great War appeared to render the prewar international system illegitimate, and in its wake many in Asia and elsewhere believed that the U.S. president possessed the will, the opportunity, and the power to construct a new international order consistent with the ideals expressed in his wartime speeches. It is in that context that Woodrow Wilson could be imagined as “Christ or Buddha,” a figure of millennial significance who would transcend the longstanding dichotomies of “East” and “West” and replace the practices of imperialism with the universal application of the principles of equality and self-determination.

In retrospect, it is clear that the expectations for a more inclusive international order that Wilson’s rhetoric and global stature raised among Asian intellectuals went far beyond the U.S. president’s intentions, and even farther beyond what he would achieve. This knowledge makes it easy to assume that his failure was inevitable, and therefore that it would have been foreseen by those who adopted Wilsonian language at the time. Given the implausible promises and spectacular failures of the Wilsonian moment when viewed in hindsight, it may be tempting to assume that the praise that Chinese and Indian intellectuals showered on Wilson, their apparent admiration for him, and their adoption of his rhetorical flourishes were little more than tactical maneuvers, perhaps even designed to expose the emptiness of the president’s words and thus to mobilize their peoples against the false promises and internal contradictions of Western liberalism. This interpretation, however, finds little support in

and *Syndicalism* (London, 1918), undated but written sometime in the summer of 1919. Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, Writings and Speeches, serial no. 21, NMML.

⁸³ Ibid.; Mao Zedong, “Study of the Extremist Party,” *Xiangjiang pinglun*, July 14, 1919, reprinted in Schram, *Mao’s Road to Power*, 1: 332 and n. 1.

⁸⁴ The full intellectual genealogy of Wilson’s thinking on self-determination ideas is traced in Pomerance, “The United States and Self-Determination.” But compare Knock, *To End All Wars*, esp. chaps. 2–4.

⁸⁵ On the evolution of international society toward the inclusion of non-Western nations, see Hedley Bull, “The Emergence of Universal Society” and “The Revolt against the West,” both in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (New York, 1984), 117–126, 217–228; Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society* (Oxford, 1984), esp. chaps. 2–4.

the contemporary documents. Many people at the time, in Asia and even more so in Europe, were clearly convinced that the recent horrors of the war would lead humanity to change its ways in a radical fashion, a conviction that made Wilson's rhetoric appear plausible. Wilson's unusual background as an intellectual in politics, his rhetorical eloquence, his conceptual promiscuity, and the relatively benign image that many Asian intellectuals had of the United States, as compared to other Western powers, also helped make him credible. The multiple expressions, both private and public, of admiration for Wilson from intellectuals such as Kang and Tagore—in Kang's letter to his son-in-law, in Tagore's desire to dedicate his book to the U.S. president—can leave little doubt that they viewed him as genuine in his convictions and hoped that he would be effective in implementing them. The fulsome praise of Wilson in the advertisements for the respective editions of his collected wartime addresses in China and India clearly had a practical purpose—to sell copies—but it also suggests that positive images of Wilson, however fleeting, were widespread and genuine, since otherwise such praise could hardly have been expected to achieve its purpose.

During the Wilsonian moment, most opinion leaders in India and China believed, together with the throngs who lined the streets of Europe to cheer the U.S. president, that the peace conference could bring about a radically transformed international order. His proposal to advance international cooperation through the establishment of a League of Nations, they hoped, would help bridge the prewar gap in sovereignty and dignity between the nations of Europe and those of Asia. Thus, while the mobilizations among Chinese and Indians behind the campaigns for self-determination and international equality during this period had varied roots in the domestic dynamics of the respective societies, they were also deeply embedded in the international context of the time. The realization by the spring of 1919 that the postwar settlement would fall far short of expectations quickly dissipated the spectacular visions of East-West harmony that Wilson had evoked, and helped launch a series of near-simultaneous revolts against empire that shaped the subsequent evolution of the movements for national self-determination in India and China. Although the war had prepared the ground for these events, it was the failures of the peace rather than the war as such that precipitated the crisis of 1919 in the colonial world. The ideal of self-determination, honored largely in the breach in the peace settlement as far as the world outside Europe was concerned, served to draw the battle lines between imperialism and its enemies in the succeeding decades.

Erez Manela is Assistant Professor of History at Harvard University, where he teaches international history and the history of the United States in the world. He received his Ph.D. in history from Yale University in 2003. This article grew out of his research for a book on the "Wilsonian moment" in the colonial world, which is due out next year from Oxford University Press. Manela's research remains focused on the history of international society. His current project is a history of the global campaign to eradicate smallpox in the 1960s and 1970s.