

American Propaganda in China: The U.S. Committee
on Public Information, 1918-1919
(中国におけるアメリカのプロパガンダ活動：
1918-1919 の合衆国広報委員会)

Kazuyuki Matsuo*

SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 20 世紀初頭に、アメリカの「影響力」は中国大陆に広がりつつあったが、それはかならずしもキリスト教の宣教師たちや軍人たちだけがになっていた役目ではなかった。ウッドロー・ウィルソン大統領(任期 1913-21)のもとで、合衆国政府の機関として「合衆国広報委員会」なる組織が作られ、この委員会が「アメリカ」を中国や世界のさまざまな国に売り込むという努力をしていたのである。

このようなことが行なわれたのは、第一次世界大戦をきっかけとしてプロパガンダという概念が登場し、ドイツを中心とする勢力と、イギリスを中心とする勢力が、広報・宣伝合戦を展開したからである。世界的規模で行なわれた宣伝合戦に立ち遅れていた当時のアメリカは、急遽編成された広報委員会をつかって「ドイツに対抗する勢力として、アメリカとイギリスが、抑圧された国の解放を目指している」とした。

ところがこのような広報活動の故に、民衆の心の中には独特なアメリカのイメージが固まっていた。それはアメリカの当局者が直接意図したものというよりも、宣伝活動が言外に暗示していたアメリカ像であった。宣伝資料として、当時の大統領ウッドロー・ウィルソンの格調の高い演説が利用されたこともあり、「アメリカ」は現実の問題に対処する国というよりは、きわめて理想主義の色濃い、原理原則に固執する「正義の味方」となっていた。

民衆の心の中に植え付けられた「自由と正義の国アメリカ」のイメージは、その後独自の成長を遂げて一人歩きを始め、中国では、アメリカの理想主義に影響を受けた民衆が、「抑圧」に対して立ち上がるという動きをすることになった。

* Professor, Faculty of Foreign Studies, Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan.

INTRODUCTION

America's intellectual overtures to China in the early twentieth century were not limited to the works of American missionaries. Under President Woodrow Wilson, who was a preacher's son, a government publicity organization called the Committee on Public Information was trying to win the hearts of the Chinese for America's war causes. This paper is an attempt to show the scope of activities of the Committee in China (Part II). Also, to put its behavior in China in perspective, the origin of the committee is briefly examined (Part I).

Due to limitations of time and scope of this paper, intensive search for primary sources was limited to the papers at the U.S. National Archives. Examination of Chinese newspapers, especially student periodicals, would have yielded more information to add substance to the story. Yet, from materials this researcher could obtain, there emerged a complex picture of the Chinese political/intellectual situation in regard to American propaganda.

While America was selling its philosophy of democracy to the Chinese, the government in China was divided into several segments. Under such circumstances, American efforts had to be focused upon the most dominant government and its supporters. Furthermore, America was in alliance with England against Germany. But England in Chinese eyes was an archenemy of China's independence.

Some Chinese intellectuals realized the dualistic nature of America's propaganda. On one side, America said that she was a friend of oppressed nations. On the other side, America was the friend of the powers that tormented China. America was often seen allied with dominant political factions warring with others (Part III). It seems that the Chinese students and some leaders who eventually transformed the old China into a new one were seeing ironies in America's publicity efforts. Yet, no one could deny the clear, if not simple, message the American propaganda machine communicated. In the hearts of the Chinese people, America remained as a "Liberator," and a nation of freedom.

I

A few weeks before the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, President Woodrow

Wilson was on board the liner *George Washington* heading toward Europe. He knew then that his promises of progressive programs for all mankind could not be fulfilled. His promises, though vague and general, were elaborated and broadcast to the people of the world by the propagandists of the allied countries and by the Committee on Public Information, the official publicity organization created under Wilson's administration.

This government organization was engaged in a wide variety of propaganda activities to "sell America" to the world, thus pumping the air of expectation into the lofty Wilsonian balloon of idealism.¹ It was probably the first public institution to be engaged in this kind of activities. It was the first organized efforts to present "America" to the public in the world as a knight on a white horse of "freedom and democracy."

One evening on the deck of the ship, Wilson said to George Creel, the zealous chairman of the Committee on Public Information, "It is a great thing that you have done . . . but I am wondering if you have not unconsciously spun a net for me from which there is no escape. It is to America that the whole world turns today, not only with its wrongs, but with its hopes and grievances. The hungry expect us to feed them, the roofless look to us for shelter, the sick of heart and body depend on us for cure. . . ." Deeply troubled by the prospect ahead of him, Wilson continued, . . . "people will endure their tyrants for years, but they will tear their deliverers to pieces if a millennium is not created immediately. Yet you know and I know, that these ancient wrongs, these present unhappinesses are not to be remedied in a day or with a wave of the hand. What I seem to see—with all my heart I hope that I am wrong—is a tragedy of disappointment."²

The process toward this tragedy started soon after Wilson took office as president. As soon as the war broke in Europe in 1914, the informational war started. And this "war of words" was to build up to an unrealistic scale. In 1914, the British government quickly took control over major communication systems. The Atlantic cable communication between Germany and the U.S. was suspended. This was possible for the British government since virtually all of the world communications relied on the Malconi Wireless Company of England—the first exploiter of electromagnetic airwaves for commercial purposes. As a result, the Allied stories and news came to secure much wider publicity than that of Germany in American newspapers.³

To counter this English move, Germany hired Dr. William Bayard Hale, a

close friend of Woodrow Wilson and former journalist-clergyman as a propaganda agent.⁴ This German agent would be engaged in varieties of activities in New York and Washington D.C. He would have parties, lectures, newspaper briefings and even commissioned articles—paying large amount of money for a favorable article. Yet his efforts were not a match to the English technology to control the communication system.

Along with these propaganda efforts of both sides, wild stories of spying were being spread. Probably influenced by German or English agents, popular magazines were printing many “untold tales of spies” in America. Anti-German books also appeared suddenly in great numbers.⁵ It was widely believed that there were more than 100,000 German spies engaged in sabotage, espionage, and insidious propaganda.⁶ To counter these “dangers,” various civil organizations were formed for “adequate national defense.” Among them were, the National Security League and the American Defense Society.⁷

As time passed, Germany was losing ground in this “war of words.” The sinking of the *Lusitania*, the German atrocity stories, the Zimmerman note, and Germany’s U-boat added fuel to the sense of national fear. U-boat or German submarine was a new type of war machine that fascinated people but gave vague fear. It traveled under water unseen. It was an inscrutable technology that could be used against anybody. Billy Sunday, a popular evangelist at the time, said, “If you turn hell upside down; you will find ‘Made in Germany’ stamped at the bottom.”⁸

Under these circumstances, the popular mood was for more and more curbs on civic liberties in the name of “national security.” The passage of the Espionage Act by Congress in 1917 was the first major result of popular pressure toward this direction. America was to be driven by this sense of fear further to the ultimate action—participation in the war.

Another issue hotly debated in Congress in the same year was the legislation on national censorship. The censorship bill, if enacted, was supposed to root out every possibility of giving out vital information to the “enemy.” Yet, the ominous implications of government censorship prevented the legislative branch of the Government from proceeding swiftly with the bill. Wilson, who was aware of the implication of the pending bill, quickly acted when America declared war. Instead of letting Congress pass a mandatory censorship bill, Wilson, by the recommendation of his cabinet members, acted to establish a government agency by executive order.

A week after the declaration of war in 1917, the secretary of state, the secretary of war, and the secretary of the navy sent a joint letter to Wilson:

America's great present needs are confidence, enthusiasm, and service, and the needs will not be met completely unless every citizen is given the feeling of partnership that comes with full, frank statements concerning the conduct of public business. . . . We recommend the creation of a Committee on Public Information. . . .⁹

The primary purpose of the committee was to supervise and administer voluntary censorship by newspapers and magazines. But it was hoped that the committee would also work as "machinery with which to make the fight for loyalty and unity at home, and for the friendship and understanding of the neutral nations of the world." It would "fight indifference and disaffection" and show "the absolute justice of America's cause, the absolute selflessness of America's aims."¹⁰ Obviously the administration wanted to counter the English propaganda activities to protect American position. The American government was to be engaged in its own public relations activities.

The president was ready. On the day he received this letter, April 13, 1917, Wilson issued Executive Order 2594 to create the committee. On the same day, George Creel, a former journalist, was appointed as the civilian chairman of the committee.

Creel was an active muckraking reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, Colorado. There, he was instrumental in ending the brutal treatment of radicals and inviting Margaret Sanger, a prominent advocate for family planning, for lecturing. As a progressive journalist, he joined Wilson's campaign of 1916 and attacked the "forces of privilege and monopoly." Through his presidential campaign, Creel developed a close relationship with Wilson. When Congress later attacked the Committee on Public Information or Creel Commission, Wilson was reported to have said, "If necessary, I will go up there myself as your counsel."¹¹

In spite of this presidential confidence, however, the flaring temper of this muckraker journalist created some uneasiness. The *New York Times* pointed out Creel's unfitness as a public official.

Essential to the information of the public during the war will be not pleas-

ing fictions prepared by imaginative writers but facts, even painful facts, accurately described by conscientious and competent reporters.¹²

For several months after its creation, the committee confined its efforts to the U.S. The Division of Foreign Language Newspapers of the Committee would monitor the news printed in foreign languages in America. The Official Bulletin Division would give out government news to the press. The Division of Civic and Educational Cooperation was to enlighten the public on America's war causes.¹³ These efforts of "America's propaganda ministry" were believed to be instrumental in unifying public opinion solidly behind the official version of the causes of the war. It was an act of "holding fast the inner lines."¹⁴

Soon, however, demands were made frequently to Creel and his staff to propagate the "correct" opinion of America in foreign countries. It was believed that the German news service was distorting American intentions by editing American news before giving out to the public of the world. In England, through Reuters, a news company, they were already conducting governmental propaganda throughout the world. So was France with its Havas Agency. Of the major nations, the U.S. alone did not have an official publicity organization for overseas. This situation was held responsible for the fact that "even the firmest friends of America could not know the nation's heart and soul as a native American could."¹⁶

With these criticisms mounting and pressing the committee, Creel decided to launch an overseas propaganda. In late 1917, the committee began to attack Germany "by the most insidious weapon of modern warfare—the press of the world." The committee's arsenal was an American heritage of "freedom and democracy." Especially Woodrow Wilson's speeches rich in high-minded idealism and rhetoric were to prove effective weapon to fight against oppressive forces. They soon arranged to send Wilson's speeches without editing or abbreviation to the world.

Since the commercial communications channels were expensive, even Allied nations were careful in using those services. Naturally, they sent more of "their messages" than American news. For instance, Woodrow Wilson's speeches and stories of American war efforts were carried in abbreviated form. The world was not much informed about America.

The American committee would now pay the entire cost of cable operation for the transmission of Wilsonian speeches, plus "small overhead expenses" to

cable operators. It was hoped this would increase the "American stories" in the medias in the world. The navy communications system was also utilized to send less significant news of America to the world. Besides the words, photos depicting democratic scenes of America were sent out every week to thirty-five countries. It was often argued at that time that the only news the world get about America was stories of crimes. To prove America was not a country of gangsters but was a country of "freedom and democracy," it was decided to send pictures together with words to the world. A total of 60,000 large news pictorials were shipped out together with films and postcards.

Agents of the committee were placed in Paris, London, Rome, Berne, The Hague, Copenhagen, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Lima, and Santiago. In China and Russia, the work was to be carried out by employees of the committee's New York office. These agents acted as wholesalers of news, feature stories, pamphlets, and movies. Perhaps some of the agents went beyond providing American information to counter "propaganda" of other countries. Often it was reported that "they interpreted their orders in . . . variety of ways" so as to cause rumors about "tapped Wires, midnight meetings, and a general effort at political intrigue and melodrama."¹⁷

II

Until the outbreak of the war, American news services did not exist in China. The only Western services were English Reuters and German Ostasiatische Lloyd. With historical involvement with China, England had an influential position in providing western news to China. Germany was not sitting still under this English dominance. With the Shantung area where they occupied as a base, the German communication service was developing a sophisticated publicity system.

The English Reuters service was inefficient, if not hostile, toward American news. Indeed, American news conveyed by Reuters consisted largely of reports of crimes, political graft, and commercial hypocrisy. American policies were seldom referred to except when British interests were affected. The Japanese Kokusai Wire Service was the largest supplier of news to Chinese publications, but was affiliated with Reuters. The Japanese government also had a financial interest in the company. Therefore, Kokusai was regarded by Ameri-

cans in China as doubly biased—by English and Japanese views.¹⁸ On the other hand, American news agencies did not show an interest in Far Eastern service because (1) cable tolls across the Pacific were very high and (2) the number of publications in China able to subscribe to a news service was small.

With the outbreak of the World War I, the American ministers in China felt that it was necessary to keep Americans informed of war activities in their home country. It was said that the Reuters news was “devoted largely to telling of British victories and steadily minimized the part played by the Americans and French.” Without adequate American news, the “Chinese would never have learned of the very important part America has played in the War.”¹⁹

To meet this need and in front of pressuring demands, the Navy Department started to send some news from its San Diego wireless station to Manila in December, 1917. The Manila station would broadcast the news in Asia, expecting the Japanese to intercept and distribute in Asia. But this expectation was too optimistic. Early in 1918, this route was replaced by the San Francisco-Hawaii-Guam route. From Guam, the news which averaged 500 words a day was cabled south to Shanghai in China and north to Tokyo in Japan. With this new routing, the quality of communication improved greatly. The U.S. Consulate in Shanghai could, then, receive the report on a daily basis.

Despite this improvement, the American news service in China was still inferior to that of England and Japan. There were no sure ways to give out the received news to Chinese papers. The coverage of American events was sporadic, and, above all, the news was in the English language, which limited the usefulness of American news to Chinese papers. One American diplomat in Peking saw the problems and complained to George Creel. The diplomat urged the necessity to “improve American news services in China.”²¹

The complaint of inadequate American information services in China was mounting. George Creel was receiving daily reports of German intelligence activities in China and the lack of American effort to counter it. These reports came in the form of intercepted letters from American citizens who lived in China. The U.S. War Trade Board, a government agency, would open letters from China at postal stations in San Francisco and Seattle. The inspectors of the board would make notes or copies of letters which they judged to be relevant for the security of the nation. They were sent to the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information with the inspector’s comment.²² For instance, Betty King wrote from Hing Chow to her mother in Maryland:

An Austrian Lord who was supposed to have been gathering botanical specimens in the area. . . . It always remaining a mystery that an Austrian Lord could find pleasure in the gentle pleasure of hunting flowers. . . .²³

Apparently forgetting that Gregor Mendel who studied beans and discovered laws of genetic inheritance in late 19th century was an Austiran, she was suggesting the existence of a German spy in her area. Another missionary wrote home:

It is evident that there are a number of German missionaries, who are recognized propagandists of the German government. There are hints that these missionaries, together with other German subjects in China, are back of much of the political unrest in China.²⁴

Similar reports of German propaganda and its effects, real or imagined, were faithfully delivered to Creel in mail pouches from the West Coast.

In July 1918, while the news of German propaganda was reaching its highest tide, a certain American called Carl Crow in Shanghai wrote a letter to Creel and made a proposition. Crow would be glad to work as an American propaganda agent in China; his salary should be 600 Mexican dollars per month; he had excellent references in Washington and New York; the propaganda office should be located in Shanghai, a neutral city in Chinese politics.

In his letter of proposal Crow said that there were more than 400 daily newspapers published in Chinese language and to supply these newspapers with American news translated into Chinese would be the best way to reach the mass of Chinese people. He continued:

There is no way for the Chinese without a knowledge of European languages to keep in touch with foreign events. The only references to the war which find their way into the Chinese language publications are more or less garbled stories translated from the English language papers—the translation often being done by Chinese so ignorant of the countries at war that they confuse Austrian and Australian, Belgian and Bulgarian.²⁵

According to Carl Crow, no Chinese newspapers were subscribers to Reuters. Several of Wilson's speeches were printed by the English-language papers but

appeared in none of the Chinese papers. Thus, the Chinese public at large was kept in darkness as far as American intentions were concerned. On the other hand, German propaganda was creeping into the minds of the Chinese.²⁶ To Carl Crow who had worked once as a reporter for the United Press in America, this was indeed a sorry situation. His proposal demanded Creel's urgent consideration.

Chairman Creel knew that Woodrow Wilson had a deep interest in China from the beginning of his presidency. Wilson's decision to withdraw from consortium of the banks of six countries, his recognition of the new Republic of China in 1913 (the U.S. was the first Great Power to do so), and his appointment of Paul S. Reinsch as American minister to Peking were all considered to be benevolent gestures toward China. Only two weeks after he became president, Wilson stated in his "Declaration of the Policy of the U.S. with Regard to China" that the "awakening of the people in China to a consciousness of their responsibilities under free government is the most significant, if not momentous event of our generation."²⁷

With this background of presidential enthusiasm, Carl Crow's proposal had a favorable prospect in the eyes of George Creel. On September 10, 1918, Crow was appointed as an agent for the committee at a salary of 500 Mexican dollars per month and "a small working expense."²⁸ Immediately after this appointment, Crow opened the Shanghai office of the Committee on Public Information at 113 Avenue Edward VII, and hired two assistants, two translators, and several office workers. By October, he could organize an American news agency. This agency was to do the translation of American news and distribute it to Chinese-language papers.

The Chum Mei (中美) News Agency or Chinese-American News Agency started to supply news of America to more than 300 newspapers mostly free of charge.²⁹ Carl Crow would report by November that the "American news now predominates in the Chinese papers, and this American agency . . . is now supplying the bulk of foreign news and comment published in the Chinese press."³⁰

It was a very timely service of Carl Crow, since, like the Magazine Revolution in the U.S. at the end of the nineteenth century, China was experiencing the beginnings of popular magazine explosion. Editors who were eager to find news quickly discovered that the Shanghai office of the Committee was a gold mine of stories. For instance, a new women's magazine in Shanghai, the first

of its kind to be published in China, regularly received its stories from Crow's office. Special articles were also given out to farm journals and political and economical journals.³¹ The flow of American news even reached Siberia where American soldiers were stationed.³²

Crow did not stop with the news service. If the news service was to win the hearts of the public, his compilation of a mailing list was to win the influence of the leaders of the public. He gathered more than 25,000 names of the prominent Chinese in every locality in order to "promptly reach the ruling class." They were members of the Provincial Assembly, Chamber of Commerce, officials of "above rank of Magistrate," and all the Chinese scholars.³³ To these supporters of the established Chinese society, Crow would send articles and pamphlets. The news was about American history, the development of industry, the role of women in society, disappearing child labor in factories, and other contemporary topics that were believed to be representative of American progress. These articles were translated into classic Chinese or literary Chinese to be authentic and to meet the taste of the readers. Crow believed that this effort would "enable the American government to speak directly to the Chinese people."³⁴

To reach the school children, President Wilson's principal addresses were translated and published in book form. This book turned out to be a very large seller. Since the book kept the original English text beside the translation, it was used in English courses of many schools as a textbook. American missionary schools were also extremely eager to obtain the book for their use as a textbook.³⁵ The effect of this large number of text books to the Chinese mind should not be underestimated. Chinese, like Japanese, tend to "revere" books given in schools.

To the surprise of Crow, movie film was not well accepted. One hundred and thirty-eight reels of film showing the social and industrial progress of America were sent, but the service was discontinued when it was found that only 2 percent of the audiences were Chinese.³⁶

Another major effort by Crow's office was aimed at establishing a volunteer-agent system in China. Since to cover the entire Chinese land with the Shanghai staff was impossible, additional help was needed for publicity activities. After six months of work, Crow secured more than 400 agents in every province of China. These volunteers were all Americans. They were employees of Standard Oil, the Singer Sewing Machine Company, the British-American To-

bacco Company, and American missionaries. Crow boasted that his network of agents was “the most efficient organization of this kind in the Far East. No other country has now [sic.] and none can form an organization of this kind, for no other country is ably represented in the interior of China.”³⁷

In fact, missionaries and representatives of American business turned out to be eager and effective. Through them, war posters, window hangers, photographs, U.S. maps, postcards, and other paraphernalia from America were distributed. The window hangers were especially popular. Each week, sets of six hangers were mailed to these agents. In total more than 6,600 hangers decorated windows of Chinese offices and shops.

By early November 1918, President Wilson, who appeared frequently on these posters, became a well-known figure among Chinese people. Carl Crow reported to the New York office to this effect:

The missionary teachers tell me that President Wilson has come to be one of the idols of the Chinese. The Chinese are essentially hero worshippers and in the absence of any living Chinese who is fit to occupy that pedestal, President Wilson is today the most popular and most revered man in China. I have asked in this cable for 20,000 large pictures of President Wilson. As a matter of fact, I think there would be no difficulty about securing a careful and effective distribution of 100,000 pictures . . . and I feel safe in predicting that at least two-thirds of them will become permanent ornamental features of Chinese houses.³⁸

With this kind of visual aid, Woodrow Wilson became a symbol of his words. His intentional vagueness and love for the transcendent principle also fitted the Chinese tradition of falling back on principles at important occasions (Tao = 道).³⁹ Enhanced by the classic style of Chinese language used for translating the president’s speeches, Wilson’s words, indeed, worked as a powerful and authoritative means of conveying noble principles to the Chinese mind. People could read such utterances as:

No nation should seek to extend its policy over any other nation or people.

We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind.

We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations. . . .

The war had its roots in the disregard of the rights of small nations and of nationalities which lacked the union and the force to make good their claim to determine life. . . .

Peoples and provinces are not to be betrayed about sovereignty as if they were merely chattels and pawns in a game. . . .

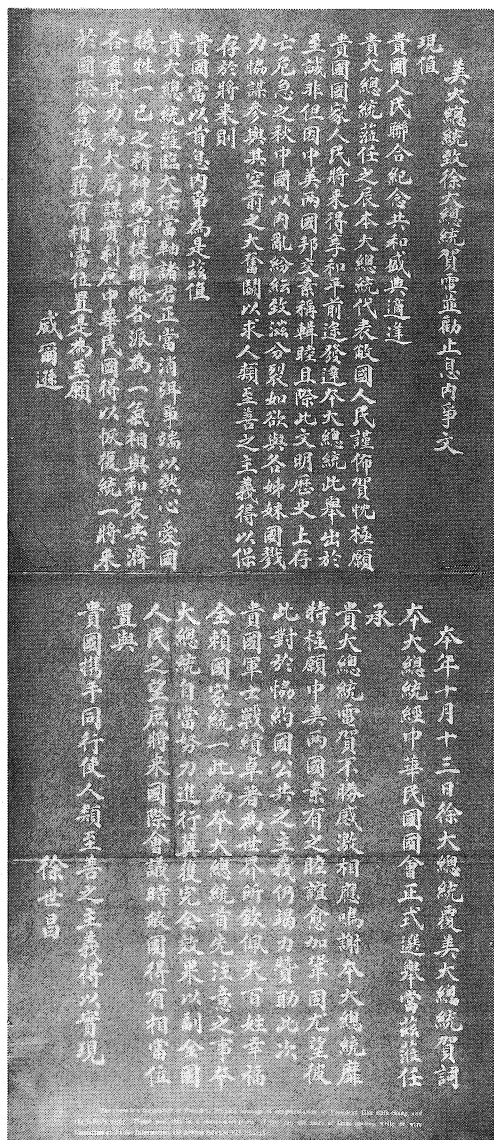
Every territorial settlement involved in this war must be made in the interest and for the benefit of the populations concerned, and not as a part of any mere adjustment or compromise of claims amongst rival states. . . .⁴⁰

III

When the war started, there were scarcely any newspapers in China that would carry Wilson's words. Yet after establishment of the Shanghai office of the U.S. Committee on Public Information, messages like "the war to end war," were liberally flowing into the minds of Chinese. On New Year's Day, 1919, the greetings of President Wilson to the people of China were pasted on gates and city corners (see insert on page 32). This seemed to be a major achievement and a triumph of American public relations activities in China. German propaganda was negligible especially after China declared war on Germany. It was American news, not British, that dominated newspapers by the end of 1918.

In spite of this apparent American "victory" of the information war, however, the Chinese attitude toward the war was curiously nonresponsive. This indicates a Chinese reality which is far more complicated than what Carl Crow imagined. The land is vast. The history is full of entanglements and intrigues among powers. And, above all, people were diverse.

At the request of the Shanghai office, the field agents reported various aspects of Chinese society. Among them were reports of Chinese attitudes toward America and the causes of the war. And many of the reports commented



Woodrow Wilson's New Year greetings to the President of China. He congratulates the anniversary of the Republic and wishes internal peace for China. (1919), *The C.P.I. Files*, National Archives.

on the vague, inscrutable attitude of the Chinese. A missionary in Shantung wrote:

The war does not seem to have taken a very strong hold on the imagination of the people. . . .⁴¹

Another report said:

The comment I heard on every hand was this: "President Wilson is a just man, and China's friend." . . . I can get them to say very little about the war. . . .⁴²

The situation encountered in Nanking by an American teacher was similar:

We have done all in our power to help them to understand the great principles which have been at stake and appreciate the importance to the world of the victory of right over might. . . . But we find them [students] like all of their class, extremely sensitive and unwilling to freely express an opinion.⁴³

Even Thomas Millard, a publisher-editor of the *Millard's Review of Far East* in Shanghai, complained about the mild Chinese response:

It is not easy for a foreigner to penetrate Chinese thought. . . . A foreigner may discover what the Chinese mass are thinking, but it is next to impossible for a foreigner to learn from them why they think as they do.⁴⁴

One of the reasons for this Chinese ambiguity was the existence of a vast, illiterate population. The rate of illiteracy was sometimes reported to be 70 percent. As late as 1936, the reading public of China was estimated to be not more than 5 percent of the national population.⁴⁵ If this was the case, the public did not have opportunities to read Wilsonian words though they might have admired Wilson. The other probable explanation of the Chinese attitude was, as one missionary observed, that "the Chinese are too polite to have made unfavorable comments" on American policies in the hearing of an American.⁴⁶

In fact many Chinese had pro-German sentiments, but were too polite to say

so to an American. England and Japan had been destroying Chinese trust with their various colonial practices such as that typified by Japan's Twenty-One Demands. Both countries were regarded by the public as the archenemies of China's sovereignty, and America was dangerously close to English interests. Americans even looked and spoke like the English.⁴⁷ Germany, on the contrary, was regarded as a country that would fight against these colonist powers.

There was even wide-spread rumor that Germany would liberate China from the Japanese grip once the war had ended with Germany's victory. One American missionary in Kaying observed this feeling of the public:

At the outbreak of the war the Chinese of this locality were unanimously in favor of the Germans. This was accounted for by their dislike for the English, and because Germany was opposed to Japan. At the present time they very much dislike and distrust Japan and have little faith in England.⁴⁸

Similar reports came from Peking:

There is such a deep and wide-spread hatred of Japan that the commonest view seems to be that it would be well for Germany to win so that Japan would be defeated. Many of them hardly care what happens to China if only Japan would be whipped.⁴⁹

The situation was the same in Shantung where people hated "the Japanese like poison and were pro-German if for no other reason than that their sympathies were absolutely against the Japs."⁵⁰ There was "a universal feeling of admiration for the German strength and their courage, their ability that could be applied toward England and Japan."⁵¹

This popular pro-German attitude lingered on even after China's declaration of war against Germany. For the common Chinese the war was the politicians' war. The Peking government took a belligerent attitude toward Germany after Paul S. Reinsch, an American minister to Peking, promised a \$10-million loan for "war expenses of China."⁵² But President HU Shih-ch'ang was not the overall leader of China. The opposition regime in Canton, a province in the south, was active and powerful. There were many other regional governments controlled by warlords who declared independence after Yuan Shih-kai's death.

Under such circumstances, the national and international politickings lost their relevance to the common Chinese. The high-minded concern of President Wilson toward the government of Peking even appeared as an American intervention into internal affairs of China. One man in Changshu complained to an American missionary that Washington was recognizing the Hu government "while the Parliament at Canton refused to acknowledge the constitutionality of this election, which if held on American soil, would have been denounced and rejected as irregular."⁵³ An American professor at a theological seminary in Nanking made the same observation:

Chinese . . . are rather indifferent because of their lack of respect for the President of China. In this section, they are out of sympathy with the Northern party and have caught little of the enthusiasm of the south. . . . As to the war, they are also rather indifferent with a strong pro-German tendency, and are chiefly interested in having the war end.⁵⁴

Some intellectuals even saw a sinister irony in America's dualistic role in China. America said it was the greatest friend of oppressed nations and preached equality and liberty. Yet, the same country was friendly to the Peking regime—a suppressor of rebels and liberals. A report from Shansi Province to Carl Crow said that there was "considerable doubt as to the unselfishness of the motives of the U.S. in entering the war on the part of men of the best education." The report continued that there was "a good deal of skepticism as to Germany's crimes. Many people feel that the things reported are the fruit of prejudice. Germany, they think, cannot be as black as she is painted."⁵⁵ America's insistence on Chinese domestic peace and her alliance with England was a sign of America's ignorance of "what is at stake in China." Her activities in China looked like she was denouncing "the very thing for which Chinese would expect America to stand firm and the thing Chinese learned primarily from Americans."⁵⁶

It looks America's public relations efforts in China during the war was lost in this tremendous complexities of the land. In spite of the large number of American posters and numerous magazine articles, the Chinese mind did not move toward the American side. Chinese intellectuals were even skeptical about America's intention and idealism. In John Dewey's words, "they were acutely aware that the spirit of imitation [of Western democracy] at the expense of

initiative and independence of thought has been the chief of China's retrogression."⁵⁷

EPILOGUE

If John Dewey's analysis is correct and the examples of Chinese responses to American publicity are in any way representative, then the Chinese minds were seeing very complex realities China was confronted with. Nevertheless, it is also true that the Wilsonian words won many Chinese hearts—especially hearts of young intellectuals. Thomas Millard reported that Wilson's words "penetrated everywhere" and the Chinese took Wilson's statements "literally."⁵⁸ Paul Reinsch stated in the same effect:

You [Wilson] have become to the people of China the embodiment of their best hopes and aspirations.⁵⁹

In his book, *An American Diplomat in China*, published in 1922, Reinsch says further:

Probably nowhere else in the world had expectations of America's leadership at Paris been raised so high as in China. The Chinese trusted America, they trusted the frequent declaration of principle uttered by President Wilson, whose words had reached China in its remote parts.⁶⁰

Using this idealistic professor-diplomat's writings, researchers like Wang Yi Chu, Russel Fifield, Chow Tse-tsung, Thomas La Fargue, and most other scholars concluded that there was a wild enthusiasm for Wilsonian idealism which swept the Chinese mind during the war. And the enthusiasm triggered in return a big disappointment following the Paris Peace Conference.⁶¹ It is true that much surprise and disillusionment was created in China due to the result of the conference, especially the way the Shantung issue was handled.⁶² The realities of international politics revealed its unromantic side.

Then who were the people who read Wilson's words in the classic Chinese language and naively believed in the march of the oppressed nations after the war? Perhaps it was the literary class—those on Carl Crow's mailing list—

together with young intellectuals who saw benefits in a stabilized and nationally asserting China.⁶³

Especially the young Chinese intellectuals were gratefully influenced. Though their movement was not simple to analyze, they certainly were influenced by the idea Wilson promoted. Hu Shih, the chief promoter of the use of vernacular language for the people and the intellectual leader of young men of the time, was one of them. He wrote about the feeling of students after the news of the Shantung settlement:

“The New World Order” was no more! This disillusionment was followed by a conviction: China must not rely upon the wishes of other nations for settling our own affairs. The May Fourth episode was an outcome of this conviction.⁶⁴

The May Fourth Movement was carried out by young Chinese intelligentsia like Hu Shih together with the new business class, the urban workers, and the lumpen proletariat.⁶⁵ The movement was eventually lead to the nation-wide revolutionary movement that gave birth to the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

It is ironic that the very forces that created a large communist nation came partially from American sources. It was the spirit of the Progressive Era that inspired many Chinese youths. The reformism that started with the Populist Movement in the 1890s continued into the Progressive Movement of the twentieth century in America. Woodrow Wilson was the last man to stand in this line of reformists. His publicity man, George Creel, was also a muckraker himself who said, “Is it possible to build a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, or must humanity, by reason of its own stupidity, blindness, incapacity, and cowardice yield inevitably to the rule of the self-elected few?”⁶⁶ The Chinese intellectuals knew about this Progressive spirit and because of that, they were able to carry out their task of nation building.

Indeed, a large number of Chinese intellectuals were once students in the U.S. during this Progressive Era. Wellington Koo and C. T. Wang, promoters of “Wilsonian idealism” at the Paris conference as Chinese delegates, were educated in America. Hu Shih, the great star of the May Fourth Movement, was deeply influenced in America while he was studying at Columbia University. He was an editor of the *Chinese Student Monthly*, published in New York

at the height of the Progressive Movement.⁵⁷ Hu Shih's advocacy of the "new woman," the "new humanism," the "new nationalism" and the "new freedom" sound suspiciously similar to the American agitations of the Progressive Era. Indeed, Hu Shih's spiritual guides, Herbert Croly and Walter Weil, were the two alter egos of the trustbuster, President Theodore Roosevelt.

It was this American influence that made Lo Chia-luh, leader of the New Tide Society, say, "We would rather worship George Washington than Peter the Great, Benjamin Franklin than Bismark. . . ." ⁵⁸ Moreover, the number of Chinese students who stayed in America during this period was not small. For instance, in 1915, there were 1,200 such students in the U.S. ⁵⁹ The enthusiastic reception of John Dewey who visited China three days before the May Fourth was supported by the returned students and their sympathizers. They were the people who stimulated the sale of Dewey's book, a composition of his speeches in China. It sold 140,000 copies. ⁷⁰

One can assume that Chinese students had already a wealth of experience about reformism and principles of democracy by the time Carl Crow opened his office in Shanghai. It will not be too much to say that in 1918 the young Chinese intellectuals were experiencing the era that Henry May called "the end of innocence." Like in America, there were "old insurgents and invaders" (Yen Fu et al.) and there were "innocent rebellion" to create a new value system (youth magazine called *La Jeunesse*).

Carl Crow's propaganda that took place amidst this intellectual upheaval was, therefore, destined to have positive responses among Chinese youths. Thus, Woodrow Wilson, the demigod for the American propaganda machine, was remembered as a man of high idealism. In later days, the American utterances created echoes and responses until the 1950s in mainland China. When Wilson complained to George Creel about a net of idealism from which there was no escape, he was probably wrong. At least in China, he had good audiences who put those thoughts into action.

The closing of the Committee on Public Information office in Shanghai in April 1919 was the end of one phase of American relationship with China. ⁷² The days of Wilsonian words were over. After Wilson, China and the U.S. would be involved with problems of economic competition and another war. Both countries would go through a materialistic phase of their histories—the Jazz Age and nation-building based on Marx-Leninism. Yet it is intriguing to note that there were youthful idealism and spirit of progressivism at the bases

of their histories.

Notes

- 1 Through Colonel House who traveled Europe as a scout for Wilson, the president knew that his victory over the Allies in Paris was a harder one to win than that over Germany.
- 2 George Creel, *The War, the World, and Wilson* (New York, 1920), pp. 162-63.
- 3 Bertland Russel, *These Eventful Years*. vol. 1 (New York, 1924), p. 380.
- 4 Dr. Hale's boss was Dr. Bernhard Derinberg, a German representative to the Red Cross. For details, see G. S. Vireck, *Spreading Germs of Hate* (New York, 1920), p. 118.
- 5 Thomas Johnson, *Our Secret War—True American Spy Stories* (Indianapolis, 1929); Henry Leland, *The Enemy Within: The Inside Story of German Sabotage in America* (Putnam, 1937).
- 6 This widespread fear of German spies culminated in the enactment of the Espionage Act of 1917. The law was supposed to "define and punish espionage."
- 7 Formed in 1914, the National Security League was sponsored by prominent Eastern industrialists such as J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller. This organization was very active in antipacifist campaigns.
- 8 Ray H. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms* (New York, 1933), pp. 69, 70.
- 9 Cited in James Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton, 1939), p. 84.
- 10 U.S. Committee on Public Information, *Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information: 1917-1919* (Washington, D.C., 1920), p. 1.
- 11 Mock et al., *Words that Won the War*, pp. 52, 53, 61.
- 12 *New York Times*, April 16, 1917, p. 4.
- 13 The Committee on Public Information [hereafter C.P.I.], *The Complete Report*, pp. 2-3.
- 14 Mock et al., *Words that Won the War*, p. 4. The overzealousness of the committee frequently drew criticism and the Congress reduced the appropriations for the committee in 1918.
- 15 C.P.I., *Complete Report*, pp. 109, 112.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- 17 Mock et al., *Words that Won the War*, p. 238.
- 18 C.P.I., *The Complete Report*, pp. 274-275.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- 21 Letter from Philip Patterson of the state department to George Creel, February 22, 1918, in *Correspondence on Foreign Countries* by A. Wood, *The Committee on Public Information File* (The C.P.I. File) #17-A7, National Archives.
- 22 The exact nature of the U.S. War Trade Board and its activities could not be determined.
- 23 Letter from Betty Kuling to Mrs. Henry Lippincott, June 30, 1918 (U.S. Postal Censorship, San Francisco, #9228) in *Articles and Correspondence Abroad, The C.P.I. File* #1-C4, N.A.
- 24 Letter, anonymous, September 30, 1918 (U.S. Postal Censorship 11416-E, San Francisco), *The C.P.I. File*, #1-C4, National Archives.

American Propaganda in China: The U.S. Committee on Public Information, 1918-1919

- 25 Letter of Carl Crow to George Creel, July 31, 1918, in *Correspondence of the Foreign Section, The C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Quoted in Russel Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East* (New York, 1952), p. 10.
- 28 Letter from S. Rogers to Carl Crow, September 10, 1918, *Correspondence of the Foreign Section, The C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 29 Some of the papers that carried the news were paid for overhead costs.
- 30 C.P.I., *The Complete Report*, p. 276.
- 31 Letter from Carl Crow to New York Office, November 13, 1918, in C.P.I. File, #17-A2, National Archives.
- 32 C.P.I., *The Complete Report*, pp. 111, 112.
- 33 The Chinese scholars were important members of society from whom local and national officials were selected. It is interesting that Crow knew about it.
- 34 Carl Crow Report, *American Propaganda in China*, December 11, 1918, in *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 35 Letter from Carl Crow to Edgar Sisson, November 23, 1918, in *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 36 C.P.I., *The Complete Report*, pp. 143, 148.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 276, 279.
- 38 Letter from Carl Crow to the New York Office, November 5, 1918, in *Correspondence of the Foreign Section, C.P.I. File #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 39 Abrams, *Preacher Takes Arms*, p. 48.
- 40 A total of 54 speeches or messages (69,343 words) were communicated through the Foreign Press Cable Service of the committee. They included Wilson's address to Congress, "America's War Aims," "Anniversary of America's Entrance into the War," "Greeting to our Allies," and "Armistice Terms." See C.P.I., *The Complete Report*, p. 121.
- 41 Letter from a missionary in Weihsieh, Shantung, to Carl Crow, November 15, 1918, in *Correspondence of the Foreign Section, C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 42 Letter from a missionary in Kuling to Crow, November 19, 1918, in the same file as above.
- 43 Letter from a teacher at Ginling College, Nanking, to Crow, November 18, 1918, in the same file as above.
- 44 Thomas F. Millard, *China, Where It Is Today and Why* (New York, 1928), p. 16.
- 45 Chiang (Kiang) Wen-han, *The Chinese Student Movement* (New York, 1948).
- 46 Letter from a missionary in Soochow to Crow, November 20, 1918, *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 47 One missionary reported that Chinese were extremely careful in distinguishing English and American before they spoke up about their feelings to the war.
- 48 Letter from a missionary at Kaying to Crow, November 22, 1918, *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 49 Letter from a missionary in Peking to Crow, November 11, 1918.
- 50 Letter from a missionary in November 15, 1918, in the *C.P.I. File*.
- 51 Letter of a teacher in YMCA in Hang Chow, November 12, 1918, *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 52 Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East*, pp. 63, 64.
- 53 Letter from a missionary at Changshu to Crow, November 20, 1918, *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 54 Letter from a teacher in the Theological Seminary in Nanking to Crow, November 8, 1918, *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.

- 55 Letter from missionary in Shanshi to Crow, November 12, 1918, in *C.P.I. File #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 56 Letter from missionary at Honglok to Crow, December 6, 1918, in *C.P.I. File, #17-A2*, National Archives.
- 57 John Dewey, "America and Chinese Education," *The New Republic*, March 1, 1922, reprinted in John Dewey, *Characters and Events* (New York, 1929), p. 306.
- 58 Thomas Millard, *Conflict of Policies in Asia* (New York, 1924), p. 52.
- 59 Quoted in Frank Prentiss Baldwin, Jr., "The March First Movement: Korean Challenge and Japanese Response," Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1969, p. 31.
- 60 Paul Reinsch, *An American Diplomat in China* (Garden City, 1922).
- 61 Wang Yi Chu, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West: 1872-1944* (Chapel Hill, 1966); Russel Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East* (New York, 1952); Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, 1960); and Thomas La Fargue, *China and the World War* (Stanford, 1937).
- 62 Chow Tse-tung and Chiang Wan-han cite, for instance, the student pamphlets which in part say: "Throughout the world, like the voice of a prophet, has gone the word of Woodrow Wilson strengthening the weak and giving courage to the struggling . . . but no Sun rose for China. Even the cradle of the nation was stolen." Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, p. 93, and Chiang, *The Student*, p. 36.
63. As for Korean political activists and Wilsonian promises see: Lee and Chang-su Houchins "The Korean Experience in America, 1903-1924," *Pacific Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (November 1974): 570, 571. Japanese political leaders' response to Wilsonian message is described in: Kimitada Miwa, "Japanese Opinions on Woodrow Wilson in War and Peace," *Monumenta Nipponica* 22 (1967): 368-389.
- 64 Hu Shih (Suh), "Intellectual China, 1919," *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* 5 (1919): 346-47.
- 65 Charlotte Furth, "May Fourth in History," in Benjamin Schwartz, ed., *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 60.
- 66 George Creel, *Wilson and the Issues* (New York, 1916), p. 24.
- 67 Crow, *The May Fourth Movement*, p. 28.
- 68 Ibid, p. 61.
- 69 Ibid, p. 26, also in Chiang, *Chinese Student*, pp. 14-16.
- 70 John Dewey, *Lectures in China: 1919-1920* (Honolulu, 1973) p. 8.
- 71 Henry May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time: 1912-1917* (Chicago, 1959).
- 72 Carl Crow who established the Shanghai office moved to Siberia to engage in American intelligence operations to deal with the Volshevics.

Sources

National Archive Papers:

File on the Committee on Public Information (The Creel Comm.) File number CPI-17-A1, A-2, A-7, 17-C7, E1, E2, I-D1.

American Propaganda in China: The U.S. Committee on Public Information, 1918-1919

On the Committee:

- U.S. Committee on Public Information, *Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information: 1917-1919* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1920).
- Creel, George. *Rebel At Large: Recollections of Fifty Years*. New York, 1947.
- _____. *How we Advertised America*. New York, 1972.
- Mock, James and Larson, Cedrick. *Words That Won the War: Story of the Committee on Public Information: 1917-1919*. Princeton, 1939.

Books:

- Abrams, Ray H. *Preachers Present Arms*. New York, 1933.
- Chen, Joseph. *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai*. Leiden, Netherlands, 1971.
- Chiang, Wan-han. *The Chinese Student Movement*. New York, 1948.
- Chow, Tse-tsung. *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. Cambridge, 1960.
- Creel, George. *Wilson and the Issues*. New York, 1916.
- _____. *The War, the World, and Wilson*. New York, 1920.
- Dewey, John. *Characters and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, edited by J. Ratner. New York, 1929.
- _____. *Lectures in China: 1919-1920*. Trans. by R. Clopton and Tsuin. Honolulu, 1973.
- Fifield, Russel. *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East*. New York, 1952.
- Garrett, Shirley. *Social Reformers in Urban China: The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926*. Cambridge, 1970.
- Grieder, Jerome. *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution: 1917-1937*. Cambridge, 1970.
- Hohenberg, John. *Between Two Worlds: Policy, Press, and Public Opinion in Asian American Relations*. New York, 1967.
- Hu Shih. *The Chinese Renaissance, Haskell Lectures*. Chicago, 1934.
- La Farge, Thomas. *China and the World War*. Stanford, 1937.
- Lasswell, Harold. *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. New York, 1938.
- Millard, Thomas. *Democracy and the Eastern Question*. New York, 1919.
- _____. *China, Where It Is Today and Why*. New York, 1928.
- Reinsch, Paul. *An American Diplomat in China*. New York, 1922.
- Russel, Bertrand. *The Problem of China*. New York, 1922.
- Schwartz, Benjamin, ed. *Reflecting on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium*. Cambridge, 1972.
- Tsi, C. Wang. *The Youth Movement in China*. New York, 1927.
- Wang, Yi Chu. *Chinese Intellectuals and the West: 1872-1949*. Chapel Hill, 1966.

Periodicals:

- The Chinese Social and Political Review*, 1918-1919.
- Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 22, 1967.
- New York Times* (1918).
- Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 18, no. 4, November 1974.