

U.S. Silk Imports during World War I: Contextualizing U.S.-Japanese Relations, Munitions Production, and Wartime Substitution

The opening of the United States' domestic market to foreign imports to achieve foreign policy objectives with the Far East is primarily linked to two historic events: the reformation of U.S. trade policy during the 1930s to facilitate the needs of American diplomacy, and the Cold War.¹ Beginning with Secretary of State Cordell Hull's push for free trade during the Great Depression, and critical revisions to the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that opened U.S. markets to Japanese cotton textiles in 1955, the decades that followed witnessed ever-increasing imports from the Far East that characterize our vast trade imbalance today. Policymakers believed that in order to support the containment of Communism in Asia, Japan needed to be a strong economic ally. The model they advanced meant that U.S. support for East Asian capitalism required opening America's domestic market to imports.² Doing so would provide critical economic security, and also prove to the world that liberal democracy was a superior mode of economic organization. In turn, the U.S. looked to Japan as the single-most important Far Eastern nation capable of facilitating the United States' Cold War agenda.

At the same time, and since the latter half of the twentieth century, U.S. politicians, economists, and business interests have also emphasized the consumer benefits of the United States' trade imbalance with the Far East. There is a long-standing belief that Americans'

¹ Alfred E. Eckes, *Opening America's Market: U.S. Foreign Trade Policy Since 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 140-177; Michael A. Butler, *Cautious Visionary: Cordell Hull and Trade Reform, 1933-1937* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1998); Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle: The Cold War Context of Japan's Postwar Economic Revival, 1950-60* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

² Ibid, Mark T. Berger and Douglas A. Borer, eds., *The Rise of East Asia: Critical Visions of the Pacific Century* (London: Routledge, 1997); William S. Borden, *The Pacific Alliance: United States Foreign Economic Policy and Japanese Trade Recovery, 1947-1955* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Richard D. Leitch, Akira Katō, and Martin E. Weinstein, *Japan's Role in the Post-Cold War World* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995); Robert G. Sutter, *The United States and Asia: Regional Dynamics and Twenty-First Century Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015) Thomas W. Zeiler, *Free Trade, Free World: The Advent of GATT* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

individually benefit from affordable imports from Asia in a manner that is considered separate and apart from the foreign policy agenda that facilitated this trade expansion. I want to roll back the clock, however, to focus on what I believe is an earlier precedent to this Cold War trade arrangement by examining the United States silk market during World War I. The single commodity that best defined the United States' trade relationship with Japan prior to World War II was silk. Predominately used for ladies' hosiery, but also clothing, gloves, lingerie, and men's shirts, socks, and robes, silk was traditionally classed as a luxury textile. Notwithstanding, the outsized surge in U.S. silk consumption during the First World War requires further scrutiny. On the surface, Japan's status as the United States' most important silk supplier appears as a natural and plausible development given US wartime munition manufacturing that required silk, and Japan's willingness to export its raw silk via its merchant marine. However, I argue that silk imports need to be reappraised as a symbol of informal diplomacy between the United States and Japan. This is because imports of Japanese raw silk were mainly used by American consumers—not for munitions productions. By mid 1918, U.S. imports of Japanese silk reflected policymakers' intent to maintain Japan's economic stability in recognition of U.S. shipping needs. At the same time, these diplomatic measures also meant that the United States' increased consumption of silk developed under a model of voluntary consumption that obscured and distorted perceptions about silk use as a wartime substitute. Throughout the war, U.S. silk manufacturers' promoted silk as an essential and affordable textile for most Americans; tangible proof of American's rising standard of living. This perception, however, ignores the complex scaffolding of supply chains, and protracted negotiations among war and state officials, that validated the voluntarist approach.

Within the literature, the wartime purpose of silk has not been examined as a component of the United States economic diplomacy with Japan. This oversight is likely because U.S.

purchases of Japanese silk reflected an external arrangement to that of the traditional formal agreements U.S. state and war officials arranged through the State Department and the Inter-Allied Commission in the form of contracts to purchase Japanese ships in exchange for U.S. steel. During the war, the limited and inadequate state of our merchant marine meant that we desperately needed access to Japan's shipping resources. As tensions mounted over U.S.-Japanese negotiations for steel resources, the United States used its consumer market as a tool to placate Japan because the U.S. represented Japan's most important market for its raw silk. American war officials recognized the necessity of supporting Japan's economic stability as an acceptable tradeoff for advancing its more pressing wartime agenda.

The United States' ethos of voluntarism starkly contrasted with Europe's state-controlled rationing programs. Public claims that Americans voluntarily regulated their purchasing habits veiled formal policies regulating American consumer habits. It also meant that the government relied on public conservation campaigns and private negotiations with trade associations and industry-specific committees to restrict and curtail the use of materials needed for war purposes. Robert D. Cuff has contended that World War I's ideology of voluntarism can be interpreted in two distinct ways: one, as a form of organization and planning that "rested less upon manipulation and dictation than upon education, cooperation among civil volunteers, widespread consultation among private groups, and a general spirit of patriotism."³ Two, as a "tool in the administrative process itself, an ideology that sophisticated administrators like [Herbert] Hoover wielded in their general struggle for power and legitimacy."⁴ Many components of US wartime mobilization reflected no connection between the rhetoric for voluntarism and the complex

³ This method is most often used to interpret key differences between European and American bureaucratic structures of mobilization and as proof of American exceptionalism. Robert D. Cuff, "The Ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization During the Great War," *Journal of American History* 64, no. 2 (September 1977): 358.

⁴ Celia Malone Kingsbury maintains that Hoover rejected wartime rationing out of preference for a "voluntarism" approach stemmed from his conviction that the poor "could not afford many of the food items that rationing would have controlled in the first place." Kingsbury, *For Home and Country*, 28. Cuff, "Ideology of Voluntarism," 364.

institutional arrangements needed to arrange wartime planning. According to Cuff, it “fell to the ideology of voluntarism to justify the movement of private men into public places and to counter the charges of conflict of interest thus generated.”⁵ While Cuff is specifically interested in understanding the wartime growth of the US administrative state, examining the reasons behind U.S. silk imports also critically reveals how American consumers benefitted from a complex scaffolding of supply chains that belied the self-sufficient voluntarist ethos policymakers promoted as a democratic strategy to support the Allied war effort.

When the U.S. declared war on Germany in April 4, 1917, it took several months for officials to organize, assess, and comprehend the full scope of the United States’ economic resources and best determine their deployment for the Allied cause. During this period, war organizers learned that the United States’ two main priorities were to first aid France with trained troops, and second, provide urgently-needed shipping tonnage. At a November 1917 Conference of the British War Cabinet that included the War Trade Board’s Vance McCormick, and U.S. Food Administration’s Alonzo E. Taylor, Britain’s Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin warned the U.S. that they would not have access to Allied shipping resources in 1918, and that “you have to do more” with the nation’s industrial resources to build up a proper shipping fleet.⁶

Initially, the United States’ merchant marine was grossly inadequate for maintaining its own imports, much less supporting a global war. In 1916, the U.S. controlled only two percent of the shipping traffic in the Pacific, and eight percent of the world’s shipping tonnage.⁷ While the U.S. Shipping Board would eventually oversee the construction of hundreds of thousands of tons of shipping tonnage, the United States was dependent on Japan, and to a lesser extent British and

⁵ Cuff, “Ideology of Voluntarism,” 362.

⁶ United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War (Washington, 1917), 372. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>

⁷ The small scale of the United States’ merchant marine was a consequence of the Civil War and the destruction of American ships, and Britain’s technological advancement that enabled it to produce stronger and faster ships out of iron in contrast to the United States’ slower and more costly wooden vessels.

Dutch shipping resources in the Pacific. U.S. plans to strengthen its substandard merchant fleet included contracting with Japanese shipbuilding yards to obtain urgently needed ships.

U.S. entry into World War I also did not appear promising for the silk industry at the outset. Due to the pressing demands of the shipping situation, war officials' strategy for wartime economic planning prioritized the conservation of shipping resources. Following Europe's practice of restricting imports and exports, the United States worked to categorize commodities between that of "luxury," "essential" and "non-essential" goods. And silk was considered a luxury textile.

But even prior to the shipping crisis, in 1914 Japanese silk trading houses and U.S. silk manufacturers both maintained skepticism that the United States could continue as a strong market for Japanese raw silk and manufactured habutai (a lightweight silk fabric) due to the rising popularity of artificial silk, which would later be known as Rayon. Japanese trader Naoichi Masaoka indicated that the United States was manufacturing inexpensive habotai substitutes, and that "we may as well give up our dream of holding our habutai in competition with the American silk manufacturers."⁸ Naoichi's concerns mirrored those of U.S. silk manufacturers, and the Silk Association of America, who sought out the Federal Trade Commission to also protect their silk products from growing competition with silk substitutes. The Silk Association wanted guarantees that "the use of the word 'silk' when applied to merchandise," should only reference "materials deprived from the cocoon of the silk worm," and not fabrics utilizing cotton or other textiles.⁹ Due to slackened demand for the natural textile, U.S. silk manufacturers initially wanted to preserve silk's traditional status as an unmixed and high grade textile.

⁸ Masaoka, Naoichi. *Japan to America: A Symposium of Papers by Political Leaders and Representative Citizens of Japan on Conditions in Japan and on the Relations between Japan and the United States* (New York, N.Y: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 71.

⁹ Anonymous, "The American Silk Industry," *Semi-Annual Review: The American Silk Trade* (1916), 8.

When war broke out in Europe, Horace B. Cheney, lamented the state of the U.S. silk industry to Ennemond Morel, president of the French silk firm Union des Marchands de Soie de Lyon.¹⁰ Cheney was co-owner of Cheney Brothers Silk Co., a prominent high-end family-owned silk firm in the United States. This family-owned silk business stretched back to the early eighteenth century and was considered an industry leader. And Horace Cheney's brother, Charles Cheney, served as the president of the Silk Association of America. Cheney remarked that the American market reflected roughly "\$150. loss for every broad goods loom in the United States in six months, which is equal to a fair appraisal of the value of the looms." Cheney indicated that Jean Duplan's (of Duplan Silk. Co.) "most sensational sales" reflected startling price drops with \$2.00 items selling for \$1.50. According to Cheney "we do not anticipate, ourselves, any very great changes of return of prosperity before the end of the war. We are not believers or sympathizers with the view of those who claim that the war will result in advantage to our country. It cannot. We will by nature suffer with Europe."

Even so, early speculation about how the war would affect the global silk industry had favored Japan since Italy and French zones of silk production were expected to decline. In November 1915, Jean Duplan observed that the war would eliminate "all trade competition in the Far East . . . much of the commodity furnished China, Java, Borneo, Holland-India, and even India came from Europe . . . but war has removed this European competition."¹¹ Furthermore, Duplan indicated that Japan would not be negatively affected by the Chinese boycott, that "the war, while it has affected the Italian output, has in no way checked that of the Japanese. The Japanese raw silk men should make a fortune out of the present situation."¹²

¹⁰ Lyon, France represented Europe's center of silk production.

¹¹ Anonymous, "Jean Duplan on the Japan Trade Outlook," *American Silk Journal* 34, No. 11 (November, 1915), 62.

¹² Anonymous, "Jean Duplan on the Japan Trade Outlook," *American Silk Journal* 34, No. 11 (November, 1915), 62.

Within the literature, most historians and economic historians have portrayed the United States' outsized surge in demand for Japanese silk as a spontaneous act caused by wartime necessity.¹³ Notwithstanding, scholars of U.S.-Japanese relations during the First World War have devoted little attention to the role of silk, even though it was Japan's most valuable export commodity during this period.¹⁴ Existing discussion about American wartime demand for silk has primarily centered on U.S. military usage and assumptions that Japanese silk exports supplied this demand.¹⁵ At the same time, this wartime proliferation of silk usage by American consumers is portrayed as a progressive example of the "democratization" of silk.¹⁶ Meaning that the increased mass-consumption of silk by more middle-class consumers reflected improved living standards within American society.

The torrential shellfire of trench warfare required silk cartridge cloth to safely fire heavy artillery. Cartridge cloth, a silk textile manufactured from silk waste, was necessary to manufacture cartridge bags that encased shells for cannons and guns with a 4.7" diameter or

¹³ Silk was also used for the military's flags, banners, sewing of uniforms, neckerchiefs, braids, and hatbands. See also Debin Ma, "The Modern Silk Road: The Global Raw-Silk Market, 1850-1930." *Journal of Economic History* 56, no. 2 (June 1996): 345; Jacqueline Field, Marjorie Senechal, and Madelyn Shaw, *American Silk, 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 154-156. Giovanni Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry, 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43-45; Kristin L. Hoganson, *The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 92.

¹⁴ Makoto Iokibe, *The History of U.S.-Japan Relations: From Perry to the Present* (Singapore: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2017); Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1992); Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York: 1997); Noriko Kawamura, *Turbulence in the Pacific: Japanese-U.S. Relations During World War I* (Westport: Praeger, 2000); Sidney Pash, *The Currents of War: A New History of American-Japanese Relations, 1899-1941* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

¹⁵ Japanese economic historian William Lockwood stresses that that "foreign buyers" of Japanese silks "shared largely in the consumer benefits from rising technical efficiency and continuing low wages in Japan." William W. Lockwood, *The Economic Development of Japan: Growth and Structural Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 94, 318-19; Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 154-155; Shichirō Matsui, *The History of the Silk Industry* (New York: Howes Pub. Co., 1930), 93; Shinya Sugiyama, *Japan's Industrialization in the World Economy: 1859-1899: Export Trade and Overseas Competition* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 16, 222-223.

¹⁶ The idea that silk consumption reflected a democratization of silk use first originated with Frank W. Taussig, an economist at Harvard and the director of the U.S. Tariff Administration from 1917-19. Frank W. Taussig, *Some Aspects of the Tariff Question* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), 294. It has more recently been discussed by Debin Ma and Giovanni Federico. Ma, "The Modern Silk Road," 346; Giovanni Federico, *Economic History of the Silk Industry*, 45-61.

larger.¹⁷ Unlike cotton and other textiles, silk cartridge cloth did not “smolder,” or leave ash or residue inside a gun barrel once fired. This technical quality of silk was invaluable because it enabled guns to maintain “continuous firing without stopping to clean the barrel.”¹⁸ Silk fragments also did not smolder in the gun’s breech, which prevented the premature ignition of shells being loaded and prevented unnecessary injury and death to soldiers. Finally, silk did not “flash at the muzzle of the gun” as did cotton and linen, which minimized enemy visibility of Allied artillery locations.¹⁹ While efforts were underway to chemically treat cotton textiles as an alternative source, they were unsuccessful during the war period.

U.S. RAW SILK IMPORTS, 1911-1919 (POUNDS)

YEAR	China	Japan	France	Italy	Other
1911-12	4,776,506	14,493,131	91,387	2,058,456	58,325
1912-13	5,510,607	17,425,353	121,203	2,811,606	4,441
1913-14	5,926,745	20,196,212	66,230	1,997,428	17,180
1914-15	5,097,169	18,217,083	49,843	2,610,570	63,467
1915-16	7,419,616	22,914,898	127,076	2,545,845	56,260
1916-17	7,006,700	26,341,833	35,767	467,405	408,057
1917-18	6,180,480	28,645,529	8,438	7,309	180,703
1918-19	5,755,311	28,440,400	40,825	26,169	190,040

The problem with linking Japan as the primary supplier of silk for U.S. cartridge bags is the type of silk required in their manufacture. Cartridge bags were manufactured from spun silk, not raw silk, which comprised the bulk of Japanese silk imports during this period. Spun silk was manufactured from silk waste, a byproduct of silk reeling that consisted of broken silk fragments, unreelable raw silk called filature waste, and punctured cocoons considered too damage for reeling. Silk noils, the byproduct of the spun silk process were also considered silk waste and used by the woolen industry during the war because of the special machinery required to card the

¹⁷ United States, *Report on the Progress and Condition of the United States National Museum for the Year Ending June 30, 1920* (Washington, D.C.: 1920), 118.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

coarse silk pieces into usable yarn. Spun silk was traditionally used in the manufacture of ribbons, standardized bolt cloth, velvets, woolen manufacturers, electrical manufacturers to cover wires, and manufacturers of silk underwear and hosiery.²⁰ Silk manufacturers indicated that silk waste underwent 17 processes before it reached the state of spun silk.²¹ The manufacture of spun silk required high-wage experienced skilled labor due to its difficult and technical nature. Spun silk could not be manufactured from raw silk because the silk waste had already been removed during the reeling process. There were only a handful of firms in the United States with the capacity to manufacture spun silk. They consisted of:

Cheney Bros., South Manchester, CT
Champlain Silk Mills, Brooklyn and Whitehall, NY
American Silk Spinning Co., Providence, RI
National Spun Silk Co., New Bedford, MA
Griswold Worsted Co., Darby, PA
Nonotuck Silk Co., Florence, MA
Wm. Ryle Y Co., Newton Upper Falls, MA²²

U.S. Spun Silk Imports, 1910-1919 (pounds)

	China	Japan	Italy	France	England	Other
1910	546,078	78,739	147,111	1,344,516	487,460	441,331
1911	924,035	126,104	312,870	1,276,335	831,354	651,528
1912	1,113,258	449,258	1,103,317	525,203	118,568	583,382
1913	1,904,668	260,687	880,188	380,155	1,556,224	911,819
1914	1,533,879	574,606	938,955	412,032	1,709,445	708,727
1915	2,358,656	817,601	1,013,795	226,093	438,662	115,447
1916	4,106,562	2,547,235	1,144,283	339,223	451,269	68,750
1917	3,593,193	2,078,295	363,202	181,915	132,370	71,502
1918	3,569,978	4,337,760	160,142	110,585	119,087	285,792
1919	7,786,023	5,796,605	683,894	83,602	261,638	423,127

When the United States formally declared war on April 4, 1917, silk producers initially communicated with U.S. military officials through the General Munitions Board to ascertain

²⁰ United States, and United States Tariff Commission, *Silk and Manufactures of Silk: Schedule L* (Washington: U.S. Tariff Commission, 1918), 7, 69.

²¹ Ibid, 69.

²² Ibid, 73.

wartime silk needs. Horace B. Cheney contacted Lieutenant Colonel J.W. Joyce to ascertain the government's silk needs. According to Cheney, the government needed to "commandeer" all materials made in the U.S, and that "if necessary to secure material from outside of the United States, Japan will be the only available source of supply." Cheney also indicated that wool blended with silk noils "serves no real purpose other than to make the fabric soft with a nice sheen." Cheney endorsed Guerin Spinning co. as the designated manufacturer for government contract work due to the firm's history as the traditional supplier of silk bags. Cheney also supplied the government with an extensive list of U.S. silk manufacturing contacts that could help meet the government's needs. By May, the National Research Council was also made aware that the only other available source of supply of silk noils outside the U.S. was Japan.

The Federal Munitions Board was tasked with acquiring the resources needed for war. But in the early weeks, it was not clear how much silk was needed for cartridge cloth bags, parachutes, surgical sutures, neckerchiefs, and sewing thread. Charles Cheney, president and chairman of the Silk Association of America, and also a co-owner of Cheney Brothers, worked with government officials to discuss options for domestic silk production and provided an overview of the nation's silk production resources. Cheney indicated that the U.S. had the available materials and could supply the needed 1,600,000 pounds of silk noils and silk wastes. Surprisingly, initial state plans for addressing silk consumption by U.S. consumers came from the State Department and centered on Italy. In May 1917, an inter-Allied conference was proposed between the United States, Britain, France, and Italy to discuss the Italian silk industry.²³ Silk was considered Italy's most important and valuable export. However, the Allies had discovered that Italian thrown silk was making its way into Germany via Switzerland. The British government proposed that "this could be solved if compensating markets were found. It

²³ United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War (Washington, 1917), 1262.<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>

has been suggested that the United States might cooperate in finding a solution as they are the world's largest silk consumers."²⁴ During the June conference, the United States learned that Germany was using the silk as a substitute for military purposes as cotton had become scarce. Étienne Clementel, the French Minister of Commerce, and Denys Cochin, Undersecretary of State for the Blockade, proposed to create an inter-Allied purchase bureau located in France at Lyon to acquire specific grades of Italian silk. Lyon was the French capital of silk production. The Lyon Chamber of Commerce would oversee the purchasing. Each government was expected to contribute 10,000,000 francs to finance the endeavor. It was "suggested that possibly the United States could devise means of absorbing a considerable portion of the Italian output which it is proposed to cut off from Switzerland."²⁵ The United States entered into a formal agreement with the governments of France, Italy, and Britain to support Italy's silk industry.

The U.S. commitment to Italian silk purchases amounted to roughly 10 percent of U.S. silk imports during the war. One scholar indicates that "on the eve of World War I the Italian industry was the most productive in the world."²⁶ But Italy's silk industry suffered during the initial years of war. It could not access its traditional markets in Russia, France, and Germany. The U.S. silk industry was also experiencing contractions and "showed no desire to buy silk."²⁷

It was not until six months into the war in October 1917, that federal auxiliaries were created to oversee and manage the U.S. wartime economy. President Woodrow Wilson issued executive orders authorizing the creation of the U.S. Food Administration, U.S. Shipping Board, U.S. War Industries Board and U.S. War Trade Board. These institutions were collectively

²⁴ United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War (Washington, 1917), 1262.<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>

²⁵ United States Department of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War (Washington, 1917), 1166-1167.<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>

²⁶ Giovanni Federico, *An Economic History of the Silk Industry, 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 130.

²⁷ Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Supplement to Commerce Reports: Daily Consular and Trade Reports*, No. 8a, June 17, 1915, 18.

tasked with collaborating and specializing their efforts for the newly militarized economy. Records indicate that the Federal Munitions Board primarily communicated with Charles Cheney, and local silk producers such as Guerin Silk Co., and Nonotuck Silk, to discuss silk needs for the military from May to October 1917. While the United States continued to import silk from Italy, these imports do not appear to be used by the federal government or widely promoted by silk manufacturers.

The War Trade Board's (WTB) was tasked with overseeing and regulating the majority of the United States' imports and exports in connection with the U.S. Shipping Board. Chaired by Vance C. McCormick, the WTB members hailed from a diverse range of government and private institutions, and included representatives from U.S. agriculture and industries, the US Treasury, secretaries of state, and the Department of Commerce. In Fall 1917, the War Department indicated that "silk is among the useless articles in wartime."²⁸ Because shipping resources needed to be conserved, silk was debated as a wartime essential. Within the State Department, a study conducted in 1917 specifically examining U.S. imports of raw silk revealed that even though the United States was the largest consumer of Japan's raw silk exports, "Japan could not penalize the United States, by way of retaliation, for any reduction of imports which we might make." In essence, the report revealed the United States naivete about its limited shipping resources and the potential ways silk would factor in the U.S.-Japanese relationship in the months ahead.

Throughout 1917, the United States had to negotiate with European powers and Japan for access to shipping resources in light of its own inadequate merchant marine. As one historian of the U.S. merchant marine has observed, "prior to the war, 58 percent of American foreign trade

²⁸ Anonymous, "Raw Silk Situation," *Dry Goods Economist* 71, no. 3823 (October 13, 1917), 33.

was carried by British ships and 15 percent by German and Austrian ships.”²⁹ The United States only controlled eight percent of its foreign commerce.³⁰ In turn, Japan was poised to capture and dominate shipping opportunities opened by the war. Within the Pacific, Japan’s monopoly was noted by shippers and prominent newspapers. The *Wall Street Journal* commented in August 1916 that “before the war United States Pacific tonnage was 21%, British 39%, Japanese 33%, with remainder scattering. American tonnage has fallen to 2% and British to 30%. Japanese tonnage now amounts to 55% of bottoms in trans-Pacific trade.”³¹ Japan’s shipping industry proved both an opportunity for Japan’s economic growth, but also a source of inter-allied tensions.³²

U.S. dependency on foreign ships for the bulk of its imports provided Japan with leverage for expanding its raw silk trade. U.S. officials and representatives of the Japanese government came to an agreement by October of 1917 to permit Japanese silk imports to continue to the United States. The War Trade Board raised concerns that shipping space needed to be conserved in order to expand the “carrying capacity between the United States and allied ports of troops and military supplies.”³³ Japan did not want to reduce its raw silk exports or sacrifice its shipping tonnage, but the nation agreed to help support the allied effort.

The October 1917 agreement with Japan represented the first instance to use the U.S. consumer market for the purpose of diplomacy. Unlike the federal government’s formal commitment to Italy that also involved France and Britain, it was an informal arrangement with no contracts or rules, nor discussion with U.S. allies regarding how much silk the U.S. would

²⁹ René De La Pedraja, *The Rise & Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 47.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Wall Street Journal*, August 28, 1916.

³² William Wray, “Opportunity vs. Control,” in *Merchant Marine in International Affairs*, edited by Greg Kennedy (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 59-61.

³³ Anonymous, “Raw Silk Situation,” 33.

accept. In addition, U.S. imports of Japanese silk were also being exported to other foreign ports which “added to the rail congestion.”³⁴ The *American Economist* noted that “the growth of the Japanese ocean-carrying trade has been nothing short of marvelous since the outbreak of war, and in no case has it been more marked than in the case of vessels plying between Japan and the United States.”³⁵

Furthermore, U.S. willingness to accept Japanese silk imports must also be considered within the context of formal U.S. diplomacy measures with Japan. Much of the literature discussing Japanese shipping during World War I emphasizes the diplomatic tensions between the United States and Japanese government over U.S. access to Japanese shipping tonnage, and Japan’s access to U.S steel resources for shipbuilding purposes.³⁶ The United States’ urgent need for ships caused it to outsource part of its shipbuilding needs to Japan to build up its merchant marine. Because Japan lacked the sufficient quantities of steel, a complicated series of negotiations was carried out beginning in September 1917 to determine how much U.S. steel was appropriate to turn over to Japanese shipyards. Internally, WTB correspondence and memos reflected suspicion about the intentions of Japan’s merchant fleet and the discriminations that occurred against U.S. exporters.³⁷

Japan expressed beliefs that the United States was attempting to unjustly restrict Japanese commerce and shipping because of the embargo placed on U.S. steel and iron exports. Post Wheeler, a US diplomat temporarily stationed in the U.S. Japanese embassy during the war, sent

³⁴ Anonymous, “Raw Silk Situation,” 33.

³⁵ Anonymous, “Perils of Oriental Competition” *The American Economist* 61, no. 7 (February 15, 1918): 76.

³⁶ Peter N. Davies and Tomohei Chida, *Japanese Shipping and Shipbuilding Industries: A History of their Modern Growth* (London: Athlone Press, 1990) 34-35; Jeffrey J. Safford, “Experiment in Containment: The United States Steel Embargo and Japan, 1917-1918,” *Pacific Historical Review* 39, no. 4 (November 1970): 439-451; Jeffrey J. Safford, *Wilsonian Maritime Diplomacy, 1913-1921* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978); William Wray, “Opportunity vs. Control,” in *Merchant Marine in International Affairs*, edited by Greg Kennedy (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 59-83.

³⁷ Shanghai Consulate-General Shipping Report, August 31, 1917, box 37, F.C. Munson, I-J, Records of the Executive Office, General Correspondence of the Members of the Board, 1917-1919, Records Group 182, War Trade Board, National Archives at College Park, MD.

a telegram to the State Department with a statement expressing the sentiments of Japanese trading companies, as well as shipping and dock officials. From their perspective:

America has taken advantage of the present opportunity to give serious blow to Japanese shipbuilders and others by the ban on steel shows America's cleverness and baseness of character, is a regrettable affair for the honor of America. One of the reasons given for the ban is that America wants to prevent smuggling of goods through neutral countries to the enemies. But that clause will not apply to Japan. If that is made to apply to Japan, then it is an insult to the honor of this country.

Amidst these charges against U.S. character, the WTB was attempting to coordinate with U.S. steel manufacturers while listening to concerns from American merchants in the Far East that "United States shippers and citizens are being discriminated against, and that unless the situation is changed all shippers other than the Japanese 'might just fold up their tent and steal away.'" Because Japan dominated most of the shipping traffic within the Pacific, U.S. war officials had limited options to facilitate Japanese cooperation.

Within a similar time frame, U.S. silk manufacturers recognized the need to justify the use of silk imports as the War Trade Board sought to understand and implement new policies and restrictions. Charles Cheney's concern that silk was perceived as an unessential wartime commodity led him to mail inquiries in November 1917 to major luxury department stores about their position on the curtailment of U.S. silk production during the war. The 13 firms that responded overwhelmingly argued that silk was no longer a luxury, but a necessity for most Americans. John Wanamaker of Philadelphia stated that "I would really like you to take this in a truly patriotic way, when I say I agree with you that silk, as made by our American manufacturers . . . is by no means a luxury, but a necessity to the average woman." Halle Bros. claimed that "a great many people have been taught to wear silk, and regard it as a necessity rather than a luxury." Joseph Horne & Sons claimed that "silk fabrics cannot be classed as a luxury any more . . . [they are] a necessity more than a luxury." Lord & Taylor stated that silk is "now an article of utility. For some years past they have proven to be an everyday wearing

apparel for a large part of the public, the wearing qualities of silks have been very satisfactory and the prices are not any higher than other dress fabric in current use.” Jordan Marsh Company claimed that “if Canada after three years of war suffering can import silks, surely we may continue to use silks here, and at the same time develop the export trade to Canada and South America both now and after the war.” Silk wholesaler McCreery silks was somewhat more forthcoming by admitting that “the fact is developing that the women of our country are being compelled, more and more, to utilize silk as a dress fabric because the advances in the prices of woolen materials particularly have been so great that they have become almost prohibitive, hence the necessity of continuing the manufacture of moderate priced domestic silks.”

A War Industries Board internal report prepared in early December 1917 did not support the view that silk was a commonly-used textile. Reflecting efforts to evaluate the role of silk within the U.S. wartime economy, the report indicated that silk was “of minor importance for military use.” The report also stated that silk “would be classed outright as a luxury were it not for the fact that it is a substitute for cotton, wool, and linen. This fact, however, makes the supply and the price of silk a matter of importance to the public welfare at this time . . . in order to remove silk from the luxury classes and increase its use as a war-textile substitute attention therefore should be given to prices chiefly.”

However, the perspective that silk consumption reflected a growing affluence among Americans is further complicated by the reality that the silk used was not necessarily the best quality. The Bureau of Home Economics had observed this pattern among available silk products and gathered research to evaluate women’s purchasing trends. Irene Bjorklund’s report on silk manufacturing stressed that “durability, however, does not always mean today what it meant to the woman whose best, and often only, black silk dress was expected to last ten years or more...the rapidly changing fashions have had a very marked effect upon our standards of

value.”³⁸ Bjorkland critiqued the unreasonable thinness of real silk stockings as contrasted with the affordability of artificial silk. She also doubted that most women would purchase silk sweaters because they were “so expensive if made of true silk that they are out of the question for the majority of people.”³⁹ Bjorkland’s perspective was shared by others who were concerned that the quality of goods available for consumers was deteriorating. Notwithstanding, in November 1917, the *Dry Goods Economist* advised shopkeepers that there existed a “real desire of buying public for highest grade fabrics when economic conditions make their acquisition possible.”⁴⁰ Cotton and woolen shortages meant that more women could now have silk. Despite wartime inflation, silk prices were “below rather than above the average increase in almost all other commodities.”⁴¹

Untangling the motivations for U.S. silk consumption during World War I also needs to be considered within the context of the War Industry Board and War Trade Board’s ambiguous public position on silk for much of the war. While the versatile commodity was subject to license restrictions alongside most other war commodities, the U.S. government relied on the textile industry to primarily communicate with the public regarding its use. Charles Cheney, both president of the Silk Association of America and co-owner of one of the most prestigious silk firms in the nation, was the primary point of contact between the government and the silk industry, and thus his experience and knowledge shaped conversations with both silk manufacturers and officials. Existing evidence indicates that Cheney’s full-fledged support for the national war effort did not conflict with willingness to use scarce American labor for non-essential silk production during the war years.⁴²

³⁸ Irene Bjorkland, “Silk Manufacturers,” *Journal of Home Economics* 9, no. 8 (August 1917): 377.

³⁹ Bjorkland, “Silk Manufacturers,” 377.

⁴⁰ “Broad Silks,” *Dry Goods Economist* 71, no. 3826 (November 1917), 15.

⁴¹ “Broad Silks,” *Dry Goods Economist* 71, no. 3826 (November 1917), 15.

⁴² Much has been written about the debate regarding whether the federal government, or private firms possessed the most power over government resources during the war, and this debate remains unresolved. With respect to the silk

Reflecting on his role in WWI in 1931 with a coterie of America's elite executives, Cheney recalled contacting the Ordnance Department's to help them secure silk to manufacture cartridge cloth while they were still trying to understand the silk situation. According to Cheney, "they came to see us what we could do about it and what we did about it was to form an illegal company in restraint of trade, so that we could supply the needs of the United States Government without competing against each other for raw material which was limited and we saved the Government hundreds of millions of dollars by it." Cheney went on to discuss how he voluntarily reduced his profit scale during the war so that by the end his firm was only clearing 1 percent profit from the original 7 percent. In discussions between Cheney and the War Trade Board, an understanding existed that silk was to be used economically, that its use as a substitute in place of cotton and wool textiles was justified primarily because of the war.

However, to mitigate demands for essential and non-essential items during the war, the War Trade Board collaborated with the Executive Committee of the Silk Association, also helmed by Charles Cheney, to best determine how to economize silk usage. The variety of commercial designs were reduced, and available colors were standardized. Cheney agreed that it "would not be advisable . . . for the silk manufacturers to undertake any general campaign to encourage the substitution of silk for wool." That being said, at the regular quarterly meeting of

industry, Cheney considered himself an ally of the state. Cheney's power extended to the streamlined organization of the silk industry during the war. This position is consistent with Robert D. Cuff's work on the War Industries Board which demonstrates that the WIB did not dictate to firms and sought compromise as part of Wilson's prewar strategy to balance public and private interests. This view is also supported by Gabriel Kolko, Robert Wiebe, and Louis Galambos. On the other hand, Robert H. Zeiger, David M. Kennedy, and Celia Malone Kingsbury have argued that the newly-strengthened wartime administered state did blackmail firms and relied on excessive propaganda to manipulate wartime support. Robert D. Cuff, *The War Industries Board: Business-Government Relations During World War I* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-Interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Louis Galambos and Joseph A. Pratt, *The Rise of the Corporate Commonwealth: U.S. Business and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press); Celia Malone Kingsbury, *For Home and Country: World War I Propaganda on the Home Front* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

the Board of Managers of the Silk association of America held in New York December 12, 1917, Cheney expressed that at a previous conservation meeting in New York on November 27, 1917, which included representatives from “garment manufacturers, jobbers, retailers, dress makers, importers model houses, tailors, mail order houses, pattern makers, fashion publications, and others, show how clearly the value and utility of silk as a substitute for wool is understood by the trade.”⁴³ Cheney quoted from a resolution this conservation committee had passed in which “wherever possible other fabrics such as silk, cotton etc., be combined with woolen materials in the manufacture of women’s, misses’ and children’s coats, suits, and dresses, and that they use their influence in advertising and exhibiting to popularize the use of these other materials.”⁴⁴

For much of 1918, ladies fashion advertisements promoted silk dresses as patriotic wartime apparel. Despite wartime inflation, silk prices were “below rather than above the average increase in almost all other commodities.”⁴⁵ Helen Koues, the associate editor of *Good Housekeeping*, and widely considered an arbiter of “good taste” in her day, stressed that “the question of how to dress in wartime confronts every woman who wants to do her bit—and who doesn’t? Was there ever a time when the women of the world played a greater part?”⁴⁶ This message applied to the image 1 on the following page (page 20). Koues was commenting on dresses made from silk duvetyn and Georgette cr pe fabrics as a strategy to obtain much-needed “sanity” during a “time of stress.”⁴⁷ Image no. 2, an advertisement for a silk foulard dress by Betty Wales Dresses on the following page (page 21), invites the consumer to “unite pleasure with patriotism,” for “economy is the keynote of our government’s call for conservation.”⁴⁸ An

⁴³ “Annual Meeting and Reports of the Silk Association of America,” *Silk* 11, no. 4 (January 1918), 39.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Broad Silks,” *Dry Goods Economist* 71, no. 3826 (November 1917), 15.

⁴⁶ Helen Koues, “How Shall We Dress in War Time,” *Journal of Good Housekeeping* 66 (1918): 66.

⁴⁷ Charles McGovern has noted that in the first decades of the twentieth century, “women were responsible for 85 percent of all purchasing decisions, with influence over the rest.” Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 36. Koues, “How Shall We Dress in War Time,” 66.

⁴⁸ *Journal of Good Housekeeping* 66 (1918): 8.

advertisement from the *New York Tribune*, image no. 3 (page 22), argued that “to buy well is to save,” justifying the purchase of more expensive clothing during the war as an investment for

HOW SHALL WE DRESS IN WAR TIME

THE question of how to dress in war time confronts every woman who wants to do her bit—and who doesn't? Was there ever a time when the women of the world played a greater part! The world today has an army of women workers, women from every walk of life, working side by side in the hospitals and reconstruction work abroad, in the Red Cross, the Y. M. C. A., and in war relief work of all kinds here in America. Their thoughts and their hearts are not intent on gaiety or even on their own interests, but on how they can help in this great fight—a fight that has become theirs, since it takes away those they love.

Naturally, then, there is a seriousness which compels simplicity even in clothes; lines are straighter—to save wool for the soldiers; and dresses are fewer—to save pennies for the sufferers.

THE helpful person in times of stress is she who retains her poise—her sanity. And to this problem of dress, as to all others, let us bring sanity. Let us dress with moderation in the clothes of the new season; let us choose those which are suited to the work we are doing. If we have a war job let us have a war job dress—a simple tailored frock or suit; if we have a social duty, again let us be suitably gowned in a softer dress. Let us buy what we need sanely and wisely for ourselves and our children, in proportion to our incomes, remembering that in buying wisely we are sustaining not only the clothing industries, but the great allied industries as well. Let us keep these industries going, but let us abstain from needless luxuries, when by so doing we may add our mite of thrift and help to our cause. And our mite, be it only the War Saving Stamp of the youngest girl who reads this, is a real and vital help to our Government. And, above all, be cheerful. Look your best. Do your best. Don't let yourself down; don't let others down. Keep yourself and your home in readiness for the flying visit of its absent soldier. It is in ways such as these that we do our part.

HELEN KOUES.

AND now to make some practical application—since wool is needed for the soldiers be satisfied with a suit and top-coat of wool, *only what you need*, and let your frocks combine foulard and wool or silk and wool. Or wear one of the simple tailored taffeta or foulard dresses

THE Eton suit is a patriot among clothes, since it wastes no wool in needless frills—especially when it is helped out by a waistcoat of linen. The narrower skirt, not the sheath of some years ago, but a step-length skirt, is also playing its part, and often the tunic at least is of silk

OBSERVING one color scheme throughout the wardrobe is frequently helpful in dressing smartly on a limited income. If blue be your color for the season, let your hats, your top-coat, and other accessories of dress blend with it. If castor is the shade, then abide by it

THE house dress of Georgette crêpe of a solid color—be it straw color, rose, or blue—is charming this year, and if simple in style it may be dyed a dark color next season, and answer most admirably again. Do not be afraid to have partly worn dresses dyed: they are like new



The patriotic Eton is shown at the left in a suit from Bonwit Teller of turquoise blue duvetyn with a vest and tunic



Here is a dress which serves for afternoon and evening, too, and is \$27.50: white, blue, or black beaded Georgette crêpe

years to come. The ad did not mention if war would be over by then.

Patriotism and Charm

ECONOMY is the keynote of our government's call for conservation. To be economical is to be Patriotic.

Unite pleasure with patriotism in wearing this charming dress of serge combined with silk foulard in the newest patterns—a real Betty Wales Dress with hand-drawn collar of voile, ready to wear with Kleinert's Gem Dress Shields. No. 30. Price \$27.50.

And just as attractive is the combination of fancy voile, (pink and white, blue and white or black and white) with white linen. No. 55. Price \$15.75.

This same style is also made in pin check gingham (pink and white or blue and white) combined with plain colored voiles. No. 60. Price \$14.50.

*Betty Wales
Dresses*

On sale at one exclusive Betty Wales Agency in each city or sent post paid on receipt of price. (Sizes 14 to 42.) Only the genuine Betty Wales dresses bear the Betty Wales label. Send for free Style Book or 20c for statuette of Betty Wales Good Luck Ploshkin.

**BETTY WALES
DRESSMAKERS**
109 Waldorf Bldg., N. Y.

8 March Good Housekeeping

Image no. 2, *Journal of Good Housekeeping* 66 (1918): 8.

Author's permission required for circulation.

The new fall Models say "Conserve"

AND EVERY DOLLAR DOES ITS DUTY

TO BUY well is to save. The dress that hangs in your closet, the dress that got "shoddy" after a dozen wearings, is the dress you can't afford. You probably never suspected the reason why so often a new frock lost its style, its newness, after a few wearings or a sudden shower. Because it was sewed with cheap thread instead of silk!

That is why your frock drew and puckered at the seams, wrinkled along the hem and generally lost its smartness. That is why the stitches caught the dust, coarsened, faded—and didn't even dye properly when, in desperation, you had the dress dipped. It was not sewed with silk!

Not even the shops suspected that manufacturers were substituting cheap thread for silk in even the most expensive models! To save a manufacturer from 5 to 6 cents on a costume, your frock was to lose its lines, its newness, its *chic*. It was to be a disappointment and a waste of good money.

Today you can protect yourself. The shops are eager to cooperate with you. The label "Guaranteed sewed with silk" in a garment assures you that it is exquisitely and conscientiously made throughout.

In New York alone already twenty-five leading stores have joined this movement for the "Silk seams" label.



FROM STERN BROTHERS

This princess dress developed in black tricollète has the loose panel back so favored this fall and the deep silk fringe. All seams sewed with silk. \$135.



FROM LORD & TAYLOR

Tunic frock of satin charmeuse trimmed with jet bugles. The bell sleeves and beaded nosegay at hem and shoulder are especially *chic*. Sewed throughout with silk. \$110.



FROM BEST & CO.

For war days, what could be more appropriate than the charming simplicity of this frock of black drop-stitch tricollète?

Luxuriously soft and serviceably firm, it wants no trimming save the three large buttons at the girdle. Guaranteed sewed with silk. \$45.

GUARANTEED SEWED WITH SILK

Every model on this page is from a house that is proud to carry the "Silk seams" label in its stock. You can buy any one of these models and feel confident that as long as you wear it, the lines of your frock will be as perfect as the day you purchased it.

IF YOU WISH TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS MOVEMENT for preventing this substitution and for insuring silk sewed seams, write for interesting booklet, "Behind the scenes with the men who make your clothes." Address: Publicity Committee, Silk Sewed Seams, 354 Fourth Avenue, New York.



FROM JOHN WANAMAKER

To carry out the slim lines of this black satin-faced crepe meteor, Wanamaker has added the smart "apron" front panel, trimmed, of course, with fringe. All seams silk sewed. \$48.50.



FROM JAMES MCCREERY & CO.

Here the tunic is cut with a point, and for contrast, the blouse under straight revers of the black satin, is Copenhagen blue georgette. Guaranteed sewed with silk. \$48.

GUARANTEED SEWED WITH SILK

The selection of ads presented in this paper are a good representation of advertisements for silk use during the war. Silk was not promoted as a luxury, but as an economical and wise decision during a self-imposed chapter of austerity under U.S. voluntarism.⁴⁹ Curiously, the WIB's concerns regarding shortages in the cotton market proved unfounded. According to a report on the WIB, "throughout the war there was always a surplus of raw cotton in the country and this section never found it necessary to control either prices or distribution of the domestic fiber."⁵⁰ Wool, on the other hand, required outside sources, and the U.S. imported two-thirds of its raw wool supplies.⁵¹ While policymakers were certainly sensitive to the rising costs that placed great pressure on manufacturers to provide products at affordable prices, it is unlikely that silk could have been promoted as a wartime essential had not Japan not prioritized silk as a key export commodity.

In February 1918, the War Trade Board worked to revise the list of items permitted to enter the U.S. through the authority of the Trading with the Enemy Act with the intent of conserving as much shipping tonnage as possible. All imported raw silk was controlled under a new Import License Regulations held by the War Trade Board.⁵² Commodities and goods were categorized by whether they were considered a "luxury," which was to be prohibited, "those . . . useful in normal times [but] are not essential in war times, and "those essential in war times,

⁴⁹ Kristin L. Hoganson's work on the global production of goods consumed by American women emphasizes how Far Eastern design from Japan and China infused U.S. silk purchases, and that "in marketing imports, silk purveyors stressed more than cost and quality. They presented the Orientalism of their fabric as an important part of its appeal." What Hoganson doesn't acknowledge, however, is why silk became so prominent within American consumer society between 1914 and 1918. Kristin L. Hoganson, *The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 87, 91, 92, 93.

⁵⁰ The U.S. produced about three-fifths of the global cotton supply, but crop output was abnormally low between 1915 and 1917. However, the decrease of cotton exports during this period ensured a surplus of available supply. Richard H. Hippelheuser and Bernard M. Baruch, *American Industry in the War: A Report of the War Industries Board* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1941), 230.

⁵¹ Argentina and Australia were the two largest foreign suppliers. The government controlled wool imports by requiring import licenses through the War Trade Board (WTB). The U.S. government received first priority on all wool imported for a period of 10 days. In addition, imported wool could only be sold to a manufacturer under consent of the WTB. Hippelheuser and Baruch, *American Industry in the War*, 231.

⁵² The SAA had a clause inserted into raw silk contracts that stated: "The silk is to be imported from (China or Japan as the case may be)." Anonymous, "Raw Silk Under Import License Regulation," *Silk* 21, no. 2 (February 1918): 39.

imports of which must be cut down.” The policy to restrict imports had been “adopted as the policy of the United States” and approved by president Woodrow Wilson.

Japan, justifiably, was alarmed that the U.S. would restrict its silk trade at a crucial moment when Japan’s own industrial development and expansion depended on U.S. purchases of raw silk.⁵³ By mid-February 1918, Viscount Motone of Japan contacted Ambassador Morris in Tokyo to discuss the United States’ efforts to restrict imports, with a specific emphasis on silk. According to Motone, Japan’s silk exports occupied a marginal space on ships. Furthermore its:

“industry was small in bulk it extended over the entire country of Japan and touched every phase of Japanese life and that the export trade great value was represented. This industry would almost totally be destroyed by the American embargo and a very unfavorable feeling would be created among the people of Japan who would not understand the purpose and meaning of embarkation.”⁵⁴

Motone’s concerns were well placed. Despite contemporary views of U.S. department stores that viewed silk as a “necessity,” U.S. policymakers at no point during the war considered silk an essential textile.

During this same period, the United States had continued its negotiations with Japanese shipbuilders to construct up to 300,000 tons of additional shipping tonnage in exchange for U.S. Steel Plate. Edward N. Hurley, chairman of the U.S. Shipping Board, did not want to pay Japanese shipbuilding firms the higher wartime rates and demands for an 18 percent profit rate. In a communication from Ambassador Morris to the State Department, Morris indicated that

British and French governments have been engaged for past three years in the purchase of ships in Japan. Definitely know what ships there are and by whom they are own. These countries have assisted U.S. with this knowledge. Situation is that Japanese shipbuilders do not have ships to trade with and are compelled to bargain in the open market with the owners.

⁵³ See Christopher Howe, *The Origins of Japanese Trade Supremacy: Development and Technology in Asia from 1540 to the Pacific War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 324-325; William Lockwood, *The Economic Development of Japan: Growth and Structural Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, 38-77); Kozo Yamamura, ed., *The Economic Emergence of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Hurley expressed concerns that paying higher prices to Japanese shipbuilders would only cause complications for the United States' building program. To Hurley, it was strategically in the United States' best interest to provide more steel in order to secure lower prices for Japanese-constructed ships. It was proposed that the United States' would purchase an additional 12 ships from Japan capable of carrying 100,000 deadweight tons in exchange for one ton of steel per deadweight ton, which was to include steel "plates, shapes, and cars." The State Department and war officials agreed to Hurley's plan.

Frederick R. Dickinson, a specialist on the significance of World War I to Japanese society and political development, has discerned that historians have not sufficiently considered the Great War's wide ranging effect on U.S.-Japanese relations.⁵⁵ According to Dickinson, what scholars have missed is that the Great War was a turning point within Japan's later ascent toward the Cold War. This is because Russia's imperial collapse following the Russian Revolution, coupled with Chinese republicanism and Woodrow Wilson's international call to democracy, meant that Japanese leaders increasingly felt isolated within the new world order.⁵⁶ At the same time, most historians of U.S.-Japanese relations during the World War I have equally tended to frame the war within the shadow of World War II and the conflict that loomed ahead. These scholars focus on the United States' tensions with Japan in initial foray into the war, the creation of the 1917 Lansing-Ishii agreement that formally recognized Japan's "special interest" in China, U.S. suspicions of Japan's involvement in Siberia and Manchuria, and U.S. disavowal of Japanese interests at the Washington Disarmament Conference in 1921-22.⁵⁷ It is this framework that Jeffrey J. Safford's work on maritime diplomacy also fits within. While Safford has emphasized the United States' use of its embargo power of its steel resources for purpose of

⁵⁵ Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 176-177.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 178-179.

⁵⁷ LaFeber, *The Clash*, 106-115; Iokibe, *History of US-Japan Relations*.

obtaining ships and shipping resources from Japan as a strategy to counter Japan's growing influence, this focus has not considered other aspects of U.S. trade strategy during the war period.

By examining how and why silk imports were permitted, we can better see that U.S. policymakers and state officials were not in consensus in their debates about U.S.-Japanese diplomacy. Interestingly, throughout the first half of 1918, War Trade Board officials began to critically shift in their stance on Japan with the intent of reducing geopolitical frictions through a more liberal approach to U.S.-Japan trade relations during the war. A new policy was proposed for trading with Japan that moved away from "quid pro quo" procedures, in which commodities were exchanged only if something of value were to be offered in return, which in the case of the U.S. meant additional shipping resources, and toward one of "leniency" and "liberality." According to the WTB, "we would adopt this policy without stipulation for anything in return, as a practical expression of our good will toward Japan and of our appreciation of the sacrifice which she is making on behalf of our common cause toward Germany." The policy was ultimately not adopted, but the conversation raised about the need to reduce frictions with Japan in light of the shipping situation, as well as the United States' shortcoming in supplying Japan with raw materials for shipbuilding, indicates that war-time relations during this period created opportunities for accord that merit further exploration and consideration

Threaded throughout the war period was a growing awareness and acknowledgement by government officials that silk represented a critical bond between the two nations that greatly fortified Japan, contributed to the Allied war effort, and benefitted Americans on the home front. Had U.S. policymakers forced a reduction in silk imports it would have crippled Japan at the same time the U.S. needed Japanese tonnage and shipbuilding resources. A decision to maintain silk imports at pre-war levels could have been proposed, but in practice, the United States' use of

Japanese silk for domestic purposes exploded, as more American's could access silk wearing apparel and hosiery. U.S. policymakers perceived their role in controlling imports as a serious factor for freeing-up badly-needed shipping resources for the Atlantic. Notwithstanding, of all the items considered unessential for the war effort, silk was the "only commodity allowed to be imported."

Since its inception, and throughout the war's duration, the War Trade Board actively researched the silk situation. An internal report prepared by the WTB's Bureau of Research in August 1918 raised the question: "Should the United States Restrict Imports?" The Bureau of Research indicated that if silk were to be restricted it "might release tonnage for the carriage of men, munitions and food-stuffs to the battlefield of Europe . . . [and] partially remove a possible non-essential industry in the United States, thus releasing labor and capital for war work." But the report also acknowledged that the consequences of restrictions would "destroy not only the Japanese silk industry, which is wholly dependent on its exports to the United States, but also the silk industry in this country . . . [and] would lead to fiction and misunderstanding between the people of Japan and the government of the United States." Because silk only used roughly four percent of available shipping space from the Far East, and Japan had provided "some 400,000 tons of shipping to be used in trans-Atlantic service and has thereby been compelled to accordingly restrict her imports and exports . . . Japan will continue to make shipments of silk her principle single item of export." Appreciably, the report's author also demonstrated an awareness that one-third of Japan's agricultural families depended on sericulture, and silk was connected to hundreds of thousands of lives connected through the Pacific corridor.

World War I ended November 11, 1918. Though silk had been debated as a non-essential commodity during the war, it forged an important linkage between Japan and the United States. The only restrictions the U.S. imposed on silk were export restrictions, not imports. However,

U.S. largesse did not extend as nearly as far to Italy.⁵⁸ While the United States committed to purchasing Italian silks during the war to support Italy's most important industry, U.S. support for Japan via informal arrangements vastly surpassed it. The opening of the U.S. market to foreign imports for the purpose of maintaining the economic stability of an ally to best serve America's larger strategic interests in the international theater is a pattern that would be repeated in the decades ahead. What is unfortunate is that this arrangement has gone largely unnoticed by historians and treated as a spontaneous consequence of war—when it was anything but.

In addition, contemporary discussion about the popularity of silk during the war years has also been affected by this lacunae. Scholars of U.S. consumerism and silk production have consistently treated the wartime silk renaissance as a natural outcome to the rising prices of cotton and wool textiles. In turn, this focus on the consumer-driven aspect of wartime silk use equally minimizes the tradeoffs made between the U.S. and Japan, in which American citizens were not subjected to the same deprivations as their European counterparts. The U.S. emphasis on wartime voluntarism fully obscured the badly-needed shipping supply chains strung across the Pacific that were themselves not honorary participants of war. It also encouraged Americans on the home front to justify their patronage of silk products as a blended expression of patriotism and enlightened buying power. In an era of modern propaganda, the informal diplomacy of silk relied on more subtle messaging through its widely-visible presence.

In the aftermath of World War I, Japan was the largest producer of silk in the world and had effectively displaced the influence of French and Italian silks within the U.S. market. Japan's

⁵⁸ The War Trade Board's Bureau of Research "Italian Silk Report," noted that Italy had surrendered its status as the largest producer of silk to Japan and China. Indicated that "there has been much discussion in the past as to the advisability of extending effort toward developing an industry that rewards its workers after so beggarly a fashion as does the silk industry. Italy's silk industry has surprisingly grown. Outbreak of war had a depressing effect . . . however, the industry rallied. "the impossibility of importing Chinese and Japanese silks into Europe caused Italian silks to be the more in demand." Conclusion: war interfered with Italy's silk industry, prices fluctuating, industry has "been able to withstand the hardships arising out of the war, and is at present contributing extensively to the silk needs of the allied nations.

exports of raw silk to the United States expanded from 70.4 percent of Japan's total silk exports to 95.1 percent in 1923, and to approximately 96 percent in 1929." However, more research needs to be done to better understand the full spectrum of commodities carried on Japanese ships for the U.S. that its silk purchases made possible. And even though Japanese silk production would later all-but disappear during World War II, it did reappear as an important postwar industry as a luxury textile—one that was not considered affordable. In 1961, silk sold for upwards of \$4.00 per pound, while cotton and rayon could be had for only 30¢ per pound.⁵⁹ Japan would also resume its place as one of the world's most important silk producers in the decades that followed. Thus, in thinking about the connections between the World War I, and the later surge in economic activity in the Asia-Pacific by the end of the twentieth century, we need to recognize that these events have older antecedents, that our economy had long-served as a resource for Japanese growth and industrialization, and that our Cold War strategy was preceded by an earlier chapter in the history of U.S.-Japanese relations.

⁵⁹ George F. Ackerman, "Japanese Silk Industry," *Financial Analysts Journal* 17, no. 5 (Sep.-Oct., 1961): 83.

Consulted Archives:

Hagley Museum & Library, Wilmington, Delaware

Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford University, California

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland

National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.