



E-ASIA
university of oregon libraries

<http://e-asia.uoregon.edu>

JAPAN'S NEW ISLAND POSSESSIONS IN THE PACIFIC: HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS

By George H. Blakeslee, Ph.D., Professor of History and International Relations, Clark University

The coming conference on the limitation of armaments has focussed the world's attention upon the Pacific Ocean and the Far East. Among the many issues in this great region which may very possibly engage the thought of the conference is that of the former German islands in the Pacific. Those lying north of the equator, Japan now holds as a mandatory under the League of Nations, but the United States has officially protested the validity of the title. The still unsettled dispute in regard to Yap has served to call attention to certain American interests in these tiny dots in the Pacific, but it is not generally realized that, historically, Americans for seventy years have played an important part in these island groups, and have given to many of them the degree of civilization which they now possess.

These newly acquired Japanese Islands, the Carolines, Marshalls and Marianas, are situated east of the Philippines, and slightly south of the direct route from the Philippines to Hawaii. Comprising many hundreds of islands, most of them tiny islets, they extend nearly 2000 miles from east to west through the Pacific. While a few are of volcanic formation, with rocky peaks in the center, the greater number are low-lying, coral islands, rising but a few feet above the ocean, but crowned with hundreds of picturesque coconut palms. The inhabitants, some 50,000, are in general Micronesians.

Of the three archipelagoes, the Marianas were discovered first, in 1521, and were shortly after that brought under the control and the civilization of Spain, which retained them until 1898-9. But the Carolines and Mar-

page 174

shalls, although discovered soon after the Marianas, were subsequently neglected. It was not until the nineteenth century that a few whites began to visit and settle in these islands, and to give to them a most unfortunate introduction to civilization. Lawless sandalwood traders, the worst

elements of whaling crews, and the shiftless beach-comber taught the natives during the first half of the nineteenth century only the power and the unscrupulousness of the white man.

In contrast to these undesirable representatives of European and American civilization were the missionaries, who for a hundred years have worked in many of the Pacific islands for the religious and social development of the native peoples. Among the most striking results are those obtained by the Americans, under the American Board for Foreign Missions, in Hawaii, the Eastern Carolines and the Marshalls.

After the native church in Hawaii had reached the height of its success, it wished to send missionaries to other groups in the Pacific. In 1852 therefore the American Board, in cooperation with the Hawaiian Church, sent a mission party to the Eastern Carolines, which established permanent stations at Kusaie and Ponape, the two principal islands. A few years later, in 1857, the work was extended to the Marshalls and to the neighboring Gilberts. All of these groups were entirely independent; they had no other government than that of the various chieftains. The natives were lower in the scale of development than the Polynesians of Hawaii and Samoa; were largely, and in many islands entirely, naked; lived on the danger line of famine; wasted their strength in frequent wars; and although naturally inclined to be friendly many of them, from their contact with the traders, looked upon every white man as an enemy whom they tried to kill. One of the missionaries, in describing his landing upon a new island, with hundreds of natives on the shore, wrote, "Perhaps not more than five natives could be found that day with anything in the line of clothing on their bodies." He could not understand their language, nor they his.

page 175

The missionaries had to learn the local language, reduce it to writing, compose primers so that the natives could read it, translate the Bible and other useful books into the newly written vernacular, and finally import handpresses so that these works could be put into printed form. The natives became eager to learn, and when after some years the printed books and pamphlets were ready, would bring yams, bananas and coconuts, with which to buy them. But the missionaries did not limit themselves to teaching, reading and giving instruction in religion; they improved economic conditions by showing how better houses, roads and wharves could be built, and by introducing new articles of food, such as melons and sweet potatoes, and new domestic animals, such as cattle,

sheep, hens, geese and ducks; and they safeguarded so far as possible the health of their native community. After years of this work a number of the islands of the Eastern Carolines, such as Kusaie, were almost wholly Christianized; and the same was true in the Marshalls, where the American Mission had 86 preaching stations on 20 different islands, and where on Nauru for example 1100 of the 1500 inhabitants were members of the mission church, and Sunday congregations of from 800 to 1000 were not unusual. In some of these islands, due to the great influence which the missionaries had secured over the natives, they were the actual rulers of the land. In the islands where only part of the population could be regarded as Christianized, the missionaries nevertheless brought the elements of civilization to the whole group. By the middle '80 's, the American missionaries had come to be the strongest influence in the Eastern Carolines, the Marshalls, and probably in the neighboring Gilberts. as well. One of the best tributes to their work is given by Dr. Georg Irmer, at one time German administrator of the Marshalls. He wrote in 1915:

It is especially due to their sacrificing energy that in the island territories the wild cannibals and bloodthirsty reef pirates have been made peaceful men. The Americans did not limit themselves to prayers, singing and tea drinking. In the Marshall Islands, in my time, there were no young people who had not

page 176

learned to read and write in the American Mission school on Kusaie.*

The influence and the power of the American mission in these archipelagoes might easily have led to an American protectorate or to actual annexation had the United States so desired. In fact throughout the Pacific as a whole, although from the beginning of the nineteenth century the Americans had played a leading part not only in mission work but in whaling, trade, commerce, exploration and discovery, yet the government at Washington made no effort to obtain, and even refused to accept, political control in any of the islands. While it aimed to protect and develop American trade and commerce, especially by sending naval expeditions into the Pacific, making agreements with local chieftains, and securing cessions of a very few necessary harbors and ports of call, it was unwilling to overthrow native rule.

But this reluctance was not a peculiarity of our country at that time. None of the great nations of the world were especially interested during that

period in securing colonies or dependencies. In fact, during the greater part of the nineteenth century, when the scattered islands of the Pacific were being visited by occasional sandalwood and whaling ships, and a few of them settled by small numbers of whites—missionaries, traders, and beach-combers—the European powers were showing a marked indifference to the possibility of securing possession of the lands of the Pacific. During the first three quarters of the last century there was a strange lull in the long and bitter struggle for oversea dependencies, which the greater states of Europe have carried on from the days of Columbus to the present. Statesmen and writers came to believe that the possession of colonies was of doubtful advantage. This attitude existed in Europe at the very period when the Pacific was becoming thoroughly known for the first time and prevented the nations of Europe from making their usual earnest and systematic efforts to seize oversea possessions.

*G. Irmer, *Volkerdämmerung im Stillen Ozean*, p. 1-9.

page 177

Gradually, however the centuries-old longing for subject territories was revived. The change began in the '70's, and within fifteen years sufficiently developed to precipitate the famous "scramble" of 1884-5 for Africa and the islands of the Pacific. In the northern part of the Pacific this contest was practically limited to Germany, Spain, and Great Britain, while the United States merely looked on, a passive but highly disgruntled spectator.

The German government, which for many years had resisted the pressure of its colonial enthusiasts, finally acted with its customary vigor, and in 1884 attempted to take under its control nearly all the unappropriated lands in Africa and in the Pacific. To avoid serious difficulties with Great Britain, Germany signed a treaty, April 6, 1886, by which these two powers defined their respective spheres of interest in the western Pacific. On Germany's side of the dividing line lay the Carolines and the Marshalls.* The latter group Germany had seized October 15, 1885. Regarding the Carolines however there was serious trouble. Spain had discovered these islands, and had made some half-hearted attempts to establish missions in them, but had never at any time really occupied them. Germany, not without some reason, regarded the archipelago as a no-man's land, which could properly be appropriated. But Spain was also affected by the revived interest in colonies, and determined to reassert its old claims to the Carolines. The result was that one day in August, 1885, while Spanish ships were in the harbor of Yap, ready to carry out their instructions to

raise the Spanish flag in the island, there steamed up the bay a German gunboat, the *Itis*, which under the very eyes of the slow-moving Spaniards hoisted the German flag and proclaimed the island under the control of his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Germany. The *Itis* then sailed for the central and eastern islands of the Carolines, where American influence was so strong, and formally took them also under German control. When news of these events

*U. S. Foreign Relations, 1886, p. 330.

page 178

reached Spain, so intense was the popular feeling that mobs attacked the German embassy in Madrid, and tore down and burned the escutcheon and flagstaff with shouts of "Death to Germany;!" while street crowds listened to impassioned orators who threatened Germany with certain defeat at the hands of the Spanish army.

A quarrel with Spain however did not fit in at all with the international policy of Bismarck, who after all was only a lukewarm supporter of these colonial projects. He willingly agreed to refer the ownership of the islands to the arbitration of the Pope, who rendered a decision, October 22, 1885, favorable to Spain, although he admitted that Spain had never made an effective occupation of the islands.* But Spain was weak, and Germany could afford to wait.

The United States was intensely dissatisfied at these seizures of the independent island territories of the Pacific. Had it been willing to abandon its policy, and join the European powers in their contest for control of these unappropriated lands, it might easily have secured a number of desirable archipelagoes. As Secretary Bayard stated in a despatch, in 1886:

There are islands in the Pacific Ocean known to be wholly in the undisturbed possession of American citizens as peaceable settlers, and there are many others where American citizens have established themselves in common with other foreigners.**

Among the islands to which Secretary Bayard referred were undoubtedly the Eastern Carolines, the Marshalls and the neighboring Gilberts. Americans had brought a written language, the elements of civilization, education, and Christianity to the three archipelagoes. More than that, Americans had a large share of the commerce and trade; in the Eastern

Carolines, practically all of the traders settled on Ponape, the capital island, were Americans; and in the Marshalls, for a time, the foremost commercial firm was American, Andrew Crawford and Company, of San Francisco. Further, it was the sovereignty of the

*U. S. Foreign Relations, 1886, p. 776.

**Moore, *Digest*, I, 423.

page 179

United States rather than that of any other power which was clearly preferred by the natives themselves. In the Gilberts, the attitude of the people was strikingly shown a few years later, in 1892, when the king of Butaritari, fearing the aggression of another foreign power, came in person all the way across the Pacific to petition the American government to take his islands under its control. This strong position of the United States was recognized when Senor Castelar stated in the Spanish Cortez, in 1886, that, after Spain, it was the United States and not Germany which had the best claim to the Carolines, and that this was due to the results of the labors of the American missionaries.

But the United States would not make the slightest move to develop its preponderant influence into political control; it grumbled loudly when Spain, Germany and England seized these groups, yet it declined to make any vigorous action to preserve their independence, and refused to take them itself. In regard to the Caroline Islanders, the Secretary of State wrote :

When the dispute arose with Germany in respect to the possession of the islands, Spain maintained no government there and could point to no act of modern date that could be considered as the basis of a claim of sovereignty The only foreign influence they had known was the quiet, peaceful and beneficent effort of the American missionaries to educate and civilize them. To this influence they had shown themselves readily susceptible, and it is beyond question that they had become deeply attached to their benefactors. They were also content. They sought neither the protection nor the control of any foreign power; and it was not by reason of any solicitation on the part of the natives that Germany and Spain disputed as to the right to govern them.*

The same attitude of dissatisfaction was shown by the United States regarding the Anglo-German treaty of 1886, by which the Pacific was

divided into spheres of influence. Secretary Bayard wrote to Berlin :

It is not easy to see how either Great Britain or Germany can assert the right to control or to divide between them insular possessions which have hitherto been free to the trade of all flags and which owe the civilizing rudiments of social organization

*Foreign Relations, 1892, p. 444.

page 180

they possess to the settlement of pioneers of other nationalities than British or German. If colonial acquisition were an announced policy of the United States, it is clear this country would have an equal right with Great Britain or Germany to assert a claim of possession in respect to islands settled by American citizens, either alone or on a footing of equality with British or German settlers.*

An even stronger statement was made by Secretary Foster, in 1892, to the British government regarding American claims in the Gilberts. He wrote :

The germs of civilization were planted in the Gilbert group by the zealous endeavor of American citizens more than half a century ago. The result of this work, carried on by American citizens and money, has been, in fact, to change the naked barbarism of the island natives into enlightened communities and to lay the foundations of the trade and commerce which have given these islands importance in the eyes of Europe to-day. Wrought by the agents of a colonizing power, this development would have naturally led to a paramount claim to protection, control, or annexation, as policy might dictate. This country, however, has slept upon its rights to reap the benefits of the development produced by the efforts of its citizens.**

The Eastern Carolines, soon after the Papal award of 1885, were occupied by Spanish officials and troops. Shortly after this upon Ponape, the capital island, trouble developed between the Spanish and the American missionaries, which the State Department officially stated was due to acts of persecution against the Americans and their native converts. Finally the Washington government found it necessary to send the warship Alliance, under Commander Taylor, to Ponape for the missionaries' protection. In the official report prepared by Commander Taylor, after he had left the island, he emphasized the supremacy of American influence. He wrote:

For nearly half a century the influence of American Protestant missionaries has been strong and without a competitor in Ponape. There has been a voluntary submission of the mass of the inhabitants to the missionaries' guidance and dominance in religion and education.***

*Moore, *Digest*, I, 423.

** Moore, *Digest*, I, 426.

***U. S. Foreign Relations, 1892, 444, 454; 1893, 566ff; *Moore's Digest*, vi, 345.

page 181

Upon the other islands of the Eastern Carolines, the Spanish authorities did not seriously interfere with the Americans, nor prevent the continuance and even the development of their religious and educational work; nor did they lessen the strong influence which the missionaries had secured over the natives throughout this part of the archipelago.

Although the United States had been unwilling to take control of any of the Pacific islands in the '80's, its policy was unexpectedly changed by the Spanish War. Then it became obvious that Hawaii was absolutely necessary as a naval base for American expeditions crossing the Pacific, and Congress at once accepted the cession of the archipelago. Guam also was seen to be a valuable naval station on the route to the Philippines, and was demanded from Spain in accordance with the terms of the protocol which ended the war.

During the negotiations at Paris, 1898, between the Spanish and American commissions, the American delegates became convinced that the Caroline Islands were important to the United States, provided our country should secure the Philippines. The American delegates, however, when they began their study of Pacific conditions could hardly qualify as experts, for some of the Commission, at least, did not know whether the Philippines were north or south of the equator, or whether the Carolines were north or south of Guam; but they soon learned the essential facts from men who were thoroughly acquainted with the Pacific Ocean. Admiral Bradford pointed out to them that the Carolines in the hands of an enemy "would offer a serious menace to the line of communication between the Pacific coast and the Philippines, and stated that in his judgment they should all be acquired if the United States were to possess the Philippines.*"

Senator Frye, one of the commissioners, cabled President McKinley:

*Sen. Doc. No. 62, Part 1, 55th Cong., 3rd Sess., pp. 474, 475, 484.

I am sorry the Carolines were not taken by us as they are infinitely more valuable than the Ladrões. If war is resumed hope orders will be given Dewey to seize at once all of the Philippines, as also the Carolines.

Secretary Hay soon thereafter cabled the following instructions to the United States commission:

You are therefore instructed to insist upon the cession of the whole of the Philippines, and, if necessary, pay to Spain \$10, 000,000 to \$20,000,000, and if you can get cession of a naval and telegraph station in the Carolines you can offer more

Various proposals and counter proposals were then made by the American and Spanish commissions which dealt, together with other matters, with the possible cession of Kusaie, one of the two most important islands in the Eastern Carolines. Finally the American commission formally proposed and urged that an article be inserted in the treaty by which Spain should cede Kusaie, together with the right to land telegraph cables in certain other Spanish territory, in return for a payment of \$1,000,000. But the Spanish commission refused to accept the article, stating that their government had no idea of disposing of the Carolines, and that their commission was constitutionally unable to agree to the alienation of any of them, since no previous authorization had been given by the Cortez, as had been done in the case of the other Spanish possessions which had been mentioned in the protocol of peace between the United States and Spain.*

The United States was evidently unwilling to insist upon the cession of Kusaie to the extent of threatening to renew the war; so the matter was dropped. But the American commission was convinced of the importance of the Eastern Carolines to the United States and the government, when too late, made an effort to secure one or more of the islands.

*F. E. Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain: the Spanish-American War*, II, pp. 463, 467-8. Sen. Doc. No. 62, Part 1, 55th Cong., 3rd sess. pp. 251-2.

The year after the Spanish-American War, 1899, Germany bought from Spain for a little over \$4,000,000, the Carolines, and what remained of the

Marianas after Guam had been ceded to the United States.

German rule was a great improvement over the Spanish, and, upon the whole, was reasonably successful in a material sense; and, in general, not unduly harsh. The Germans however did not succeed in making themselves popular; neither the Americans nor the natives liked them.

During their administration they bore strong testimony to the devotion of the natives to the American missionaries and to their preference for the United States. The new rulers naturally wished to Germanize their subjects, and found the Americans in their way. They therefore made formal complaints, in 1902, that the missionaries were Americanizing the natives. From the missionaries' letters it is evident that the latter were trying most scrupulously to avoid even any appearance which would seem to justify criticism; they were attempting, though rather unsuccessfully, to suppress the long-established native celebration of the Fourth of July, and to introduce the celebration of the Kaiser's birthday. But, as one of the missionaries in the Carolines wrote, it was impossible for the Germans to crush everything American in a few months; and added, "The natives do love the American people and the English language." A missionary from another Caroline island wrote the same year, "In a certain sense the missionaries have been their rulers for years—the missionary influence has been and is paramount." The strong attachment of the natives for America and the Americans was reluctantly admitted by the Germans. Deeken, one of the recognized authorities on the German Pacific, although openly unfriendly to Americans, wrote, in his work *Die Karolinen*, published in 1912:

It will naturally take a considerable time before our missionaries succeed in spreading the German spirit and doing away with the preference of the natives for the Americans. This result can hardly be expected before the next generation.*

* R. Deeken, *Die Karolinen*, p. 35.

page 184

When the World War began, the Germans had no fortifications of any kind on any of the Carolines, Marshalls or Marianas; they had no troops, and only a few natives as police, probably less than 100 in all the three archipelagoes together, but they did have wireless stations on Nauru, Yap

and Angaur. Only a few days after the outbreak of the war, in the early part of August, 1914, British cruisers appeared in the harbors of Yap and Angaur and destroyed the wireless stations by bombardment. A month later, a British landing force on Nauru took away some of the essential parts of the wireless and rendered it useless. But the British made no immediate effort to occupy any of the Carolines, Marshalls and Marianas—with the single exception of Nauru, the only island in these groups south of the equator—and the Japanese, in the first days of October, took control of all the other important islands in the three archipelagoes.

The Japanese administration of the Carolines, Marshalls and Marianas has been more energetic and more efficient, although no less dictatorial than the German. Soon after the islands had been seized Japanese officials and experts visited them in large numbers; while, to impress and conciliate the natives, the chiefs were taken on visits to Japan. Japanese schools were soon started throughout all the important islands, although under the Germans the entire work of education had been left to the missionaries; and wherever these schools have been established attendance has been made compulsory. Many of these new institutions are boarding schools where the native children are not merely taught the rudiments of education by Japanese teachers, but are brought under the almost constant influence of Japanese culture. Desired results have already been obtained, for a large number of native children have learned to speak the Japanese language.

In material ways similar progress has been made. New wireless stations have been erected, one of them powerful enough to speak with Tokyo at all times. Japanese commercial companies have been established in practically all parts of these island groups; monthly steamship connections

page 185

with Japan have been made; while over 3000 Japanese have settled in the different islands. The Government has also been actively assisting Japanese traders and planters.

It must be added however that during the first few years at least there was some complaint of the arrogant attitude and arbitrary methods of some of the petty naval officers, for the Islands have been from the time of their capture under the administration of the Japanese Navy. As for the natives, they were, at least at first, somewhat dissatisfied with the Japanese administration, but how deep and how widespread this dissatisfaction has

been, it is impossible to state with positiveness.

The chief value of these islands lies in their strategic and naval importance. The Japanese military and naval classes seemed to desire them particularly for potential or actual use against the United States. Possible coaling and naval bases exist in the Carolines and Marshalls, although they are not rated as first class. These islands however would serve for submarine retreats and sally-ports, and for aeroplane stations. Stretching nearly 2000 miles across the Pacific they flank, and, if held by an enemy, endanger American communications between the United States and the Philippines, Hawaii and the Philippines, and the Panama Canal and the Philippines.

It was largely because of their strategic value, that Germany purchased the Carolines and Marianas in 1899. The best informed German opinion is expressed by Dr. Georg Irmer, former governor of the Marshalls and for many years intimately associated with the colonial administration in Berlin. He wrote, in 1915:

The acquisition of the Caroline islands was based upon the strategic value of the small but secure mountainous harbors of Kusaie and Ponape, for coaling stations and ports of refuge for German gun-boats and cruisers in case of war.

These small but rock-bound harbors . . . are dangerous points of sortie for the Japanese cruisers and U-boats against the American outer forts and warships in Manila.*

*Irmer, p. 56 and 135. See also *Überseeische Deutschland*, pp. 588-93; O. C. Salesius, *Die Karolinen Insel Yap*, p. 165; R. Deeken, *Die Karolinen*, pp. 25, 36; *(Köln) Gazette*, quoted in *The Japan Chronicle*, February 7, 1918.

page 186

The Japanese writers who have discussed this subject seem to be agreed as to the strategic and naval value of these islands, particularly as against the United States. A few typical quotations will illustrate this attitude.

It is important to consider the strategic value of our seized islands as related to the strategic positions held by our rival in the struggle for the mastery of the Pacific. For instance, a glance at the map of the Pacific shows that the line of communication with our newly acquired territory directly intersects the Hawaii, Guam, Philippine line of communication at a

point about 800 miles south of our Ogasawara islands. This is why Americans have been so much concerned about our seizures in the South Sea ever since we took possession. (*Dai Nippon*, August, 1918, article on "Political Changes of the Pacific Ocean.)

Japan, which has no defenses against an attack from the south, should secure an island in the South Seas to make it our naval base, in order to intercept the American line of communication with their naval bases. (*Yorodzu*, October 7, 1914.)

But just so much as danger is felt by the United States this shows how important a position these islands are for Japan. Japan's occupation of these islands would make for the Peace of the Pacific. Unless Japan secures these territories for herself we do not know what insults she may not receive from the United States that may result in the disturbance of peace. On the other hand, should these islands be retained by Japan, the United States would not dare to be overbearing, thus making it possible to maintain the Peace of the Pacific. (New Year's Number, 1918, *Kokocho*.)

Here is the fact which we must remember, that we captured the South Sea Islands, and here comes the boundary of the Japanese navy in the Pacific Ocean, which extends south and cuts the American boundary near Guam. (The *Taiyo*, April, 1917, vol. xxvii, p. 24. Probably Japan's foremost magazine.)

We must think of the position of the islands. They stand between the Philippines on the west and Hawaii on the east, and in the center is the American Guam. We have every reason to suppose that if we have reasonable preparation from a military and naval standpoint, in these islands, it may be sufficient to cause great hesitation to the hypothetical enemy. (The *Taiyo*, September, 1916.)

The Japanese occupation of the South Sea Islands is a question of life and death importance to Japan the 100,000 square miles of the territorial waters of the South Seas which are now in Japanese occupation are of great value to Japan, affording, as they do, a series of excellent naval bases. (Mr. K. Inukai, the leader of the Kokiiminto Party, in the *Seinin*, April, 1917.)

American naval authorities, as well as diplomats, have also recognized the

strategic value of these Caroline islands. It was due to their naval importance that the United States Peace Commission, at the close of the Spanish War, attempted to secure at least one of the important Eastern Carolines, Ponape or Kusaie. The following year Admiral Bradford wrote:

Their future disposition is a matter of vital importance to the United States. . . . In possession of a hostile nation, these islands are capable of becoming very formidable naval bases from which attacks on the line of communication between the Pacific Coast and the Philippines can be made.*

During the recent war Rear Admiral A. P. Niblack, U. S. N., former Governor of Guam, expressed apprehension regarding the effect of Japan's possession of the islands upon America 's position in the Pacific. He said:

It will be noted that the positions which Germany held in the Pacific are now held, possibly only for the moment, in other hands, thereby upsetting that balance of positions which gave no one country too great a dominance for our own future good. . . Any one really alive to the actual situation in our Pacific possessions must feel grave misgivings as to our future on that ocean.**

Although this very guarded statement was made in the seclusion of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, it was soon detected and was widely quoted and commented upon by the Japanese press.

As the war developed, it was apparent that there was a clear conflict of interest between Japan and the United States as to the permanent ownership of the Carolines, Marshalls and Marianas. Influenced, possibly, by the knowledge that American sentiment would oppose the cession of these islands to Japan, the Japanese government, in February, 1917, by an exchange of diplomatic notes, made definite agreements with Great Britain, France and Italy by which, in return for reciprocal favors, these Powers pledged themselves to support Japan's claim to the islands

**Forum*, 1899, vol. 26, pp. 745, 748.

** *Transactions of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers*, 1916, p. 143.

at the Peace Conference. These pledges were kept secret, however, and were not known by the United States officials until after the delegates had

convened at Paris.

When the war ended therefore there were three possibilities for these Pacific archipelagoes. They might be ceded to Japan, or ceded to the United States, or be wholly or partially internationalized.

While the value of the stake at issue was primarily strategic and naval, the islands had some slight economic and commercial importance. They all produced large amounts of copra, a commodity which during the war came to have a greater value than ever before; and some of the Western Carolines, especially Angaur, contained quantities of phosphate rock, which the Germans had worked on a large scale. As ports of call, the islands were of slight importance to either country; only a few minor trade routes, either American or Japanese, pass through any of these island groups. Finally there were the cables which centered at Yap. In view of the present controversy regarding this cable center, it is interesting to note that during the war the cables were scarcely mentioned in the published discussions regarding the value of the islands; nearly all emphasis was placed upon naval and strategic importance.

At the time of the peace conference the claims of Japan to these island groups were substantial. It had captured them at the beginning of the war, and had administered them efficiently for four years. In trade and commerce, its interests were vastly greater than were those of the United States. The islands were relatively near to Japan and would make a natural extension of its growing island Empire. Finally, it had written pledges in its favor from all the leading victorious Powers except the United States.

But United States claims were not lacking. The principle of self-determination would have given most of these islands to America. The strong preference of the natives for the Americans, which Deeken, the German authority, admitted in 1912, still continued. As a white resident of one of the groups, not an American, well stated shortly

page 189

before the peace conference "if a poll were taken of the Islanders, a vote for American government would be almost unanimous. *

Geographical propinquity would be the basis of a further American claim. These islands, although nearer to Japan than to the United States, are

very close to American insular possessions. One of the Mariana islands, Rota, is hardly more than 45 miles from Guam; while the Carolines begin near the Philippines, and sweep through the Pacific in the direction of Hawaii.

The demand for naval security however was America 's strongest claim. In the judgment of all competent authorities, these islands in the possession of Japan would threaten the naval communications of the United States between Hawaii and the Philippines. But if they were in American possession they would threaten no Japanese communications. The United States, to be sure, did not need the islands for its own security, for no port or harbor in any of the groups equalled the three great naval bases which it already owned in the Pacific—Hawaii, Guam, and Tutuila; but it did need to be assured that no possible or potential enemy would hold them. It was therefore to the interest of the United States either to possess these islands itself, or to have them so thoroughly internationalized that they could not be used to cut American ocean communications.

But for the United States to ask for the cession of these islands would have been to violate the idealistic declarations in accordance with which this country entered the war. It is probably due to this reason that President Wilson, it is believed, never even considered making a demand for them; but there were others who believed that, the United States should make every effort to secure these archipelagoes. It is probable too that the United States could have secured them, with Japan's consent, if it had been willing to make concessions, territorial and otherwise, to Japan in other quarters.

* For recent confirmation of this statement, see the articles of Mr. Julius B. Wood, of the *Chicago Daily News* who visited these islands in February of this year : *Chicago Daily News*, April 8, 1921; *Asia*, September, 1921, p. 747.

page 190

The Peace Conference however decided to internationalize all of Germany's former colonies to the extent at least of granting them to various powers only as mandatories to be held under the supervision of the League of Nations. During the Conference it was tentatively agreed by the Council of Four, May 7, 1919, that Japan should be given the mandate for all of the former German islands north of the equator. President Wilson has stated that he made an exception of the Island of Yap, which on account of its three great cables he wished to have more completely

internationalized than the other islands; but this exception, while recorded in the minutes of previous meetings, does not appear in those of May 7. After the United States had practically withdrawn from cooperation with its former war-time associates, the remaining principal allied and associated Powers granted these islands, including Yap, to Japan, and formulated the terms of the mandate, which were later confirmed by the Council of the League of Nations, at its meeting of December 17, 1920.

The United States government however has protested against this settlement. In the last vigorous note to the Powers, April 5, 1921, Secretary Hughes not only objects to the inclusion of Yap in the Japanese mandate, but points out that the United States, as one of the principal allied and associated Powers, has never given its consent that the Pacific Islands north of the equator should be given to Japan. Since the consent of the United States is essential, and has never been given, Japan has at present, according to the American contention, no legal authority over the Pacific Islands which she claims to hold as mandatories. Although the American note deals, in its conclusion, solely with Yap, its reasoning invalidates Japan's title to all the Carolines, Marshalls and Marianas.

In the terms of the mandate as now formulated, though without the consent of the United States, the most important provision from the point of view of the United States, is the stipulation that "No military or naval bases shall be established or fortifications erected in the territory." This prohibition of naval bases and fortifications meets,

page 191

in part, the chief fundamental objection to Japan's possession of these islands. Only in part, however, since, if war should come, submarines would not absolutely require a regularly established base, but only the protection and anchorage of these lagoons and harbors, to be able to put out from them and intercept American ships en route between Hawaii and the Philippines.

The strategic and naval value of these islands however is of importance only in view of impending or actual war between the United States and Japan. If the coming conference should remove the causes of friction between these two countries and restore their old-time friendship, the possession by Japan of these mandative islands which threaten the approach to the Philippines, would cause more apprehension to the United States than does the possession by Great Britain of Jamaica, which

equally threatens the approach to the Panama Canal.