

Flotsam, jetsam and Uncle Sam: Irish publicists in the contest for a just Imperialism in Northeast Asia, 1900s-1940s

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<Abstract>

At our first meeting in Tokyo I presented an overview of the main planks of Japan's platform as a late imperialist in Northeast Asia. My presentation pointed to growing disconnects between Japan's master narratives, a subset of domestic images and facts on the ground. The inherent contradictions of proclaiming national victimisation both in Geneva and in Northeast Asia, even to broadly sympathetic Anglophone settlers there, brought Japan's credibility into question and eventually, unanswerably, challenged its national integrity and provoked its retreat from internationalism.

At our meeting in Belfast, I want to look at the roving cast of publicists who devised, sometimes drove, took and prosecuted Japan's case from bases in Tokyo, New York, Seoul and Hsinking/Xīnjīng (Changchun) to forums in Paris, Geneva, Washington and further afield.

In the hope that their association with Britain's most troublesome Imperial project will enrich and test our thinking, my paper will focus on Irish, Anglo-Irish and Irish-American publicists writing and speaking for Japan and, in antithesis, an Irish author and an Irish-born media entrepreneur who sensationalised the threat from Japan and reset the balance of Anglophone opinion.

Examining these compradors of information, their backstories, professional circumstances and rivalries is intended to bring us closer to the personal contests and vendettas at the heart of our project, and thence to a more nuanced understanding of Japan's failure to make a better case for itself in the period under review. The sum of all this should throw a brighter but not necessarily a harsher light on the nature of power and its enablers.