*The following excerpt is taken from historian* [*Seiji Shirane’s*](https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/profiles/seiji-shirane) *portion of a May 2019 Carnegie Council/Macaulay Honors College panel entitled “*[*100 Years After Versailles*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/calendar/data/2019-05-07-100-years-after-versailles)*.” This transcript has been edited for classroom use.*

**How did the Treaty of Versailles influence Japanese foreign policy after World War I?**

For Japan, [the Paris Peace Conference] really was an arrival and part of a continuing struggle to gain status as a world power. They joined the “Big Five” at Versailles along with the United States, Britain, France, and Italy. [T]he reason why they were able to do that is they participated in the occupation of German territories in Shandong in North China, as well as taking over German territories in the South Pacific, what we know today as Micronesia.

In 1919 in Versailles when they [the Japanese] proposed the Racial Equality clause[[1]](#footnote-1) to be respected as an equal nation or equal race to the Western nations, this was part of their efforts to promote the idea that Japan was at least an honorary Western power. They had been experiencing anti-immigration laws in California [Alien Land Laws of 1910], Canada, the British dominions in Australia and New Zealand…

In fact, this Racial Equality clause, when it was voted on by the League Committee in April 1919, seven out of the eleven powers—including China, which was protesting Japanese imperialism—approved this Racial Equality clause, but Wilson rejected it on the claim that he needed a unanimous vote.

So what's the legacy? Japan loses out on including a Racial Equality clause, but in many ways they can point to 1919 and the 1920s and 1930s, as they further expand into China and then later into Southeast Asia, of how the United States and Western powers are very hypocritical in their moral principles and international relations. It becomes fuel for this pan-Asian order that Japan needs to liberate the rest of Asia from Western dominance, and they can point to 1919 to show how the League of Nations was founded on unjust principles.

1. How did the Treaty of Versailles influence Japanese foreign policy? Explain.

**Racial Equality Proposal, 1919:** “The equality of nations being a basic principle of the League of Nations, the High Contracting Parties agree to accord as soon as possible to all alien nationals of states, members of the League, equal and just treatment in every respect making no distinction, either in law or in fact, on account of their race or nationality.”

1. The proposal was voted for in favor 11-7, but U.S. President Woodrow Wilson overturned it saying it needed unanimous approval. Why do you think the U.S. and the British Empire were opposed to this proposal?

1. Also known as the Racial Equality Proposal. This proposal was not intended to create universal racial equality but rather equality among countries that were members of the League of Nations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)