

The Russian Protocols of Zion in Japan

The 1920s were a crucial period in modern Japanese history, when new and revolutionary western ideologies, like communism and fascism, entered Japan and found adherents there. Anti-Semitism was one of those western ideologies to arrive at that time. It offered a simplistic explanation of the perplexing turmoil of the world. It appealed to conservatives alarmed about communist subversion and to those attracted by conspiracy theories. Few publications have dealt with the strange phenomenon of Japanese anti-Semitism.¹ This thin volume is an important addition to that literature.

Ben-Ami Shillony

Kovalio, Jacob. 2009.

The Russian Protocols of Zion in Japan. Yudayaka/Jewish Peril Propaganda and Debates in the 1920s.

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JAPANESE ANTI-SEMITISM lacked the religious and social roots which fed the animosity toward Jews in the west. It remained an intellectual fad that did not produce the physical attacks and other measures against Jews, which characterized western anti-Semitism. Moreover, Japanese anti-Semitic writers sometimes expressed admiration for the rich and clever Jews, who allegedly control the world, and advocated befriending them and learning from them.

In search of scapegoats

The Russian Protocols of Zion in Japan. Yudayaka/Jewish Peril Propaganda and Debates in the 1920s focuses on the appearance and acceptance of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Japan in the decade broadly known as Taishō Democracy. As Kovalio points out, the *Protocols* were a forged document, concocted by the Paris branch of the tsarist secret police (*Okhrana*) at the beginning of the 20th century. The aim of the forgery was to deflect popular Russian discontent from the government toward the Jewish conspiracy to subvert the state. The document carried the minutes of an alleged conference of world Jewish leaders, in which they worked out their grand strategy to control the world. The purported author of the document was Sergey Nilus, a Russian occultist and a former anarchist who reverted to Russian-Orthodox Christianity. The *Protocols* were translated into many languages and gained considerable notoriety in many countries in the years following the First World War and the Russian Revolution. They provided an easy explanation to millions of bewildered people, looking for scapegoats to exorcize their miseries. The enigmatic, rich and influential Jews presented a perfect scapegoat. Even in the US, which had not been ravaged by war and revolution, the *Protocols* gained a wide audience. As Kovalio shows, prominent American figures, such as Henry Ford and Thomas Edison, were outspoken anti-Semites, promoting the *Protocols* and blaming the Jews for the evils of the world.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion were introduced into Japan by Japanese army officers who had participated in the Siberian Expedition of 1918-1922, helping the fiercely anti-Semitic White Russian troops who blamed the Jews for the Russian Revolution. As Kovalio shows, in the Japan of the 1920s, as in the west at that time, anti-Semitic ideas were voiced by respectable people

and appeared in reputable journals. In 1921, the liberal monthly magazine *Chūō Kōron* welcomed the return of Crown Prince Hirohito from his European tour with the words: 'We are elated to welcome back His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince, confident now that our serious fears that He might be hurt by violent Koreans or Jewish plots did not materialize' (p. 2). The first publicised Japanese edition of the *Protocols* appeared in the March 1920 issue of the magazine *Shinrei*, the organ of the religious sect Ōmoto-kyō. In 1924, the Buddhist nationalist leader Tanaka Chigaku ran for the Diet's Lower House on an anti-Semitic platform. In the anti-Semitic literature, based on the *Protocols*, the Jews and the Freemasons were accused together of being part of the same international conspiracy.

Forgery and fantasy

Yet, as Kovalio shows, not all Japanese intellectuals subscribed to anti-Semitic ideas, and there were those who criticized the Jewish-conspiracy theory. Professor Yoshino Sakuzō of Tokyo Imperial University, the leading liberal thinker of the 1920s, attacked the anti-Semitic writings of this time. In essays in *Chūō Kōron* in 1921, he dismissed the *Protocols* as an absurd fabrication unworthy of Japanese intellectuals. Himself a Christian and a Freemason, Yoshino ridiculed the identification of the Jews with the Freemasons, showing that until the late 19th century, Jews were not admitted to the Masonic Order. Another liberal Christian scholar from Tokyo Imperial University, Yanaiharadao, rejected the childish accusations of the Jews, pointing out that only a few of the world's capitalists were Jews and only a few of the Jews were capitalists. Yanaiharadao dismissed the accusation that Zionism was a Jewish tool to control the world, and expressed support for the Jewish return to Palestine. Other critics of anti-Semitism included Uchimura Kanzō and Hasegawa Nyozeikan. Kovalio translates a roundtable symposium on 'The Jewish Question,' which appeared in *Heibon* magazine in 1929. In that symposium, the participants praised the Jewish financier Jacob Schiff who had extended help to Japan during the Russo-Japanese War. The conclusion of the symposium was that the *Protocols* were a forgery, Zionism did not aim to subvert the world, and the Jewish conspiracy was sheer fantasy (pp. 50-57).

In the last chapter of his book, Kovalio discusses current Japanese anti-Semitic literature. He claims that in postwar Japan, the Jewish-conspiracy theory has been replaced by an Israeli-conspiracy theory. He regards Professor Itagaki Yūzō of Tokyo University as the leading exponent of this leftist-Islamic form of anti-Semitism. He laments that in today's Japan no brave intellectuals, like Yoshino Sakuzō and Yanaiharadao, have come out to challenge the Israel-conspiracy theories.

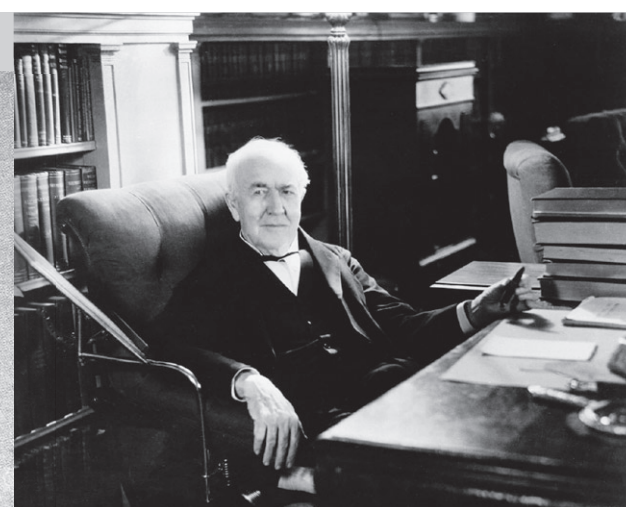
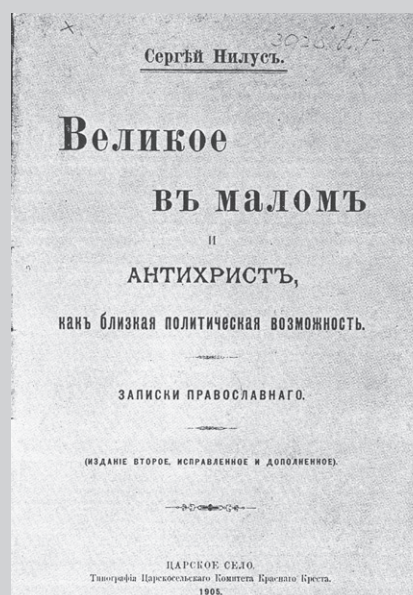


Fig. 1

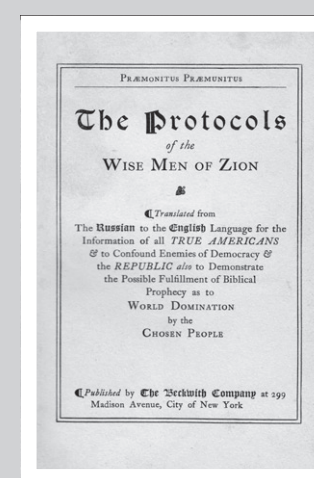


Fig. 2

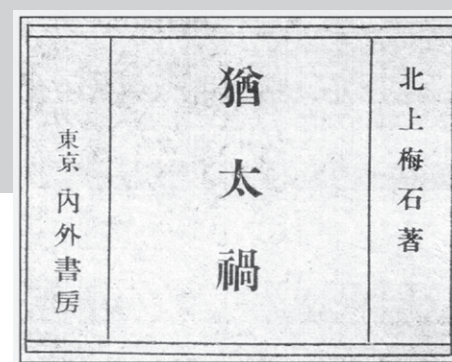


Fig. 3

Thomas Edison (above right) and Henry Ford (above left) were outspoken anti-Semites, promoting the *Protocols* and blaming the Jews for the evils of the world.

Fig. 1: A reproduction of the 1905 Russian edition by Serge Nilus, appearing in *Praemonitus Praemunitus* (1920).

Fig. 2: *Praemonitus Praemunitus*—The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion. The Beckwith Company (1920).

Fig. 3: A reproduction of the cover of *Yudayaka* (The Jewish Peril), the title on the original front cover of Kitagami Baiseki's book published in 1923 in Japan.

However, Kovalio seems to overstate his case, when he claims that the demonised image of the Jews in the last 150 years was created by the 'conspiratorial minds' of Sergey Nilus, Pope Pius IX, Karl Marx, Henry Ford, Adolf Hitler, Shiōden Nobutaka, Itagaki Yūzō, Anis Mansour, Mahathir bin-Mohamad, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Uno Masami and others (p. 68). Lumping together all these names into one anti-Semitic block may sound as fantastic as the accusations of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Eccentricities

Kovalio uses both the terms 'Judeophobia' and 'anti-Semitism', but often prefers the lesser known Japanese phrase 'Yudaya-ka' (Jewish peril). As a result, anti-Semitic writers become 'Yudaya-ka ronja' (Jewish peril advocates). He also uses the self-made acronym CSA (Conspiracy and Scapegoating Anti-Semitism). Such unfamiliar terms make the reading less fluent. The transliteration of some Japanese words does not follow the standard system. Thus, the suffix 'shita' is spelled throughout the book as 'shta.' One also wonders why Karl Marx is constantly referred to as Karl Heinrich Marx, which is factually correct but not the standard form. These small eccentricities do not detract from the value of the book as an important source for the study of prewar Japanese anti-Semitism.

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Note

1. See for instance: Goodman, David G. and Masanori Miyazawa. 1995. *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype*. New York: The Free Press; Rotem Kowner, 2006. 'On Symbolic Antisemitism: Motives for the Success of the Protocols in Japan and its Consequences,' *Posen Papers in Contemporary Antisemitism*, No. 3. Jerusalem: The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and my own, Shillony, Ben-Ami. 1991. *The Jews and the Japanese: The Successful Outsiders*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle.