This chapter shows the networks of the English-language newspapers of East Asia in action: reporting, debating and campaigning on the key issues of the day, largely in Japan, during the years 1918–30. Although these were busy times for its network in China, for most of the 1920s the Advertiser consistently sat on the fence in its reporting of domestic issues in Japan. Therefore the focus is on the debates between the Japan Chronicle network and the Foreign Ministry network, largely as demonstrated in the pages of the Japan Times.

These alignments changed after 1931, when the Japan Advertiser network in China became the Foreign Ministry network’s most overt media adversary in East Asia. From 1931 until its sale in October 1940 the Advertiser was itself more consistently challenged at home than was the Chronicle, as Japanese officialdom put increasing pressure on its journalists and other staff through a variety of agencies: sudden arrest of journalists and translators by the special ‘higher’ police, the constant presence of police spies, the censor, sudden withdrawal of telephones and uncertainties in the supply of newsprint. At the same time, the Advertiser business was threatened by a series of accidents that nearly put it out of business and, in contrast to the domestic pressures outlined above, a group of well-meaning Japanese helped to ensure its survival.

However, compared to the Chronicle network in China, the position of the Advertiser network there was greatly enhanced from the late 1920s by the advance of Chiang Kai-shek and the promotion of longstanding network figures such as Hollington Tong and Thomas Millard within the Guomindang publicity machine in Nanjing. In Japan, the Chronicle, perhaps because it appeared less influential on American perceptions, perhaps because the linchpins of its China network – the North-China Daily News and the Peking & Tientsin Times – were given such a hard time by the Nanjing regime in terms of postal bans, censorship and staff deportation threats, certainly suffered its share of police spies and censorship. However, the Chronicle’s frosty relationship with the British embassy and its location in Kōbe and its eventual accommodation with the Foreign Ministry Information Bureau in 1938 may have made it appear less of a threat to the authorities and therefore helped protect it from the degree of domestic assault suffered by the Advertiser.
THE NETWORKS AND THE ISSUES IN THE EARLY 1920S

What sort of coverage of Japan did the English-language newspapers of East Asia provide to their readers in the 1920s? The most consistently debated topics in the period under review were: Japanese militarism, expansion in China, the administration of Korea and the Korean independence movement, Japan’s population problem and emigration, naval disarmament, and Japan’s political development. In the early 1920s, the networks of the English-language press coalesced and divided around a series of controversies: the Korean Independence risings of 1919–21; the Shaw affair of 1921–22; the campaigns for and against the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1919–22; Lord Northcliffe’s tour of East Asia and his subsequent ‘Watch Japan!’ campaign over the winter of 1922; and the Foreign Ministry network’s campaign to prevent the 1924 US Immigration Act.

Bubbling under these issues was a range of contentions which impinged on the nature, needs and intentions of Japan and of the Japanese as a nation. From these, we can isolate a group of contemporary notions which the Japan Times and most Foreign Ministry network publications treated as truisms, but which the Advertiser and the Chronicle and their networks treated as contentious. Among these were: that Japan had special interests and natural rights in China and Korea; that Japan and Great Britain were natural allies; that Japan was overpopulated with a concomitant need for overseas expansion or emigration; that in East Asia Japan constituted an oasis of stability and developing democracy and was therefore the natural repository of Western confidence; that Japan was a victim of racial discrimination; and finally that Japan’s special traditions and culture made it difficult for her to adopt wholesale various international agreements.

In the spring of 1919, with Matsuoka Yōsuke and John Russell Kennedy managing Japan’s publicity at the Paris Conference, Japan’s campaign for the insertion of a racial equality clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations was given huge coverage in the Japanese press. In the Foreign Ministry’s network, banner headlines in the Japan Times and Seoul Press detailed Japan’s determination to push through this vital change, implying that the racial equality proposal was intended as a universal principle, whereas the aim was to redress an anticipated imbalance in the treatment of Japanese compared to Europeans and Americans in and by the League of Nations, not the betterment of other races than the Japanese.1

However, Japan’s failure to make this distinction clear and the coincidence of the racial equality proposal with Japan’s stern handling of the spring 1919 independence demonstrations in Korea may have backfired on its image among Anglophone readers in East Asia, and among some officials in Whitehall and Washington, although it had no proven influence on the outcome of the racial equality campaign in Paris.

The Japan Chronicle dwelt on Japan’s severity in quelling the Korean disturbances, flagging its readers with punchy headlines: