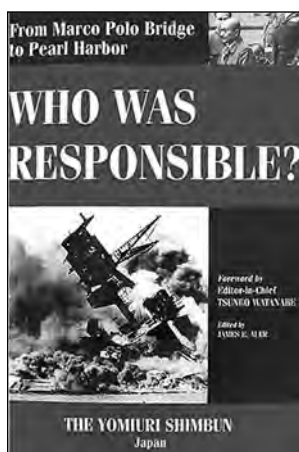


## *From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor* WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE?

JAMES E. AUER, EDITOR

TOYKO: THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN, 2006  
410 PAGES, ISBN 10: 4-643-06012-3, HARDBACK

REVIEWED BY RICHARD H. MINEAR



**W**ho Was Responsible? is a fascinating volume. It is the English-language version of a massive *Yomiuri* newspaper inquiry that published its final installment on August 15, 2006. The anniversary of Japan's surrender in 1945 was not a coincidence. Watanabe Tsuneo, *Yomiuri's* octogenarian editor-in-chief, has been a force for facing the past, and he has opposed ceremonial visits by prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine. The major players were seventeen researchers—

all men, named only in a note on page nine, thirteen *Yomiuri* translators—eleven men, two women, listed on page 391, and three native-speakers of English. (The volume lists James Auer as editor and carries endorsements by Henry Kissinger, Alvin Toffler, Francis Fukuyama, and Orville Schell; though four are names to conjure with in certain circles on both sides of the Pacific, none of the five is an expert on the Pacific War.)

The *Yomiuri* team's agenda was as follows (page 286): "Why did Japan go to war? Why was it impossible to halt the war even after the tide of the war turned against Japan? Why did the Japanese leadership fail to move quickly enough to end the war?" Its five themes: "Why did Japan extend the lines of battle following the 1931 Manchurian Incident? Why did Japan go to war with the United States in spite of extremely slim prospects for victory? What prompted the Japanese military to employ suicide tactics? Was it possible to prevent the US atomic bombings and the last-minute Soviet entry into the war? What were the problems with the Tokyo Tribunal?" The volume includes "Introduction" (twelve pages), "Japan's Wars in 1931–45" (175 pages), and "Conclusion" (sixty pages). There are also nearly ninety pages of Appendices (twenty-four documents).

People not familiar with the history of Japanese thinking about the Asia-Pacific War (here termed *Shōwa* War, dating 1937–45) often charge that Japan has not come to terms with its past. That charge rests in part on undeniable fact: the Tokyo trial was an Allied proceeding, not a Japanese one, and the 1952 "peace" treaty committed Japan to accept the Tokyo verdicts. *Who Was Responsible?* may reinforce that idea by claiming to be "the first [war responsibility examination] of its kind taken up by Japanese themselves" (286). But

attempts to come to terms with this issue date from the decade after 1945, including notably three Marxist historians' *Shōwashi* (1955) and Ienaga Saburō's *Pacific War* (*Taiheiyō sensō*, 1968; English translation, 1978). What sets this attempt apart is its impeccable Establishment credentials. This volume cites some English-language scholarship, including Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's *Racing the Enemy* (2005) but not my book on the Tokyo trial (*Victors' Justice*, 1971; Japanese translation 1972); its select bibliography (pages 379–80) praises Helen Mears's under-appreciated *Mirror for Americans: Japan* (1948) and takes a slap at Herbert Bix's over-appreciated *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2000). The report bears the dedication, "For our Neighbors," meaning, I think, South Korea and China—they are the two Watanabe mentions in his "Foreword" (9).

Inevitably, *Who Was Responsible?* deals with the Tokyo trial, that earlier attempt—by eleven non-Japanese judges—to assign legal/historical responsibility. Of the trial, the *Yomiuri* team is skeptical at best, although it expresses that skepticism elliptically (Chapter 14). When it comes to judgments of individual responsibility, the *Yomiuri* team zeroes in on seventeen of the twenty-five Tokyo defendants who remained at the end and adds to that group eleven others, four of them responsible for the *kamikaze*. Eight Tokyo defendants it deems insignificant by not assessing their acts in its conclusion. The *Yomiuri* team also argues that the Emperor served as constitutional monarch and hence did not incur "actual responsibility" (263).

Its conclusions are aimed primarily at a Japanese audience. American readers need to keep that fact firmly in mind. The focus is on *Japan's* decisions, *Japan's* responsibility. In the "Afterword" (283), Chief Writer Asaumi Nobuo, speaks of the US firebombing and atomic bombs, and the Soviet declaration of war in violation of its treaty obligations, and its postwar acts only to say, "This book partially touches upon those matters, but the committee decided to go no further into them in its examination as it prioritized its efforts to identify the responsibility of Japan's war leaders." Fair enough. But, readers need to be aware of that choice and of the assumptions on which this study rests: history is—can be—a matter of assigning individual responsibility; *Japanese* responsibility can be isolated from the international circumstances of the time. Let us look at each briefly.

Is history really a matter of assigning individual responsibility for great historical events? I am writing this review on January 24, 2007, scant weeks after President Bush vowed to escalate the war in Iraq despite the election returns, despite the Iraq Study Group's report, despite the recommendations of most of his generals, despite the situation on the ground. In this context, "Why was it impossible to halt the war even after the tide of the war turned against Japan?" seems quite naïve. One might ask rather: is it *ever* possible for leaders to confess failure and reverse course? When historians write the history of the second US war on Iraq, who will be responsible? Surely Bush, and Cheney, and Rumsfeld. But, how about compliant military officers? White House aides? Neo-cons like Richard Perle? Neo-con guru Leo Strauss? And how do we weight the role of impersonal forces: 9/11, oil, the rubber-stamp Congress 2000–2006, long-standing anti-Arab racism, the fundamentalist Christian attachment to Israel, a compliant UN, the first Gulf War, defeat in Vietnam, the military-industrial complex? Assigning responsibility—individual or not—is not as easy as it

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looks. One's answers depend in significant measure on the sort of responsibility one looks for. The *Yomiuri* team set out to deal with responsibility it could attach to individual Japanese.

Can we discuss *Japanese* responsibility without also discussing the international circumstances, notably, *US* actions? What of the US oil embargo of July 1941? The Hull Note of November 1941? The Potsdam Proclamation of July 1945? The *Yomiuri* team tiptoes around each. Of the oil embargo, it writes, "The advance into southern French Indochina in July 1941 invited the US retaliatory measure of an oil embargo on Japan" (106). But the *Yomiuri* team does not assess the motives or wisdom of the embargo. From at least as early as Paul Schroeder's, *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941* (1958), American critics have pointed out that the oil embargo was a threat to Japan's very existence, and every US president since Richard Nixon has equated energy security—that is, an uninterrupted supply of foreign oil—with national security. If that is a defensible policy for the US since the 1970s, why is it not a defensible policy for Japan in 1941?

According to the *Yomiuri* team, the Hull Note represented "the US basic response to the Japanese compromise plan" (119). The team suggests Hull softened it somewhat in handing it to Nomura Kichisaburō, but concludes: "Hull told US War Secretary Henry Stimson that the matter was now in his hands." Most American scholars now agree that the Hull Note was a wrapping-up of the negotiations, a re-statement of the US position intended not as a negotiating position but as an acknowledgement that negotiations were over. Stimson wrote in his diary of a meeting that noon in the White House (Nov. 26, 1941): the President "brought up the event that we were likely to be attacked perhaps next Monday, for the Japanese are notorious for making an attack without warning, and the question was what should we do. The question was how much we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves." US officials sought to legitimize US entry into the war; why lay all the blame on Japanese officials?

The *Yomiuri* team takes the Potsdam Proclamation at face value except to discuss why the Soviet Union was not invited to be a signatory. But Leon Sigal's, *Fighting to a Finish: the Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945* (1988), established that the Proclamation was primarily a matter of public relations, of clearing the decks for Hiroshima by seeming to give the Japanese one last chance. If US officials were hell-bent on dropping the atomic bombs, why the emphasis (as in the title of Chapter 12) on Japan: "Japan fails to prevent dropping of atomic bombs."?

My point is not to dispute specific conclusions, but to emphasize that focusing on the actions of only one side leads to too-easy answers. The general conclusion the *Yomiuri* team reaches parallels



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the conclusion Ienaga Saburō reached thirty-eight years earlier, in his *The Pacific War*: Japan was responsible for the war (Ienaga did not attempt to assign individual responsibility). Both that volume and now this are available in English. The danger in each case is that American readers, not knowing that important questions exist about US policy, read *The Pacific War* and *Who Was Responsible?* and conclude that US wartime propaganda and the American master-narrative were right after all, that the Japanese leaders—and they alone—were responsible. Both books have an important and laudable role to play in the thinking of their primary—Japanese—readers; they function differently for American readers, not their primary intended audience.

Is *Who Was Responsible?* useful in our classrooms? It depends entirely on how we use it. If we use it as an example of conscientious Japanese trying to come to terms with Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific War, yes. If we use it to show how the historical questions we ask are as important as the answers we arrive at, yes. If we use it as gospel, if we use it to reinforce the American master-narrative, no. ■

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## LEAVES FROM AN AUTUMN OF EMERGENCIES

### *Selections from the Wartime Diaries of Ordinary Japanese*

SAMUEL HIDEO YAMASHITA, EDITOR

HONOLULU: THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PRESS, 2005  
334 PAGES, ISBN 13: 978-0-8248-2977-3, PAPERBACK

REVIEWED BY THEODORE F. COOK



**W**hat is war like? How can we view war through the eyes of those experiencing it without knowing its certain outcome? Samuel H. Yamashita brings us major excerpts from eight extraordinary diaries, left by what he calls “ordinary Japanese,” that give us access to the inner lives of individuals in the midst of the great catastrophe of the Asian and Pacific War. All writing during the war in widely dispersed parts of Japan, these people tell us of their concerns and their experiences in deeply personal ways.

All is not misery for these people, since their diaries are records of lives in process, not lives viewed in retrospect, except, ultimately by their editor and, perhaps, by us, the readers of this outstanding book.

The art of diary writing has long been a skill to which Japanese have applied themselves with dedication and patience in the face of extraordinary difficulties. One needs only to consult Donald Keene's fine study of famous diaries and diarists to document the value of that form of personal recollection for anyone wishing to grapple with how individuals in Japanese society see their own lives.<sup>1</sup> The wartime diary of a renowned literary critic like Kiyosawa Kiyoshi,<sup>2</sup> or the daily record of a professional military man, such as the diary of Admiral Ugaki Matome, both made available in English a number of years ago,<sup>3</sup> provide invaluable insights into Japan's experiences during the long years of war.

There can never be a perfect window into the war, but Yamashita's skillful selection of diaries and his faithful and humane translation brings to life a range of Japanese experiences that will both broaden and complicate any discussion of what it meant to live through the Second World War in Japan. Among the characters we come to know through their diaries are Itabashi Yasuo, a Navy Special Attack pilot, whose last entry was written on April 8, 1945; Tamura Tsunejirō, erstwhile billiard parlor owner whose diary, when published in Japan, was given the title, *Bittersweet: The Wartime and Postwar Diary of an Ordinary Kyoto Person*; and Nomura Seiki, in



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