

surreptitiously consulting archives, conducting interviews, and collecting files, thousands of which he has stored with an anonymous friend in the countryside for safekeeping. Based on a combination of these primary sources, recently published accounts, and his own experiences, Yang has compiled the most comprehensive and richly layered account to date.

In that vein, *Tombstone* is not a casual or general read. At over 500 pages of text, *Tombstone* does not offer a concise overview of the Great Leap Forward (for that readers should consider my article from the winter 2012 edition of *Education About Asia*). While Yang's prose is clear and accessible, the subject is heavy, and the statistics can seem dense and even overwhelming. But with it, Yang accomplishes his primary purpose: to offer a comprehensive and detailed account of the causes and repercussions of the famine grounded in a variety of reliable sources that collectively make the famine undeniable.

The original Chinese-language version of *Tombstone* was published in Hong Kong in 2008 and has already undergone several editions, with the much-anticipated English translation appearing in print just last year. But because the same authority is still in power in China and hangs its legitimacy on Mao, the Great Famine remains a sensitive subject. Yang notes that even today, over forty years after the event, "No full account of the Great Famine has been published in mainland China." His straightforward indictment of Mao and the Communist Party unsurprisingly failed to change history. But the fact that Yang still lives and publishes in Beijing may indicate some degree of progress on that front and offers hope that his study and others may one day become available where it will do the most good.

Nobel Prize-winning author Elie Wiesel suggested that to forget a holocaust is to kill twice. The Nanjing Massacre Memorial and other similar monuments exist to prevent us from forgetting needless deaths and reenacting similar crimes. But as noted in Yang's study, more Chinese were killed by the Great Leap Forward than by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. In that sense, the greatest tragedy of Yang's book is that his account is available to everyone except those directly affected by the disaster. For this, he offers a plea and a warning to his compatriots: "Human memory is the ladder on which a country and a people advance. We must remember not only the good things, but also the bad; the bright spots, but also the darkness." This literary tombstone compels the Chinese—and every human being—to remember the Great Famine. ■

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Japan 1941 *Countdown to Infamy*

BY ERI HOTTA

NEW YORK: KNOPF, 2013

352 PAGES, ISBN 978-0307594013, HARDBACK

Reviewed by Peter K. Frost

Japan 1941 discusses why Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor even though many senior officials knew that their chances of winning the war were at best 50-50. While the author also discusses historical events such as Matthew C. Perry's 1853 visit to Japan, the rationale behind Japan's joining the Tripartite Pact with Italy and Germany in 1940, the per-

sonal experiences of "Soldier U," and the popular reaction to the seemingly endless war with China that—depending on your point of view—began in the 1931 invasion of Manchuria or the 1937 occupation of much of the rest of China, most of Hotta's book focuses on Japanese policy meetings and Japanese-American conversations that took place during the fateful 1941 year. A dateline and list of the principal Japanese characters are also included.

To put it another way, Hotta is particularly concerned with the quality of Japanese leadership and decision-making in the summer of 1941. She gives a good deal of background information on Prince Konoe Fumimaro, who was prime minister at several key moments in the prewar period; Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke; General Tōjō Hideki, who was prime minister at the time of the attack; and even the Showa emperor (Hirohito to Americans). Hotta makes clear that she regards Konoe as weak and vacillating. All too often, he would make belligerent speeches in public that masked his private doubts. Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke strikes the author as self-aggrandizing and wildly wrong in his notions that the Americans would reach a settlement with Japan rather than face a united Axis front. Her portrait of the emperor is on the whole sympathetic, suggesting that he desired peace but was counseled by his advisers not to involve the imperial throne in controversial political matters. Tellingly, Hotta illustrates how a pacifistic poem the emperor recites was interpreted differently by those who wanted war. "One cannot help wondering," she says, "what would have happened had the emperor been more explicit in his opposition to war?" (176).

Given this emphasis on the various Japanese policy conferences and flawed leaders, it is perhaps natural that Hotta discusses, but does not emphasize, such underlying factors as the relatively devastating economic effects of the Great Depression; the refusal of the Western Powers to recognize Japan's right to have colonies, although they had empires or dominated other polities; and the immigration restrictions and the trade barriers—including the August 1, 1941, oil embargo—that made Japan worry about whether it could get the raw materials it needed. Similarly, more stress might be given to Secretary of State Cordell Hull's stern note on November 26, 1941, demanding that the Japanese get out of China and French Indochina.¹ All this leads Hotta to conclude that while "there had been errors of judgment on both sides, the errors had been induced, amplified, and spun out of control largely by the erratic and inflexible fashion in which Japan had been carrying out its foreign policy over many months." (273). This undoubtedly explains why, borrowing Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous characterization of the Pearl Harbor attack, Hotta subtitles her book "Countdown to Infamy."

Overall, Hotta's work strikes me as wonderfully researched and well-written, yet perhaps too narrowly focused for those *EAA* readers who need an initial, more general study of the outbreak of the Pacific War. Indeed, it is precisely because I believe that there surely were "errors of judgment on both sides" that I try in my own teaching not only to criticize the Japanese leadership as Hotta so ably does, but also to put even more stress on the underlying factors that explain why, even today, a surprising number of Japanese do not believe that 1941 was a "countdown to infamy." ■

NOTE

1. Hull's note can be found in, among other places, Hans Trefousse, *What Happened at Pearl Harbor* (College and University Press, 1958).

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