

The Final Confrontation

Japan's Negotiations with the United States, 1941

VOL. 5 OF JAPAN'S ROAD TO THE PACIFIC WAR

EDITED BY JAMES WILLIAM MORLEY

TRANSLATED BY DAVID A. TITUS

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When I ask my students why Japan and the United States went to war in 1941, the answer I sometimes get is "because Japan attacked Pearl Harbor." This is not a satisfactory answer, of course, and one of my tasks is to show why the war began. My own understanding of this problem has been enriched by a critical reading of *Japan's Road to the Pacific War*, a series of translated selections, edited by James Morley, from a multivolume study produced by the Japan Association on International Relations in the early 1960s. *The Final Confrontation: Japan's Negotiations with the United States, 1941* is the fifth and final volume of Japan's Road to the Pacific War. The late Tsunoda Jun wrote the chapters for this volume. David A. Titus, the translator, provides an excellent thirty-page critical introduction.

Tsunoda draws from private papers of Japanese government officials, foreign ministry and military archives, records of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, and interviews with important Japanese political and military leaders. His research on the American side is less exhaustive, however, and his analysis of American policies and motivations is weak. His treatment is detailed and strictly chronological, avoiding broad generalizations or analysis. Tsunoda's approach emphasizes the role of individuals, and he gives us a vivid sense of the personalities of Japanese political and military leaders. Yet he provides little broader diplomatic or political context, and the legitimacy of Japan's aims is never questioned.

The blurb on the book jacket is revealing. "Stripped of the Marxist slant that had characterized much [Japanese] historical writing on the subject, Tsunoda places the blame for Pearl Harbor and the subsequent Pacific War evenly on the United States and Japan." The research team that produced the series had its own agenda, which was to exonerate Japan. Tsunoda, himself a minor participant in Japan's New Order in Asia, sought to exculpate it. An officer in "an important training center devoted to Japan's mission in Asia" (xvii), Tsunoda also served as an aide to Konoe Fumimaro, prime minister until October 1941. Tsunoda's first-hand participation in the events colors his judgment. His sympathetic portrayal of Konoe and Tōjō Hideki, for example, contrasts sharply with his treatment of Stanley Hornbeck of the State Department's Far Eastern Division. Tsunoda faults Hornbeck for his "self-righteous moralism, prosecution-like judgments, and distrust of Japan," and his lack of "sensitivity to or

perception of the ever-changing power balance in the Far East . . ." (93-95). Hornbeck was sensitive to that ever-changing power balance, of course, and correctly attributed it to Japanese expansionism. Tsunoda does not recognize that Japanese-American relations were undone by Japan's intransigence in China. According to briefing documents for a September, 1941 imperial conference, the Japanese Army General Staff believed that if Japan were to withdraw from China, "China will not heed what we say, and Japan will not be able to survive." Moreover, if the Americans "do not accede to the conditions we have presented, we must take the view that they harbor designs to bring Japan to its knees; thus, it is clear that if we make concessions we will soon be put to their poisoned swords" (171). Tsunoda does not find remarkable the notion that Japan's survival depended on aggression against China, and, as David Titus points out, Tsunoda "supports rather than questions" the mentality that allowed no concessions (xxx).

In his treatment of American policy, Tsunoda misrepresents Secretary of State Cordell Hull's November 1941 draft proposal to Japan as "virtually an ultimatum," (314) intended to provoke war. "Extreme patience" on Hitler's part (347) had forestalled war between the United States and Germany, Tsunoda claims, so the United States had to provoke a war with Japan in order to enter the European War. Tsunoda draws upon reliable American diplomatic historians, including Robert Bulow, Herbert Feis, and William Langer. But he also cites, and appears to draw his interpretation from, the anti-Roosevelt polemicist Charles Beard and Harry Elmer Barnes, an apologist for Nazi Germany, uncritically accepting their Pearl Harbor conspiracy theories.

Yet *The Final Confrontation* has great value to those of us teaching this subject. It is based on a wealth of Japanese primary sources (evidence that actually undermines Tsunoda's analysis), and provides one influential Japanese perspective to the events leading to Pearl Harbor. It can be used as well as an exercise in critically reading secondary scholarship. ■

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