

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIV-9

John Gripentrog. *Prelude to Pearl Harbor: Ideology and Culture in US-Japan Relations, 1919-1941*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. ISBN: 9781538149430 (hardcover, \$105.00); 9781538166505 (paperback, \$36.00).

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Introduction by Michael Barnhart, Stony Brook University

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Ideology and agency have been two ancient adversaries. While most scholars recognize the necessity of understanding the mindsets of cultures and societies, some have difficulty making direct connections between such mindsets and the realities that policymakers create on the ground. Put another way, soft power is real, but hard power may be more real.

As all the commentators in this forum acknowledge, John Gripenrot's analysis in *Prelude to Pearl Harbor: Ideology and Culture in US-Japan Relations, 1919-1941* goes a long way to suggesting such connections. And, as most of the reviews suggest, there is still considerable work to be done in this regard. Good news for aspiring Ph.D.s.

Gripenrot's central thesis is straightforward: Both the United States and Japan embraced what he labels "liberal internationalism" in the aftermath of the First World War. That sort of internationalism stressed reliance on the orderly and non-violent adjustment of differences and disputes among nations, and a similar adherence domestically within nations, which most of its adherents assumed would be along democratic lines. In Japan, the economic and other disturbances of the 1930s led to a collapse in support for that internationalism. In America, they did not. Japan attempted to substitute a pan-Asian kind of order in its place, a substitution that led eventually to Pearl Harbor.

Gripenrot's response skillfully summarizes the various reviewers' praise and reservations. Here, I hope to point out some premises and assumptions in each reviewer's piece.

Jon Davidann begins his review by challenging aspects of Gripenrot's core thesis. He asks whether Japan had ever committed itself to liberal internationalism, or whether some Japanese strove to persuade the West that it had. It is a good question, especially since it abandons the idea of a monolithic "Japan." But Davidann implies that those Japanese remained, at core, Japanese unilateralists, unhappy that their façade had broken down in the 1930s. Is another reading possible? Perhaps those Japanese, whom American Ambassador Joseph Grew would come to know and admire, were sincerely committed to internationalism and experienced a "January 6<sup>th</sup>" movement in the early 1930s that succeeded. And that these Japanese had to find ways of coping in a country that they felt no longer was theirs? Davidann is correct to argue that 1920s Japan still needs a fresh interpretation, but that interpretation should not overlook the wider international environment of that decade. As Zara Steiner's superb work reveals, the challenges of restoring or improving the international order in the wake of the First World War were titanic, and titanic efforts were made. It seems cynical to dismiss international hopes that if liberal democracy could be brought to Germany, it might flourish in Japan.<sup>1</sup>

If cynicism might be questioned for the 1920s, it is in full display for the following decade, as June Grasso emphasizes in her comments. Trans-Pacific soft power initiatives included an exchange of athletes, including baseball legend Babe Ruth, among two nations, a concerted and, as Gripenrot makes clear, heavily government-sponsored effort through the Society of International Cultural Relations [*Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai*] to burnish Japan's image among Americans. But these efforts to make Washington to see Japan as a civilized pillar of order in East Asia—as compared to a fragmented, corrupt or communist China—were

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<sup>1</sup> Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

undermined at the outset by Japanese military initiatives on the Asian continent. The outbreak of full-scale fighting in 1937 and the infamous Nanjing Incident that followed destroyed them completely.

These developments did not, however, preordain Pearl Harbor. While most of the reviewers here assume as much, I think mistakenly, Hiroo Nakajima goes furthest in attempting an alternative explanation for the eventual Pacific War. How liberal was “liberal internationalism”? Even after the First World War, and despite Woodrow Wilson’s lofty rhetoric, the world remained one of empires. The United States was no exception. Whether it was Jim Crow at home or possessions abroad, the American rule-based order was composed of imperial/colonial rules. Although Nakajima does not say so, his line of argument challenges key aspects of Gripenrotg’s thesis, and Gripenrotg’s response goes a great distance to stress that the sorts of “empires” envisioned and operated by Tokyo and Washington were strikingly different. Given the ubiquitous use of the term “imperialism” these days, the reply appears to be warranted.<sup>2</sup>

Kazuo Yagami focuses on the question of inevitable war. He sees the US-Japan negotiations from April to November 1941 as crucial. These ended in failure once the Japanese understood that the Americans insisted on withdrawals from French Indochina and China. Two issues stand out in this analysis: it relegates ideology to a distinctly secondary place; and it does not deviate much from one that could have been written fifty years ago. Yagami faults Gripenrotg for failing to sufficiently clarify why, in the end, Washington was so inflexible. As Gripenrotg notes in his response, by November 1941 the Americans had come to see the Japanese threat as an ideological as well as geostrategic one.

But why, and by when, did Washington see the dual nature of that threat? Traditional interpretations and Gripenrotg’s fresh work both point in the same direction: to the signing of the Tripartite Pact in September 1940. Prior to that, the United States was prepared to tolerate Japan’s activities on the Asian continent. After it, Washington was dedicated to the survival of Great Britain, which relied upon its extensive empire in Asia and Oceania. And, as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill observed to American President Franklin Roosevelt, proposing all aid short of war and maybe, eventually, war itself to preserve Britain’s rights of territorial integrity and self-determination made compromising China’s rights to those same principles difficult to justify to the American public. That public, by 1940, had long forgotten Japan’s cultural initiatives of earlier decades. In Nanjing and elsewhere in China, Japanese atrocities made it easy for that public to equate Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki with Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

In Tokyo, the central question becomes why Japan actively sought and signed the Tripartite Pact. While that story has grown in complexity over the years, particularly as to the role of the Imperial Navy, it remains focused on the Japanese military’s desire to attach itself to Germany’s powerful position and to ensure that Germany would not assert control over the European colonies in Asia and the Pacific after it had conquered the homelands of those colonies. And while there certainly were those Japanese who wanted to copy the Nazi style of government, one will search in vain for any senior Japanese military officer who was willing to relinquish his institution’s constitutional dominance over Japan’s foreign and defense policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Arguments of this type can be found in Caroline Elkin’s often unpersuasive *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2022).

That the Pact was conceived as an instrument of geopolitical power in Tokyo, and perceived as an ideological threat in Washington, is just one of the insights offered by Gripenrog's thoughtful synthesis. Scholars should be grateful to have it.

### Participants:

**John Gripenrog** is Professor of History at Mars Hill University, a liberal arts institution near Asheville, North Carolina. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and specializes in the history of U.S.-Japan relations. In addition to articles in *Diplomatic History* and *Pacific Historical Review*, he is the author of a chapter in *Nation Branding in Modern History* (Berghahn, 2018).

**Michael A. Barnhart** is Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus, formerly at Stony Brook University. He has written *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941* (Cornell University Press, 1988), *Japan and the World since 1868* (Hodder Education, 1995), and *Can You Beat Churchill?: Teaching History through Simulations* (Cornell University Press, 2021). His current, eternal project is a multi-volume survey tentatively titled *E Pluribus: A Political History of American Foreign Relations from Jamestown to Obama*.

**Jon Davidann** is Professor of History at Hawai'i Pacific University. He is also the chair of the History, Humanities, and International Studies Department. Davidann has been at HPU for 24 years. He has published six books on U.S.-East Asian relations and world history. His most recent monograph, *The Limits of Westernization: American and East Asian Intellectuals Create Modernity, 1860-1960* (London: Routledge, 2019) won the Kenneth W. Baldrige Prize in 2020. He earned a fellowship to Oxford University in 2008, served as a Fulbright Specialist in 2017 at Ghent University in Ghent, Belgium, and has given invited lectures internationally. In 2021, he published a highly regarded essay with *Aeon* magazine called "The Myth of Westernization."

**June Grasso** is Associate Professor of Social Sciences at Boston University's College of General Studies. She has a Ph.D. in Modern Chinese History from Tufts University. Among her recent publications is *Japan's "New Deal" for China: Propaganda Aimed at Americans before Pearl Harbor* (Routledge, 2019). She is currently working on the sixth edition of *Modernization and Revolution in China* (Routledge, 2023).

**Hiroo Nakajima** is Professor at Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University. His book *Monrō dokutorin to Amerika gaikō no kiban* [The Monroe Doctrine and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy] (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2002) won the Shimizu Hiroshi Prize of the Japanese Association for American Studies. He is, among other works, the author of "The Monroe Doctrine and Russia: American Views of Czar Alexander I and Their Influence upon Early Russian-American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 31:3 (2007): 439-463 and editor of *International Society in the Early Twentieth Century Asia-Pacific: Imperial Rivalries, International Organizations, and Experts* (Routledge, 2021).

**Kazuo Yagami**, a native of Japan, earned his Ph.D. in East Asian History from Florida State University. He is Associate Professor at Savannah State University. His major publications include *U.S.-Japan Relationship in Diplomacy and Culture: Japanese Perspective* (Bloomington: Balboa Press A Division of Hay House, February 2018), *The U.S.-Japan Trade Friction – the 1980s and the early 1990s: Japan Bashers and Their Views* (Koln,

Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, April 2009), and *Konoe Fumimaro and the Failure of Peace in Japan, 1937-1941: A Critical Appraisal of the Three-time Prime Minister* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., February 2006). He is currently writing a monograph on Chinese modernization in comparison with Japanese modernization.

*Prelude to Pearl Harbor* is an excellent addition to US-Japanese studies, with its adept rendering of high-level diplomacy and its use of cultural diplomacy in the making and unmaking of US Japanese relations in the 1930s. The book is very well written, and John Gripentrog uses extensive sources for both sides of the dialogue. Gripentrog has adeptly fused diplomacy with ideological imperatives, creating a convincing narrative. It is possibly the best account to date of the 1930s divide between the United States and Japan as reflected in both sides' official diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, part of the book's central argument that the United States and Japan reached a consensus on liberal internationalism in the 1920s—which then fell apart after the 1931 Manchurian Incident and became a contest of ideologies in the 1930s—represents a moment to reflect and reconsider. It was more an American perception than indisputable reality that in the 1920s Japan pursued a liberal internationalist agenda. This became a problem of the lens through which Americans saw Japan rather than Japanese actions and intentions, which, while seemingly aligned with liberal internationalism, were in fact the product of Japan's distinctive development, a direction that sought independence from the West while attempting to use some of its tools.

In *The Limits of Westernization: American and East Asian Intellectuals Create Modernity, 1860-1960*, I argue that Americans have exaggerated their importance in shaping Japan's modern destiny and underestimated the power of Japan in its own trajectory (as well as that of other East Asian nations). American perceptions that Japan fundamentally desired westernization and that its military adventures in World War II were simply a 'dark valley' reached its apogee in the historical writing of the Harvard scholar and American Ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer. But even today, long after Reischauer's work has been critiqued and dismissed by scholars, there is evidence of its continuing influence on narratives of US-Japanese history which endorse the bifurcation between a modern liberal West and a Japan that could either join or, if not, was no longer a part of the modern world. Thus, Japan appears as an enigma in many interpretations, popping onto the world stage in the 1920s with a liberal agenda and then disappearing into the mists of time with an ancient feudal military culture in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> While *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* does not succumb to this distortion, it leans too

<sup>3</sup> Several of Akira Iriye's books focus on the prewar period. He has indisputably exerted a powerful influence on the study of US-Japanese relations, especially creating new methodologies and topics over his lengthy career. See for instance *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921-1931* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). Michael Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). Roger Dingman, *Power in the Pacific: The Origins of Naval Arms Limitation, 1914-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). My book, *Cultural Diplomacy in U.S.-Japanese Relations, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), mostly focuses on unofficial diplomacy, but the central argument explains the impact of unofficial relations on the breakdown of official relations.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer originated the 'dark valley' thesis in his book, *The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950). The thesis continued to be utilized and debated into the 1980s. Harry Wray and Hilary Conroy's *Japan Examined: Perspectives on Modern Japanese History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1983) devotes one section of the book to it. Kenneth Pyle's first book *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885-1895* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969) offered up a strong endorsement of Reischauer's westernization thesis in identifying a generation of Meiji intellectuals as westernizers.

heavily on the first part of the thesis that Japan in the 1920s was a willing and unabashed liberal internationalist partner.

But the ship is righted immediately with Gripentrog's analysis of the Manchurian Incident. His argument that Manchuria marked the beginning of the decline of US-Japanese relations in the 1930s makes sense. Manchuria created a divide between Japan and the West. Once again, though, there are incongruities that need to be explored. If, as Gripentrog asserts, before the Manchurian Crisis the Japanese chose liberal internationalism, and after Japan became transfixed by a rightwing militaristic consensus, then much weight hangs upon Manchuria itself. While there is no doubt that the Manchurian Incident is crucially important, it did not completely transform Japanese political culture as this argument implies. It was more a case of the Japanese coming to grips with their fundamental commitments and identity as a people, aspirations that long preexisted the Manchurian Incident. The violent political disputes between liberals and militarists which Gripentrog tends to downplay—his dismissal of “government by assassination” (53) assertions by Japanese historians is indicative—are crucial to understanding Japan in the late 1920s and during the Manchurian moment.

Let me elaborate. While I do not see a consistent use of Reischauer's narrative, I do see echoes of it. I have argued over decades in two books that what was going on in Japan was never in fact American-style liberal internationalism but something quite different, a fusion of East Asian and western ideas and values prompting an approach which was at times western oriented but always with an eye on the emperor and the Japanese empire.<sup>5</sup> This meant that even in the midst of the battles between liberals and conservatives in Japan in the 1920s, they all supported the Japanese monarchy and its interests in Northeast Asia. Any pretensions to a western-style liberal internationalist regime in Japan were simply that, pretensions. Japan was pursuing a different path not from the 1930s but from the 1870s.

Second, there are details of US-Japanese policies in the 1920s argument that point back to the bigger problem. Three examples suffice. First, the author uses Yoshino Sakuzō as an example of a liberal internationalist attempting to re-create Japan's political atmosphere in the immediate aftermath of World War I. But there has been considerable research on Yoshino, including my own demonstration that he did not adhere to western style liberal internationalism but in fact reshaped internationalism to include both the emperor and the Japanese empire.<sup>6</sup> Domestically he created an ideology called ‘*minponshugi*’ which allowed for functional democracy within the emperor system. Concerning Northeast Asia, Yoshino was admittedly a fierce critic of the way that Japanese leaders handled Japan's colony in Korea. But he never argued that Japan should not have an empire. In fact, Yoshino's ideas were premised upon Japan's ability to develop a more democratic empire and encourage regional trade that supported the Japanese economy. In a second instance, eminent historian Walter LaFeber argued in *The Clash* (1997) that the Japanese were well satisfied with the

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<sup>5</sup> Jon Davidann, *Cultural Diplomacy in US-Japanese Relations, 1919-1941* and Davidann, *The Limits of Westernization: American and East Asian Intellectuals Create Modernity, 1860-1960* (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Jung-Sun N. Han, *An Imperial Path to Modernity: Yoshino Sakuzō and a New Liberal Order in East Asia, 1905-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Brett McCormick, “When the Medium is the Message: The Ideological Role of Yoshino Sakuzō's Minponshugi in Mobilizing the Japanese Public,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 6:2 (2007): 185–215; Joshua A Fogel, ed., *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao's Introduction of Modern Western Civilization to China*, China Research Monograph 57 (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, 2004).

Washington Treaties.<sup>7</sup> I argued against his thesis in my book *Cultural Diplomacy in US Japanese Relations, 1919-1941* (2007). However, Gripenrog accepts LaFerber's (and Reischauer's before him) liberal internationalist line asserting Japanese applause for the Treaties. The reality is more complex; conservative newspapers in Tokyo condemned the Washington Treaties, and militarist forces in Japan gained momentum from their signing by presenting Japanese liberals as appeasers.

A third example is the treatment of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing war. While the Japanese signed this pact, they never believed it to be a liberal internationalist solution. They signed it without reservation but with the same understanding of the pact as the United States, which had a vague informal reservation of self-defense in the Pact which it in practice applied to its interests in Latin America. The British used this American exception of the Monroe Doctrine to justify out their own exception. The Japanese saw their own empire in Northeast Asia as parallel to the policies outlined in the American Monroe Doctrine and in British interests; therefore, they insisted upon being treated as equals in the pact.<sup>8</sup> This is not liberal internationalism but a realistic assessment of Japanese interests and a fair distrust of western agreements. It is also literally the expression of regionalism in the 1920s, not only on the part of Japan but on the part of the United States and Great Britain as well. So much for liberal internationalism.

There are other examples (the Kanto Earthquake which strengthened the hand of the Japanese military underneath seeming improvement in relations between the US and Japan, and the role of Columbia University Professor James Shotwell, self-proclaimed creator of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. He believed that he was an East Asian expert—not quite, rather a European historian. Shotwell also maintained he was fully capable of bringing his liberal internationalist agenda to fruition in the region, but the truth is, he had only limited influence there). Even so, I do not wish to belabor the point. In fairness to the author, the problems emanate from larger issues of how we see Japan and cannot be laid primarily at his feet. Given this evidence, the 1920s are still in need of a compelling interpretation.

But when we turn to the book's analysis of the Manchurian Incident and its fallout, which is the bulk of the volume, the narrative becomes much more convincing. The discussion of the decade of the 1930s is the real strength of this book, and its strong argument and substantial evidence make it an excellent contribution to work on the rise of Japanese regionalism and Pan-Asianism in the Japanese government.<sup>9</sup> The book has the best explication of the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai I have read in the English language.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> LaFerber, *The Clash*.

<sup>8</sup> Michiko Ito, "The Japanese Institute of Pacific Relations and the Kellogg-Briand Pact: The Activities and Limitations of Private Diplomacy," in *Hawaii at the Crossroads of the US and Japan before the Pacific War*, ed. Jon Davidann (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 79.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to my own work there is Sharon Minichiello, ed., *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy 1900-1930* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), Tomoko Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2002), Han Jung-Sun, "Rationalizing the Orient: The 'East Asia Cooperative Community' in Prewar Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 60:4 (Winter 2005), Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders* (London: Routledge: 2007), and Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Jessamyn R. Abel's *The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan's Global Engagement, 1933-1964* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), is at best an uneven account of the influence of the KBS.



At the time of the Manchurian Crisis, Japanese liberals were put under immense strain. They had attempted to construct a Japan that was more open to and less suspicious of the West, and now they saw their project failing. Gripenotrog effectively quotes Shidehara Kijūrō—the well-known liberal foreign minister of Japan who had guided Japan’s negotiation of the Washington Treaties—to the effect that Japan’s Manchurian incursion was China’s fault and China, not Japan, had violated the same said Treaties. Whether or not Shidehara actually knew the depths of the Japanese military’s skullduggery in the Incident, he certainly must have realized his own claims were spurious. Was he so susceptible to ideological persuasion that he became a secret Pan-Asianist? Or was something else going on, a deeper sense of fealty to the core principles of the Japanese nation. In the decades since I first wrote of Nitobe Inazo’s similar conversion to flag-waving Japanese nationalism, I have wondered what it must have felt like to be in the cold wind of the militarists’ suasion in 1932, to face a Japan bristling with weaponry and aggressive desire. To the pacifist Quaker Nitobe, the greatest Japanese internationalist of the prewar period who served as Undersecretary General of the new League of Nations in the 1920s, it had to have been a horrible awakening to realize that room for maneuvering had disappeared, and his obligation as a subject of the realm was to support the expansion of the Japanese Empire into Manchuria (which he did quite publicly in a subsequent lecture tour of the US defending Japan’s actions). Gripenotrog’s narration of the consensus that quickly emerged about Manchuria is gripping in its telling.

Similarly, Gripenotrog’s stories about Matsuoka Yōsuke possess verve and entertainment. The blunt Matsuoka, who spent nine years in the United States in Oregon at a formative period in his life and graduated from the University of Oregon Law School, seems the most unlikely character to have damaged the US-Japan relationship. And yet he was at the center of Japan’s late 1930’s antagonism with the West. Gripenotrog’s quotation of Matsuoka’s comment that the “totalitarian system is going to win out the world now” (182) after Germany had conquered western Europe in 1940 left me taken aback at its implications for the rise of authoritarian politics in the United States and across the globe today.

Gripenotrog’s narrative deploys facts and events that have been partially obscured or willfully ignored. It usefully discusses the Japanese signing of the Axis Pact with Germany in September 1940, an event which has been underplayed by historians. His description of the Japanese aristocrat Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro’s almost constant fatigue and uncanny ability to slip away when the going got really tough is colorful and draws the reader into Konoe’s extremely important role in sending Japan down the path of pure ideology in Japan’s “New Order in East Asia” and then its “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” in its war against China. Gripenotrog effectively juxtaposes Japan’s dream world of Asia united against the West with American misunderstanding and naïveté about Japan, describing the American inclination in the late 1930s “to pit modernity against militarism and surmise that the future of Japan flows toward America not against it” (106). *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* has much to offer. A story of the drive to total war in the time before Pearl Harbor, it surely reminds us today of the insurmountable tragedy of conflict.

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Akami’s analysis of the KBS in “The Emergence of International Public Opinion and the Origins of Public Diplomacy in Japan in the Inter-War Period,” *Hague Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 3:2 (September 2008) is solid but brief.

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When John Grirentrog penned an epilogue that described contemporary challenges to international liberalism and democratic governance, he could not have envisioned what would happen soon after – the unfolding of a tragedy in democratic Ukraine that has unfortunate similarities to the consequences of the nationalistic goals of the Axis Powers. He writes that in 1931 the Japanese government broke “its vows of self-denial” by violating multiple multilateral treaties and chose “unilateralism and force over cooperative diplomacy” (63). Meanwhile, the United States government avoided directly provoking Japan for the next decade. Grirentrog’s detailed study of Japan’s complicated relationship with the United States in the years leading up to Pearl Harbor highlights the failed quest to avoid war as well as the persistent struggle between an expansive, aggressive Japan and the liberal international order. It is sobering to ponder whether there may be lessons to learn in the twenty-first century.

Grirentrog has produced a carefully researched study based on varied primary and secondary sources from archives in both the United States and Japan. He analyzed American documents from the National Archives and Records Administration, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, and the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, as well as those from Tokyo’s Japan Foundation to examine the impact of political and cultural forces on the development of hostilities between the two nations. He routinely integrates relevant background information, helping to flesh out the complex chronicle, and adeptly intertwines evidence from once-secret government documents, newspapers, contemporary journals, diaries, speeches, and monographs to produce a clear, lively narrative.

The chronology follows closely the important events leading up to the war in the Pacific, starting with the 1920s, a time when Tokyo, like Washington, appeared to adhere to values embodied in the covenant of the newly created and much-troubled League of Nations.<sup>11</sup> Grirentrog insightfully examines the evolution over the next decade of significant, sometimes wavering, policy changes in both the Japanese and American governments, what he refers to as a “zigzag pattern” (123) of friendliness and tension. In addition, he analyzes the contributions of opposition groups and individual personalities in both governments who attempted to assert their own agendas and visions. They were sometimes successful at temporarily influencing political moves for both sides. One prominent actor who is unsurprisingly featured is American Ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew, whose real friendships and interactions with Tokyo’s political elite led him to express optimism for shared goals in Asia for the two former allies.<sup>12</sup> Grirentrog describes Grew as one of several influential Americans who were determined to embrace the notion that Japanese leadership was internally divided in its aims for East Asia. Even as late as 1940, when Grew observed disagreements among Japan’s high-level policymakers over the utility of the Axis alliance for Japan, he remained committed to diplomatic solutions as a way to avoid future conflict. Grirentrog details Grew’s growing frustration with his inability to prevent impending disaster.

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher G. Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933* (London: Hamilton, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan: A Contemporary Record Drawn from the Diaries and Private Official Papers of Joseph C. Grew, United States Ambassador to Japan, 1932-1942* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944); Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952).

Compared to other studies of the interwar years, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* places greater emphasis on the role cultural trends in Japan and the United States played in impacting their post-World War I relationship.<sup>13</sup> Considerable analysis is dedicated to the work of the government-sponsored Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (Society of International Cultural Relations, KBS) and related propaganda organs in promoting the image of Japanese-American amity. The KBS started its operations in the early 1930s by sponsoring a vast array of cultural exchanges and programs in order to win the affection of the American audience and portray the Japanese as a people who not only had an appreciation for American culture but seemingly were quickly becoming Americanized. Gripenrog enlivens the narrative with often humorous details garnered from the writings of American journalists who marveled at Japanese “swooning” over American movie stars, buying American cars, wearing “American-style” clothing, and catching “jazz fever” (106). The high point of the 1930s obsession with American culture was the rapid adoption of the American game of baseball. The 1934 tour of Asia by Babe Ruth and other American athletes followed the next year by a US tour of the newly established professional baseball team, the Tokyo Giants, were successful soft power moves.<sup>14</sup> He argues that “based on newspaper coverage of the tour, Americans came away with a decidedly positive image of the foreign barnstormers, one teeming with cultural affinity” (104).

Successful efforts at cultural diplomacy brought optimism to those Americans who saw Japan as the preferred partner for the United States in Asia compared to what appeared to be a backward, struggling China. But, as the Japanese army advanced in its pursuit of Chinese territory, concern deepened within the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The welcoming of American athletes in Japan coincided with renewed violence between Japanese and Chinese in North China. In Japan conservatives and militarists among Tokyo’s leadership rejected a Western vision of international relations and openly despised the behaviors of “traitorous” Japanese who embraced what was called Americanized modernity (106). Meanwhile, the Japanese government purposefully expanded its soft-power campaigns by supporting elaborate business junkets, hosting American garden clubs, sponsoring popular art exhibits, and donating to American philanthropic causes. Yet, despite such efforts, sentiment in the United States openly became split between pro-Japan and pro-China views.

One of the strengths of the book is the discerning way it tries to portray the entire, complicated picture of what was happening culturally, politically, and militarily in Tokyo, Washington, and Europe as hostilities intensified year by year. The fluid situation in China served as the important backdrop for the evolution of the eventual clash between the United States and Japan, but the political reality in China presented obstacles to arriving at a clear choice of action for the United States. Gripenrog details the problems manifested by an apparently unstable ally in the Guomindang government of China, the burgeoning popularity of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as the opportunistic and, from the American view, troubling, alliance between the two. In the end Gripenrog makes two important points about the inevitability of war: for Japanese leaders,

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<sup>13</sup> Classic texts emphasized strategic competition between Japan and the United States. Among the important are: Asada Sadao, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006); Dorothy Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and His Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific* (New York: Longman, 1987); Herbert Feis, *The Road to Pearl Harbor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950).

<sup>14</sup> Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); June Grasso, *Japan’s “New Deal” for China: Propaganda Aimed at Americans before Pearl Harbor* (London: Routledge, 2019).

the purpose of war was to secure Japan's future by incorporating China and other parts of East Asia under Tokyo's control, so they did not see the Axis alliance as paramount for their goals. To them, the war in China should have been deemed a regional struggle and a matter of concern for Tokyo alone. On the other hand, American leaders saw developments in East Asia as part of the global contest between regional hegemony and the values associated with diplomacy based on treaty obligations and national sovereignty. Such world views were irreconcilable. Gripenrog concludes that "in their convictions about foundational political and cultural values, and ideas of world order, Japanese and American officials had come to a point in which coexistence was deemed impossible" (207).

John Gripenotrog's book is an invaluable addition to the historiography of US-Japan relations in several ways. It is the first monograph to incorporate the Society for International Cultural Relations (Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, or KBS) into discussions of cultural relations between the two countries. The first monograph on KBS, Shibasaki Atsushi's *Kindai Nihon to bunka kōryū* [International Cultural Relations and Modern Japan] (1999), that Gripenotrog mentions, does not focus on US-Japan relations.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Gripenotrog's narrative on the widening ideological rift between the United States and Japan, or between the "orderly processes" (3) of Wilsonian liberal internationalism and Japan's Pan-Asianism in the years preceding the attack on Pearl Harbor, is written in lucid and compelling prose. Given the attention that Japanese, American, and European scholars have recently paid to Pan-Asianism,<sup>16</sup> the book neatly brings this concept into discussions of the history of US-Japan relations before World War II.

Even more, the book gives a mostly balanced account of the road to Pearl Harbor. Gripenotrog's assessment of Joseph C. Grew, American ambassador to Japan, complicates the image of Grew as "a true friend of Japan."<sup>17</sup> He offers a favorable portrait of Stanley K. Hornbeck, the China specialist who directed the State Department's East Asian policy. Grew's indispensable contribution to cementing postwar US-Japan cultural relations is exemplified by the fact that two prominent historians of US-Japan relations born in Japan, Akira Iriye and Sadao Asada, attended liberal arts colleges in the United States on scholarships from the Grew Foundation (now the Grew Bancroft Foundation) in the early 1950s. The scholarships were established by Kabayama Aisuke, president of the America-Japan Society, when Grew donated his royalties for the Japanese translation of his memoir *Ten Years in Japan* (1944).<sup>18</sup> For the most part, however, the book offers an evenhanded treatment of US historiography and the topic at large.

That said, I have one reservation about the Gripenotrog's approach. The dichotomy he draws between the US-led "orderly processes" and Japan's Pan-Asianism (or the Asian Monroe Doctrine) seems to be outdated, if not farfetched. At a time when Princeton University has removed Wilson's name from its school of public policy and a residential college, I wonder if it is still plausible to characterize the US-led world order of the prewar period as liberal even though the author tends to use the term "orderly processes" rather than 'liberal internationalism' or 'Wilsonianism.' Mark Mazower calls the United Nations, the foremost example of those "orderly processes," "no enchanted palace" and points out British "imperial internationalism" in its origins.<sup>19</sup> Gripenotrog cites one of Mazower's works (219, n. 9) and the bibliography contains both of his representative works on global governance. Gripenotrog also points the racism of American society (204) and the "Jim Crow way of life" (198). He further mentions the ideological congruence between the United States and Japan,

<sup>15</sup> Shibasaki Atsushi, *Kindai Nihon to bunka kōryū* [International Cultural Relations and Modern Japan] (Tokyo: Yūshindō kōbunsha, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders* (London: Routledge, 2006); Matsuura Masataka, eds., *Ajishugi wa nani wo katarunoka: Kioku, kenryoku, kachi* [What does Pan-Asianism narrate? Memory, Power, and Value] (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Hirobe Izumi, *Gurū: Nihon no shin no tomo* [Grew: A True Friend of Japan] (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> <http://grew-bancroft.or.jp/outline.html>. See also Hirobe, *Gurū*: 328. Edgar A. Bancroft was the American ambassador to Japan in 1924-1925.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

referring to Akira Iriye's work that pointed out that the declaration of the Great East Asia Conference issued in November 1943 resembled the Atlantic Charter.<sup>20</sup> But Gripenrotg dismisses it as an occurrence after 1943 during the war (217, n. 10). Even though the words did not match reality, the declaration's emphasis on "autonomy and independence," according to Iriye, went even further than the gradual decolonization that Anglo-American statement supposed.<sup>21</sup>

As Gripenrotg writes, "the age of empire persisted... [and] the paradox of the . . . British Empire" existed and so was "French rule in North Africa and Indochina" as well as "the Dutch in Indonesia" (89). Congress had barely passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act that promised Philippine independence in ten years when KBS President and future premier Konoe Fumimaro embarked on a journey to the United States to explain "the truth" about Japan's benevolence toward other Asians in 1934 (89). By early 1943, according to British historian Christopher Thorn, the British Embassy believed that the United States was taking "a fairly clear imperialist line" as it envisaged the fortification of the Pacific.<sup>22</sup> The result was the postwar Trusteeship of Japan's former Pacific mandates under the United Nations, which was arguably a euphemism for the US (informal) empire in the Pacific.

A. G. Hopkins argues in his *American Empire* that the United States has been an "insular empire" retaining the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, and Cuba, "an example of a protectorate." He writes, "the insular empire acquired by the United States experienced the same methods of rule as the other Western empires." Hopkins tried to write the book "without incorporating the notion of 'exceptionalism.'"<sup>23</sup> One could argue that by emphasizing the dichotomy of American "orderly processes" and Japanese Pan-Asianism, Gripenrotg's book falls into the trap of exceptionalist narrative, even though it is seemingly critical of "national mythology of exceptionalism" (114).

This question does not at all excuse the suffering that Japanese soldiers inflicted on other Asians including women and POWs. While reading the book, I could not help thinking of the atrocities Russian soldiers, acting on orders from President Vladimir Putin and his acolytes, are committing against Ukrainian civilians. Japanese statements like "Manchuria was Japan's 'lifeline'" (54) and "Japan had acted in 'self-defense'" (48) are strikingly similar to Putin's claims to the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine. Gripenrotg's contention that most Americans exaggerated "civilian/military split among Japan's leaders" (7) is also quite convincing.

When Matsumoto Shigeharu, one of the agents of Japan's prewar public diplomacy, read Charles A. Beard's letters to *The New Republic* (December 16, 1931), he wrote, "Mr. Beard's idea of the so-called 'military rule' needs to be corrected extensively."<sup>24</sup> Beard wrote that not enough emphasis was placed upon the power of the military in Japan. Matsumoto considered Beard, whom he met during his studies in the United States in the mid-1920s and who visited Japan before and after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 with his wife Mary, to be his American mentor. Still, he criticized Beard shortly after the Manchurian Incident. Moderate leaders

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<sup>20</sup> Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Iriye, *Power and Culture*, chap. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher G. Thorn, *The Allies of a Kind: The United States, Great Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978): 281.

<sup>23</sup> A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018): 8, 14-15.

<sup>24</sup> National Diet Library, Tokyo, Modern Japanese Political History Materials Room [Kenseishiryōshitsu], Tsurumi Yūsuke kankei bunsho [Tsurumi Yūsuke Papers], Matsumoto Shigeharu to Tsurumi Yūsuke, 7 January 1932.

like Matsumoto, who were instrumental in establishing the International House of Japan (I-House), which was arguably the hub of intellectual interchange in postwar Japan, had accepted ‘the fact’ the military had created. Gripenotrog’s focus on Pan-Asianism or the Asian Monroe Doctrine is sound as well because the idea was held not just among Japan’s military leaders but also among moderate civilian leaders. The fact that the last volume of Dexter Perkins’ classic trilogy on the Monroe Doctrine, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1867-1907* (1937), was translated into Japanese only three years after its publication is just another example of its popularity among Japanese intellectuals of the time.<sup>25</sup>

Still, new findings from transimperial history, I believe, should make us think a little harder. When the United States colonized the Philippines, Americans inherited multifaceted legacies from the Spanish Empire they despised. In turn, information on US practices there was shared with the authorities in other Western empires. Historian Oliver Charbonneau points out that in the early twentieth century Philippines, there existed “the coproduced character of the US Empire.” According to Charbonneau, there was also “the composite character of American rule.” Even if US rule in the Philippines was “the lesser of two evils,” those imperial histories of the Philippines, according to historian Genevieve Clutario, reconfigures the “triumphalist narrative of war” in “statist history.” Japanese rule there was “associated with the remainders of both Spanish and US imperial life.”<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, historian Tomoko Akami characterizes the mid-twentieth century order in Asia and the Pacific as “liberal inter-imperial.”<sup>27</sup> Gripenotrog describes “orderly processes” as “playing by agreed-upon rules and dealing with disputes multilaterally” (51). But were any of those multilateral dealings with people subjugated by settler colonialism and imperialism?

It is not just the views of historians interested in imperialism that do not accord with Gripenotrog’s dichotomic explanations. Iriye, a prominent figure in the study of transnational and global history since the mid-1990s, discusses the *transwar* experiences of Maeda Yōichi, his future father-in-law and son of Maeda Tamon, director of KBS’s “Japan Culture Center” (the Japan Institute) (146) at the beginning of his chapter in an edited collection of essays on transnational history. Maeda came to Paris to study Pascal’s philosophy but was recruited to the Japanese Embassy when World War II broke out. After the Allied invasion of Normandy, he moved to Berlin. When Germany surrendered, he was sent to the United States, where he was confined in a hotel for several months, and then sent back to Japan. As he moved from one country to another, he both enjoyed opera in Paris and was horrified at the sight of concentration camp inmates on a ‘death march.’<sup>28</sup> His

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<sup>25</sup> Dekisutā Pākinzu, *Monrō shugi* [The Monroe Doctrine], trans. Toyoda Yoshimichi (Tokyo: Sansuisha, 1940).

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Charbonneau, “The Permeable South: Imperial Interactivities in the Islamic Philippines, 1899-1930s,” in Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020) [hereafter *Crossing Empires*]: 183-202, at 197; Genevieve Clutario, “World War II and the Promise of Normalcy: Overlapping Empires and Everyday Lives in the Philippines,” *Crossing Empires*: 241-258, at 241, 243-244 and 253. See also Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116: 5 (2011): 1348-1391.

<sup>27</sup> Tomoko Akami, “Understanding Trans-Pacific Interactions: The Liberal Inter-Imperial Order in the ‘Pacific’ Region, 1920-1960,” in Hiroo Nakajima, ed., *International Society in the Early Twentieth Century Asia-Pacific: Imperial Rivalries, International Organizations, and Experts* (Oxon, Eng.: Routledge, 2021): 5-14.

<sup>28</sup> Akira Iriye, “The Making of a Transnational World,” in Akira Iriye, ed., *Global Interdependence: The World after 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014): 681-682. See also Irie Akira, “Katei no Maeda Yōichi” [Maeda Yōichi at Home], in “Maeda Tamon: Sono hito sono bun” henshū iinkai, ed., *Maeda Tamon: Sono hito sono bun* [Maeda Tamon: His personality and his writings] (Tokyo: “Maeda Tamon: Sono hito sono bun”

experience does not fit comfortably within the dichotomy of Pan-Asianism and “orderly processes” or into the periodization created by World War II.

The same was true of a female Japanese moderate. Ishimoto (later Katō) Shizue was influenced by Margaret Sanger, whom she had met on her first visit to the United States in 1919-20 and who had come to Japan in 1922 to advocate for birth control. In 1939, she received a “breakup letter” (*zekkōjō*) from Mary Ritter Beard, who had helped her publish her autobiography in 1935. Mary Beard thought her criticism of Japan’s militarism was not emphatic enough. Kato was so shocked by the letter that she started to express harsher criticism of Japan’s militarism to her American friends. In 1953, the translation of Mary Beard’s *Force of Women in Japanese History* (1953) by Katō was published in Japan. Mary Beard had received the source material for the book from Katō before the war.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the author could have consulted the papers of Kaneko Kentarō or those of Kabayama Aisuke and Matsumoto Shigeharu, all of which are stored at the National Diet Library. Kaneko, a Harvard graduate, played an important role when President Theodore Roosevelt, another Harvard graduate, mediated the peace conference after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. He became a strong advocate of the Asian Monroe Doctrine in the 1930s. Both Kabayama and Matsumoto were active in Japan’s prewar public diplomacy. After the war, they were instrumental in restoring US-Japan cultural relations as leaders in the establishment of the I-House. That way, the dichotomy and perhaps the periodization divided by Pearl Harbor might have been relativized.

These comments are not necessarily indicative of the book’s weaknesses. Rather, they show that Gripenrog’s book has created new possibilities for research by combining the standard account of US-Japan relations before Pearl Harbor with penetrating reflections on the two countries’ ideologies and cultures.

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henshū iinkai, 1989) [hereafter *Maeda Tamon*]: 440-443; Edwin O. Reischauer, “Reminiscence of Professor Yoichi Maeda,” *Maeda Tamon*, i-ii.

<sup>29</sup> Aiko Takeuchi-Demirci, *Contraceptive Diplomacy: Reproductive Politics and Imperial Ambitions in the United States and Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018): chap. 2; Hiroo Nakajima, “Beyond War: The Relationship between Takagi Yasaka and Charles and Mary Beard,” *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 24 (2013): 125-144. See also Nancy F. Cott, ed., *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard through her Letters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991): 286-287, 301-302.



In this masterful work, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor*, John Gripenrog focuses on the two key areas of study about the Pacific War: “soft power,” or cultural and political propaganda; and the “ideological confrontation” between the United States and Japan, US liberal internationalism and Japan’s Pan-Asianist regionalism. This work offers an important contribution to the historiography in the Pacific War. It is original and more balanced and complete than any previous account of what led to Japan’s assault on Pearl Harbor.<sup>30</sup>

No other historian has ever examined the role of the soft power in the Pacific War as deliberately and thoroughly as Gripenrog does in this analysis of understanding and illuminating the nature of the war to each nation. His exhaustive research is based on a wide range of primary sources, which enhances the readability of his account. More importantly, it contributes to a better understanding of the role of culture in terms of the way in which each nation dealt with its confrontation with the other and also what the war truly meant to both nations.

Closely correlated to soft power, the ideological contrast between the United States and Japan – US liberal internationalism and Japan’s Pan-Asianist regionalism – is one of the core and conflicting points in arguments about why the Pacific War became inevitable. Gripenrog does a great work by providing the points of view of the key individuals of both sides such as Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yusuke, Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, Army Minister Tojo Hideki, Emperor Hirohito, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, US Ambassador to Japan Joseph C. Grew, President Franklin Roosevelt, and diplomat Stanley Hornbeck. Here, objectively looking into the narratives of both sides and avoiding to express his own view, Gripenrog lets the reader decide which side prevailed

With his sound analysis of the key areas of study on the subject of the Pacific War, soft power and the ideological confrontation of two nations, Gripenrog presents one of the most highly researched and documented accounts of how the Pacific War became inevitable with Japan’s assault on Pearl Harbor. While his comprehensive account is based on thorough research and the use of a wide range of primary sources, one may find, however, that it is insufficient in his arguments on some of the major points regarding the origin of the Pacific War. Although comprehensive and composed, it makes overall his narrative over the topic somewhat not as compelling as it could.

A few points support it. One is the shift of Japanese diplomacy from Shidehara Diplomacy to anti-West Diplomacy due to internal and external changes during the decade of the 1920s. As historians call it, the 1920s is known as “The Decade of Democracy.” There was worldwide consensus about the failure of WWI settlement and urgency to do something to end the unsettling crisis in economy and politics caused by that failure. As demonstrated by the Shidehara Diplomacy (non-confrontational approach to settle international disputes), Japan was eager to go along with the consensus and signed all the major international treaties. That was rather quickly reversed as the decade of the 1920s was coming closer to an end. The consensus of the early 1920s was fading away after the economic catastrophe, the Great Depression and the subsequent rise of worldwide isolationism and protectionism as typically symbolized by the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act in 1930. Preceded by the United States’ 1924 immigration Act that virtually prohibited Japanese immigration to the

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<sup>30</sup> See Gordon W. Prange, *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1982); Water Lord, *Day of Infamy* (Ware, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 1998); John Toland, *Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014).

United States, this economic and political meltdown led to the rise of right-wing nationalism in Japan, leading to the movement for the end of the status quo by Japanese right-wing intellectuals and militarists, as well-exemplified by the advocate by Konoe Fumimaro's argument, "Reject the Anglo-American-centered peace."<sup>31</sup>

What is equally significant to the above is the debacle of one of the military factions known as the *Kodo-ha* (Imperial Faction) during the February Twenty-six Incident in 1936. In this incident, the *Kodo-ha* desired to establish a sort of "new Japan" in which the Emperor of Japan would be a central figure, rather than a figurehead. This attempt by the *Kodo-ha*, later known as the "*Showa Restoration*," failed when Emperor Hirohito showed no desire to be part of it and denounced the *Kodo-ha*. As a result, the balance of power existing in the military between the *Kodo-ha* and the opposing faction known as the *Tosei-ha* (Complete Faction) was shattered, favoring the *Tosei-ha* and consequentially opening up the way for the *Tosei-ha*'s desire to have Japan's advancement toward French-Indo China and Southeast Asia to secure natural resources, including Japan's lifeline commodity, oil, against the *Kodo-ha*'s aim of moving northward. As Konoe stated in his postwar memoir, *Lost Politics: Writing of Konoe Fumimaro*, this was the crucial turning point in the US-Japan relation, paving a way for the force-coming showdown between the two nations.<sup>32</sup>

One other point that is crucial in understanding why the war became inevitable is the six-month intense US-Japan negotiations from April 1941 to October 1941. In order to see why Japan made the decision to carry out its assault on Pearl Harbor, it is essential to grasp how the negotiation unfolded and ultimately failed. The negotiations got underway when both nations agreed that the war should be avoided. There was a consensus among top leaders of Japan that Japan had no chance of winning the war. The United States was not quite confident about fighting two wars simultaneously: one in Europe and the other in the Pacific and being victorious. Thus, a crucial question that needs to be answered is why the negotiation failed when both sides did not desire war.<sup>33</sup>

Although speculative, one answer to the question is that the United States did not have much expectation or even desire to have success in negotiation from the outset. In the argument why, one is that the United States needed time to build up its military capacity to fight two wars in Europe and the other is that the United States needed to force Japan to carry out an assault on the US soil in order to bring an end to US isolationism. Looking back on the negotiations, the key element that led to the failure was the US demand for Japan's withdrawal of the troops from both China and French-Indo China as an indispensable condition for Japan to accept in order for the negotiation to succeed and to avoid a suicidal war against the United States.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kazuo Yagami, *Konoe Fumimaro and the Failure of Peace in Japan 1937-1941* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006). Also see Konoe Fumimaro, "Eibeihoni no Heiwashugi o Haisu" [Reject Anglo-Saxon Centered Peace] in *Talks in Politics* (Tokyo: Chikura Shobō, 1936).

<sup>32</sup> Konoe Fumimaro, "Ushinawareshi Seiji: Konoe-kō no Shuki" [Lost Politics: Writing of Prince Konoe] (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1946).

<sup>33</sup> Yagami, *The US-Japan Relation in Culture and Diplomacy: Japanese Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> See Charles A. Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948) and also Hamilton Fish, *Tragic Deception: FDR and America's Involvement in World War II* (Old Greenwich, CN: The Devin-Adair Company, 1983).

Submitted by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, when the Draft Understanding of the negotiations was adopted at the outset, it was this condition that Japan found impossible to accept. Accepting it meant to Japan nothing less than a return to the status-quo of Anglo-Saxon dominance and consequentially discarding the establishment of Pan-Asianist regionalism. In this situation, War Minister Tojo advocated for war if there were no other option for Japan to take. Konoe as Prime Minister was reluctant to have such an option. He did not want national ruin. Konoe was ready to accept the US demand.

Facing impasse internally and externally in the negotiations with the US, Konoe unsuccessfully requested a summit meeting between himself and Roosevelt. The meeting was destined to fail. There was a crucial difference between Konoe and his counterpart, Cordell Hull, regarding the purpose of the meeting. While Konoe wanted to gain 'leverage,' having the summit meeting with Roosevelt to suppress the internal opposition against his idea of accepting the US demand, Hull proposed the idea of using the meeting as an occasion to ratify agreements reached before the meeting. Konoe was dismayed by Hull's proposal. If the meeting were to be for ratification only, it would be meaningless because he could not bring anything to ratify.

Regarding this proposed summit meeting, the US Ambassador to Japan, Joseph C. Grew, along with the British Ambassador to Japan, Robert Craigie, lamented the US reluctant response toward Konoe's suggestion for the summit. Grew later wrote: "little or no effort on the part of our government to simplify Prince Konoe's difficult task or to meet his even halfway. So far as we in the Embassy could perceive, the policy of the administration during this critical time was almost completely inflexible."<sup>35</sup> This remark tells that the State Department led by Cordell Hull did not see any merit in pursuing the summit meeting.

These points stated above are essential if we wish to grasp how and why Japan reached its fateful decision to carry out its assault on Pearl Harbor, indicating that Japan did what it did not because of its preference but because it had no other option. Although Gripenrog does not fail to touch upon each of those three points, his arguments do not sufficiently clarify them.

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904-1945*, Vol. 2, ed. Walker Johnson (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1952), 1334.

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Response by John Gripentrog, Mars Hill University

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I would like to thank the four reviewers—Jon Davidann, June Grasso, Nakajima Hiroo, Yagami Kazuo, and—for their careful reading and thoughtful comments on my book. I am equally grateful to Kimura Masami for organizing this forum and to Michael Barnhart for writing the introduction.

Standing in a well-plowed field of study can be daunting as well as exhilarating. In my own case, tracing the escalation of hostilities between Japan and the United States across the 1930s to the outbreak of war in 1941 allowed me to engage with the scholarship of hundreds of exceptional historians. I am honored the reviewers found *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* to be a valuable contribution to the historical literature.

A principal aim of my book is to illuminate the role of ideology and competing ideas of world order—in particular, liberal internationalism’s emphasis on “orderly processes” and its tortuous confrontation with Japan’s Pan-Asianist regionalism. I do not minimize standard realist arguments, but instead demonstrate how ideology undergirded and justified strategic considerations. Relatedly, my book explores how Japanese officials employed a vigorous cultural diplomacy in hopes of winning over American public opinion and legitimizing the empire’s regionalist aspirations. I am appreciative of the reviewers’ recognition of this contribution to the cultural turn in international history, which makes a concrete connection between soft power and actual policymaking.

The response that follows focuses on the reviewers’ main criticisms.

Jon Davidann’s comments mainly concern the book’s first chapter, where I introduce the post-World War I diplomatic revolution and liberal treaty system, 1919-1930. He argues that I overstate the depth of Japan’s attachment to liberalism in the 1920s. He suggests instead that any adherence was mostly superficial, and that my interpretation sometimes flirts with the “dark valley” thesis, which is tied to modernization theory advanced by the likes of Edwin O. Reischauer.<sup>36</sup>

This is an excellent discussion point. I agree that scholars need to be nuanced in depicting Japan’s interaction with the liberal treaty system. In the main, my book both implicitly and explicitly discredits the “dark valley”

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<sup>36</sup> The “dark valley” thesis asserts that Japan’s aggression from 1931 to 1945 represented an anomalous departure from a half-century of progressive modernization. The thesis confines blame for this alleged aberration mainly to a small cabal of “militarists.” See Edwin O. Reischauer, *The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950). See also John Dower, *Ways of Forgetting, Ways of Remembering: Japan in the Modern World* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 1-16.

thesis, with its critical assessment of US Ambassador Joseph Grew and various Japanese “moderates.” Nonetheless, I agree with Davidann that I was less effective in chapter one in depicting Japan’s ambivalences.

My goal in the first chapter was to delineate new world trends—the post-World War I dream of a rules-based order, embodied by the League of Nations and the multilateral treaties of the 1920s. I wanted to capture for readers the reformist energy and Geneva spirit that followed in the wake of the Great War, including the burgeoning international networks and growing interdependence, as well as how, ultimately, Tokyo and Washington worked together to build liberal institutions in the 1920s. Davidann’s criticism could have stemmed from statements like the following: “If Japan’s embrace of Wilsonian internationalism was somewhat cautious, it nonetheless was more evident on paper than it was for the United States” (4).

At the same time, however, I did attempt to temper suggestions that Japan’s ruling class fully embraced the new liberal order. In the introduction, for example, I state that “a strong undercurrent of Japanese intellectuals [and] politicians chafed against the new international status quo, which they deemed a ruse for Anglo-American supremacy” (4). Subsequently, in chapter one, I reference Foreign Minister Uchida Kōsai’s lukewarm assessment of the Paris Peace Conference agenda, and note that Japan’s acceptance of the new liberal norms “did not mean unqualified subordination of regional interests to internationalist imperatives” (17, 21). On the 1922 Washington Conference’s naval treaty, I add that “alarm bells went off among the Japanese delegation,” and that various American compromises failed to appease the Japanese Navy’s fleet faction (24-25). On the 1922 Nine-Power Treaty, I note that the treaty’s sweeping aspirations “raised equally sweeping concerns among Japan’s delegation” (28). Finally, on the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Treaty, I quote concerns by diplomat Ishii Kikujirō as well as general Japanese reservations (33-34), and also reference Japanese backlash to the 1930 London Treaty (34-35).

Considering the above, along with concrete evidence in remaining chapters, my interpretation of Japan’s relationship to liberalism overall runs counter to modernization theory and its “dark valley” linkages, even if I do not wholly align with critics of that theory, such as E. H. Norman and Maruyama Masao. Historiographically, this places me more in line with Thomas Burkman and Fred Dickinson, who identify meaningful liberal impulses in the 1920s without discrediting the influence of Japan’s feudal legacies and Meiji state’s incomplete revolution or defective modernization.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Reischauer, *The United States and Japan*; E. Herbert Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State: Political and Economic Problems of the Meiji Period* (New York: International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940); Masao Maruyama, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. I. Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914–1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), and Frederick Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of the New Japan, 1919–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). See also John Dower, *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: Selected Writings of E. H. Norman* (New York: Pantheon, 1975).

Nakajima Hiroo, meanwhile, appreciates my focus on ideology, but believes the dichotomy between liberal internationalism and Pan-Asianism is too severely drawn. He suggests there are more convergences or commonalities than I suggest. He is particularly skeptical about the depth of American liberalism, even suggesting that a Wilsonian-led interwar liberalism is irrelevant because of President Woodrow Wilson's racism.

I respectfully disagree with this interpretation. Convergence invariably requires emphasizing liberalism's limits and paradoxes, while diluting the radical exceptionalism of Japan's Pan-Asianism and the war-making it justified. This leaves problematic ramifications about war responsibility.

To be sure, it is important to be sensitive to liberalism's shortcomings and biases, as well as the grandiosity of universal claims, which can easily lead into hypocritical corners. Nakajima rightly references historian Mark Mazower, whose works remind us of these limits and pitfalls.<sup>38</sup> Recent H-Diplo roundtables on the value and viability of liberal internationalism further underscore its contested nature (particularly salient after the foreign policy dysfunction of the Donald Trump administration).<sup>39</sup> Toward this end, Nakajima cites evidence that contradicts liberalism's weighty promises, especially the ugly persistence of colonialism among liberal powers in the interwar era, and the hypocrisy of post-World War II trusteeships. I agree; in addition to the examples in my book, I would include aspects of Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal's dissenting opinion at the Tokyo War Tribunal.<sup>40</sup>

As Nakajima correctly suggests, any study of World War II that does not contextualize liberal internationalism's paradoxes can spiral into a triumphalist Allied-Powers narrative.

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (London: Penguin Books, 2013); Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 13-7 on Patrick Porter, *The False Promise of Liberal Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), ed., Diane Labrosse, 28 January 2022; <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/9572543/h-diploissf-roundtable-13-7-false-promise-liberal-order>; and H-Diplo Roundtable XXIII-3 on G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and The Crises of Global Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), ed., Labrosse, 20 September, 2021; <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/8302237/h-diplo-roundtable-xxiii-3-ikenberry-world-safe-democracy-liberal>. See also Robert Jervis, Francis J. Gavin, Joshua Rovner, and Labrosse, eds., *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Ushimura Kei, "Pal's 'Dissentient Judgment' Reconsidered: Some Notes on Postwar Japan's Responses to the Opinion," *Japan Review* 19 (2007): 215-223.

At the same time, however, we need to be equally sensitive to meandering toward a kind of false equivalence between liberalism and Pan-Asianism. Part of the haze, I believe, can be attributed to viewing these respective ideologies through the lens of flawed assumptions about the Open Door and so-called Asian Monroe Doctrine, namely, that America's postwar liberalism was a simple replication of US Secretary of State John Hay's Open Door policy, and Japan's Pan-Asianism was another Monroe Doctrine.

With the regular caveats in place for broad statements, my book takes seriously the diplomatic revolution that followed the Great War. Above all, I stress that the new liberal norms proceeded from the overriding principle that aggression in the pursuit of national interests was no longer an acceptable form of state behavior. One hundred years later, it is easy to gloss over this touchstone and focus instead on hypocrisy. But given the context of the immediate post-World War I era, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it represented a watershed moment in international relations. (For this reason Princeton University's recent "Double Sights" marker contrasts Woodrow Wilson's internationalist achievements against his racist thinking).<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, with its focus on managing global conflicts multilaterally through a rules-based system of orderly processes, post-World War I liberalism revised America's Open Door policy. Partly as a result of William Appleman Williams's influential book, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, the Open Door is often narrowly interpreted by the first of John Hay's notes, which emphasizes equal trade access in China.<sup>42</sup> Viewed critically, asymmetrical American economic power can transform equal access into informal imperialism. No argument there. Postwar liberalism, however, placed even more emphasis on Hay's second note about "territorial integrity." And the Nine-Power Treaty (1922), which was so impactful on US-Japan interwar relations, went even further. In addition to equal economic opportunity and territorial integrity, the Nine-Power Treaty targeted presumptions of leasehold perpetuity in China by requiring the contracting powers to "provide the fullest and most unembarrassed opportunity to China to develop and maintain for herself an effective and stable government." Any dispute mandated convening for "frank and full discussion."<sup>43</sup>

Perfumed words, of course, do not make up for paradoxical deeds. But even in the case of colonialism, Wilsonianism's aspirational rhetoric, once dry on the diplomatic paper, could not be undone. As Erez Manela has observed, marginalized peoples around the world "adopted Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination and the equality of nations to formulate their demands and justify their aspirations."<sup>44</sup> And though the age of empire persisted, "new" colonialism collided conspicuously and adversely with the liberal program, especially as newly articulated in the Atlantic Charter.

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<sup>41</sup> "University dedicates marker addressing the complex legacy of Woodrow Wilson"

<https://www.princeton.edu/news/2019/10/10/university-dedicates-marker-addressing-complex-legacy-woodrow-wilson>

<sup>42</sup> William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1959).

<sup>43</sup> [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/tr22-01.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/tr22-01.asp).

<sup>44</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

The same cannot be said for Japan's radical iteration of Pan-Asianism in the 1930s. Its profound exceptionalism and chauvinism, which placed the Japanese as the "leading race" in Asia, was routinely invoked to justify unilateralism, autarky, militarism, and, essentially, a new phase of imperialism. Thus, instead of viewing Japan's ideological premises in the 1930s as an Asian Monroe Doctrine, as Nakajima's review accepts, a more accurate analogy would be America's exceptionalist ideology of Manifest Destiny.

Historian Joanne B. Freeman's statement on the origins of American exceptionalism applies strikingly to Japan's Pan-Asian-fueled aggression in Asia: "An 'exceptional' people does not always engage with other nations or peoples in good faith. They assume that their self-defined virtue and glory justify their actions. They value themselves above those who are unlike them or less fortunate; their strutting on the world stage often has grave implications. As unifying as it can be, a sense of exceptionalism can crush competing peoples and cultures with nary a second thought."<sup>45</sup>

Which is why I remain skeptical of Tokyo's idealized Pan-Asianist proclamation made at the Greater East Asia Conference in November 1943. It requires ignoring or minimizing more than a decade of evidence—both belligerent words from the Japanese government and brutal deeds by the emperor's army—that occurred between 1931 and 1943. Also, increasingly dire circumstances have a curious way of altering rhetoric. By the time of the conference, Japan's forces had evacuated Guadalcanal, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku had been killed, and the Americans were beginning their counteroffensive at Tarawa.

This explains my disagreement with Iriye Akira's *Power and Culture* (1981), which first posited convergences between liberalism and Pan-Asianism.<sup>46</sup> I have nothing but respect and admiration for Iriye, whose monumental scholarship cleared research paths for two generations of historians studying US-Japan relations. I find *Power and Culture*, however, to be his least compelling work, which John Dower described critically as "revisionism by omission." As Dower noted, "...the Japanese never ceased to describe their ultimate goal as being world peace, but it was their expressed position...that global peace and stability could only be accomplished through 'the promotion of sphere-living and sphere-understanding'—that is, through autarkic regional blocs." And that the Japanese referenced the Atlantic Charter in 1943 in order to distinguish it from Japan's allegedly superior vision<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Joanne B. Freeman, "Afterword" to Robert M. S. McDonald & Peter S. Onuf eds., *Revolutionary Prophecies: The Founders and America's Future* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 262.

<sup>46</sup> Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> John W. Dower, "Rethinking World War II in Asia," *Reviews in American History* 12:2 (June 1984): 160-161.



Interestingly, Yagami Kazuo's response approaches the book from an entirely different angle than the other three reviewers. He similarly affirms the value of my book's main points, but also believes there are some omissions, or, perhaps, a lack of elaboration on certain points. I admit to some confusion about Yagami's response because my book covers the subject matter he references (Shidehara diplomacy, 1924 Immigration Act, Great Depression, 2/26 attempted coup, 1941 US-Japan talks, the Konoe-suggested summit). This appears to be a case of differing interpretive lenses—not so much *what* was covered, but *how* it was covered. Yagami's review outlines an orthodox telling of the road to war, based on the “dark valley” thesis and a narrative that relies heavily on usurpation of power by the Japanese military. This, of course, runs counter to my argument and narrative arc, which, as Davidann and Grasso intimate, builds upon irreconcilable worldviews in the 1930s, while becoming deeply entwined with rising geopolitical stakes.

The so-called Draft Understanding in 1941 illustrates the interpretive gap. Yagami suggests that a compromise between Tokyo and Washington was viable, but that it was botched by myopic leaders, especially those in the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. I spend considerable time assessing the 1941 negotiations and Draft Understanding (which I refer to as the Draft *Mis*understanding), showing how the two sides remained divided along ideological lines (194-198; 201-208). For example, I demonstrate that Cordell Hull's Four Principles, which the secretary of state laid down as a necessary precondition for official talks, amounted to a compressed version of the Nine-Power Treaty and Kellogg-Briand Pact. If the Roosevelt administration was inflexible, it is because the Americans had come to see an existential congruence between ideology and geopolitical aggression. As Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox said in November 1941, “The perils which loom across the sea today are not merely threats to our national security, for this is no struggle between rival powers but a conflict between hostile ideas.”<sup>48</sup>

Finally, June Grasso provides an excellent summary analysis of my main points and contributions, for which I have no clarifying comments.

In conclusion, I am grateful to the reviewers for their engaging commentary, and also to H-Diplo for giving me the opportunity to participate in the excellent community of scholars of international history.

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Frederick Moore, *With Japan's Leaders* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1942), 298.