

Pearl Harbor as “New History:” Japanese-American Relations, 1938–1941, and the *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho**

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The title comprises a wordplay that might not be immediately obvious to readers. It draws on two works — Columbia University Press’s *Pearl Harbor as History* and *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho* (*New History Textbook*) — whose basic outlooks deserve comparison at this essay’s outset.¹⁾ On the one hand, *Pearl Harbor as History* — whose extraordinary depth and richness of analysis remains a benchmark for scholars today — proceeded on the assumption that Japanese-American relations were “a two-way street that had constantly to be looked at from both ends.”²⁾ On the other hand, *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho* (*ARK*) — penned as a junior high school textbook rather than as an academic exercise — was fueled by the perception that, “each nation has its own perception of history, which differs from those of other nations. It is *impossible* for nations to *share* historical perceptions.”³⁾ Of course, a junior high school textbook cannot be held to the same scholarly standards as an academic text. Even so, the discrepancy in these two books’ basic outlooks remains instructive, and in fact can be likened to two poles that inform the parameters of this essay.

In a nutshell, *ARK* exists less to educate than it does to inculcate a sense of national pride amongst Japanese youth. Although it would have been unwieldy, the title of this essay might more accurately have read: This is an essay about how *ARK* presents distortions, half-truths, and falsehoods as historical education. It is an essay about how *ARK*’s authors have not only rejected the interpretations of professional historians but dispensed with all standards of historical objectivity. Finally, it is an essay aimed ultimately at revealing this chicanery for what it really is, particularly as it relates to the textbook’s presentation of Japanese-American relations from 1938 to 1941.

These are serious charges to lay at the feet of a junior high school textbook and its authors. Such charges are all the more disturbing because, to borrow the words of historians Laura Hein and Mark Selden: “Textbooks are important vehicles through which contemporary societies transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of the community.”⁴⁾ *ARK* is no exception. Clearly it is not *just* a textbook. Indeed, unlike other junior high school textbooks in Japan, *ARK* was also published for public consumption. Once in the public realm, the controversy surrounding *ARK*’s publication (as well as the text’s relative simplicity) ensured that it reached the hands of otherwise disinterested onlookers around the nation. In this way, *ARK* represented an active attempt to mould a public memory of Japan’s modern experience, and in particular of World War II. Herein lies *ARK*’s ultimate significance,

for, as historian Akira Iriye has observed, “the nation as a whole has failed to develop a coherent picture, a public memory, of the war.”⁵⁾

Who are *ARK*’s authors? They are the kernel of a nationwide movement known as the *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukurukai* (Japanese Society for Textbook Reform, or *Tsukurukai* for short). The contributing authors to *ARK* numbered thirteen, and included Nishio Kanji, a specialist on German literature at Electro-Communications University, Fujioka Nobukatsu, a professor of education at the University of Tokyo, and Sakamoto Takao, a professor of political science at Gakushūin University.⁶⁾ The principal historian within their ranks was (and remains) University of Tokyo Professor Emeritus Itō Takashi. Born in 1932, Itō as a young man was a member of Japan’s Communist Party. He left the Communist Part in the early 1960s, and for decades thereafter stressed the importance of scholarship beholden to no political ideology. Since the early 1990s his political philosophy has moved discernibly to the right, and his *Tsukurukai* membership suggests that he no longer recognizes the virtue of politically neutral scholarship.⁷⁾ In any case, the *Tsukurukai*’s self-professed aims are grandiose: “For the purpose of Japanese children living in the twenty-first century, we decided to create a new textbook and to fundamentally renovate history education.”⁸⁾

What, then, are the *Tsukurukai* rallying against? “Postwar history education is something which has made us ... lose pride in being Japanese,” they explain. “Particularly in terms of contemporary history, we are treated like criminals who are destined to continue apologizing for posterity.”⁹⁾ The *Tsukurukai* believe the roots underlying this problem exist at various levels. At one level, it is less about scholarship or education than it is about politics. This is hardly surprising, for the Japanese Government’s practice of directly supervising and censoring textbooks places history — and particularly the authorship of history textbooks — squarely in the political realm. As historian Ian Nish put it: “The history of the twentieth century has become a highly politicized issue in Japan.”¹⁰⁾ For their part, the *Tsukurukai* charge the Japanese Government in recent decades with having displayed an overly sympathetic ear to “persistent Korean-Chinese objections” to Japanese textbook content. In particular, the *Tsukurukai* lament Tokyo’s insistence on prioritizing “international understanding and cooperation” over and above protecting Japan’s purportedly sovereign prerogative in writing its own textbooks. This, they argue, has merely encouraged further foreign protests over textbook content, forcing the government to “yield” ever further to “foreign pressure.” In the end result, this vicious cycle has “invited a flood of masochistic textbooks.”¹¹⁾ Seen in this light, *ARK*’s effort to redress Japan’s supposed “submission” to other nation’s “perceptions of history” is an unapologetic political act.¹²⁾

At another inter-linked level, the *Tsukurukai* are rallying against what they perceive to be academic or educational issues. They maintain that those textbooks which have “yielded” to foreign pressure are predicated on two distinct views of Japanese history, both of which assume that war guilt rests solely with the Japanese. On the one hand, they charge “socialism’s illusory historical view” with having depicted the “nation-state formed during the Meiji period as an evil one, and condemn all of Japan’s modern history ... as a succession of criminal acts.”¹³⁾ On the other hand, the *Tsukurukai* charge the so-called “Tokyo Trials’ historical view” with having imbued Japanese youth with “the supposition that World War II was a just and victorious war between ... United States-British

democracy and Japanese-German fascism.”¹⁴ Suffice it here to note that the *Tsukurukai*’s rejection of these two historical viewpoints neatly reflects a historiographical trend that emerged in Japan in the 1960s, when Japanese historians challenged the hitherto overwhelming influence of both Marxist scholarship and the Tokyo Trials.¹⁵

The *Tsukurukai*’s agreement with the wider historical community does not however go much beyond this most basic of levels, for they reject criticism of almost *any* aspect of Japan’s war. This involves a blanket rejection of the findings of the wider historical community. In terms of the period under review, the *Tsukurukai* make the perverted case that the Anglo-American nations bore almost sole responsibility for war. To quote a separate *Tsukurukai* publication (which notably did not have to undergo the scrutiny of the Japanese Government’s so-called Textbook Authorization Committee, thereby affording Nishio Kanji complete freedom to express his views): “America’s fighting spirit was not something that came alive after Pearl Harbor. Its fighting spirit had a long history, and there is really no way of expressing it other than to say that in the end this is what started the war.”¹⁶ In presenting their case, the *Tsukurukai* have dispensed with both the findings of other historians and all standards of historical objectivity.

Konoe’s New Order Proclamation and the American Response

Take for example, the first discernible point in *ARK* at which the *Tsukurukai* reconstructs the origins of the war. Subtitled “Japanese-American Relations Worsen,” this section begins with Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro’s announcement on 3 November 1938 of the so-called “New East Asian Order.” To quote from page 272:

In 1938 Prime Minister Konoe proclaimed the New East Asian Order in which he suggested the formation of an economic bloc that united Japan, China, and Manchuria. This later developed into the slogan “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” that included Southeast Asia.¹⁷

In presenting Konoe’s proclamation of a New East Asian Order, the *Tsukurukai* provide their readers with neither background nor analysis. No mention is made, for example, of Konoe’s famous *aite ni sezu* address of 16 January 1938, in which he proclaimed that henceforth his government would deal with Chiang Kai-shek only on the battlefield and at the surrender table. In neglecting to place Konoe’s “new order” proclamation in such a perspective, the *Tsukurukai* are able to paint that proclamation as a benevolent attempt to initiate reform throughout Asia. It is as if they are acting as Konoe’s personal spokesperson some seventy years after the event. Whilst however the *Tsukurukai* have neatly captured the public face that Konoe sought to present, there was much more to Konoe’s statement.

Although we cannot expect most middle school students to make the following connection — and herein lies the problem — Konoe’s proclamation of a “new order” carried with it the implication that Japan was dispensing with the “old” or “pre-existing” order. What was this old order? Established in the early 1920s at the so-called Washington Conference, it was characterised by cooperation between the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and the other powers in pursuit of their economic objectives in China. The old order’s emphasis on peaceful, economic expansion was underpinned by

a promise amongst the powers to respect China's sovereignty as well as the principle of "equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations throughout the territory of China."¹⁸⁾ As *ARK* correctly notes, this meant that Japan at the Washington Conference accepted *in treaty form* the traditional policies of the United States with regard to China.¹⁹⁾ In return Japan obtained a measure of security vis-à-vis the United States that was otherwise unattainable (although this was hotly disputed within naval circles), as well as access to American capital and markets, which was deemed necessary to the nation's further development. All things considered, the contemporary impression that Japan's chief delegate to the Washington Conference, Admiral Katō Tomosaburō, had served his country well seems justified. In the words of one authority, "for Katō ... the invitation to the Washington Conference must have seemed a god-send."²⁰⁾ Not that the *Tsukurukai* would have their readers believe this. Although *ARK* is short on specifics, Nishio Kanji in a separate publication accused those historians who look favourably upon the old order as "thinking of their own national history from the American viewpoint."²¹⁾

In contrast to their willingness to criticise professional historians, the *Tsukurukai* are loath to criticise Konoe's "new order" statement. This puts them in an incongruous position, for Konoe's statement put the rest of the world on notice that Japan finally had rejected both the path of great power co-operation and the notion of China's territorial integrity. Such a policy ensured that, unless it significantly changed its policy, Japan would never emerge victorious from its ongoing war in China — for it simply did not have the resources to unilaterally bring China to its knees. Herein lies the significance of the Konoe proclamation, although it receives no treatment at the hands of the *Tsukurukai*.²²⁾

If the *Tsukurukai*'s presentation of Konoe's "new order" proclamation is misleading, then their treatment of the American response is disingenuous. To quote from page 272:

America set forth the Open Door Policy and equal opportunity and did not recognise Japan's creation of its own economic bloc. America, which had been tentatively neutral in the Sino-Japanese War, strongly opposed Konoe's announcement and came to support officially China's Chiang Kai-Shek. The conflict that led to the Japanese-American War began directly from this point.

In 1939 America notified Japan that it would not extend the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Commerce and Shipping. Japan, which depended on trade with the United States for many goods, gradually suffered economically. In the Japanese Army the way of thinking that a northward advance to dispose of the Russian threat was traditionally strong. But from this time the southern advance thesis of advancing into Southeast Asia to acquire natural resources became strong. However if Japan advanced into Southeast Asia it would inevitably collide with France, the Netherlands, America, and England, all of which had colonies there.²³⁾

In contrast to their treatment of Konoe's "new order" proclamation, the *Tsukurukai* proved entirely willing to analyse the American response. Their analysis is however objectionable on the grounds that it creates the impression of a far tougher stance on Washington's part than was actually the case, and in fact goes so far as to imply — not at all subtly — that American actions led "directly" to the Japanese-American war.

Underlying this deceit is an inability — or unwillingness — to distinguish between American support for China and the American commitment to the Open Door.

The distinction — however fine — is an important one to make. If (as the *Tsukurukai* would have us believe) the United States supported China unequivocally, then it could not but be implacably hostile to Japan, in which case a Japanese-American war was a near inevitability. This was patently not the case. Indeed, American policymakers until Pearl Harbor were agreed on the need to avoid a war with Japan — if not on the means by which this might be achieved — in order to better concentrate their nation's energies on the proportionately greater threat of Nazi Germany. In this way, American policy was characterized by a commitment not to China *per se*, but to the self-same Open Door that Japan had committed itself in solemn treaty form at the above-mentioned Washington Conference. As American ambassador Joseph C. Grew explained to his protagonists in Tokyo following Konoe's "new order" proclamation, the United States could not admit the right of any one power to "prescribe ... the terms and conditions of a 'new order' in areas *not under its sovereignty* and to constitute itself the repository of authority and the agent of destiny in regard thereto."²⁴ In other words, American policy derived less from an attachment to China than it did from the perceived need to halt Japan's aggressive actions in that beleaguered country.

It is in this context that the American decision to end the two nations' commercial treaty should be seen. President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced on 26 July 1939 that Japan was being given the mandatory six months' notice of the abrogation of the two nations' commercial treaty. This meant that the United States would be in a position in January 1940 — *if it wished* — to impose trade sanctions on Japan. Because Japan's economic well-being depended on close commercial relations with the United States, such a step clarified American opposition to Japan's policy of aggression. At the same time, however, the door to two nations' trade had not been shut. To borrow the words of Herbert Feis: "The United States was committed to nothing final."²⁵ The application — or non-application — of sanctions would *depend on subsequent Japanese actions*. In other words, if Japan dropped its insistence on realizing its policy objectives through the use of force and reaffirmed its commitment to the Open Door, then Japanese-American conciliation remained a possibility.

As the foregoing suggests, American policy was predicated on the basic assumption that any adjustment in diplomatic relations must necessarily result from Japanese initiative. This in no way resonates with the impression — that of a tough American policy that led "directly" to war with Japan — which the *Tsukurukai* sought to leave their readers. This discrepancy between the historical reality and the *Tsukurukai*'s reconstruction of history renders the remainder of the above passage little more than an uncritical acceptance of what historian Hata Ikuhiko has termed "the path toward certain *self-destruction*."²⁶ Notable for its absence in *ARK*'s discussion of the debate over northward or southward expansion is any mention of the mauling that Soviet forces in 1939 handed Japan's Kwantung Army.²⁷ This was a decisive factor in quelling enthusiasm for a northward advance and simultaneously turning attentions to the colonial regions of Southeast Asia. In an irony that apparently is lost on the *Tsukurukai* — or perhaps it is an irony from which the *Tsukurukai* sought to shield their readership — the foreign forces Japan would face should it advance southward would be organised and

equipped far better than were the Russians in 1939. Presumably, revealing this instance of strategic myopia ran counter to the *Tsukurukai*'s insistence that it was American policies that led "directly" to the Japanese-American war.

The Tripartite Pact

As the subheading — "The Blind Spot of the Japan-Germany-Italy Tripartite Military Pact" — suggests, *ARK*'s reading of Japan's alliance relationship with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy does present a reasonably critical view of this aspect of Japanese diplomacy. Even so, in light of the *Tsukurukai*'s selective — and distorted — reconstruction of Japanese-American relations in the aftermath of Konoe's "new order" proclamation (as discussed above), the account does not go nearly far enough in criticizing Japan's decision to tie itself to Hitler's Germany. To quote from pages 273–274:

... In 1940 the German Armies invaded Western Europe by a lightning war, made a triumphant entry into Paris, and forced France to surrender.

Japan's eyes were riveted on Germany's victories in Europe. Japan anticipated that a Germany which had destroyed France would also defeat England, and in 1940 concluded, along with Italy, the Japan-Germany-Italy Tripartite Pact. By the Pact, Japan could alleviate its feeling of isolation, but the military alliance with two distant European countries did not have realistic utility. In addition, it was a factor that decisively deepened the opposition of America which supported England.²⁸⁾

In April 1941, Japan and the Soviet Union concluded the Japan-Soviet Union Neutrality Treaty. Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke, who put together the two treaties, sought to develop a Four Power [Japan-Germany-Italy-Soviet Union] Treaty. He thought the pressure [that would result from such a treaty] would be advantageous in advancing negotiations with the United States. However, in June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union and the German-Soviet War began. Matsuoka's plans were crushed.

The first criticism to be leveled at this passage rests with the *Tsukurukai*'s sterile assertion that Japan entered the Tripartite Alliance to "alleviate its feeling of isolation." Perhaps such thinking did play a role in convincing Japanese policymakers of the virtue of the alliance, but far more pressing concerns were at stake. Principal among these was Japan's military-driven advance into Southeast Asia. To borrow the words of historian Stephen Pelz: "The conflict in Europe stripped from the British, French, and Dutch colonies in East Asia what little protection they had enjoyed in the days of peace."²⁹⁾ In this connection, the *Tsukurukai* inexplicably — but perhaps not unexpectedly — neglected whatsoever to mention the fact that immediately prior to the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact, Japanese troops undertook the first step in their nation's southward advance by marching into northern Indochina.³⁰⁾

Objections can also be raised concerning the *Tsukurukai*'s account of Matsuoka's diplomatic vision. Although the narrative is accurate, its silence on critical issues is striking. In particular, the *Tsukurukai*'s assertion that Matsuoka's envisioned Four Power Treaty was conceived with an eye to strengthening Japan's hand in its forthcoming negotiations with the United States leaves the reader begging for more. How, according

to Matsuoka's vision, would tying Japan's fortunes to Germany, Italy, (and later the Soviet Union) improve Japan's bargaining position in negotiations with the United States? Witness Article Three of the Tripartite Pact, which committed the signatories to "assist one another with all political, economic and military means when one of the three contracting parties is attacked by a power at present not involved in the European War or the Sino-Japanese conflict."³¹⁾ This was, as President of the Privy Council Hara Yoshimichi noted, "a treaty of alliance with the United States as its target."³²⁾ By presenting the United States with the threat of war against an overwhelming anti-democratic front — which, once the Soviet Union had been brought into the fold, would stretch across the Eurasian continent — Matsuoka hoped to cow the United States into its isolationist shell. This in turn would remove the one remaining obstacle to Japan's southward advance. As he explained in an impromptu, off-the-record press conference one day before he took office: "In the battle between democracy and totalitarianism the latter adversary will without question win and will control the world. The era of democracy is finished and the democratic system bankrupt."³³⁾ The man's audacity was nothing short of breathtaking.³⁴⁾

The failure to make explicit the connection between the Tripartite Pact (and Matsuoka's envisioned Four Power Pact) and Japan's aggressive intentions leaves *ARK*'s readership woefully uninformed regarding the *Tsukurukai*'s criticism of the Pact for having no "realistic utility." Nor, as the foregoing analysis suggests, is the directly interconnected issue of American opposition to the Pact placed in its proper context. The Pact had no "realistic utility" because far from breaking Washington's resolve, it steeled it. The Pact had no "realistic utility" because in threatening the United States with the use of force, it did not account for the fact that the force Japan could muster was merely a fraction of that which the United States possessed. The Pact had no "realistic utility" because Japan's alliance partners were in no way able to make up for that windfall. The Pact had no "realistic utility" because it pushed Japan — now allied militarily to America's proxy enemy in Europe — perilously close to an unwinnable war with the United States. The Pact had no "realistic utility" because Matsuoka's dream of drawing the Soviet Union into the fold was never anything more than a dream. None of these issues receive treatment at the hands of the *Tsukurukai*.

The Japanese-American Negotiations, 1941

All of the falsely presented premises that underlie *ARK*'s reconstruction of Japanese-American relations in the aftermath of Konoe's "new order" announcement are brought out in full relief in its presentation of the Japanese-American negotiations of 1941. To quote from pages 274–275:

In spring 1941, the Japanese-American negotiations began in Washington for the purpose of remedying the deteriorating Japanese-American relationship. Japan, for the purpose of avoiding war, approached the negotiations with great expectations and America, which had cracked Japan's secret diplomatic code ... led Japan into negotiations that were advantageous to itself.

In July, Japanese naval forces resolutely occupied southern Indochina and triumphantly entered Saigon. Saigon was an important military point to make

possible attacks on American territory in the Philippines, English territory in Singapore, and Dutch Indonesian territory. America, which aggravated this critical feeling, counterattacked in July by freezing Japanese capital assets in the United States and by prohibiting entirely oil exports to Japan. Both the United States and England held a conference in the Atlantic and proclaimed an Atlantic Charter that strengthened their alliance, announced their war objectives, and decided to delay war with Japan for two or three months.

The most immediately obvious objection to be raised in connection with this passage concerns the *Tsukurukai*'s selectivity in presenting the historical record. Having stated — correctly — that Japan sought to “avoid war,” the *Tsukurukai* conveniently neglect to tell their readership that the United States *also* sought to avoid war. This is a critical sin of omission whose underlying intent — if not already obvious — becomes apparent with the *Tsukurukai*'s later assertion that President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the Atlantic Conference of August 1941 “decided to delay war with Japan for two or three months.” This is an outrageous departure from the historical record. Churchill at the Atlantic Conference urged upon Roosevelt a joint declaration that “any further encroachment by Japan in the Southwest Pacific” would produce a situation in which Britain and the United States “would be compelled to take countermeasures *even though these might* lead to war.” Roosevelt proposed instead to revive an earlier offer of Indochinese neutrality, whereby if Japanese troops pulled out of Indochina, Washington would seek to settle the remaining issues with Japan. Only if and when the Japanese failed to respond to this proposal and instead undertook further aggression, would Roosevelt respond with measures that “*might* result in war between the United States and Japan.”³⁵⁾ In discussing the *possibility* — or the increasing *probability* — of war in the Pacific, *at no point* did Roosevelt and Churchill agree to “delay war with Japan for two or three months.”

Exposing this historical falsehood renders utterly meaningless the *Tsukurukai*'s assertion that the United States “led Japan into negotiations that were favourable to itself.” This assertion labours under the false premise that the United States entered the negotiations intent on going to war with Japan. By this reckoning, the United States determined to delay the war's opening in order to better prepare its own war machine while at the same time maximising the toll that economic sanctions — not to mention the ongoing war in China — exacted on Japan's military forces. To be sure, in the event that war did break out, it was in American interests to delay that war as long as possible. Contrary to the *Tsukurukai*'s conviction, however, the United States did not enter the negotiations intent on war with Japan. Even as the negotiations began, American military officers — in secret staff conversations with their British counterparts — reached the fundamental decision that *if* Japan entered the war, Germany's defeat was still to be given priority over that of Japan.³⁶⁾ These were hardly the actions of a military machine champing for a fight in the Pacific. Indeed, Secretary of State Cordell Hull captured the sense of cautious hope that pervaded Washington in early 1941 when he counselled Roosevelt to await Ambassador Nomura Kichisaburō's forthcoming arrival, in the expectation that “he may have some proposals and suggestions to offer.”³⁷⁾ In other words, the United States entered the negotiations in the belief that the possibility of conciliation with Japan

— however slight — still existed.

As far as American policymakers were concerned, the possibility of Japanese-American conciliation rested on the willingness of their Japanese counterparts to drop their adherence to a policy of military conquest. This was entirely consistent with the policy to which the United States adhered throughout the period under review. That being the case, it is difficult — if not impossible — to substantiate the *Tsukurukai*'s claim that the United States “led Japan into negotiations that were favourable to itself.” Furthermore, in light of the “great expectations” that Japan took into the negotiations — expectations that have received treatment earlier in this paper — it is hard to see how it was led into anything at all. Perhaps this explains why the *Tsukurukai* fail to outline these “great expectations.” Suffice it here to note that, in his initial instructions to ambassador Nomura, Matsuoka maintained that any understanding Japan might reach with the United States would be predicated on Japan's Tripartite Pact commitments, and its ongoing pursuit of the so-called Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.³⁸⁾ In short, Matsuoka was insisting that Washington must accept Japan's desire to overrun Southeast Asia. “Great expectations” indeed, but they spelled disaster for the negotiations with the United States. As ambassador Nomura put it prior to his departure for Washington: “There is no way we should think there is any chance of adjusting relations with the United States while Japan and Germany are working hand in hand.”³⁹⁾ Herein lies a contradiction that the *Tsukurukai* are unwilling — or unable — to tackle: Japan's policymakers argued that they sought rapprochement with the United States, yet the “great expectations” they carried into the negotiations of 1941 showed no inclination to adopt a course that might facilitate such rapprochement.

As a parting shot at the idea that America “led Japan into negotiations,” it is instructive to consider the policy perceptions informing the navy's middle echelons at the outset of the Japanese-American negotiations. It is worth recalling in this connection that the navy was bound to bear the brunt of a war with the United States, and hence held the key to war in the Pacific. In the autumn of 1940, a mid-level naval officer suggested: “Ever since the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact, nay, even before then, [our nation] has anticipated war with the United States.” Yet the time was not yet ripe for war, for it was first necessary to secure strategic provisions from “the enemy.” In keeping with this purpose, ambassador Nomura was to be “thrown as a bone to the United States.”⁴⁰⁾ Granted, the navy's top echelons were not in agreement with these ideas — at least until June–July 1941 — yet their prevalence amongst the navy's middle ranking fire-eaters rendered meaningful concessions to the United States out of the question. At the same time, in the absence of concessions, the state of American-Japanese relations could only deteriorate, eventually to the point of war. In this way, the ramblings of a mid-rank navy hawk were a self-fulfilling prophecy. At the very least, this quotation reveals that Japan entered the negotiations with its eyes wide open — there is certainly no evidence to suggest that it was “led” into negotiating with the United States.

The final criticisms to be levelled at the above passage concern the *Tsukurukai*'s treatment of Japan's “resolute occupation” of southern Indochina. “Resolute” it may have been, but it in no way squared with the negotiations playing out in Washington. As Nomura cabled Tokyo nearly three weeks prior to the occupation of Indochina: “If you are resolved to use armed force against the Southern Regions at this time, there seems to

be no room at all for adjusting Japanese-American relations.”⁴¹⁾ His sound judgement was snubbed by his colleagues in Tokyo. Even with the benefit of hindsight, the *Tsukurukai* failed to see this self-evident truth, and instead made the bewildering — and unsubstantiated — assertion that the United States “aggravated this critical situation.” How the United States “aggravated” the situation is anybody’s guess — Hitler’s assault on the Soviet Union in late June would have seemed a more plausible candidate — yet the assertion fits neatly with the *Tsukurukai*’s attempts to lay the blame for Pearl Harbor at Washington’s feet.⁴²⁾

The final *ARK* passage under review is that which reconstructs the ultimate failure of the Japanese-American negotiations. To quote from page 275:

Japan, also, while giving thought to war against the United States continued its diplomatic negotiations with America, but in November America’s Secretary of State Cordell Hull thrust uncompromising proposals that were called the Hull Note before the Japanese side. The Hull Note demanded unconditionally Japan’s immediate withdrawal from China. Responding to this demand, the Japanese government thought it had the meaning of surrendering to the United States and finally made up its mind to begin war with the United States.

In this passage the *Tsukurukai* actively sought to create the impression of a Japan pushed into a corner by the United States, and in particular by Secretary of State Hull. To be sure, the Hull Note of 26 November was “uncompromising” — as Hull himself apparently understood. Having delivered the note to ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu, he told Secretary of the Army Henry L. Stimson, “I have washed my hands of [the matter], it is now in the hands of you and [Secretary of the Navy Frank] Knox — the Army and the Navy.”⁴³⁾ Yet the *Tsukurukai*’s assertion that Japan to that point had continued the negotiations “while giving thought to war against the United States” is a masterful understatement. As early as 6 September — nearly three months prior to the Hull Note — Japan’s policymakers agreed: “In the event that there is no prospect of our demands being met by the first ten days of October ... we will immediately decide to commence hostilities against the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands.”⁴⁴⁾ Prime Minister Konoe’s resignation in October temporarily halted the momentum, although again on 1 November the Japanese government — some three weeks prior to the Hull Note — stipulated that should the Japanese-American negotiations prove unsuccessful, then war would begin on 1 December.⁴⁵⁾ At the same time, Japanese policymakers never seriously considered making such concessions to the United States as might have ensured those negotiations’ success.⁴⁶⁾ Looking back on the failed negotiations a decade after the event, Japan’s Foreign Ministry remarked simply: “Japan at the time should have made difficult concessions.”⁴⁷⁾ It is telling that even today the *Tsukurukai* appear unable to make those concessions.

The above analysis has shown that the *Tsukurukai* have dispensed with both the interpretations of historians and with the historical record itself in pursuit of their ideologically-driven reconstruction of Japan’s pre-Pearl Harbor diplomatic history. In short, they have laid most — if not all the blame — for the Pacific War at the feet of the United States. Underlying this effort is a warped sense of recent Japanese history — not

as an aspect of human history, nor as part of the Asia-Pacific's regional history — but as “national” history, to be used less as a tool of education than as a tool of indoctrination. The *Tsukurukai* justify this effort with the facile insistence (as quoted at the outset of this paper) that “it is impossible for nations to share historical perceptions.”⁴⁸⁾ In thus perverting the historical discipline, the *Tsukurukai* have replaced the traditional historicizing question, “How it actually was?” with the very different question, “How it should be perceived?” And it is for this, one hopes, they will be most remembered.

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Notes

- 1) Dorothy Borg & Shumpei Okamoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931–1941*, (New York, 1973); and Nishio Kanji, et al., eds., *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho [New History Textbook]*, (Tokyo, 2001).
- 2) Borg & Okamoto, *Pearl Harbor as History*, xiv.
- 3) “Declaration,” Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, (http://www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/01_opi_02.html, last accessed 8 July 2004), 2 December 1996 (*Italics added*).
- 4) Laura Hein & Mark Selden, “The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change,” in Laura Hein & Mark Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, (Armonk, NY, 2000), 3.
- 5) Akira Iriye, “Introduction: Historical Scholarship and Public Memory,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 4 (Summer 1995), 90.
- 6) Gavan McCormack has written a perceptive essay about the *Tsukurukai* — with a particular focus on Fujioka Nobukatsu — that was published one year before *ARK*’s publication. See Gavan McCormack, “The Japanese Movement to ‘Correct’ History” in Selden & Hein, eds., *Censoring History*, 53–73.
- 7) For Itō’s signature contribution to modern Japanese historiography, see Itō Takashi, *Shōwa Shoki Seijishi Kenkyū: Rondon Kaigun Gunshuku Mondai o Meguru Shō Seiji Shūdan no Taikō to Teikei* [A Study of the Political History of the Early Showa Period: Conflict and Collaboration among Political Groups over the London Naval Treaty Controversy], (Tokyo, 1969). He has also edited an enormous number of pre-surrender statesmen’s diaries and memoranda, including that of Admiral Katō Kanji. See Itō Takashi, ed., *Kaigun: Katō Kanji Nikki* [The Navy: The Diary of Katō Kanji], (Tokyo, 1994).
- 8) “Shuchō” [Our Insistence], Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, (http://www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/01_opinion.html, last accessed 8 July 2004), 30 January 1997.
- 9) Ibid.
- 10) Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period*, (Westport, Connecticut, 2002), 11. For an essay which explores the initial politicization of the textbook issue (in 1982), see Chalmers Johnson, “The Patterns of Japanese Relations with China, 1952–1982,” *Pacific Affairs*, 59 (Autumn 1986), 419–25.
- 11) “Naze Kodomotachi no Kyōkasho wa kore hodo made Hizunde Shimatta no ka?” [Why have Children’s Textbooks Become this Warped?], Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, (http://www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/02_maso.html, last accessed 14 July 2004), January 2001.
- 12) “Declaration,” Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, (http://www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/01_opi_02.html, last accessed 8 July 2004), 2 December 1996.
- 13) Ibid.
- 14) “Kankoku no Hitobito e no Tegami” [A Letter to the Korean People], Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, (http://www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/01_opi_03.html, last accessed 8 July 2004), 19 May 2001.
- 15) For an outstanding essay that introduces the basic historiographical trends in postwar Japan, see Hatano

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- 16) Nishio Kanji, *Kokumin no Rekishi* [Citizen's History], (Tokyo, 2000), 598.
 - 17) Nishio, et al, eds., *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho*, 272.
 - 18) Texts of the treaties signed at the Washington Conference are reproduced in Daniel M. Smith, ed., *Major Problems in American Diplomatic History: Documents and Readings*, (Boston, 1964), II, 458–61.
 - 19) Nishio, et al, eds., *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho*, 259.
 - 20) Sadao Asada, "The Revolt Against the Washington Treaty: The Imperial Japanese Navy and Naval Limitation, 1921–1927," *Naval War College Review*, 46 (Summer 1993), 86. For an excellent treatment of the Washington system, see Akira Iriye, *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East*, (Chicago, 1990).
 - 21) Nishio, *Kokumin no Rekishi*, 593.
 - 22) Notwithstanding the *Tsukurukai*'s silence on these issues, they do receive attention in the following works: Michael Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941*, (Ithaca, NY, 1987), 91–114; Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, (Longman, 1987), 64 ff.; and Yoshitake Oka, *Konoe Fumimaro: A Political Biography*, (Tokyo: 1983), 79 ff.
 - 23) Nishio, et al, eds., *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho*, 272.
 - 24) US Department of State, Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931–1941, (Washington DC, 1943), 445–47. (*Italics added*). Regarding Grew and the policymaking process of which he formed a part, see Waldo Heinrichs, *American Ambassador: Joseph Grew and the Making of the American Diplomatic Tradition*, (New York, 1986). For an interpretation which emphasizes Washington's commitment to the Open Door over and above support for China, see Norman A. Graebner, "Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Japanese" Borg & Okamoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History*, 25–52. See also Dorothy Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933–1938: From the Manchurian Incident through the Initial Stage of the Sino-Japanese War*, (Cambridge, MA, 1964).
 - 25) Herbert Feis, *The Road to Pearl Harbor: The Coming of the War Between the United States and Japan*, (New York, 1967), 24.
 - 26) Hata Ikuhiko, "Continental Expansion" in John W. Hall, Marius B. Jansen, Madoka Kanai, & Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan, vol. 6, The Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, 1988), 308–09. (*Italics added*).
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 - 28) Nishio, et. al., *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho*, 273–74.
 - 29) Stephen E. Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor: The Failure of the Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II*, (Cambridge, MA: 1974), 213.
 - 30) The best account of Japan's move into northern Indochina remains Hata Ikuhiko, "The Army's Move into Indochina," in James W. Morley, ed., *The Fateful Choice: Japan's Advance into Southeast Asia, 1939–1941, Selected Translations from Taiheiyō Sensō e no Michi*, (New York, 1980), 172.
 - 31) The terms of the Axis Pact are reproduced in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter referred to as *FRUS*), *Japan 1931–1941*, vol. II, (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 165–66.
 - 32) See the minutes for the 19 September 1940 Imperial Conference in Nobutaka Ike, ed., *Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences*, (Stanford, 1967), 9.
 - 33) Quoted in Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, (New York, 2000), 374.
 - 34) Regarding Matsuoka, see David J. Lu, *Agony of Choice: Matsuoka Yōsuke and the Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1880–1946*, (Lanham, Md., 2002).
 - 35) *FRUS 1941*, vol. I, 358. (*Italics added*).
 - 36) Samuel E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, vol. I, The Battle of the Atlantic*, (Boston, 1947), 46–7; Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, vol. III, The Grand Alliance*, (Boston, 1950), 137–38.
 - 37) Hull to Roosevelt, 5 February 1941, *FRUS 1941*, vol. IV, 22.
 - 38) Quoted in Peter Mauch, "Revisiting Nomura's Diplomacy: Ambassador Nomura's Role in the Japanese-American Negotiations, 1941," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 38 no. 3 (Summer 2004), 362–62.

- 39) See Peter Mauch, "Maverick Admiral: Nomura's Ambassadorial Appointment, 1940," *forthcoming*.
- 40) Itō Takashi & Nomura Minoru, eds., *Kaigun Taishō Kobayashi Seizō Oboegaki* [The Memoranda of Admiral Kobayashi Seizō], (Tokyo, 1981), 86.
- 41) Mauch, "Revisiting Nomura's diplomacy," 369.
- 42) Regarding the Japanese Government's decision to move into southern Indochina following the opening of the German-Soviet war, see *Ibid.*, 368–75.
- 43) Henry L. Stimson & McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War*, (New York, 1947), 389.
- 44) "The Essentials for Carrying Out the Empire's Policies," Adopted by the Imperial Conference, 6 September 1941, reproduced in Ike, ed., *Japan's Decision for War*, 135.
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- 46) Regarding Japan's diplomatic strategy in November, see Mauch, "Revisiting Nomura's Diplomacy," 375–82.
- 47) Quoted in Ogura Kazuo, *Yoshida Shigeru no Jimon: Haisen, Soshite Hōkokusho 'Nihon Gaikō no Kago'* [Yoshida Shigeru's Self-Questioning: Defeat in War and Reports, 'Mistakes in Japanese Diplomacy'], (Tokyo, 2003), 189–92.
- 48) "Declaration," Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, (http://www.tsukurukai.com/02_about_us/01_opi_02.html, last accessed 8 July 2004), 2 December 1996 (*Italics added*).