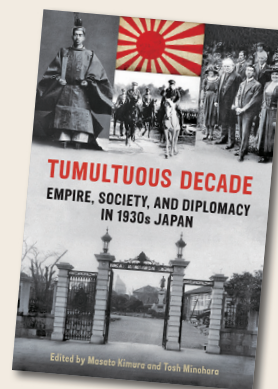


BOOK REVIEW

Tumultuous Decade: Empire, Society, and Diplomacy in 1930s Japan

Edited by Masato Kimura and Tosh Minohara

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Tumultuous Decade is a bold rethinking, not only of Japanese history during the truly tumultuous decade of the 1930s, but also, and more broadly, of what it means to do Japanese history for any period. As Akira Iriye puts it in his Preface, “[*Tumultuous Decade* is part of] an ambitious new series, ‘Japan and Global Society,’ [that] will explore how Japan has defined its identities and objectives in the larger region of Asia and the Pacific and, at the same time, how the global community has been shaped by Japan and its interactions with other countries” (p. vii). This project of “rescuing history from the nation” goes beyond fashionable transnationalism to encompass even “non-national entities, such as regions, religions, and civilizations” (p. viii). There is also in this “hyper-transnationalism” something of a changing of the guard heralded by the publication of this book; pushing back against “a wave of post-modernism” in history departments, the editors decided to work beyond the American academy and collaborate with their colleagues across the Pacific. Eschewing theory, questioning standard narratives, and dedicated to the rigorous research and objective scholarship that remain the hallmarks of the historical profession, the eleven scholars who have contributed to this work are to be commended for returning to the archives and, at times, radically reconceptualizing one of the most difficult periods in all of modern Japanese history. *Tumultuous Decade* has big goals, and it succeeds splendidly.

The book is divided into three sections. Part One, Economics, Culture, Society, and Identity, contains exciting research into the *zaikai*, the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, pan-Asianism as compared with pan-Islamism, and the 1940 National Eugenics Law. Part Two, The Empire and Imperial Concerns, comprises three essays: one on social work in colonial Taiwan, one on collaboration and conflict in wartime Korea, and, intriguingly, one by new scholar Yuka Fujioka on public diplomacy by Japanese immigrants to the United States. Part Three, High Diplomacy and the Statesmen, has, to my mind, some of the most compelling essays of the entire volume. Here, we have new, and sometimes extensively reworked, portraits of Uchida Kōsai and his post-League of Nations withdrawal foreign policy, the diplomatic “gamble” of Matsuoka Yōsuke, the security policies of Admiral Toyoda Teijirō, and Tōgō Shigenori’s role in the fateful decision-making that culminated in war with the United States.

Space allows me to focus on just one essay from each section of this altogether fine book. In chapter Three Section One, Cemil Aydin’s “Japanese Pan-Asianism through the

Mirror of Pan-Islamism” situates Japanese pan-Asianism within the evolving search for an “‘alternative’ vision of world order” (p. 44) in the 1930s. In the 1920s, Aydin argues, such a conception of Japan was “irrelevant,” because diametrically opposed to the confident post-WWI internationalism that drove Japan’s foreign policy. Some forty years earlier, though, pan-Asianism had actually been redundant, because early pan-Asianists (and, indeed, pan-Islamists) largely agreed with the European project of civilization and enlightenment—they simply asked that that project be expanded to include non-Europeans, as well. Aydin reminds us that it was the romantic critiques of European superiority by Westerners themselves that inspired some of the most passionate pan-Asia partisans in the East, including Okakura Tenshin and Rabindranath Tagore. But as the discourse on comparative civilizations shaded into more sinister rankings based on race, internationalism became fraught with alienation and schemes for grand assimilation. In 1907, for example, South Manchuria Railway president Gotō Shinpei expressed to Resident General of Korea Itō Hirobumi his desire to unite Japan and China in reclaiming “Asia for the Asians.” Itō warned Gotō not to use such language lest it alienate Japan’s Western allies. While the cooperation between Japan and the United Kingdom held sway, pan-Asianism was downplayed, but when Japan’s involvement in the world order began to break down, largely after Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931, pan-Asianism assumed a powerful new rhetorical force as a justification for Japan’s alternative vision of regional involvement. Ottoman intellectuals, too, had turned from engaged civilizational interaction to stricter pan-Islamist opposition, and largely for the same reason. After the end of WWII, pan-Asianists and pan-Islamists alike became scapegoats, their once-popular views now denounced by the very intellectuals who had formerly subscribed to them. This powerful current of revisionism, Aydin argues, has affected the way we understand the pan- movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In Section Two, Yuka Fujioka’s “The Thought War: Public Diplomacy by Japan’s Immigrants in the United States” provides compelling new insights into the issue of *issei* and *nikkei* in America before WWII. Fujioka reanimates the familiar points of this narrative, including the 1924 act banning Japanese immigration to the United States, into a dialectic through the inclusion of the Gaimushō’s larger strategies involving Japanese emigrés in North America. The Gaimushō, Fujioka argues, was trying to achieve a delicate balance between American continental expansion, the internal politics of exclusion and immigration in the U.S., *issei* and *nikkei* concerns, and superior Chinese diplomacy, especially in the wake of Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and her hostility toward China after 1937. As Fujioka points out, the anti-Japanese turn in American politics prompted Tokyo to take a fresh look at its diplomatic practices. “The addition of public diplomacy to [the Gaimushō’s] arsenal,” Fujioka explains, “was a turning point for Japanese foreign policy” (p. 163). Ironically, the Japanese population of the United States was so vociferously pro-Japan that it caused some embarrassment to the Gaimushō. But as the Japanese faced increasingly fewer options for engagement with American society and politics, they supported Japan with ever greater intensity. The Gaimushō became an alternative to the ballot box, a means by which *issei* and *nikkei* could influence, however indirectly, the policy of the country in which they lived. Fujioka is to be commended for her new interpretation of this period, especially since in 1996 the FBI destroyed many contemporary documents. Indeed, the Japanese Association of America (JAA) still has not opened its archives. The relocation of Japanese-Americans also meant that vital records were often lost, and pro-Japan documents were widely destroyed

after Pearl Harbor by fearful *issei* and *nikkei*. Today, the quest for reparations means that many surviving *issei* and *nikkei* are reluctant to share their earlier allegiance to Japan, for fear they harm their chances of an apology for President Roosevelt's internment policies. All of this makes the study of Japanese immigrants in the 1930s in the U.S. a challenging historical enterprise.

The last section is, to my mind, the strongest of the three, but which essay to highlight? Rustin Gates' "Meiji Diplomacy in the Early 1930s: Uchida Kōsai, Manchuria, and Post-withdrawal Foreign Policy" is a perfect example of the multiple-archives-based scholarship on which this entire volume is based. Uchida Kōsai is often remembered as having turned sharply to the right after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Gates, though, sees Uchida as essentially a Meiji diplomat trying to cultivate bilateral relations with individual Western powers in an attempt to maintain Japan's position in Manchuria. Gates positions Uchida's diplomacy, and in particular the Manchurian crisis (1931–33) "[as] the last gasp of Meiji imperialism, rather than the first volley of Shōwa militarism" (p. 190). Gates here follows Uchiyama Masakuma in seeing great consistency in Kasumigaseki *seitō gaikō* (Kasumigaseki diplomacy), whose overarching goals from early Meiji had been to join the ranks of the foreign imperial powers, and be viewed by those powers as equals. As for Uchida's infamous "scorched earth" remark, Gates brilliantly reconstructs the diplomatic and political context of those very carefully chosen words to show that, on the one hand, the remark was actually received favorably or with indifference by diplomats and journalists in the West (with Japan watcher Hugh Byas praising it fulsomely), while on the other hand the main target of the pronouncement was probably those in the military who favored a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union over expansion into Siberia. Thus, Uchida remained a savvy practitioner of the Meiji art of intelligent realism in foreign affairs. Gates' essay is a masterly critical rethinking of a controversial figure, who is all too often portrayed one-dimensionally in historical narratives.

The very breadth of *Tumultuous Decade* may make some professors reluctant to assign it to their undergraduates or graduates. The essays' trans-archival nature sometimes makes this volume's constituent parts difficult to classify. This is precisely the point, I think; even if the book as a whole is a taxonomic challenge, individual essays will greatly complement courses on diplomacy, law, colonialism, intellectual history, empire, business and institutional history, and twentieth century East Asian history in general. And, any essay in *Tumultuous Decade* would be a model for teachers of the discipline of history. *Tumultuous Decade* is historical scholarship at its very best, and one looks forward with great excitement to the future work of its contributors.

Reviewed by Jason Morgan