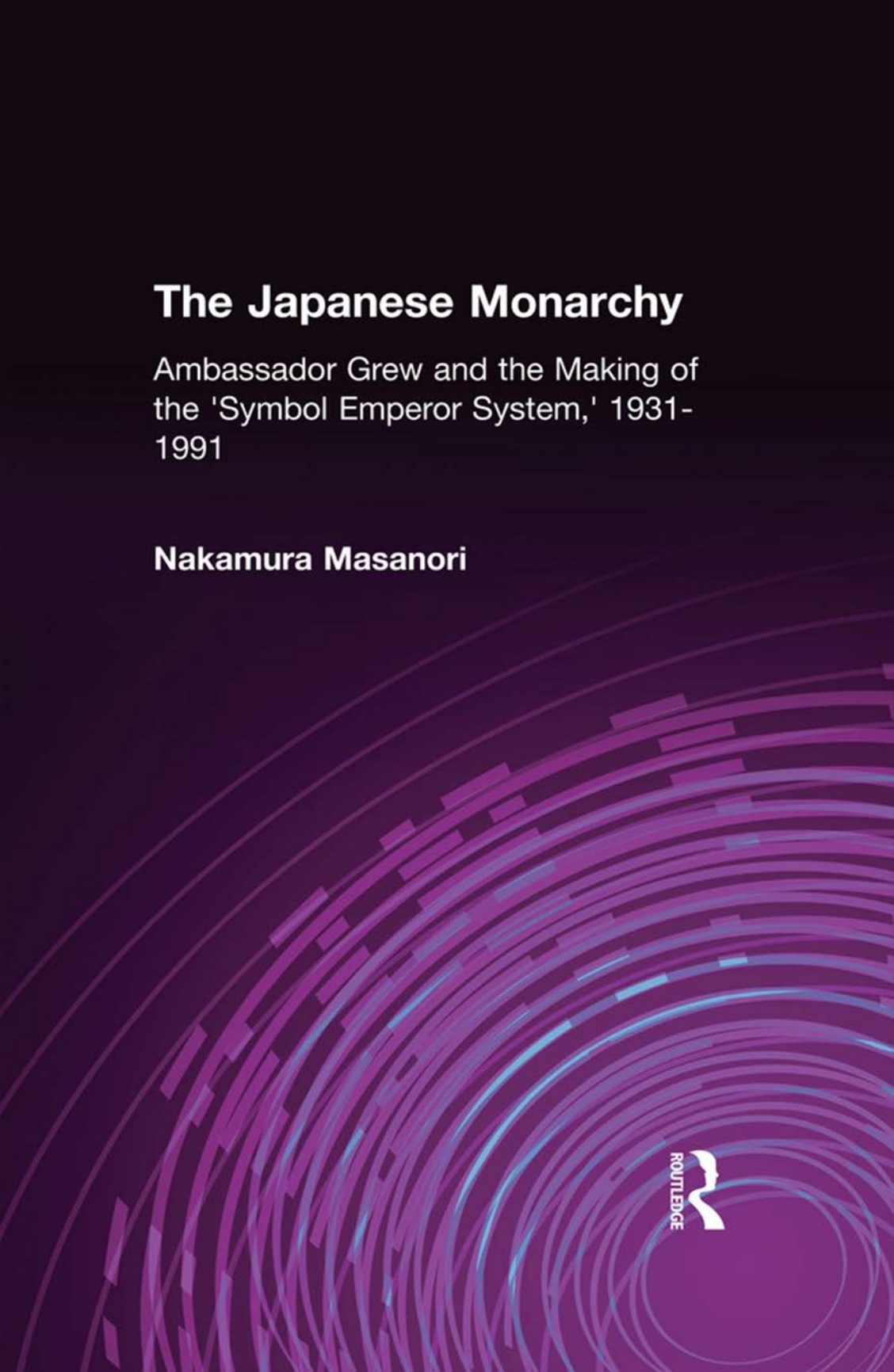
The Japanese Monarchy

Ambassador Grew and the Making of the 'Symbol Emperor System,' 1931-1991

Nakamura Masanori



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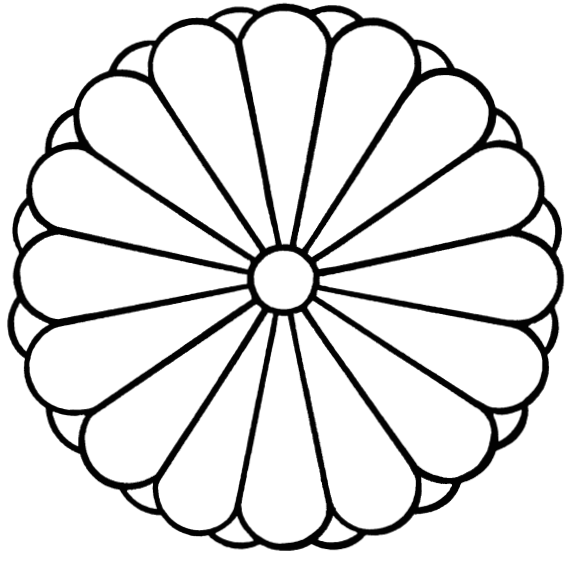

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Preface

The author of this book, Nakamura Masanori, was ten years old when he heard Emperor Hirohito announce the end of World War II. Growing up in wartime Tokyo, he was evacuated to the countryside to escape American bombing and later witnessed Japan's defeat and occupation by American armed forces. By the time Nakamura entered university in 1957, Japan's rise from the ashes of war was well underway; and when he published his first major work of history in 1972, Japan had catapulted into the front rank of economic powers and was reaping the benefits of uninterrupted economic growth.

Over the next ten years, however, as Japan continued its extraordinary economic growth, the political and economic milieu that had once been so congenial steadily eroded, while trade "frictions" and misunderstandings with the United States signaled the return of an increasingly conflictual international environment. At the same time, a more assertive Japanese nationalist sentiment began to manifest itself. Drawing strength mainly from the triumphs of the Japanese economy, the new nationalism also took delight in Japan's long history and in the imperial institution, whose postwar form was that of a "symbol" emperor system, which lent itself to diverse interpretations. The Shōwa Emperor reinforced this sense of pride in continuity with the past by his own persistent denial that defeat in war and constitutional revision had brought about any sharp break in the position of the monarchy under the new constitution.

In these circumstances, Nakamura began to reflect on the Japanese view of the emperor and the public debate about continuity and change in postwar history. Turning to the study of the Japanese–U.S. relationship during the watershed decades of the 1930s and 1940s, he sought to understand where the confusion in the constitutional specification of the emperor originated. While in residence at Harvard University in 1979 and 1980, he read the unpublished memoirs of Thomas A. Bisson, a

leading Far East specialist who, during the 1930s and 1940s, had pioneered a radical critique of America's Asian policy. Shortly afterward he began studying the papers of Joseph C. Grew, the distinguished American ambassador to Japan during the decade 1932 to 1942. Skillfully using these and other contrasting English language sources, and querying scholars and witnesses in the United States and Britain, he proceeded to build his own image of Grew and to use him to scrutinize the role and position of the Japanese monarchy in the remaking of the Japanese–U.S. relationship after 1945.

The book that resulted from his research was published in 1989 under the title of *Shōchō tennōsei e no michi: Beikoku taishi Guruu to sono shūhen* (The road to the symbol emperor system: American Ambassador Grew and his contemporaries). In nine cogently argued chapters, Nakamura analyzes Grew's writings to learn how he viewed wartime Japan, its emperor and imperial institution, and what role Grew envisioned for the monarchy in a postsurrender state. Having returned to Washington in August 1942, nearly nine months after Pearl Harbor, Grew became in succession special adviser to the secretary of state, the director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, and, in 1944, under secretary of state to Cordell Hull and later Edward Stettinius and James F. Byrnes, in charge of planning for the defeat and surrender of Japan. In these important posts, he helped shape many basic decisions that still exert influence on the postwar Japanese state and on U.S.–Japanese relations.

The first notable feature of Nakamura's assessment of Grew concerns his relationship with those whom he called the "moderates" around the throne. Nakamura shows that Grew, who could neither read nor speak Japanese, subscribed to the views of people like Kabayama Aisuke, Shidehara Kijūrō, Makino Nobuaki, and Yoshida Shigeru. Grew's Japanese contacts, in other words, were limited to business magnates, cosmopolitan admirals of the imperial navy who occupied high positions in government, pro–Anglo-American diplomats in the Foreign Ministry, and members of the emperor's entourage. Grew believed that these men, whose names he always tried to conceal, were Western-style liberals, cut in the mold of the Saltonstalls, the Sedgwicks, and the Peabodys, whom he had known from his days in Boston. They served as his pipeline to the emperor and provided him with their own "pendulum theory of Japanese history." According to

this view, Japanese development alternated between periods of extreme nationalism and antiforeignism and periods of international cooperation and conciliation. Grew's innate optimism and his belief that the pendulum would soon swing in America's favor may account for the overly complacent view of Japanese politics found in his reports to Washington. As Japan moved ever deeper into war, Grew failed to grasp the dynamics of Japanese politics and, in the end, failed to understand that the court had formed an alliance with the military at the start of the 1940s that made the Pacific War possible.

Nevertheless, Grew wanted power after Japan's defeat to return to these prewar elites—men of proven credentials as "moderates"—so that they might run the country in the same peaceful, constitutional manner that he imagined they had done during the 1920s. It was largely because of their connections with Grew that defenders of the status quo like Shidehara and Yoshida were able to become prime ministers after the war. Understandably, then, the first feature of Nakamura's approach is to show, at the outset, that postwar Japanese politics cannot be understood without a firm grasp of prewar and wartime political history.

A second feature of Nakamura's account is his balanced assessment of Grew's achievements. He notes how T. A. Bisson, Owen Lattimore, Edmund Wilson, and Andrew Roth, among others on the left, easily perceived the weaknesses in Grew's analysis of Japanese wartime politics. These wartime writers accused the professional diplomat of practicing "court diplomacy" while neglecting to analyze Japan's social and economic structure and its potential for mass popular movements. Above all, they recognized that Grew clung to the vision of the emperor as a peace-loving man who had consistently opposed the militarists and could by counted on to exert himself for peace in the future.

Nakamura shows the flaws in Grew's understanding of Japan and the imperial institution. But as a historian concerned primarily with discovering facts about Grew that illuminate his role in making the "symbol" emperor system, he emphasizes where Grew's instincts were sound. Grew was correct, for example, in thinking that the emperor, who straddled all the elites, was the key to Japan's unconditional surrender. He was also on firm ground in arguing that militarism could be disentangled from both the emperor system and Shinto, and that the

monarchy, with its power of the imperial rescript, could be used positively for American purposes.

At the same time, Nakamura emphasizes the paternalistic class basis of Grew's monarchism. Grew viewed the Japanese people as docile children who would "disintegrate" without intelligent leadership. A traditional conservative who identified with those of similar upper-crust background, he had the same low regard for the Japanese people's capacity for democratic rule as did the Japanese "moderates." Given his distaste for those who embraced egalitarian political aspirations, it is no wonder that Grew disregarded the warning of his critics against preserving an institution designed for manipulation by elites.

An important aspect of Nakamura's account is its focus on Grew's pivotal role in preserving the Japanese monarchy. American planners for the postsurrender occupation had to decide whether to retain the institution of the throne and use the powers of the individual who occupied it, or abolish it and force the emperor to step down. Grew was the first high American official publicly to advocate retaining the monarchy as a stabilizing force in a time of cataclysmic military defeat, using its power to control the people, and working through the Japanese civil bureaucracy to effect occupation goals. He believed that Emperor Hirohito (whom he always regarded as "purely a symbol") could be made to play an indispensable role in minimizing American battle losses, avoiding political chaos, and facilitating occupation reforms. Yet even Grew never imagined that the same emperor who had led the Japanese nation through the war would be able to evade his legal and moral responsibilities and remain on the throne after the surrender.

As Nakamura shows, the scenario for Japan's surrender that Grew envisioned in 1945 actually came to pass. Hirohito used his constitutional power and charismatic authority to announce Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation on August 15, 1945, whereupon millions of Japanese troops in all the war theaters of Asia and the Pacific obediently laid down their arms, just as Grew had predicted they would. A final battle on the Japanese home islands that Grew believed would have cost tens of thousands of American and Japanese lives was thereby avoided. A few weeks later General MacArthur arrived in Japan and threw his support to the emperor and the "moderate" politicians who in the 1930s had implanted in Grew's mind the notion that

the emperor had been an opponent of General Tōjō and his group of military extremists.

Grew retired from government service after Japan's surrender. He continued to maintain an interest in General MacArthur's conduct of the occupation, however, and was no doubt surprised and disquieted when MacArthur stripped the emperor of the rights of sovereignty and all political powers. In 1948 Grew played a role, as honorary chairman of the American Council on Japan, in reversing many occupation reforms that he and other members of the American establishment, not to mention the Japanese ruling groups, regarded as "excesses." Basically, though, Grew agreed with the main lines along which postwar Japan was being reconstructed, with the monarchy given a new lease of life, with the emperor transformed by the new constitution into an icon of Japanese racial unity, and with Japan itself redefined in American strategy as a bulwark against communism.

American readers may find (as Japanese readers have) Nakamura's clarification of the origins of the keyword "symbol" in article 1 of the Constitution of Japan and his theses on "the third way" the two most original features of his analysis.

Having argued that Grew "was the first American to define the emperor as a "symbol," Nakamura shows in chapter 9 that the emperor's redefinition as a "symbol of the state and of the unity of the people" emerged from the complex interaction of three national sources. There was a British political discourse in which the writings of Walter Bagehot and the 1931 Statute of Westminster, written by Arthur Balfour, figured prominently. On the American side there were two lines of derivation of the "symbol" monarch notion, one going from Grew to Brigadier General Bonner Fellers to General MacArthur, the other deriving from the constitution drafters within General Headquarters. Finally, on the Japanese side, an indigenous discourse defined the emperor as a symbol of the nation in a sense quite different from either the American or British constructions.

What really counts for Nakamura is the long-term historical effect of this weaving of the vague word symbol into the constitution. The symbol concept in the English sense, the idea in the sense intended by the American constitution drafters in General Headquarters, and the idea of symbol monarch in the Japanese context all became intertwined. As a result, the emperor's position in postwar Japanese politics

has become exceedingly ill-defined, and the question of whether he is the head of state has been left undecided. This has allowed the postwar emperors to be utilized by successive conservative party governments for political purposes, contrary to the letter and the spirit of the constitution.

In appendix 2, Nakamura introduces a second fruitful thesis, this time concerning the path that Japan failed to take in 1945. Having earlier noted that "the symbol monarchy was a product of Japanese and American bilateral cooperation," he points out that there was a third option in addition to preserving or abolishing the monarchy, namely, "to differentiate the emperor from the institution of the throne and have Emperor Hirohito abdicate, leaving behind the emperor system as a political institution." Had all progressive forces taken that path, and had they later worked together to secure the democratic rights and other provisions pertaining to peace and the emperor in the constitution, Japan would have developed differently than it did. Today this proposition, like the issue of the Shōwa emperor's war responsibility, is helping to advance debate about the political results of the monarchy's retention in the postwar period.

The first nine chapters comprise the book as Nakamura originally wrote it for a Japanese audience. For the American edition, he has added two new chapters evaluating the monarchy's role in postwar politics, plus two appendices supplementing topics alluded to in the text. Chapter 10 spells out the continuing centrality of the emperor and the imperial house in domestic politics and foreign policy both during and after the occupation period. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the Shōwa Emperor did not stand outside the political process after Japan's defeat but was integral to it. Emperor Hirohito's 1947 message to General MacArthur recommending that the United States prolong its military occupation of the Ryukyu Islands was but one of several critical occasions in which he acted in violation of the new constitution that had stripped him of all political powers. Here readers can find more of the ingredients needed to understand a fundamental issue in postwar Japanese politics.

Finally, chapter 11 traces chronologically the fluctuations in the popularity of the emperor and the prestige of the imperial house between 1960 and 1990. At the start of this period, Japan was moving in to an era of full employment and accelerated economic growth, and the ruling conservatives began to lose the incentive to utilize the throne for

purposes of social control. But by the end of 1979, when the government legalized the system of era names, many signs pointed to a new stage in the uses of monarchical ritual for purposes of furthering national integration and celebrating national power.

During the 1980s, conservative business and political leaders, such as Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, began to give expression to a more self-centered, racially conscious nationalism, which once again placed the emperor at the center of national identity. Toward the end of that decade, on September 19, 1988, the Shōwa Emperor fell ill, and three and a half months later died. His state funeral took place amid an unprecedented media campaign of "self-restraint," which lasted over half a year. The image of an open, pluralistic Japanese society suddenly gave way in this period to the older image of a closed, conformist society in which the principle of freedom of expression yielded to the ideal of all Japanese hearts beating as one for the sake of the emperor. A year later Emperor Akihito carried out his formal rituals of succession to the throne amid an opposite mood of national exaltation. But, as Nakamura notes, the enthronement of Japan's first real "symbol" emperor did not unambiguously advance the cause of democracy in Japan. For instead of being carried out on the basis of the postwar constitution, which reflected the reform of the Japanese monarchical tradition and the rejection of the notion of a state based on myth, Emperor Akihito's "Great Food Offering Ceremony" drew on rituals from the culture of Meiji era absolutism, which assumed that he was still a living deity. Thus, in affirming his support for the "peace constitution" at the very start of his reign, Akihito also reasserted the dangerous fiction that no change had occurred in the position of the emperor under the Meiji Constitution and the new constitution. In so doing, he himself restated the problem of continuity and rupture in the emperor system.

Nakamura concludes by emphasizing how profoundly antithetical to Japanese democracy has been the taboo on discussion of Emperor Hirohito's role in history. Today the Japanese media continue to underwrite the mystique of the throne by presenting it in the highest honorifics, while conservative cabinets show a disposition to exploit the emperor's authority for their own political advantage, and new grassroots conservative movements endeavor to make him the formal head of state. These tendencies may be traced back to decisions taken in

1945–46 by the governments of the United States and Japan to retain the emperor system in the form of a symbol monarchy. By his unyielding pursuit of the problem of continuity and change in the emperor system, Nakamura has made an important contribution to an ongoing political and historical debate.

Herbert P. Bix
April 26, 1992

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Introduction

THE MAKING OF *TEN YEARS IN JAPAN*

AN AMERICAN career diplomat and one of the most illustrious ambassadors ever posted to Tokyo, Joseph Clark Grew (1880–1965) spent nearly ten years in Japan between 1932 and 1942, leaving his mark on U.S.-Japanese relations in many ways. During his term of office, he was able to experience at first hand the events that led to irrevocable conflict between the two countries. He closely observed the rise of Japan's military after the Manchurian Incident (1931), Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations (March 1933), the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (July 1937), Japan's entry into the Tripartite Alliance with Germany and Italy (September 1940), the imposition of economic sanctions against Japan (July 1941), and finally, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 1941).

Grew's main work, *Ten Years in Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster), is a memoir of his experiences that was widely read when it was published in May 1944. In Japan, too, Ishikawa Kinichi's translation of the book, which appeared in 1958, attracted a considerable readership.

From March 1979 to December 1980 I was a visiting professor at the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University, working on the subject of American perceptions of Japan in the 1930s and 1940s, which naturally led me to take a keen interest in Grew. Fortunately, Harvard possesses in the world-famous Houghton Library an outstanding collection of rare books and documents, many of which pertain to Grew. These include diaries, letters, speeches, and talks, as well as numerous telegrams, newspaper and magazine clippings, personal memos, and other miscellaneous items—the amount of first-rate material is remarkable. The most valuable records, however, are Grew's diaries and letters, which best

reveal his views and particular approach toward Japan.

Historian Waldo H. Heinrichs's excellent book, *American Ambassador: Joseph C. Grew and the Development of the United States Diplomatic Tradition* (1966), makes extensive use of these sources. However, while Heinrichs's balanced commentary on Grew is a valuable source of reference, I would like in this book to build up my own image of the man, basing my work on a personal reading of these documents.

I shall focus on Grew's role in the formation of U.S. postwar policy for Japan, and in particular, the part he played in the birth of what is known as the "symbol emperor system." I begin with 1942, when Grew returned to the United States after the start of the war, and carry the story forward, first to 1946–47, during which the occupation of Japan under General MacArthur was established, and then beyond to the present day.

In considering Grew's diaries and letters, several points should be noted. First, at 554 pages in length, the book *Ten Years in Japan* represents only one-tenth of the original diaries. Concerning the great volume of material that had been omitted from the published book, Grew made the following comment in his foreword.

> This book contains only a small fraction of the original diary which, for the past ten years, fills thirteen large typewritten volumes quite apart from many other volumes of my letters, speeches, records of conversations, and pertinent press clippings. Many of the items in the original possess no permanent historic value. Others overlap. Still others cannot properly be published now. And since this is an intimate off-the-record journal I have also had to keep confidential the identity of many living colleagues and other individuals who might be embarrassed or suffer some personal consequence if their names were made known.[1]

If one compares the published version with the original, one can see that Grew indeed omitted some parts for reasons of space, while purposefully concealing others. After the above statement, he commented, "The main story has, however, not been injured by these omissions," but one should be wary of taking this at face value. I will deal in more detail in chapter 5 with the question of what he published and what he decided to hide.

The second point we should pay close attention to concerns the motives behind, and timing of, the publication of *Ten Years in Japan.*

Six thousand pages of Grew's diaries cover his period in Japan alone; he used them to record almost all daily events, as well as his personal experiences, from the point of his inauguration as U.S. ambassador in 1932. Grew maintained that he did not write his diary with a view to publication; it was, rather, a personal record of his experiences intended for his own reference when considering ideas for diplomatic strategy.

While this was indeed one aspect of the diaries, Grew also clearly lamented the fact that so little was known about Japan in the United States, where all too often, historical accounts had been distorted through ignorance or prejudice. He was convinced that "accurate historical records must be based on the precise records and comments of the time," and thus it seems natural to assume that he was hoping to make future use of the diaries in this way.

As U.S.-Japanese relations deteriorated further during 1941, Grew sent the diaries to his friend and predecessor as U.S. ambassador to Japan, William R. Castle. In letters to Castle dated March 22 and May 8, 1941, Grew asked him to store the diaries away in a cellar, or some other hiding place, should they pose any problem. If the diaries had to be destroyed, they were to be burnt rather than shredded. Grew also commented that the manuscript was completely unabridged, except for a single entry that contained top-secret information regarding a matter in which he was still involved. All of this shows the importance Grew attached to the diaries, which he naturally used as his main source when he came to publish *Ten Years in Japan*. Given their contents, however, the timing and the form of their publication were matters for careful consideration, not only by Grew, but also by the U.S. State Department.

Motives Behind the Publication

Moves to publish Grew's diaries seem to have begun as soon as he returned to the United States: on October 25, 1942, Grew noted that four publishing companies had already made offers to Chester Kerr at the Office of War Information. Of these, Grew decided on Simon and Schuster, whose letter had impressed him by its concern with patriotic sentiments over commercial considerations: whereas the other companies were aiming at a sales price of $1.50 to $2.00, Simon and

Schuster's price was only $1.00, which suited Grew's main aim of reaching as many readers as possible. (The book was in fact eventually published at $3.75.) Various titles such as "The Strength of the Enemy" and "A Message to Our People" had been suggested to Kerr, but as none of these appealed to Grew, a neutral title was chosen.

Although both a publisher and a title had been found, there remained the major task of editing such a large volume of material. At the time, Grew was holding public office as an adviser to the State Department and was not permitted to publish unedited diary entries that were classified as state secrets. Furthermore, confidential telegrams sent from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo had to be individually cleared for use in the book, by obtaining the permission of both the secretary of state and the secretary of war (see, for instance, Grew's letter to Secretary of War Henry Stimson on May 1, 1943). As one can see from his letter to Simon and Schuster of July 10, 1943, Grew went through the manuscript in minute detail, making many deletions and revisions before its eventual publication.

Despite all Grew's meticulous efforts, however, on August 12, 1943, Dr. E. Wilder Spaulding, chief of the State Department's Division of Research and Publication, advised him against using unaltered versions of official documents such as telegrams and letters, until the publication of the State Department's own white paper, "Peace and War, United States Foreign Policy 1931–1941" (published in 1943). Secretary of State Cordell Hull likewise indicated that there would be no objections to the direct quotation of government documents once the white paper had been published. Given such restrictions, Grew was unable to meet Simon and Schuster's wish to publish *Ten Years in Japan* in time for Christmas 1943. In a letter to the publisher on July 10 of that year, he even proposed delaying the date of publication until the following summer.

By early 1944, the tide of the war was turning inexorably against the Japanese. On February 1, U.S. forces landed on Kwajalein and Ruott in the Marshall Islands, and six days later, the 6,800 troops of the Japanese garrison there were effectively wiped out. On the 17th, an aerial attack on the Truk Islands inflicted huge damage on the Japanese fleet and air force. This, combined with the fact that in January the Soviet Army had embarked on a massive counteroffensive on the "Leningrad front," forcing the German army into retreat, meant that in

both Europe and the Pacific, the Axis powers were being driven into a corner.

In the midst of this, the United States began in earnest to draw up its postwar plans for Germany and Japan. On January 15, 1944, it established the Office of Far Eastern Affairs within the State Department, under the directorship of Stanley Hornbeck of the "China crowd."* But after three and a half months, Hornbeck was replaced by Grew, thus strengthening the voice of the "Japan crowd," who were then able to exert a strong influence over State Department policy decisions on Japan. Grew was by now chiefly concerned with formulating surrender conditions that the Japanese government could be persuaded to accept.

From the perspective of U.S.-Japanese relations, the time was now ripe for the publication of Grew's book. As he wrote in the preface to the Japanese translation: "The motives for the U.S. publication of this book in 1944 were twofold. The first was to describe clearly the developments and trends within every area of Japanese society leading to the outbreak of war in 1941. The second was to attempt to create a more profound and educated image of Japan and the Japanese in the minds of the American public."[2]

Thus, Grew's aim was to correct the American people's views of Japan and the Japanese. He believed that it would never be possible to establish the conditions for a constructive peace between the United States and Japan without breaking down the prejudices of ordinary Americans, who believed in such wartime slogans as "The only good Jap is a dead Jap," and the mythology of "that barbaric, cunning, and cruel race." In *Ten Years in Japan*, Grew therefore repeatedly emphasized that there existed peace-loving Japanese, led by the emperor and the moderates, who had no connection with the fanatical military. He was, however, well aware that such opinions would be unpopular, and even dangerous, in the United States at that time. Indeed, while Secretary of State Hull of the China crowd (who were opposed to the emperor) indicated that his resistance to the early publication of *Ten Years in Japan* was based on concerns regarding the use of official documents, the content of the book must surely have influenced his decision.

*"China crowd" and "Japan crowd" (or "lobby") are terms used to describe U.S. pressure groups and bureaucratic policy currents that were supportive of either China or Japan.—Trans.

When it was finally published, *Ten Years in Japan* caused a great stir. It reached number two on the *New York Times* best-seller list for June and July, and reviews were printed in nearly all the influential regional newspapers. This was because it went beyond the scope of a personal diary, presenting themes that concerned the basis of future policy toward Japan, and in particular, the issue of the emperor.

The publication of *Ten Years in Japan* was therefore set against the complex state of affairs outlined above. Grew was promoted from director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs to undersecretary of state in December 1944, whereupon his career became ever more intimately connected to the fate of postwar Japan. However, some of Grew's activities after his return home in August 1942 were certainly a little unexpected. What message did he have for the American people, and what was his vision for a future Japan?