

WARS AND RUMOURS OF WAR
1918–1945:
JAPAN, THE WEST AND
ASIA PACIFIC

SELECTED CONTEMPORARY READINGS
ON CRISES AND CONFLICT

SERIES 1: 1918–1937
FROM ARMISTICE TO NORTH CHINA



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ROGER BUCKLEY



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SERIES 1: 1918–1937 FROM ARMISTICE TO NORTH CHINA

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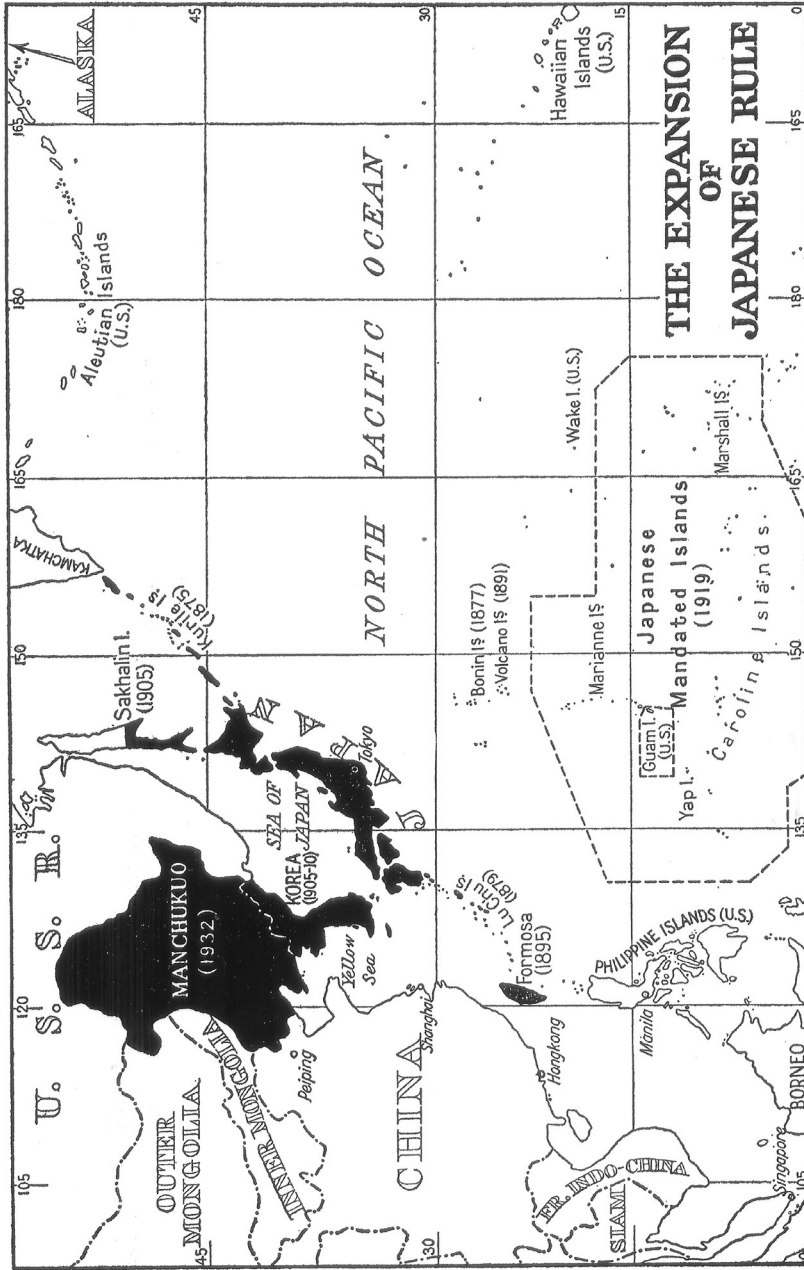
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Reprinted from William Henry Chamberlain's article, 'Naval Bases in the Pacific', *Foreign Affairs*, April 1937

'In the matter of morality, if we are not retrograding, we,
at least, are stationary'

Ascot Heath Meeting, *The Sporting Review*, July 1839

*

'Not a masterpiece'

Joseph Conrad on Mankind

*

'Our temptation is still to look upon the European stage as of the first importance. It is no longer so....These are not really first-rate events any more...Undoubtedly, the scene has shifted away from Europe to the Far East and to the Pacific. The problems of the Pacific are to my mind the world problems of the next fifty years or more.'

General Smuts, Imperial Conference, June 1921

FOREWORD

BY

ANTONY BEST



There are many kinds of sources available to those who work in the field of international history. The most obvious are the official records of governments, including those of the foreign ministry, and it is to these, and especially the latter, that historians usually devote the majority of their attention. There is, though, a problem in the tendency to rely on the words of civil servants. Their prose may be elegant and their analysis sophisticated, but one needs to remember that in the end it is politicians who make decisions. In order to understand why politicians think as they do, one has cast one's net wider to capture more sources and to look at the environment within which decisions are made. In that regard, one important, if often neglected, treasure-trove of material is the contemporary journalism that appeared in periodicals and the books written by regional specialists.

The importance of this material is that these essays, written by politicians, diplomats, intellectuals and publicists, helped to frame the nature of the debate about international politics. They are revealing in many ways. They can, for example, bring our attention to contemporary crises that are now forgotten because they did not in the end lead to conflict. They also show that there are often unofficial channels of communication in operation in international affairs that are seeking to influence formal diplomacy. Moreover, they provide insights, more clearly than diplomats' correspondence, into the normative assumptions and perceptual stereotypes of their times.

This two-series publication, *Wars and Rumours of War: Japan, the West and Asia Pacific, 1918–1945*, consists of twelve volumes of writings by a wide variety of protagonists and includes contributors from the United States, Japan, China and Britain. Among their number are politicians such as Franklin Roosevelt, Yosuke Matsuoka, Reijiro Wakatsuki, Takashi Hara, Shigenobu Okuma, T.V. Soong and Wang Chung-hui; diplomats such as Stanley Hornbeck, Hiroshi Saito, and Alfred Sze; and publicists and intellectuals such as Walter Lippmann, John Dewey, Nathaniel Peffer, K.K. Kawakami, A. Morgan Young, Hector Bywater, Hu Shih and Freda Utley.

The richness and diversity of these voices reflects a major trend in the journalism of the interwar period. The shock of the First World War led to a new fascination in international affairs and an urgent interest in how future war could be avoided. Accordingly, both in the United States and Britain, the 1920s saw the establishment of new monthly journals, such as *Foreign Affairs*, *Pacific Affairs* and *International Affairs*, which specialized in covering international and regional politics. While this trend was primarily associated with liberal intellectuals, the editors of these journals realized that true understanding could only come by providing a platform for a diversity of views. They therefore welcomed both conservative interpretations of politics from within their own societies and views from outside the Anglophone world, with the happy result that historians using this material are able to gain almost a full sense of the circumference of contemporary debate.

These volumes thus map the winding road that would eventually lead to the Asia-Pacific War drawing on a wide range of different voices which assist us in understanding the hopes for peace and cooperation and the fatal obstacles that lay in their path. They begin with the troubled aftermath of the First World War when Japan's imperialistic ambitions in China stood in stark contrast to the internationalist sentiments that now underpinned the American approach to foreign affairs, as epitomized by its understanding of the 'open door'. This stand-off led some to fear that a new war was in the making, but what, in fact, transpired at the Washington Conference of 1921–22 was a very welcome move to what appeared to be a new, stable international order in East Asia based on a reduction of armaments, in the shape of the naval arms limitation process, and a renewed commitment to the 'open door'. In other words, it appeared that internationalism had triumphed. This trend was then built upon over the next decade with the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 and the conclusion of the London naval treaty in 1930, both of which are covered here.

The problem, however, was that beneath the surface of international politics lay a number of intractable issues. Of these, the most difficult was the problem of Manchuria. In 1905 Japan had gained, as a result of its victory in the Russo-Japanese War, a dominant position in south Manchuria, which provided it with access to vital raw materials and security for its colonial possession, Korea. The question was what would become of these interests in the face of the rise of Chinese nationalism, which in the 1920s was clearly, as the contemporary articles in these volumes demonstrate, on the march. The answer came in September 1931 when, in a move as far from internationalism as imaginable, the local Japanese force in Mukden took unilateral action both to defend Japan's interests and to expand them by undertaking the conquest of the whole of Manchuria. In response, China appealed to the League of Nations and the United States for assistance, thus turning a regional incident into an international crisis and a crisis for internationalism.

Manchuria thus shattered the post-war consensus. It demonstrated that Japan would no longer respect the open door in China and it also soon led to the collapse of the naval arms limitation process. But Japan did not completely turn in on itself. It tried, as we can see in these volumes, to explain its policy in the contemporary Anglophone media and to pinpoint

FOREWORD

what it saw as the contradictions within the international order. It is easy to dismiss these essays as nothing more than propaganda, but if one is to understand the motivations behind Japan's actions it is important to reflect on the arguments that it used. It is also significant to note that Western intellectuals were themselves interested in what underlay Japan's new radicalism and what this said about how the international order could be improved.

The rapid escalation of tensions in East Asia meant, however, that there was no time for multilateral solutions. In the summer of 1937 Japan and China went to war, and the West was increasingly faced with the prospect that it would be drawn into its own conflict with the regime in Tokyo, while at the same time having to worry about the tide of events in Europe. In 1940 these two currents became one as Japan began to use the defeat of France as a means of building up a new sphere of influence in South-East Asia. From this point on war became an ever more likely outcome. Once that conflict opened in December 1941, Western commentators turned to a new if familiar agenda, namely how could such a war be avoided in the future. In other words, how could internationalism be revived and made more practical? The argument had therefore come full circle and was to have an important impact on post-war international politics and the shape of occupation policy.

The essays in this volume thus provide us with many important insights into the international politics of the interwar and wartime period. They are a valuable resource which present a rich diversity of views and which accordingly illuminate the ideas and issues that drove Japan towards its fatal collision with the United States. These sources have been neglected for too long and it is time that they were used more fully.

PREFACE



‘More cannon fodder’ was how my exhausted mother was first told by the doctor at Liverpool Maternity that she now had a son. Doubtless similar remarks were being rehearsed across the globe as World War Two reached what would soon prove to be its final months, yet this prediction could not have turned out to be more incorrect in my case. Aside from firing off blanks from a Lee-Enfield .303 blunderbuss on a miserable field day on Cannock Chase and one quite illegal RAF flight in my brother’s helicopter across Hong Kong to the New Territories in order to have breakfast in the Black Watch’s sergeants’ mess (with the painting celebrating the highlanders’ charge at Tel-el-Kabir on proud display), I have had absolutely no dealings with the military. Escaping national service and laughing off rudimentary civil defence measures introduced during the height of the Cold War, I have no first-hand experience of either conflict or any reckoning of the consequences of nuclear attack.

War, whether between states or in less conventional form, has passed me by. My generation’s good fortune was far from being the case for those who lived in the Asia Pacific between 1918 and 1945. My father, for example, was caught off-loading torpedoes at Singapore’s naval base when the city came under Japanese attack in early 1942 and was lucky to escape on the last merchantman to flee the doomed colony. Equally, my father-in-law who had known life in the French concession at Tientsin during the 1930s when working for a Japanese insurance company, was called up only to find that he was to be sent to headquarters in Tokyo and, though his family in central Tokyo was subject to violent fire-bombings before war’s end, he never experienced the miseries of the Burma front. Many millions of soldiers and civilians in the Asia Pacific from Manchuria and Mongolia to Nanking and as far south as New Guinea were to share a similar fate to those Japanese soldiers who first advanced and then, as the tide turned, retreated and died in the jungles, hills and plains of South-East Asia.

Wars and Rumours of War, 1918–1945 attempts to illustrate how conflict in Asia Pacific in all its myriad dimensions was seen by contemporaries in the years between 1918 and 1945. It places a succession of differing wars, some involving Great Powers over vast distances for regional hegemony, others of a more local but still disruptive nature and yet a third group where civil wars are fought out between competing armies for future control of the state, within their national and international political and

economic contexts. Since it deliberately employs a selection from the mountain ranges of English-language material written between 1918 and 1945 in either journal, book or pamphlet form there is little room for the historian's privileged use of hindsight. On offer is what politicians, scholars, admirals, officials and commentators of different states and diverse views wrote at the time to explain and analyse, defend and justify. It is broadly organized chronologically with authors from Japan, China, the United States and Britain in separate volumes. No alterations have been made to the texts and extracts with the result that, for example, the Japanese individuals appear in print as either Matsuoka Yosuke or Yosuke Matsuoka and place names vary considerably, thus Shantung or Shantong, and Peiping, Peking or Beijing.