

CHAPTER 3

Japan and the “Spirit of December 8”

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December 8, 1941, was a strange day in Japan. As poet and novelist Itō Sei passed by his neighbor’s house in Tokyo at around 1 p.m., he overheard the radio broadcast of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the invasion of Malaya, and the declaration of war against the United States and Britain. Exhilarated by the news, he decided to see what things were like in town. But whatever he saw felt subdued and not out of the ordinary. This was mystifying, Itō felt, for a country that had just declared war.¹ He took a bus to Shinjuku, which was too quiet for his liking. No other passenger even mentioned the war in passing. Itō itched to scream out, “At last, war has finally begun!” But he kept quiet, convinced that he was the only person excited by the news. From Shinjuku he made his way toward Ginza, where his strange day continued. He passed through Yotsuya, Hanzōmon, and Hibiya before noticing anything resembling excitement. Things finally changed when he reached the National Theater (Nihon Gekijo) in Yūryakuchō. He saw university students who seemed “a little worked up, speaking with frowns on their faces. But passersby were all sullenly reading the newspaper.” Itō finally went home and was restless that evening. Thrilled by what Japan had accomplished, he noted in his diary, “This is splendid. Japan’s attack is every bit as magnificent as that of the Russo-Japanese War.”²

What a difference a day made. In his diary on the following day, Itō reflected on the excitement boiling over in Tokyo. “Today everyone is beaming with joy [*kishoku arite akarui*]. This is entirely different from yesterday.”³ He surmised that nobody spoke of the war the previous day owing to the initial shock of the news. But given time to digest the gravity of Japan’s success, shock turned to joy. Not

two months later, he came to view the war in even more vivid and upbeat terms. On February 15, 1942, the day that Singapore fell, Itō could not contain his pleasure. "This war is bright," he wrote. "It certainly has brightened Japan even more than it has been since before the China Incident. And the gloominess [that had pervaded] just before the Greater East Asia War is also gone. This war is good. Bright."⁴

As Samuel Yamashita's chapter in this volume shows, Japanese subjects met the decision to wage war against the "Anglo-Saxon powers" with a mixture of emotions, from concern and dismay to exhilaration.⁵ Nonetheless, the pure excitement displayed by people like Itō Sei must be seen as the dominant narrative. The attacks of December 8 mobilized support from the broader populace, many of whom, like Itō Sei, now saw the war as "good" and "bright." This support was understandable. Government propaganda and media reports since the 1930s had emphasized that Japan was a long-term victim of Anglo-American arrogance and belligerence. Many Japanese thus rejoiced at the decision to strike back against their persecutors. Moreover, the stunning success of that strike, in the space of little more than a day, swept away the weariness and distress from four years of a drawn-out and demoralizing war in China. For those who had misgivings about the "China Incident," the undeclared total war raging in China, the war against the "Anglo-Saxon powers" placed the conflict in China in a new context. They now believed in good faith that Japan was fighting a "holy war," not to exploit its neighbors but to liberate Asia from the West.

The dizzying success of the attacks of December 8 generated a festive atmosphere and a sense of popular excitement for Japan's expanded war. In this sense, the outbreak of war brought about perhaps the most powerful moment of what Louise Young has called "imperial jingoism."⁶ The outbreak of war against the United States and Great Britain ensured popular commitment to Japan's effort to build a new empire that reached across Greater East Asia, from the cold woods of Sakhalin to the jungles of Indonesia, and from the Philippine tropics to the jungles and deltas of Burma.

MOBILIZED BEHIND JAPAN'S "BRIGHT" WAR

Itō Sei was by no means the only person who thought of Japan's war against Britain and America as both "good" and "bright." The broader public, too, was ecstatic. Many across Japan remembered the excitement as immediate and overpowering. Ikezaki Tadataka, a politician who earlier in his career wrote as a critic under the nom de plume of Akagi Kōhei, learned of the attack after taking a train to Ōsaka. He made his way to his office, only to find it buzzing with delight. "One and all," he wrote on December 14, 1941, "not even one person was unexcited.

Even [Nozaki's] timid wife had a smile on her face and tears in her eyes. Looking upon this, I suddenly felt my own eyes water. In that moment," he continued, "there were no words to express my state of mind. *At last we have done it!*" Ikezaki could not stop thinking about the momentous, history-changing decision to open hostilities against the Anglo-American powers. "This," he wrote, "is the most epoch-making event in the six-thousand years of world history."⁷

Of course, not everyone celebrated. Some who had substantial knowledge of the limits of Japanese power viewed the expanded war with dread. Ozaki Yukio, a maverick independent politician who had been critical of the growing influence of the military in public life, noted his concerns about the outbreak of war against the Allied powers. What worried him most was "the ecstatic response" of the people to Japan's military achievements. He thus responded by expressing his views on the war, in private, through two poems:

桶狭間の奇勝におごり本能寺の	
奇禍を招ける人な忘れん	
<i>Okehazama no</i>	Forget not he, whose
<i>Kishō ni ogori</i>	Arrogance in triumph at
<i>Honnōji no</i>	Okehazama
<i>Kika o mankeru</i>	Invited calamity
<i>Hito na wasuren</i>	On the grounds of Honnōji

詰手なき将棋をさしつ勝ち抜くと	
嘯く人のめでたからずや	
<i>Tsumete naki</i>	A fool's errand
<i>Shōgi o sashi tsutsu</i>	To press on playing shogi
<i>Kachi nuku to</i>	Deceiving oneself
<i>Usobuku hito no</i>	That victory lies ahead
<i>Medetakarazu ya</i>	Despite no hope of checkmate ⁸

Both poems served as private, diary-bound warnings. The "arrogance in triumph" of Ozaki's first poem referred to Oda Nobunaga, one of the three unifiers in Japan's warring states period. Although Nobunaga had achieved a great victory in the Battle of Okehazama in 1560, he would later be forced by one of his retainers to commit suicide. Pride, Ozaki hints, was Nobunaga's undoing. The second poem is an even harsher indictment of the decision to wage war against the Allied powers despite having no real way to win. Wishful thinking alone never won wars. Both poems thus point to the misplaced jingoism in the wake of the attacks of December 8 and suggest that the seeds had already been

sown for Japan’s future defeat. Far from feeling jubilant, Ozaki felt that the public should instead be worried.

Others responded in a similar way. Prince Higashikuni—Hirohito’s uncle—lamented in his diary on December 8, “With this, I knew that Japan had taken its first step to ruin, and I was disheartened.”⁹ Former prime minister Konoe Fumimaro and former foreign minister Matsuoka Yōsuke were similarly despondent.¹⁰ Konoe spent a dejected day on December 8 at the Peers Club in Tokyo. His downcast mood provided a stark contrast to the popular excitement among Japan’s nobility. He later told his aide and son-in-law, Hosokawa Morisada, “Our luck will not last more than two or three months at best.”¹¹ Matsuoka, too, reportedly wept in dismay. He told his private secretary, Saitō Yoshie, “I am now painfully aware that the signing of the Tripartite Pact was the biggest mistake of my lifetime. . . . When I think of this, it will bother me even after I die.”¹² Finally, political scientist Nanbara Shigeru bemoaned the war through the following *tanka* poems that convey his distress.

人間の常識を超え学識を超えておこれり日本世界と戦う	
<i>Ningen no</i>	Beyond common sense
<i>Jōshiki o koe</i>	Beyond any learning
<i>Gakushiki o</i>	It has happened—
<i>Koete okoreri</i>	Japan,
<i>Nihon sekai to tatakau</i>	At war against the world

日米英に開戦すとのみ八日朝の電車のなかの沈痛感よ	
<i>Nichi Bei-Ei ni</i>	Only the attack
<i>Kaisen su to nomi</i>	On America and England
<i>Yōka asa no</i>	Explains the sorrow
<i>Densha no naka no</i>	Permeating the train car
<i>Chintsūkan yo</i>	On the morning of the eighth ¹³

Those who had profound doubts about Japan’s war, however, largely kept those thoughts private. It would have taken great personal courage, conviction, and sacrifice to speak out in opposition. Openly opposing the war, after all, would have invited both legal punishment and social ostracism, and perhaps even attempts at assassination. From the early 1930s, political assassinations had become so widespread that they were an essential aspect of Japanese political life. Moreover, no powerful organization existed that could shield or support those who would speak publicly in resistance. The state, in fact, had used the Peace Preservation Law in the years since 1925 to control “thought crimes” and to suppress dissident organizations or heterodox ideologies. With no support for public action and fears of

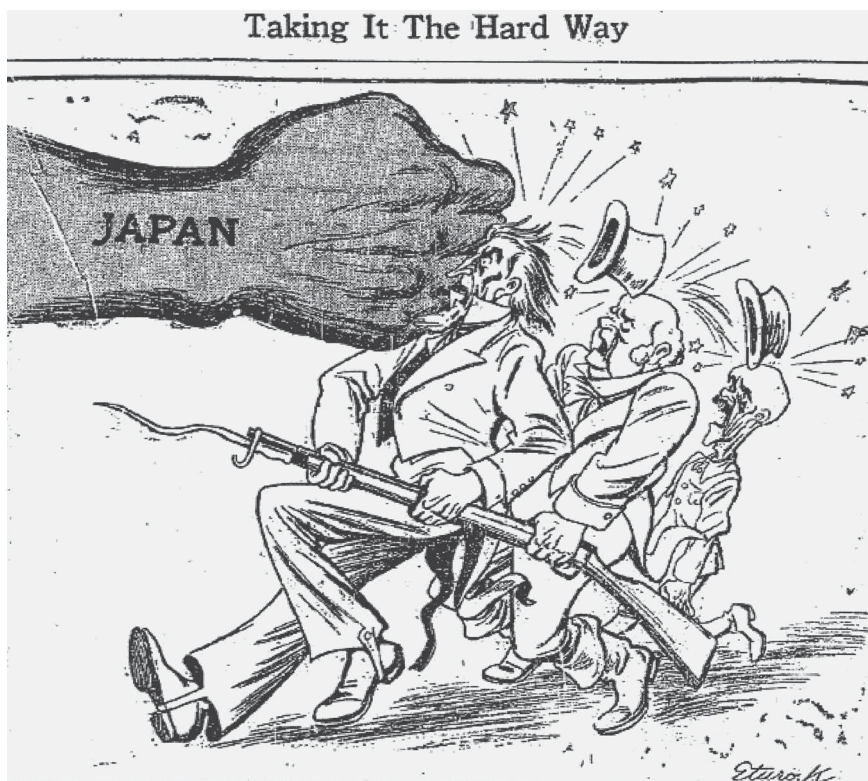
social ostracism or even personal harm, those who opposed the war kept their sentiments private. This is one reason why the Home Ministry could boast on December 9, 1941, that “there is a deep sense that the system of national unity [*kyōkoku itchi taisei*] is strengthening more and more,” and that “where public peace is concerned there is no unrest.”¹⁴

The Home Ministry was correct—most Japanese citizens were electrified by the news. Lt. General Satō Kenryō, who from 1942 to 1944 served as the director of the Army Ministry’s Bureau of Military Affairs, noted that whereas some may have been angry that Japan “did something stupid” and others lamented Japan’s “certain defeat,” many more met the war with high morale.¹⁵ Yatsugi Kazuo, the founder of the National Policy Research Association (Kokusaku Kenkyūkai), remembered the news of Japan’s war as generating an “uninterrupted tumult of excited phone calls from friends, shouting ‘At last, we’ve done it!’”¹⁶ This high morale was evident among writers in particular. Writers were quick to express their excitement at the imperial rescript declaring war through liberal use of such terms as “deep emotion” [*kangeki*] and “tears of gratitude” [*kanruiz*]. Echoing this sentiment, novelist and playwright Nagayo Yoshirō wrote, “I never thought I would live to see such a happy, enjoyable [*tsūkai*], and auspicious [*medetai*] day. The oppressive gloom that covered us like dark clouds over our heads for the past several months, or past twelve years, has vanished with the brilliant imperial edict [declaring war].”¹⁷

Second-year middle school student from Sendai Itabashi Kōshū recalled his own excitement at the news. “I felt as if my blood boiled and my flesh quivered,” he recalled. “The whole nation bubbled over, excited and inspired. ‘We really did it! Incredible! Wonderful!’ That’s the way it felt then.” Itabashi noted that cost-benefit analyses never entered the equation. “We simply hit out,” he noted. “Our blood was hot! We fought. Until the very end, no one considered the possibility that Japan could lose.”¹⁸

Itabashi’s sense of the nation’s “blood boiling over” was reinforced by popular magazines and mass media institutions. Often calling for the “annihilation” [*gekimetsu*], the “obliteration” [*zenmetsu*], the “destruction” [*hōkai*], or the “defeat” or “overthrow” [*datō*] of the Anglo-Saxon enemy, mass media institutions helped create a mood of jingoistic hysteria. Japan would fight its war of “self-preservation and self-defense” with little regard for consequences, and with little thought to costs. This sense of lashing out in self-defense is wonderfully illustrated in a political cartoon for popular entertainment magazine *Kingu* [King]. Drawn shortly after the Pearl Harbor attacks, the illustration shows a diminutive Japanese man knocking the breath out of his larger, more imposing Anglo-Saxon foe, leaving the impression that this first punch is only the beginning of a thorough thrashing.

A *Japan Times & Advertiser* political cartoon, drafted in English but intended both for domestic and foreign consumption, makes an even stronger point about



“Taking It the Hard Way,” *Japan Times & Advertiser*, December 10, 1941. (Courtesy of *The Japan Times*.)

the obliteration of the Anglo-Saxon powers. It highlights a sense of shock, dismay, and fear among the ABC powers (America, Britain, and China) as they confronted the realities of Japanese power. Uncle Sam, John Bull, and Marshall Chiang are all left reeling, at the point of toppling over from Japan’s heavy punch. And like the political cartoon that appeared in *Kingu*, this creates a sense that Japan’s first punch is only the beginning.

Other students viewed Pearl Harbor and the attacks of December 8 in a similar light. Yamaguchi Masahiko, a fifth-year student at Waseda Gakuin Middle School, noted in his diary on December 8, 1941, that “Britain and America should be afraid” and recorded the special day as inspiration to renew his desire to pass the higher-school exams.¹⁹ And Kuroda Saburō, who was then a student at Tokyo Imperial University, wrote in his own diary, “Such a delightful day like today won’t come again [*kyō mitai ni ureshii hi wa matatonai*].” The delight of December 8, he noted, left a “refreshing feeling” in his heart. The following day, Kuroda took to



The Japanese Empire lashes out in the name of “self-preservation and self-defense.”
 Taken from “*Ei-Bei gekimetsu! Kagayaku daisenkuwa to tsugi no senkyoku o kataru,*”
Kingu, February 1942, 43. (Courtesy of the National Diet Library, Tokyo, Japan)

his diary again, hinting at his desire to learn more about Japan’s victories. “For some reason I felt restless all day. I tried to read books, but after a while I’d fidget and rise to my feet. Ah, when will the evening newspaper arrive!”²⁰

Kyoto Imperial University professor Komaki Saneshige listened with students to the 11:30 a.m. radio news that reported Japan’s military successes as well as the declaration of war. He wrote on December 31, reflecting at length on the meaning of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor three weeks earlier, “University students swarming around the radio gave three cheers of ‘banzai.’ But long before that I had been privately weeping. Then, without thinking, I joined with a young member of my classroom and cried on the main street.” He later went to lunch with the same person, and neither could hold back their tears. “Choked by tears [*kyoki aetsu*], I prostrated myself toward His Majesty from afar, and cried out in my heart ‘thank you

very much,' 'thank you very much.'" With the emperor's declaration, he believed that a war had begun to bring the Imperial Way to the forefront of global politics.²¹

Renowned political scientist and Tokyo Imperial University professor Yabe Teiji met the news with a mix of excitement and concern. In his diary on December 8, 1941, Yabe wrote, "Today is the first day of a historic age." At 12:30 p.m., after grading examination papers and inputting the results into his student's records, Yabe turned on the radio and heard the imperial rescript declaring war. "The brilliant sun was shining down as if this was a warm and peaceful spring day," he penned, "and as I listened [to the radio] I watched the refined crimson of the camellias. The radio invited the sense that this was somebody else's business, and I thought the fight for our country's very existence had more than ever plunged into a decisive battle. Upon thinking that sometime enemy planes might attempt an air raid here, I shuddered."²² Over the following days, he noted with glee about the successes of the Imperial Japanese Navy. On December 9 Yabe wrote, "The navy's Hawaiian operation is one of the greatest triumphs in the history of war." The following day, he "shuddered" again when learning of the sinking of the British Royal Navy battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse*. "Navy *banzai!*," he rejoiced.²³ This excitement translated into political involvement in Japan's new order. Beginning in January 1942, Yabe would play a pivotal role in both the Navy Ministry's brain trust, the Naval Intelligence Division, and the National Policy Research Association, helping craft new visions and principles for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Five days after the outbreak of war, on December 13, 1941, throngs of supporters rushed to Hibiya Park to celebrate the war against the Anglo-Saxon enemy. Tens of thousands of people crowded together in this central Tokyo park to express their enthusiasm and joy at Japan's great military successes. Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki addressed the rally, feeding into the frenzy by drawing attention to Japanese dreams for centrality in global affairs. "The victory of Japan," he thundered, "will be the victory of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, as well as the victory of the creation of the new world order." The crowd responded with a "rousing and thunderous *banzai* for the humiliation of the haughty Anglo-Saxons."²⁴

What makes this flood of support truly striking was the fact that Japan struck from a position of great weakness. Those knowledgeable of the sources of Western power keenly understood Japan's vulnerability. A prime example is Iwakuro Hideo, a section chief in the Army Ministry's Bureau of Military Affairs. Iwakuro was a firebrand mid-echelon officer who advocated strongly for the Axis alliance, but who also took part in the first round of exploratory conversations in Washington, DC, to avoid war with the United States. In August 1941, while traveling back to Japan aboard the *Ryūta Maru*, Iwakuro drew up a graph that highlights the depth of Japan's materiel deficiencies.

Iwakuro's Assessment of Japan's Vulnerability

<i>Area</i>	<i>US Production</i>	<i>Ratio: Japan/United States</i>
Steel manufacturing	95 million tons	1/20
Oil production	110 million tons	1/100
Coal production	500 million tons	1/10
Electric power	1,800 kW	1/6
Aluminium	600 thousand tons	1/6
Aircraft production	120 thousand	1/5
Automobile production	6.2 million	1/50
Ships	10 million tons	1/2
Industrial workers	34 million people	1/5

Note: Taken from Iwakuro Hideo, *Sensō rikugun bōryaku hishi* (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbun Shuppan-sha, 2015), 329.

In all, Iwakuro argued that Japan maintained only one-tenth the productive capacity of the United States.²⁵ Moreover, this knowledge was not limited to Iwakuro and others in the know. Elites and mass media outlets never hid Japan's materiel deficiency and technological limitations. To the contrary, they readily admitted Japan's relative weaknesses, but they emphasized that any deficiencies could be counterbalanced by *Yamato damashi*, or Japanese spirit. It was spirit, not materiel or technology, that led to triumph in war. This emphasis on the primacy of spirit, in fact, had been argued since the Russo-Japanese War, and would be argued again in 1941. According to Iwakuro, this belief that spirit trumps technology led decision-makers into a "war that Japan had no prospects of winning."²⁶

The attacks of December 8 energized the public for a variety of reasons. First, they provided a sense of excitement that Japan would finally take retribution for a long history of victimization in international affairs. By 1941 many Japanese had come to believe that their nation was dragged into a world of power politics in which the cards were unfairly stacked against them. The rejection of the Japanese delegation's proposed racial equality clause at Versailles in 1919 and the so-called Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 served as constant reminders of the low regard for which Japan was held. Government propaganda in the wake of the Manchurian Incident in 1931 reinforced a narrative of Japan as isolated in a hostile world. Japan's war in China, the decision to join the Tripartite Pact, and the occupation of French Indochina only increased this sense of victimization. The United States responded by imposing "moral embargoes," followed by a broader array of economic sanctions. By late July 1941, after Japan occupied southern French Indochina, the United States froze all Japanese assets. Great Britain and the Dutch East Indies soon followed suit. The freezing of assets, which soon turned into a full

embargo, represented a major challenge to Japan. Not only did Japan lose access to 88 percent of its oil needs but it also lost three-quarters of its foreign trade.

By August 1941 the Japanese mass media had reached a “war-fevered” pitch. Media outlets complained of an “ABCD encirclement”: that they were fenced in by America, Britain, China, and the Dutch.²⁷ Those countries, which had a long history of racism toward Japan, now threatened Japan with economic ruin. In a diary entry in November, US ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew noted the prevailing mood: “It is always we who threaten; it is always we who are the potential aggressor, never Japan. Thus does the United States wholly ‘misunderstand’ Japan’s peaceful intentions . . . and thus do we render an adjustment of relations impossibly by ‘encircling’ (a word so loved by the Nazis) innocent and unoffending Nippon.”²⁸ Moreover, the Japanese media presented the Hull Note of November 26, which called on Japan to return to the status quo ante of the 1920s, as an “ultimatum.”²⁹ Although the Hull Note was never intended as an ultimatum, its presentation as such confirmed the sense that Japan was once again being bullied and humiliated, and asked to return to a third-power status.³⁰ Given this context, it is not surprising that many Japanese reacted to the attacks of December 8 with glee, relishing the fact that “war has finally arrived.”³¹ Pearl Harbor broke the impasse in international politics, provided a sense of retribution for a longer history of victimization, and gave the nation a new goal around which the people could mobilize.

Strikingly, the December 8, 1941, imperial rescript declaring war on America and Britain reinforced this victim narrative. Japan, the rescript stated, had only the purest of motives. It only sought stability, peace, friendship, and “prosperity in common with all nations.” But Japan’s enemies failed to understand its true intentions. Instead, they presented new challenges at every turn. They threatened Japan with military preparations, obstructed Japan’s “peaceful commerce,” and even severed economic ties, “menacing gravely the existence of our Empire.” Japan had patiently endured this foreign menace, but the time for waiting had passed. The imperial rescript concluded, “Our Empire for its existence and self-defense has no other recourse but to appeal to arms and to crush every obstacle in its path.” Japan, in short, was victimized into taking up arms.³²

This sense of victimization, and the glory of retribution, is perhaps best summed in “December 8,” a long-form poem by famous poet Takamura Kōtarō.

Kioku seyo, jūnigatsu yōka
Kono hi sekai no rekishi aratamaru.
Anguro Sakuson no shuken,
kono hi tōa no riku to umi to ni hitei saru.

Hitei suru mono wa warera Japan,

Remember December 8,
 the day world history changed.
 The day Anglo-Saxon power
 was denied across the land and sea of
 East Asia.
 It was our Japan that denied them,

*byōtaru tōkai no kuni ni shite,
mata kami no kuni taru Nippon nari.
So o jī shimetamau Akitsu Mikami nari.
Sekai no tomi o sōdan suru mono,
kyōgō Bei-Ei ichizoku no chikara,
warera no kuni ni oite hitei saru.
Warera no hitei wa gi ni yoru.
Tōa o Tōa ni kaese to iu nomi.*

*Karera no sakushu ni rinpō kotogotoku
yasetari.
Warera masani sono sōga o kudakan to su.*

*Warera mizukara chikara o yashinaite
hitotabi tatsu.*

Rōjaku danjo mina tsuwamono nari.

*Taiteki hi o satoru ni itaru made warera
wa tatakau.*

*Sekai no rekishi o ryōdan suru.
Jūnigatsu yōka o kioku seyo.*

the small country in the Eastern sea,
the Land of the Gods, Nippon.
Ruled over by a living God.
The powerful clan of Anglo-America,
monopolists of global wealth,
was denied in our own country.
Our denial was our justice.
We only demand the return of East Asia
to East Asia.
Our neighbors grow thin from their
exploitation.
It is we who will break those claws and
fangs.
We who build our strength and rise up.
Young and old, men and women:
soldiers all.
We fight until our great enemies see the
error of their ways.
World history has been severed in two.
Remember December 8.³³

Second, the Pearl Harbor success gave an emotional boost and positive news for a people who had made great sacrifices for the war in China. Although the China Incident was met in 1937 with a surge of popular enthusiasm, four years of inconclusive fighting had dampened popular zeal. Japanese subjects were told that they were fighting a “holy war.” But this was a war with no clear purpose, with no foreseeable end, and for which significant sacrifices were demanded. Clothing was in short supply. The government placed raw cotton on a rationing system in February 1938 and encouraged the use of the factory-produced “staple fiber” made from wood pulp. But staple fiber was weak and tended to fall apart when exposed to water.³⁴ There was a shortage of food as well. Beginning in April 1941 Japan introduced a rice rationing system in its six biggest metropolitan areas. This system limited rice purchases to 330 grams per day for people between the ages of eleven and sixty, and rationed rice even more for young children and the elderly. By that December, the system was in use throughout most of Japan. Rationing hit city dwellers hard. Most were no longer able to eat three square meals of white rice and miso soup. Instead, they often supplemented their rice intake by mixing in barley, millet, potatoes, and kabocha squash.³⁵ Moreover, queues for sugar, vegetables, and other foods were a common sight in major metropolitan areas. The

government even encouraged austerity. Starting in July 1940 the slogan "Luxury is the Enemy" [*zeitaku wa teki da*] appeared throughout the nation. Moreover, in March 1941 the Army Ministry News Department began publicizing the motto "minimum livelihood, maximum honor" [*saitei no seikatsu, saikō no meiyō*].³⁶ Both slogans encouraged sacrifice and even deprivation for the greater good of Japan's war in China. The success at Pearl Harbor gave greater meaning to those sacrifices and helped restore pride and motivation in Japan's imperial adventure abroad.

Third, the attacks of December 8 helped intellectuals and pundits make sense of the China Incident. Perhaps the most forceful and passionate argument was made by Takeuchi Yoshimi, a scholar of Chinese literature. Takeuchi penned a declaration entitled "The Greater East Asia War and Our Resolve" for the January 1942 edition of *Chūgoku bungaku* [Chinese Literature]. "History has been made," he wrote. "The world has transformed in one night. We saw this with our own eyes." The expanded war gave a sense of mission and resolve where one was lacking. "December 8, the day we received the imperial rescript that declared war, the Japanese people's resolve burned as one. It was a refreshing feeling."³⁷ Before December 8, Takeuchi had believed that war was something that should be averted. War, after all, was miserable and wretched. But Pearl Harbor made him realize that such thoughts were misguided. Like Itō Sei, Takeuchi now recognized that the war was "bright." Why was he hit by this sudden realization? Because the attacks of December 8 gave true meaning to Japan's "holy war" in China.

For Takeuchi, the "holy war" had made little sense owing to Japan's historical love for its elder Asian brother. In fact, it engendered a sense of shame and self-doubt. Takeuchi had worried that Japan was fighting for little purpose. He wrote, "Shamed by our unworthiness, we have disregarded the significance of the so-called holy war. We Japanese until just now have been suspicious that, under the pretext of constructing East Asia, we have in fact been bullying the weak." But the events of December 8 changed things. "Frankly speaking," Takeuchi continued, "suddenly we had a different feeling [*nīwaka ni onajigatai kanjō*] about the China Incident." December 8 wiped clean any sense of dislocation and gave the war a clear purpose and historical importance. The China Incident was the first step toward a grander project—the liberation of Asia from the yoke of Western imperialism. "The new significance," Takeuchi wrote, "of spreading the new order in East Asia and liberating its peoples is our resolution to which we can devote painstaking efforts. This is a resolution that nobody can distort."³⁸ Pearl Harbor thus convinced Takeuchi that the true conflict was not with China but with the powerful adherents of the old order—the United States and Great Britain.³⁹

Others felt the same way. In the January 1942 edition of *Bungei shunjū*, the fascist Japanese Century Group penned an article that noted the existence of "some dissatisfaction" with the description of the China Incident a "holy war."⁴⁰

But those dissatisfactions, the article claimed, resulted from an incomplete understanding of history. Although the China Incident was the first to be called a “holy war,” the group insisted that all of Japan’s modern wars from 1894 were part of one larger “holy war based on the noble cause of ridding [Asia] of imperialist aggression.” In this sense, the Greater East Asia War represented the culmination of Japan’s long-term fight with Western imperialism and colonial control.⁴¹ Kyoto School philosopher Kōsaka Masa’aki confidently argued the same. “The ‘truth’ of the Japan-China Incident,” he maintained, “lies in the liberation of East Asia from the old British and American world.”⁴² Even popular magazines like *Kingu* now could speak of the true “historical significance” of the Greater East Asia War, a “continuation of the *Bakumatsu* era [cry of] ‘Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians!’”⁴³ Pearl Harbor thus gave new meaning to the China Incident. No longer a fight between Asian brothers—now the Incident was recast as an integral part of a broader crusade against Western imperialism. It became the first step in the effort to create an “Asia for the Asians.”

This meaningful crusade even baptized doubters into new believers. Aono Suekichi, a left-wing literary critic who had been briefly imprisoned in 1938 for suspected thought crimes, now found himself remade anew a servant of Japan, willing to die for the emperor. This conversion is striking. Aono had been a member of the first Japanese Communist Party, which was founded in 1922, and had briefly worked to rebuild the party after its dissolution in 1924 before becoming a critic at the proletarian journal *Bungei sensen* [Literary Battlefield]. But Pearl Harbor changed his outlook. On January 1, 1942, he wrote in his diary, “It’s a truly clear day today, one that makes me want to say that the world is at peace. It is as if heaven and earth too are cheering this victorious new year. I feel strongly that Japan is the land of the gods.”⁴⁴ Literary critic Honda Akira found himself similarly moved. “The declaration of war against Britain and the United States cleared up my mind.” He continued, “With this, the meaning of our holy war has become apparent, and our war aims have also become simple and clear. I have a renewed sense of courage, and all has become easier to accomplish.”⁴⁵

The jingoistic mood inspired by the outbreak of war was best captured by novelist Dazai Osamu. In February 1942, Dazai published in *Fujin Kōron* [Women’s Review] a comic piece about how one “impoverished” housewife spent the momentous day of the Pearl Harbor attack. The piece, “December 8,” is at once humorous and slightly subversive, blending the personal and the political to parody how families reacted to the news. The story begins with the clear-headed housewife hearing a radio announcement about the outbreak of war against American and British forces. She immediately recognizes that everything has changed. “As I listened, I felt I had become a different person. . . . Japan, too, from this morning has become a different Japan.”⁴⁶ From there, Dazai’s piece caricatures a populace

that is nervous but united in cause, willing to forego even their most basic needs to help their country "smash" the enemy.

At breakfast, without thinking, I asked my husband, "Will Japan really be alright?"

"If not, we wouldn't have gone to war. We'll definitely win," he replied, sounding very stiff. My husband always tells lies, so his opinions are never reliable. At the same time, I decided that I would try hard to believe this particular statement.

While I was cleaning up the kitchen, I contemplated many different things. Is it simply their different eye color and hair color that gives me such feelings of animosity toward them? I'd like to beat the living daylight out of them. This is a completely different feeling from when we were fighting in China. I can't stand even the thought of those callous brutes of American soldiers hulking about on our dear and beautiful Japanese soil. If you take but one step on our sacred soil, your feet will rot away. You aren't worthy. Pure soldiers of Japan, please go ahead and smash them! From now, we at home may suffer from shortages of many kinds, but you need not worry about us. We don't mind.⁴⁷

Dazai did not shy away from making implicit mockery of the popular mood. At the end of the story, the housewife leaves the public bathhouse, carrying her baby on her back, to a pitch-black night. A blackout, she realizes. As she takes careful step after careful step, feeling her way back home, she begins to panic. At that point, the housewife gets a lesson in faith:

From behind, I heard a man walking toward me in rough, awkward gait while singing "Summoned by the Emperor" completely out of tune. *Gohon gohon*, he coughed twice in his peculiar way, and I knew who it was.

"This is hard on Sonoko," I said.

"What's the matter with you," he responded in a loud voice. "You people have no faith—that's why this dark road is hard on you. Me? I have faith, so this dark road feels like broad daylight. Follow me," he said and briskly walked ahead.

My amazing husband. Who knows how sane he really is?⁴⁸

The husband's stress on faith is telling. Faith, after all, was what the popular mood called for. Faith that Japanese spirit and gumption would prevail over enemy technology and materiel. Faith that Japan's war aims were achievable. Faith that Japan's leaders knew where they were going—that they were not simply, to para-

phrase Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki, “taking the plunge” off Kiyomizu Temple with little possibility of great gain.⁴⁹ Was this sane? In poking fun at the popular mood, Dazai walked a thin line between comedy and subversion. In the process, he wrote a story that highlights, in an indirect yet powerful way, the extent to which Pearl Harbor and the attacks of December 8 united Japanese subjects in the service of empire. In Pearl Harbor’s wake, groups in control of state policy could be assured of broad public backing for the war effort.

IMPERIAL JINGOISM AND THE SPIRIT OF DECEMBER 8

As Donald Keene has noted, the Pearl Harbor attack created a “festive mood” or “carnavalesque atmosphere” [*omatsuri kibun*] that continued throughout much of 1942.⁵⁰ This carnivalesque atmosphere was evident in both the popular mood and the policymaking mindset. Japan’s rapid advance in Asia generated unbridled optimism. The broader public looked with awe and pride upon Japan’s successive victories in Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, the Dutch Indies, Burma, and the Philippines. This sense of pride, self-confidence, and faith in Japan’s mission was epitomized by what writer Kamiya Shigeru referred to as “the spirit of December 8.” Kamiya wrote, “Today even small children stand before a world map, dreaming dreams of advance after advance, thinking *‘here too, here too!’*”⁵¹

This “spirit of December 8” took shape as enthusiasm for Japan’s expanded war for mastery over Asia, and a willingness to sacrifice at home for the sake of victory abroad. Many subjects became proactive participants in efforts to boost morale. On November 15, 1942, in the lead-up to the first anniversary of the Greater East Asia War, Japan’s mass party, the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, in cooperation with the leading newspapers of the day (the *Asahi shinbun*, *Yomiuri shinbun*, and *Tokyo nichichi-nichi shinbun*), invited the public to craft slogans that best captured the resolve to win the war.⁵² In the following ten days, the newspapers received more than 320,000 responses. On November 27, 1942, the newspapers announced the ten winning slogans.⁵³ “We shall not want until victory!” [*hoshigarimasen, katsu made wa*] and “lacking, lacking, [we are] lacking in ideas” [*taranu taranu, kufū ga taranu*] constituted the best known of the winners. The second slogan referred to the deprivations and sacrifices made in daily life, as even daily necessities were requisitioned for the war effort. But far from being negative and backward-looking, this slogan spun deprivation in a positive light. It hinted that Japanese subjects could make up for any shortages through good ideas and a penchant for ingenuity. These slogans, too, became emblematic of the “spirit of December 8.” They highlighted the continued enthusiasm and willingness to mobilize for wartime Japan’s imperial project, whatever the cost to their daily lives.

The “spirit of December 8” thus manifested as a moment of imperial jingoism, perhaps even surpassing the jingoism that appeared in the wake of the Manchurian Incident of 1931. In this sense, the decision to wage war against America and Britain initiated what might be thought of as an imperial moment. From the cloudless wintry morning of December 8, as Japanese leaders began to contemplate the possibilities of a new type of empire reaching across Asia, they could be assured of broad public support for Japan’s wartime goals. But this was an ephemeral moment in time. Japan’s imperial moment lasted but a year; it would fizzle out when it became apparent that Japan did not have the material wherewithal to match its imperial dreams.

NOTES

1. Itō Sei was not the only one who noticed the strangeness of December 8. His feelings were echoed by famous *benshi*, actor, and narrative artist Tokugawa Musei. Tokugawa wrote in his own diary on December 8 that he emerged into a changed world. “I go out front. The city feels completely different from the Kobe of yesterday. Even the greenhouse cyclamen and Western-style houses [*seiyōkan*] that can be seen from the street look different.” See Tokugawa Musei, *Musei sensō nikki*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1977), 11.

2. Itō Sei, *Taiheiyō sensō nikki*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1983), 9–11.

3. *Ibid.*, 12.

4. Just before this statement, he noted how happy he was that East Asia would have more than enough sugar. See *ibid.*, 59.

5. See Chapter 4 in this volume.

6. Louise Young uses this term to describe the popular reaction to the Manchurian Incident of 1931, but it is also an apt description for the situation in 1941. See Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

7. Ikezaki Tadataka, “Sono hi no kangeki: Namida urumu,” *Shin joen* (February 1942), 60–61. He wrote this on December 14, 1941, less than one week after Pearl Harbor.

8. The originals can be found in Ozaki Yukio, *Minken tōsō shichijūnen* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1952), 183; these translations are taken from Jeremy A. Yellen and Andrew Campana, “Japan, Pearl Harbor, and the Poetry of December 8th,” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 14, 24/3 (December 2016), <https://apjjf.org/2016/24/Yellen.html>.

9. Higashikuni Naruhiko, *Higashikuni nikki: Nihon gekidōki no hiroku* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1968), 103.

10. There is more than a hint of irony to this. Konoe and Matsuoka, after all, were in many ways responsible for Japan’s drift toward Pearl Harbor and the opening of hostilities against Great Britain and the United States.

11. For Konoe’s views, see Yabe Teiji, *Konoe Fumimaro*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1952), 467; and Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro: A Political Biography* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1983), 161.

12. Quoted in Jeremy A. Yellen, “Into the Tiger’s Den: Japan and the Tripartite Pact, 1940,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, 3 (July 2016), 576.
13. Nanbara Shigeru, *Keisō: kashū* (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1948), 173. The translation is taken from Yellen and Campana, “Japan, Pearl Harbor, and the Poetry of December 8th.”
14. Quoted in Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Grassroots Fascism: The War Experience of the Japanese People*, trans. Ethan Mark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 96.
15. Satō Kenryō, *Dai tōa sensō kaikoroku* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1966), 220–221.
16. Yatsugi Kazuo, *Tōjō Hideki to sono jūdai* (Tokyo: Santen Shobō, 1980), 115–116.
17. Quoted in Yasuda Takeshi, “Jūnigatsu yōka no shisō,” Hashikawa Bunsō, Kano Masanao, and Hiraoka Toshio, eds., *Kūndai Nihon shisōshi no kiso chishiki: Isshin zenya kara haisen made* (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1971), 441.
18. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York: New Press, 1992), 77–78.
19. Aoki Masami, *Senjūka no shomin nikki* (Tokyo, 1987), 153. In an interesting metaphor for Japan’s fate, he later failed his entrance exams.
20. Sugimura Masaru, *Nikki ni miru taiheiyō sensō* (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 1999), 20–21.
21. Komaki Saneshige, “1941-nen no omoide,” *Bungei shunjū* (February 1942), 10–13.
22. December 8 entry, Yabe Teiji, *Yabe Teiji nikki: ichō no maki* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1974), 481.
23. December 9 and 10 entries, in *ibid.*, 481.
24. *Japan Times & Advertiser*, December 14, 1941, p. 1.
25. Iwakuro Hideo, *Sensō rikugun bōryaku hishi* (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shinbun Shuppansha, 2015), 329. Iwakuro was remarkably accurate. The most careful recent scholarship in Japanese has shown that Japan overall had one-twelfth the productive capacity of the United States. See Yamada Akira, *Gunbi kakuchō no kindaiishi: Nihongun no bōchō to hōkai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997).
26. Iwakuro, *Sensō rikugun*, 327.
27. *Ibid.*, 327. The notion of an “ABCD encirclement” was widely publicized throughout the Japanese mass media by August 1941.
28. Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 481.
29. See, for instance, “Sanagara saigo tsūchō no atsukai,” *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 28, 1941, p. 1.
30. The Hull Note was not, in fact, a cause for war. The decision for war had, for all practical purposes, already been made. And the naval strike force had left port for Pearl Harbor on November 26, the day before the Hull Note arrived in Japan.
31. See Ikezaki, “Sono hi no kangeki: Namida urumu,” 60.
32. The English translation of the imperial rescript is taken from *Japan Times & Advertiser*, evening edition, December 8, 1941, p. 1. For the original Japanese-language document, see Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR), reference code A03022539800.
33. Takamura Kōtarō, “Jūnigatsu yōka,” *Takamura Kōtarō zenshū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1994) 50–51.
34. Simon Partner, *Tōshie: A Story of Village Life in Twentieth-Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 84–85.

35. Taiheiyō Sensō Kenkyūkai, ed., *Taiheiyō sensō ga yoku wakaru: “shinjuwan” kara hajimatta Nichi-Bei no shitō no subete* (Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 2009), 98–100.
36. *Ibid.*, 100.
37. Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Dai tōa sensō to warera no ketsui,” *Chūgoku bungaku*, no. 80 (January 1942), 481.
38. *Ibid.*, 482–483.
39. Japanese historians have made this point as well. See, for instance, Katō Yōko, *Sore demo, Nihonjin wa “sensō” o eranda* (Tokyo: Asahi shuppan, 2009), 335.
40. The Japanese Century Group was, according to *Chūō Kōron* editorial chief Hatanaka Shigeo, a “fascist critic group.” Its most active members were Daitō Bunka Gakuin professor Saitō Shō, Nishitani Yahē, *Yomiuri shinbun* reporter Hanami Tatsuji, and Izawa Hiroshi. See Kakeno Takeshi, “Senjika media no hensei to tenkai: Bungei shunjūsha hakkō ‘genchi hōkoku’ sōmokuji (ka),” *Saitama gakuen daigaku kiyō*, No. 11 (December 2011), 366.
41. Nihon Seikisha Dōjin, “Seisen no hongī,” *Bungei shunjū* (January 1942), 88–101. Hayashi Fusao popularized this very argument in the 1960s. See Hayashi Fusao, *Dai tōa sensō kōteiron* (Tokyo: Banchō Shobō, 1964).
42. Kōsaka Masa’aki, “Dai tōa kyōeiken e no michi,” *Kaizō* 24, 1 (January 1942), 34.
43. “Ei-Bei gekimetsu! Kagayaku daisenkuwa to tsugi no senkyoku o kataru,” *Kingū* (February 1942), 41.
44. Donald Keene, *Nihonjin no sensō: Sakka no nikki o yomu* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2009), 18.
45. Quoted in Yasuda Takeshi, “Jūnigatsu yōka no shisō,” 441.
46. Dazai Osamu, “Jūnigatsu yōka,” *Dazai Osamu zenshū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1990), 16.
47. *Ibid.*, 19.
48. *Ibid.*, 25.
49. In justifying the decision to go to war, Tōjō stated in October 1941, “There may be times in the life of a man when he has to close his eyes and jump from the veranda of the Kiyomizu Temple.” See Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 44.
50. See Donald Keene, *Sakka no nikki o yomu Nihonjin no sensō* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2009), 40.
51. Kamiya Shigeru, “Jūnigatsu yōka no kokoro,” *Bungei shunjū* (February 1942), 119. Cited in Yellen and Campana, “Japan, Pearl Harbor, and the Poetry of December 8th.”
52. “Kokumin ketsui no hyōgo boshū,” *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun*, November 15, 1942; see also *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 15, 1942.
53. “Kokumin ketsui no hyōgo,” *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun*, November 27, 1942; see also *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 27, 1942.