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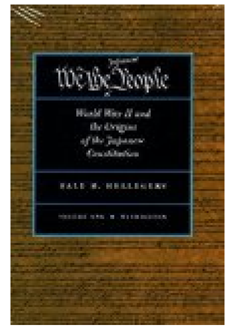
Dale M. Hellegers. *We the Japanese People: World War II and the Origins of the Japanese Constitution.* 2 vols. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001. xvii + 826 pp. $99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-3454-7.



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How America Embraced Imperialism: Japan as a Case Study

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In the middle 1940s, the United States took strong steps toward its apparently inescapable destiny as a world power. There were precedents, of course, in Theodore Roosevelt's diplomacy in Latin America and to end the Russo-Japanese War and in Woodrow Wilson's attempt to create a league of nations. But these earlier gestures produced strong isolationist reactions. In the 1940s, America crossed the Rubicon.

Dale Hellegers's massive book, in two volumes, eventually focuses on the occupation of Japan, but its most impressive parts are devoted to the embrace, by a broad diplomatic and military elite, of the notion that America must take responsibility, this time, for building democratic nations from the ashes of defeated foes.

The publication of Hellegers's long-awaited study of the origins of the Japanese Constitution is a joyous event. As Hellegers, an independent scholar, notes in her acknowledgements, this project has been many years in the making. Many people have been aware of its gestation–participant-observers and scholars with whom she explored these matters on countless panels and at conferences. Everyone knew that she was sitting on a gold mine of material, particularly the interviews she conducted with participants in the early 1970s. People had learned to respect what she had and the gentle but penetrating wisdom she showed in interpreting it.

These volumes will not disappoint her many admirers. This is a tremendous piece of work: a two-volume set, of daunting heft and cost. Sadly, it is unlikely to sell many copies. Our commercial culture will not support a 390-page text with 230 pages of notes and 156 pages of appendices. Thank heaven there are still academic publishers who will undertake such a project! These volumes are a treasure-trove for anyone interested in the American effort, during and in the wake of World War II, to transform Japan from fanatical enemy into a stable constitutional democracy.

As an account of the framing and adoption of Japan's postwar Constitution, this book tells only part of the story. Hellegers calls her two volumes "Washington" and "Tokyo," respectively. In the nine chapters of volume 1, she focuses on policy-making in the American capital; in chapters 10 through 15, she shifts the focus to Tokyo. But her timeframe is severely restricted. It begins with the summit meeting at Casablanca in January 1943, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that the Allies would fight until the Axis powers surrendered "unconditionally." It ends, abruptly, on March 6, 1946, when Emperor Hirohito announced publicly that his government had prepared a draft of a revised constitution and General Douglas MacArthur brightly added his endorsement.

A great deal happened between March 1946 and the promulgation of Japan's postwar Constitution in November 1946, including intense negotiations in April between the cabinet and MacArthur's headquarters, presentation of the revised draft to the Privy Council in May, then four months of debate in the House of Representatives and the House of Peers, leading to several significant amendments. One can dismiss these events of the spring and summer of 1946 as relatively meaningless. That indeed has been the practice of most historians. In this tradition, Hellegers (p. 784 n.100) quotes Narahashi Wataru, a glib cabinet aide, as saying on March 6 that the Diet of course would have power to amend or even reject the "government draft," but he expected that the cabinet would be able to "push it through." But to summarize the events of the spring and summer of 1946 this way is to miss essential parts of the story of Japan's democratization. By March 6, Japan's cabinet had agreed to present a text drafted by the American Occupation as its own project. It had agreed, in other words, to join General MacArthur in a conspiracy to revise Japan's Constitution. But Japan had not yet committed itself to constitutional democracy. That process began on March 6; it did not end there.

It is a mistake, though, to complain that Hellegers has not written a different book. Her book is not about how Japan came to affirm constitutional democracy. It is a study of America's emergence as an imperial power. Seen in that light, it is thoroughly admirable, and often brilliant.

It opens with a highly critical analysis of Roosevelt's insistence on "unconditional surrender" as the basis for dealing with the three Axis Powers. Roosevelt, she shows, stuck doggedly to this mantra, even as some of his leading military officers sought to encourage resistance within Italy, Germany, and Japan by holding out carrots even while applying their pulverizing sticks. Hellegers chastises Roosevelt for refusing to accept this counsel. She calls such statements of ideals as the Atlantic Charter "lovely but ludicrous" (p. 167), and she shows that the State Department was never able to move significantly beyond such platitudes. She argues that the President's refusal to be more specific complicated and postponed the resolution of disputes about post-war policy (toward the retention of the Throne in Japan and the treatment of Hirohito personally, for example). To her credit, she presents the other side of the argument: that spelling out the prospects after surrender ran the risk of being misunderstood and ridiculed by the enemy. But she insists that the costs outweighed the dangers.

Some of the best reading in the book deals with military history. Her accounts of the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa are vividly and movingly written. They set the stage for her detailed analysis of planning for the American invasion of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's main islands, which some thought might not occur until 1946 or even 1947. Hellegers includes a painstaking dissection of projected estimates of casualties on both sides. It is a pity that this masterly summary was not available when controversy flared at the Smithsonian Institution over an exhibit about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Hellegers explains the ghastly choices facing President Truman. Her account helps to explain the president's elation when he learned that the atomic bomb was ready, in time not only to lessen the bloodshed, on both sides, but to head off Soviet intervention.

One of her themes is the difference in planning styles between military and diplomatic personnel. Soldiers want as much specificity as possible. Diplomats want flexibility, freedom to adjust to the unexpected. Of course, soldiers given responsibility for administering policy want broad discretion, too, but that is a different matter. In contemplating a task, soldiers want to know all they can about what to expect. These stylistic differences led inevitably to tensions.

Another factor complicating postwar planning was Roosevelt's strong preference for civilian over military direction. This presidential instinct strengthened the hand of civilians at the command schools set up on campuses in Charlottesville, New Haven and elsewhere. Despite the advantage of presidential support, however, these academies never got very far in preparing for the work of occupation. When the time came, especially when the atomic bomb led so abruptly to Japan's surrender, generals took command and were left pretty much to their own devices.

In the second volume, Hellegers turns to the events that led directly to the framing of the American draft of Japan's postwar constitution. She devotes a chapter to each of the two official commissions established by the Japanese government to "inquire" into the need for constitutional revision. One, headed by Prince Konoe Fumimaro, based its authority on its appointment by Emperor Hirohito. Konoe, who as prime minister during the late 1930s was responsible for Japan's aggression against China but had a reputation for liberalism, named a commission led by academics from his alma mater in Kyoto. >From audiences with MacArthur and his staff, Konoe learned that SCAP (the Supreme Command for Asia and the Pacific) expected far-reaching revisions. But he made a fatal mistake in exaggerating his mandate from MacArthur. Hellegers gives him credit for sensing the need for radical reform, for attracting (though often misusing) able collaborators, and for generating some promising ideas. She also tells how he got outmaneuvered by his foes in the Japanese cabinet and fell victim to MacArthur's ruthless instincts for self-preservation. She concludes with a moving account of Prince Konoe's suicide in December 1945. Konoe, as a student, had translated a story by Oscar Wilde; the magazine that published it had been suspended. In his study after his suicide, American intelligence found an open copy of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, with a passage marked in red: "I must say that I ruined myself...."

A cabinet minister, Matsumoto Joji, headed the other official commission. Unlike Konoe, Matsumoto pointedly, even arrogantly, separated himself from MacArthur's headquarters (which, it must be said, regrettably reciprocated the hauteur after its embarrassments over Konoe). Matsumoto believed that military leaders and politicians who betrayed the emperor had caused Japan's catastrophe. Reflecting the cabinet's orthodoxy, from Prime Minister Shidehara Kijuro on down, Matsumoto saw no need for radical constitutional reform.

In these views, as Hellegers makes clear, he had good company in the West. George Sansom, for example, Britain's eminent historian of Japan and an attache at the British embassy in late 1945, believed that Japan had made solid progress toward parliamentary democracy during the 1920s and that, with the disgrace of militarists and imperialists, Japan was now positioned to resume its course on the road to democracy under a revised, but not replaced, Meiji Constitution. This view also found sympathy at the highest reaches of the American government, from people like Secretary of War Henry Stimson, John J. McCloy at the War Department, and Joseph McGrew, Acting Secretary of State.

Thus Matsumoto's basic position was not untenable. But his style of leadership rendered him worse than useless. He surrounded himself with cronies from the law faculty of Tokyo's Imperial University, men deemed "great authorities" on the Meiji Constitution. "Sequestering [themselves] on an academic Olympus," Hellegers writes, the cabinet's commission disdained to seek guidance from outside the cabinet's staff or the law faculty of Todai. "No practicing attorneys, procurators, or judges were consulted ...; no public administration specialists ...; no members of the ... Diet" (p. 468). Neither was any effort made to assess public opinion, nor to engage in some quiet diplomacy with General Headquarters (GHQ). (It would be as if constitutional reform in the United States, following calamitous defeat in an ill-advised war, were to be entrusted to a commission consisting of professors like Bruce Ackerman, Laurence Tribe, and Jack Rakove, operating in seclusion from practicing jurists, politicians, trade union leaders, or journalists.) Matsumoto's commission failed utterly, because it was out of touch with political realities, those created by the Occupation and by the Japanese people.

This left constitutional revision to the Americans, who dramatically seized the initiative in February 1946. It is remarkable how little of what went before, in Washington or at GHQ, mattered when SCAP made its move. All the fussing about whether the imperial institution should be retained or not, which was still going on in Washington, was resolved by MacArthur's cryptic directive to the drafters: "Emperor is at the head of the state.... His duties and powers will be exercised in accordance with the Constitution and responsible to the basic will of the people as provided herein." Boom! Operating with this guideline and one or two others (including a version of the clause that would renounce war), twenty or so staffers at GHQ, operating in absolute secrecy, put a draft together in a week's time. It is a stunning story, and it has been told many times.

Hellegers's principal contribution is the testimony of people she has interviewed over the years, mostly in the early 1970s. These reflections are valuable because the primary records of that famous first week of February 1946 are so scant. They must, however, be used with care. People speaking a quarter-century after an event are inevitably going to be influenced by the circumstances at the time they are speaking. To take an obvious example, where did the inspiration for Article 9 (renouncing war) come from? In 1946, it was put forward as a harbinger of mankind's commitment to peace and to hold at bay those who were bent on treating the emperor as a war criminal. By 1970, China and half of Korea were Communist powers, the United States was trying desperately to prevent Vietnam from falling into the Communist camp, and we needed as much help from Japan as we could get. Disarming Japan looked like idealism in 1946. By 1970, it looked like folly, except to leftists in Japan who were happy not to be part of the conflict in south Asia. In those latter circumstances, it was hard to get a straight answer about where Article 9 came from, or what it meant. Notes on page 787 of Hellegers's book report various recollections, but contribute little to the resolution of these questions.

Hellegers's book includes nine appendices that trace the development of the SCAP text through the week of

February 3. Her footnotes give indications of other constitutions (Weimar, Scandinavian, Mexican, etc.) that contain similar language, usually without indicating specifically whether a given text was the source. Notes in the back of the book add recollections by several of the participants regarding intentions. These are often interesting, but are presented in a relatively undigested form.

In sum, Hellegers's two volumes, many decades in the making, are a tremendous achievement. They are beautifully written and painstakingly documented, and they are strongly argued, particularly when dealing with the bureaucratic wars in Washington. Their principal contribution, besides the long-awaited publication of her interview data, is the analysis that she offers of America's first attempts to project itself as an imperial power. The great value of Hellegers's book is her analysis of these moves. She traces the intense struggle of elites–bureaucratic, military, political–to control this process. She also shows how vulnerable they all were to accidents and unexpected events, how plans "gang aft aglee," how vain these men were to invest time and energy in quarrels that were so totally swamped by events. An eminent social scientist once warned me against using the term "miracle" in my historical work. Our job, he said, is to explain what happened, to find causes and trace effects, as carefully as we can. To speak of miracles is to confess defeat. I take his point, but sometimes the conjunction of events and personalities seems to defy explanation. Hellegers's wonderful book is full of such tales.

Hellegers concludes her study by pointing to the irony in her title. "We the Japanese people," by her account, played virtually no role in bringing popular sovereignty to Japan. Taking the story beyond March 6 modifies that picture quite a bit–but that is matter for a different book. In any case, it only partly qualifies Hellegers's fundamental point: that democratization is not itself a democratic process.

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