

J. Charles Schencking, *Making Waves: Politics, Propaganda, and the Emergence of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1868–1922*

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This well-researched, very readable book makes a significant contribution to our understanding about the rise of the Imperial Japanese Navy (hereafter referred to as IJN) from 1868 to 1922. Through eight chapters, the author details how Japan, “not a naval nation” before the 1890s (p. 2), emerged as the world’s third-largest naval power by 1922. The IJN’s success story unfolds in the political arena. The central player in the Navy’s transformation, argues Schencking, was its leaders who “accepted, endorsed, and mastered the art of politics” (p. 228). In contrast to what previous scholarship has portrayed, they were neither “apolitical” nor “silent” (p. 6); on the contrary, those leaders continued to be politically astute, active, and opportunistic. By no means rebellious, the leadership exercised a great deal of pragmatism and worked successfully within the Meiji-Taisho constitutional government. Coercion and, above all, alliance formation with useful politicians and their parties were the chief means of fulfilling the Navy’s agendas. Politics was “the lifeblood” of the IJN, which was no different from the navies of Germany, the USA, and Britain (p. 6).

The author’s cultural study helps illuminate the Navy’s efforts to shape domestic politics. He amply demonstrates that the IJN leadership used public-relations campaigns and pro-Navy propaganda, such as elegantly orchestrated pageants. These efforts, in the author’s view, were successful in helping to win public support, foster nationalism, and promote visions of Japan’s empire into the South Seas (*Nan’yō*) in which the IJN was to play the role of the nation’s primary guardian. The author also pays attention to symbols of how the political landscape was perceived in society. Pictorial illustrations from *Tokyo Puck*, a major popular magazine known for its satirical cartoons (pp. 126 and 144), serve as amusing yet powerful examples. The

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Navy's political efforts underlay its growing influence within the Japanese parliament, mirroring the concurrent rise of a modern Japan.

As chapters 1 and 2 amply show, the Navy's ascendancy to a massive scale was hardly imagined during the period from 1868 to 1889. The beginning of the IJN was "remarkably humble" (p. 24). The service lacked material and human and financial capital after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which was "truly a revolutionary event" (pp. 10–11). The Navy remained rather regional/local and its role was to support ground forces because domestic rebellions posed a "far more significant threat" (p.18) to the newly formed, fledgling Meiji State than did any military threat from abroad. In this context, the well-known rhetoric of "Rich Nation, Strong Military" (*fukoku kyōhei*), a means of countering foreign threats, escapes the narrative. By the end of the 1870s, the Navy began to build its institutions for further growth (as seen in the formation of the Navy Ministry in 1872). The IJN remained a collective effort, a collage of forces from the most powerful domains. Especially during 1878–1889, in the author's view, domain-based rivalry helped form the Satsuma-based Navy in contrast to the Chōshū-based Army. Personal connections and favoritism based on clan backgrounds were the chief means by which the Satsuma slowly but steadily dominated the military service. Meanwhile, the newly constructed rhetoric of the southern frontier in the South Seas helped the Satsuma-based Navy create a strategic identity separate from that of the Army.

In chapters 3 and 4, the author argues that the 1890s marked a crucial phase for the Navy's growth. He maintains carefully that the political pragmatism of IJN leaders did not develop into a full-scale partnership with a political party in the new Diet setting of the time. Faced with extensive criticism from political parties, the Navy formed the Navy Reform Committee and capitalized on Yamamoto Gonnohyōe's leadership for administrative, organizational, and personnel reforms. Yamamoto, a man of "charisma and stature," receives the author's credit, for "no other individual would be as important to the navy's political emergence and military development in Meiji-Taisho Japan" (p. 73). In retrospect, the arrival of his leadership was as timely as the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, which clearly demonstrated the Navy's importance as the guardian of the nation. Prestige and ample funding were among the chief benefits arising from the victory, and the IJN "gained more...than perhaps any other institution apart from the imperial household" (p. 103).

One notable aspect of the book is especially in chapter 4, and later in chapter 6, in which the author details why and how the Army and Navy competed against each other for budgetary funds. Through three stages, he describes the interservice rivalry as one byproduct of the 1894–1904 period. The theme is not new: the demoralizing effects of that rivalry were moderately predictable, and the resulting disservice rather than service to the nation before 1945 was hardly surprising. However, what fascinates this reader in this and other chapters is the extent, depth, and gradual development of the subterranean, interservice political battles that Schencking presents. He speculates that the interservice rivalry helped shape Japanese politics and society "perhaps more than in any other country" (p. 8).

The author's cultural study of IJN politics shines especially in chapter 5. In his view, the Navy "shaped both public opinion and legislative programs" by various

cultural means (pp. 109–110). To that end, the Navy launched a series of propaganda campaigns, as found in pictorial illustrations of the IJN in postcards, as well as in commemoration and pageantry following the Russo–Japanese War. The publication of war fantasies also helped generate pro-Navy enthusiasm within the public sphere. Admiral Togō Heihachirō became an icon of the IJN. The Navy’s successful campaigns included treating Seiyūkai leaders as VIPs in high-profile, popular public events (such as the Grand Naval Maneuver of 1908). The author’s sporadic, brief comparisons with the Army – which could have been developed more fully – suggest that the Navy was more clever, effective, and successful in using culture to acquire and maintain power.

In chapter 6, the author highlights the Navy’s pragmatism, which underlay its budgetary victories during 1910–1913. For the cabinets, military expansion remained a bone of contention, and balancing requests from both services became all the more difficult as the interservice rivalry intensified. The author describes that the Army’s expansionary efforts were unsuccessful, for they led to the resignation of Army Minister Uehara and the collapse of Saionji’s Second Cabinet. In contrast, the IJN remained pragmatic and successful: for example, the leadership capitalized on popular protest against the Army for its anticonstitutional behavior during the short-lived Third Katsura Cabinet. The Navy’s expansion, in comparison, was “far more popular and far less controversial” than the Army’s, and the IJN action reinforced “the navy’s popular image as [being] pragmatic” (p. 161). In the author’s view, the end of the Saionji–Katsura entente “opened up a world of opportunity” for the IJN and Seiyūkai (p. 164).

In chapter 7, Schencking presents the Navy–Seiyūkai entente as the culmination of the Navy’s pragmatic opportunism during 1913–1914. The Yamamoto Cabinet in 1913 formalized this marriage of convenience for mutual gain, and the entente “would fundamentally alter elite-level politics in early Taishō Japan” (p. 138). It subsequently became the foundation for administrative, bureaucratic, and financial reforms, and the concurrent industry policy and naval expansion helped private shipbuilders, notably Mitsubishi, who supported the Seiyūkai politicians. The author notes that the formal entente was “short-lived” (p. 167) and failed to endure popular outcry against the Navy’s corrupt business practices (known collectively as the Siemens–Navy scandal). The details presented here of how the scandal developed are rich and somewhat amusing, but the author offers no concrete information about the extent and depth of the “popular outcry” and “popular outrage” (pp. 196 and 199). He curiously fails to mention, for example, that crowds of outraged citizens surrounded the Diet building and clashed with guards—an incident that could have strengthened his point.

In chapter 8, the author traces how the IJN, an opportunistic and pragmatic organization, gradually embraced the Washington Naval Arms Limitation Treaty of 1922. For the Navy, World War I was “an opportunity” to enlarge its spheres of influence in the Pacific (p. 206) and gain appropriations from the Diet for naval expansion. Katō Tomosaburō, a principal player in the IJN, realized that the international agreement would end an unlimited naval race with the United States—a race that Japan could not win, given the state of its industrial capacity. The subsequent agreement was “a potentially pragmatic solution to the difficulties” that

the IJN and Japan faced at that time (p. 219). Crediting Katō with this agreement, Schencking views him as “one of the navy’s most successful administrative leaders, more so perhaps than Saitō [Makoto] or even Yamamoto” (p. 222).

This superb study of IJN politics is highly recommended to historians of modern Japan and military historians, rather than historians of science and technology. It has very little, if anything, to do with science and technology studies, particularly because the author purposefully and continuously steers clear of those fields. As he rightly maintains, Peattie and Evans – among other scholars – have already provided us with useful studies about military technology in the IJN. Schencking constantly reminds those in the field of a key message: that, in the case of Japan, building a modern nation and technology remained inextricably entwined with active agents of change and contingent opportunities.