

Mokusatsu Revisited

Kazuo Kawai and Japan's Response to the Potsdam Declaration

ABSTRACT On July 28, 1945 Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki Kantarō apparently rejected the Potsdam Declaration, an ultimatum of the Allies calling for Japan's surrender. In November 1950, Kazuo Kawai published an article in the *Pacific Historical Review* which argued that Japan's response had been misunderstood because of the ambiguity in one of the words in that response, "mokusatsu." However, an investigation of Prime Minister Suzuki's response shows that he did in fact announce the rejection of the Potsdam Declaration. Moreover, *mokusatsu* is not an ambiguous term. Finally, Kawai worked as propagandist for the Japanese foreign ministry during the war, and evidence strongly suggests that he also did so both before and after the war as well. His *mokusatsu* story is best understood as propaganda. **KEYWORDS** Potsdam Declaration, Kazuo Kawai, mokusatsu, atomic bomb, Suzuki Kantarō

On July 26, 1945, the heads of the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of China issued an ultimatum to Japan enumerating irreducible terms upon which the Asia-Pacific War could be ended. The ultimatum, known as the Potsdam Declaration, because U.S. President Harry S. Truman and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill were meeting at the Berlin suburb of Potsdam at the time, threatened "prompt and utter destruction" if Japan did not accept. At a press conference two days later, Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki Kantarō announced that Japan would *mokusatsu* the ultimatum. Many translators rendered this word as "ignore." Subsequently, the United States used this rejection as a justification for its atomic attacks against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Soviet Union used it as a pretext to invade Manchuria. Though these operations resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties, the general feeling in Allied nations and much of the rest of the world was that these losses were regrettable, but that Japan had been duly warned.

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Then, in November 1950 the *Pacific Historical Review* published a short essay by Kazuo Kawai, a scholar who was born in Japan but was raised and educated in the United States. He spent the war and early occupation years in Japan where he served as an editor of the *Nippon Times*.¹ According to Kawai, in the war's final days, "he supplemented the coverage of his staff by personally spending several hours each day during this period in the Japanese Foreign Office." There he learned that in the view of the government, the Potsdam Declaration, "provided an attractive basis for the opening of discussions with the Allies." However, disagreements with the military prevented immediate action and the government elected to play for time. Unfortunately, *mokusatsu*, the Japanese word the government chose to characterize its response, was ambiguous and susceptible to misinterpretation. "Who knows but that save for the fateful word *mokusatsu*, Japan might have been spared the horror of the atomic bomb which came only a few days later!"²

Kawai soon amplified his story in both popular and academic venues.³ From these sources, the story broke into the mainstream in spectacular fashion. This was partly due to Kawai's indefatigable efforts flogging the story and partly to the extraordinary poignancy of the idea that the two most lethal acts of war in all of history were the catastrophic consequences of a simple miscommunication. The indisputable result is that Kawai's tale of a "tragedy of errors" has become an essential element of almost every account of the war's end.⁴ The story is a staple of Japanese history

1. Kazuo Kawai, "Mokusatsu, Japan's Response to the Potsdam Declaration," *Pacific Historical Review* 19, no. 4 (Nov. 1950): pp. 409–14; "Kawai, Kazuo" file in *The Ohio State University Evaluation Program: Basic Who's Who* (handwritten) in "Kawai, Kazuo," Biographical file in the Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio; "Kazuo Kawai," Death announcement and obituary from the Board of Trustees of Ohio State University in *Ibid*. Throughout this text the Japanese order is used for the names of Japanese, that is surname preceding given name with the exception of Kazuo Kawai. "Kazuo" is the given name and "Kawai" is the family name. This order is used because, although Japanese, Kawai himself clearly identified with the American-born Nisei to whose community he belonged.

2. Kazuo Kawai, "Mokusatsu," 409 n. 1, 413.

3. Kawai pitched his story to both Robert J.C. Butow and William J. Coughlin, who then shared the account in their writing. Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 142–49 and the bibliographic entries on 239; William J. Coughlin, "The Great Mokusatsu Mistake," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1953, 31–40 (see p. 32 for Kawai).

4. Kawai, "Mokusatsu," 409. For examples of the story, see Alvin D. Coox, "The Pacific War," in Peter Duus, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 6: The Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 373; Japan Historical Research Association (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980), 17; Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 658; Philip Nobile, ed., *Judgment at the Smithsonian: The Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1995), 53–54; Staff Writers of the Mainichi Daily

textbooks.⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the official compilation of documents produced by the U.S. government to illustrate the history of its diplomatic activities, makes reference to it.⁶ It is the subject of a formerly classified paper in an in-house journal of the American National Security Agency on the importance of clarity in communication.⁷ Even writers who regard it with skepticism or dismiss it outright are nevertheless obliged to mention it.⁸ The story is ubiquitous.

Despite its enduring and pervasive appeal, Kawai's account cannot withstand serious scrutiny. There are three parts to Kawai's argument. The first is that the Japanese government "never intended to reject the Potsdam Declaration."⁹ Rather, it intended to withhold comment. Second, the word "*mokusatsu*," which the government chose to characterize its response, is ambiguous, and in consequence the Allies mistook the Japanese intention. Third, had this intention been understood, the horrors of the atomic attacks and of the Soviet war against Japan may have been avoided. All of these points are demonstrably false.

Moreover, Kawai worked as propagandist for the Japanese foreign ministry during the war and evidence strongly suggests that he also did so both before and after the war. Kawai wrote his *mokusatsu* piece when Japan was in a precarious diplomatic situation and needed American sympathy and goodwill. The story relies on and reinforces false premises about the nature of the Imperial Japanese state in 1945. The story is best understood as disinformation that distorts where it does not invert reality.

News, *Fifty Years of Light and Dark: The Hirohito Era* (Tokyo: Mainichi Newspapers, 1975), 182; James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 512.

5. For example, the widely used Yamakawa high school history text's special version for the general public reads "While awaiting mediation from the Soviet Union, Japan adopted an attitude of *mokusatsu*." *Shin Mouichido Yomu Yamakawa Nihonshi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2017), 337.

6. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945, Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 1293, n. 2. Hereafter, *Foreign Relations of the United States* will be abbreviated *FRUS*.

7. "Mokusatsu: One Word, Two Lessons," accessed November 15, 2021, <https://www.nsa.gov/portals/75/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/tech-journals/mokusatsu.pdf>.

8. See for example, Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999), 234–35; Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Harper, Collins, 2000), 501; Kenneth G. Henshall, *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 206, n. 98; Colin P.A. Jones, "Is Japan Equipped to Handle Decisions that Cost Lives, Limbs, and Loved Ones?," *The Japan Times*, August 9, 2015, accessed October 2, 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/08/09/issues/japan-equipped-handle-historic-decisions-cost-lives-limbs-loved-ones/>.

9. Kawai, "*Mokusatsu*," 409.

JAPANESE INTENTIONS

Kawai's assertion that the Japanese government did not intend to refuse the Allied ultimatum is the most significant and, superficially, the most cogent part of Kawai's argument. Consequently, it requires the most extensive treatment. Kawai wrote of "the Japanese government's intention of holding the matter open for an eventual favorably inclined response."¹⁰ While it is a gross exaggeration to say that "the Japanese government" had this aim, it was clearly the idea held by certain key individuals in the government, who, for a brief time, looked as if they would succeed.

Foremost among those pushing for serious consideration of the Potsdam Declaration was Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori. Among the major power holders in the Japanese government at the end of the war, Tōgō is recognized by historians as the primary motivating force behind the peace faction. Since his assumption of the post in April 1945, Tōgō repeatedly stressed the necessity of coming to terms with the Allies. In fact, he initially refused the portfolio because of newly inaugurated Prime Minister Suzuki's unrealistic belief that Japan could "continue the war for two or three years." Suzuki finally persuaded Tōgō to accept the post only after the prime minister assured Tōgō that he would have complete control over Japan's diplomacy.¹¹

Such a decision, however, was not entirely in Suzuki's hands. There were other interested parties, most significantly the hard-liners in the military, who significantly complicated Tōgō's job. During his tenure as foreign minister, Tōgō worked tirelessly to try to build a consensus to open talks with the then-neutral Soviet Union. Only at the very end did he succeed in establishing a fragile and grudging consensus to use these talks to reach a settlement with the Western Allies. Nevertheless, Tōgō succeeded in exploiting the military's fear of a Soviet entry into the war to gain its acquiescence in a peace initiative.¹² Tōgō's efforts soon stirred others to action. On July 10 Baron Harada Kumao, a political insider and the longtime personal secretary of Saionji Kinmochi, the last *genrō* or elder statesman from the Meiji period,

10. Ibid, 413.

11. Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no Ichimen* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1989), 460. See also Tōgō Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan*, trans. Tōgō Fumihiko and Bruce Blakeney (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 269–71.

12. Tōgō Kazuhiko, "Potsudamu Sengen Judaku to Gaishō Tōgō Shigenori no Kutō," *Kyōto Sangyō Daigaku Hōgakkai "Sandai Hōgaku,"* 51, no. 3–4 (January 2018). See also Tōgō Kazuhiko, "Foreign Minister Tōgō's Bitter Struggle and the Acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration," Brian P. Walsh, trans., in *Journal of American East-Asia Relations* 30, no. 1: 62–106.



FIGURE 1. Japanese Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori led the efforts of the peace party at the end of the war. *Source:* U.S. Army.

dispatched a letter to former Foreign Minister Arita Hachirō, then sheltering from American air raids in the resort town of Karuizawa, asking him to return to Tokyo.¹³

Shortly thereafter, the Allies broadcast the Potsdam Declaration. While a number of scholars have dismissed the Potsdam Declaration, calling it “mere propaganda” or a simple rehash of earlier statements, it was a significant relaxation of Allied demands and was immediately appreciated as such in Japan.¹⁴ Most importantly, the ultimatum did not call for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese state, but only of its armed forces.

13. Yoshida Shigeru, *Yoshida Shigeru Shokan* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1994), 550.

14. Leon V. Sigal, *Fighting to a Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 130. See also Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 160; Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies, Third Edition*

This was a concession that had been specifically sought by Japanese peace emissaries in Switzerland who claimed to speak for Tōgō as well as for Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa and Army Chief of Staff Umezu Yoshijirō. Their intermediary, a Swede named Pers Jacobsson, “[o]n his own initiative,” told them that the Allies would reject such a proposal as “merely a quibble.” Nevertheless, William Donovan, the chief of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, duly forwarded the information to Secretary of State James Byrnes on July 16, 1945, only ten days before the Allies issued their ultimatum. The Japanese emissaries also raised the issue of the country’s territorial integrity.¹⁵ In its final form, the Potsdam Declaration granted the concession on the surrender of the state and guaranteed most of Japan’s territory (less Okinawa, southern Sakhalin, and the Kurils).

The concession on unconditional surrender was far more than “merely a quibble.” It was a crucial change that ironically neither many of the Americans involved in making the change nor the Japanese who received it seem to have fully appreciated. Article 43 of Convention IV of the Hague Conventions of 1907 binds occupying powers to respect “unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.” In other words, it explicitly denies the authority for the kind of state-remaking program the United States had in mind for Japan. However, Article 35 of the same convention provided that capitulations, “once settled” “must be scrupulously observed by both parties.” Thus, an unconditional surrender of the state would presumably supersede any obligation implied by Article 43 and empower the occupying state to do as it pleased. Anything short of that would not. As Eugene Dooman, a Japan expert in the U.S. State Department put the matter, it was a question of whether “we acquire the normal rights of a military occupant or supreme authority” over Japan.¹⁶

In the Potsdam Declaration, the Allies effectively conceded this momentous point to Japan. This caused considerable consternation in the State

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 235; Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), xvi.

15. “Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Strategic Services (Donovan) to the Secretary of State, July 16, 1945,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, Vol. VI: The British Commonwealth and the Far East* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), pp. 489–490.

16. “MINUTES OF THE INTER-DIVISIONAL AREA COMMITTEE ON THE FAR EAST, Meeting No. 110, July 27, 1944 “Minutes of the Meetings of the Interdiv Area Committee on FE T1197 Roll 1, RG 59, U.S. Archives II (College Park), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

Department.¹⁷ Japanese diplomats, on the other hand, were greatly encouraged. Japanese Ambassador to Switzerland Kase Shunichi cut to the heart of the matter. “Japanese sovereignty,” he wrote in a July 29, 1945 cable to his foreign ministry superiors, “is recognized,” and “the term ‘unconditional surrender’” was “meant to refer to the Japanese Army and not to the Japanese people or the Japanese Government.”¹⁸ This point was also made in an analysis of the Declaration later prepared by the foreign ministry’s treaty bureau: “throughout the whole text of the Declaration the phrase ‘unconditional surrender’ is used only once in Paragraph (13), reading ‘...the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces....,’ making reference to ‘armed forces’ only.” It concluded that the Potsdam Declaration “should be regarded in substance as a peace proposal, giving the terms in advance.”¹⁹

Writing in 1951, Vice-Foreign Minister Matsumoto Shunichi recalled that he met with the leaders of the various bureaus in the foreign ministry who all regarded the Declaration as a positive development. According to Matsumoto, they agreed unanimously that the government should do nothing to give an indication that it had any intention to reject the ultimatum. It should also instruct the press to print the full text of the Declaration and to make no editorial comments. They reported this to Foreign Minister Tōgō who readily agreed. Later that day, Tōgō succeeded in prevailing on his colleagues first at a meeting of the Big Six (see below) and later at a cabinet meeting, bringing them around to acquiesce in the foreign ministry’s views.²⁰ Tōgō essentially corroborated Matsumoto’s recollections in his memoirs.²¹ In addition, there is

17. See for example, “Comparison of the Proclamation of July 26, 1945 with the Policy of the Department of State,” in *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers: The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945*, vol. 2 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 1284–89.

18. “Magic Diplomatic Summary No. 1224,” August 1, 1945, p. 2, entry 9030 Magic Diplomatic Summaries, folder “August, 1945,” box 18 July–August 1945, RG 457: Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, NARA College Park.

19. This document is dated August 9. However, a note in the original Japanese document explains that no record of the initial reaction of the treaty bureau exists and that the study that follows used the initial reaction of the authorities in the foreign ministry as reference in completing the study. Treaties Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “A Study of the Potsdam Declaration Proclaimed by the United States, Great Britain, and the Republic of China,” p. 2, translation of Gaimushō Jōyaku Kyoku, “Potsudamu Sengen no Kenshō,” August 9, 1945. Both the translation and Japanese original are in, “Source File” A 3165 0703 F 714 to A 5902 0000 W 253, folder 2, “A Study of the Potsdam Declaration,” box 4 Military History Section, RG 554 Records of the Far East Command, NARA College Park.

20. Matsumoto Shunichi, “Shūsen Oboegaki,” as reprinted in Gaimushō, ed., *Shūsen Shirōku, Vol. 4* (Tokyo: Hokuyōsha, 1977), 15–16.

21. Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no Ichimen*, 506–7; Tōgō Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan*, 312–13.

contemporary evidence supporting these claims. On the day after Tōgō prevailed upon the cabinet to keep its silence, Tōgō sent a message to Satō Naotake, Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union, advising him that “we are adopting a policy of careful study (while waiting for the Russian answer to our proposal [of sending a special envoy to Moscow]).”²² Five days later, Tōgō advised Satō that “under the circumstances there is a disposition to make the Potsdam Three Power Proclamation the basis of our study concerning terms.”²³

In short, Kawai was correct in his assertion that the “Japanese Foreign Office, immediately sensing the significant difference between these terms and the terms of the surrender imposed upon Germany, argued that they provided an attractive basis for the opening of discussions with the Allies.”²⁴ As a result, many accept Kawai’s claim that the Japanese government “never intended to reject the Potsdam Declaration.” Such a conclusion, however, rests on three unstated, largely unquestioned, and wholly unwarranted premises in Kawai’s argument. The first of these is that using the Potsdam Declaration as a basis for study for terms ending the war was tantamount to accepting it. It was not. The second is that the foreign ministry decided the government’s foreign policy. It did not. The third is that Suzuki’s statement was an expression, however clumsy, of the foreign ministry’s policy. In reality, it was the overthrow of that policy.

Regarding Kawai’s first premise, no one in the Japanese government was even close to proposing an acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration *in toto*, which with additional burdens imposed in an exchange of notes with U.S. Secretary of State James Byrnes were the actual terms to which Japan eventually agreed.²⁵ The vaguely worded proposal of the Foreign Minister Tōgō was that the ultimatum would be used as a “basis of our study concerning terms.” What did that truly mean? No one could say. Satō, after duly noting that the BBC

22. “Magic Diplomatic Summary No. 1221,” July 29, 1945, part II, pp. 2, 5, Entry 9030 Magic Diplomatic Summaries, folder “July 1945,” box 18 July–August 1945, RG 457, NARA College Park.

23. “Magic Diplomatic Summary No. 1225,” August 2, 1945, part II, p. 3, Entry 9030 Magic Diplomatic Summaries, folder “August 1945,” box 18 July–August 1945, RG 457, NARA College Park.

24. Kawai, “*Mokusatsu*,” 411.

25. It is often stated that after a Japanese request on August 10, the Allies allowed Japan to keep the emperor as a condition of peace. In fact, the Allied response was a rejection, and Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration in full, without qualification. The Instrument of peace included the additional terms or clarifications spelled out in the Byrnes Note. See “Memorandum by Mr. Edward G. Miller, Jr., Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State (Acheson), the Mr. Benjamin V. Cohen, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State,” August 21, 1945 in *FRUS 1945, Vol. VI, The British Commonwealth, the Far East* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 682; Interrogation of Toyoda Soemu, November 13–14, 1945 in United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Naval Analysis Division, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials, Volume 2*, p. 322.

had reported Japan's *mokusatsu* statement, specifically challenged Tōgō on this very point: "I would particularly like to be informed whether our Imperial Government has a concrete and definite plan for terminating the war; otherwise I will make no immediate request for an interview [with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov]." ²⁶ The government had none. In the same telegram in which he offered that there was a "disposition" to make the Potsdam Declaration a basis for study, Tōgō candidly admitted, "it is difficult to decide on concrete peace conditions here at home all at once." ²⁷ Part of the reason was that the "disposition" of which Tōgō spoke was almost entirely his alone. According to the postwar statement of Ikeda Sumihisa, director of the Imperial cabinet planning board, the cabinet was in fact strongly against accepting the Potsdam Declaration. ²⁸ In his cable, Tōgō added the further vague promise that at "present, in accordance with the Imperial Will, there is a unanimous determination to seek the good offices of the Russians in ending the war . . ." ²⁹ However, the Imperial Will notwithstanding, the unanimity would appear to have been only within the Big Six, the group that functioned as Japan's central government (see below), and was at best superficial. Only two days earlier the official entry in the log of the Imperial General Headquarters raged with disgust at the section chiefs advising diplomacy through the Soviet Union. The author "thundered" at the planning staff that diplomacy alone was not enough and the only proper course was to do everything necessary to defeat the Americans. ³⁰

As to what sort of terms might have been reached if Tōgō did somehow manage to pull together a consensus, it is clear that they would have in no way been acceptable to the Allies. According to the postwar testimony of Admiral Toyoda Soemu, chief of the Naval General Staff, the Japanese military looked upon the Potsdam Declaration: "not as one whose terms would be actually applied to us." Rather, the military believed that if the Americans continued to prosecute the war, it could extract concessions by forcing "heavy sacrifice when your landing operations should commence in HONSHU." ³¹

Disarmament was almost certainly among the terms that Toyoda and his colleagues sought to avoid. Because of an unauthorized suggestion in a July 19 broadcast by Navy Captain Ellis Zacharias of the Office of War Information,

26. Magic Diplomatic Summary, #1222, 30 July, 1945 part II, pp. 4, 7.

27. Magic Diplomatic Summary, #1225, 2 August, 1945 part II, p. 2.

28. Frank, *Downfall*, note on 412.

29. Magic Diplomatic Summary, #1225, 2 August, 1945 part II, p. 2.

30. Gunjishigakkai, ed., *Kimitsu Sensō Nisshi, Gekan* (Tokyo: Kinseisha, 1998), 747.

31. Interrogation of Toyoda Soemu, p. 319.

the topic of whether or not Japan, in contrast to Germany, might receive the benefits of the Atlantic Charter became an issue of Japanese diplomatic exchanges.³² In a July 29 cable to Tōgō, Satō in the context of whether the Atlantic Charter might be applied to Japan, posed a thorny inquiry in his inimitably direct manner: “This raises the question of whether the Imperial Government is prepared to accept [the principle of] disarmament . . .” Satō also asked whether the Japanese government was prepared to recognize the independence of Korea.³³

In response to these very direct questions, he got Tōgō’s complaints about the difficulty of deciding on things all at once. To the Americans listening in, the evasion must have been both obvious and ominous. It should have been. Japan had no intention of committing to either. On August 29, well after the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, which explicitly limited Japan’s territory to its home islands, Shigemitsu Mamoru, serving as foreign minister in a new cabinet inaugurated after Japan’s surrender on August 15, wired his diplomats, “we still cherish the desire to see Korea revert to the empire.”³⁴ In addition, the government tried to keep the Allies from occupying major cities such as Tokyo.³⁵

In a meeting Satō had with Soviet Vice-Commissar Solomon Lozovsky, he made clear that the Japanese government had no intention of accepting the Potsdam Declaration. After mischaracterizing the Declaration, Satō stated unequivocally that the Japanese government rejected it. According to Satō, he told Lozovsky, “on the 26th America, England and China issued a three-power declaration against Japan, demanding unconditional surrender. For its part the Japanese Government is completely unable to surrender unconditionally.” He later frankly told Lozovsky of his “fear that the Three Power Joint Declaration may prevent the Russian Government from lending its good offices as Japan hopes.”³⁶ In other words, Satō explicitly stated that Japan’s only reason for seeking Soviet mediation was precisely to *avoid* accepting the Potsdam Declaration.

Tōgō’s disposition to use the Potsdam Declaration as a *basis of study* for *eventual* terms was clearly not tantamount to acceptance. Rather, Japanese leaders tended to treat the Declaration as an opening bid for a negotiated peace and believed that issues as fundamental as disarmament and Korean

32. Magic Diplomatic Summary, No. 1218, 26 July 1945, part II, pp. 3–4.

33. Magic Diplomatic Summary, No. 1222, 30 July 1945, part II, pp. 3–4.

34. Bruce Lee, *Marching Orders: The Untold Story of World War II* (New York: Crown, 1995), 548.

35. “The Swiss Chargé (Grässli) to the Secretary of State,” August 16, 1945 in *FRUS 1945 British Commonwealth and Far East*, 668–69.

36. Magic Diplomatic Summary No. 1223, Part II, July 31, 1945, pp. 2, 5.

independence were still on the table. As late as August 9, Tōgō suggested that “we should consider the problem of disarmament during discussions of the armistice agreement.”³⁷ Of course, with this ludicrous suggestion, Tōgō was probably only trying to placate hard-liners to gain support for his peace proposal and move the process along.

This, however, raises the issue of the second unwarranted premise underlying Kawai’s argument, which is that Tōgō and his subordinates in the foreign ministry decided foreign policy. This is perhaps the most problematic distortion in Kawai’s paper, for it misleads the reader about who actually held power and what, exactly, constituted the government. Kawai, throughout his piece, refers to “the government” in opposition to the army and navy, as if these were separate entities as they are in the United States, with the military clearly and explicitly subordinate to the civil authorities. This was not the case in Imperial Japan. The army and navy were not only part of the government, they dominated it.

The key decision-making body at the end of the war was the so-called “Big Six.” The Big Six was composed of the prime minister (Suzuki), the foreign minister (Tōgō), the army minister (General Anami Korechika), the navy minister (Yonai), the chief of the army general staff (Umezu), and the chief of the navy general staff (Toyoda). Moreover, in marked contrast to the case in democratic countries, under Japanese law, the service ministers were not civilians but active-duty service members. They were under military discipline and therefore subordinate to their respective services. They were not, however, subordinate to the prime minister. Under the Meiji Constitution, the prime minister was the titular head of government but was actually more *primus inter pares* than true premier. Moreover, Prime Minister Suzuki was himself a retired admiral. Thus, the core of the government was composed of two generals, three admirals (one retired), and a single civilian. To speak of “the government” as an entity that was somehow separate, distinct, and above the army and navy is nonsensical. When Kawai writes “the government,” he really means the foreign ministry. This equation is false.

In fact, the actual Japanese government issued the *mokusatsu* statement as an explicit and very intentionally strongly worded rejection of the Potsdam Declaration. This occurred after the more radical military members attending a routine government meeting overthrew the fragile consensus Tōgō had constructed the previous day. Notably, this happened when Tōgō, famously

37. Sumio Hatano, “The Atomic Bomb and Soviet Entry into the War,” in *The End of the Pacific War: Reappraisals*, ed. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 105.

persuasive and notoriously stubborn, was absent. This enraged Tōgō and other members of the foreign ministry when they learned of it, but their rage was ultimately impotent precisely because the military services were not separate from the government but rather its dominant constituents.

Making matters even further from the American experience, and thus further from the mental world of Kawai's audience, is the fact that the service ministers and chiefs of staff were no more the masters of their own domains than the prime minister was of his. Factional rivalries divided both services and even led to assassinations. Often discipline in the officer corps could only be maintained by appeasing extremists and retroactively endorsing the *faits accomplis* of radical adventurists. It was precisely this poisonous dynamic that had led to Japan's ever-increasing sphere of aggression in the 1930s and 1940s. In Tokyo it caused the top brass, especially when in the presence of their rival service, to wax bellicose whenever more junior officers were also present.

Realizing this, Foreign Minister Tōgō, upon taking office, organized meetings of what came to be called the Big Six, meetings where only the principals were present. As Tōgō wrote in his memoir, "from my experience in the Liaison Conference in the time leading up to the war, I knew that the presence of aides in these meetings tended to stifle free and open conversation among the actual members, often leading them to take a harder line."³⁸ Indeed, the Big Six seems to have functioned as intended and, according to Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda, when the Japanese government approached the Soviet Union, the only members of the navy, and, probably of the army, that knew of the initiative were their respective members of the Big Six.³⁹

Thus, Foreign Minister Tōgō was only able to make policy at the pleasure of the ministers and chiefs of staff of the army and navy. These men, in turn, were constrained by their subordinates, and were only able to pursue conciliatory policies tepidly and in total secrecy from the institutions they ostensibly led. The foreign ministry did not determine Imperial Japan's foreign policy.

The third and final faulty premise of Kawai's essay is that the *mokusatsu* statement represented the government's (or more precisely the foreign ministry's) actual position when in reality it was the result of its overthrow. As discussed above, the section leaders in the foreign ministry embraced the opportunity presented by the Potsdam Declaration and decided that the

38. Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no Ichimen*, pp. 473–74. See Also Tōgō Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan*, 282–84.

39. Interrogation of Toyoda Soemu, p. 319.

government should say nothing on the subject until they heard back about their approach to the Soviet Union. Tōgō subsequently convinced first the Big Six and later the cabinet of the wisdom of this approach. In his memoirs, Tōgō recalled that he first heard of Prime Minister Suzuki's announcement of the government's response to the Potsdam Declaration from the newspapers. He subsequently learned of events that had transpired at a routine meeting for the exchange of information between the government and the high command. At the meeting, from which Tōgō had absented himself to attend to "important matters," one of the military men present took the opportunity to urge the explicit rejection of the Allied ultimatum.⁴⁰

Here Tōgō erred badly, for he should have known that no matter how insignificant the agenda, the toxic dynamics he had wisely neutralized with his creation of the Big Six would come into play as soon as the military aides of the ministers and chiefs of staff were present, and that is precisely what happened. These men began to pressure their superiors about the dangers of government silence on the matter. These military leaders then put pressure on Prime Minister Suzuki. According to Navy Chief of Staff Admiral Toyoda Soemu, he, Umezu, Anami, Yonai, Prime Minister Suzuki, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu Hisatsune then moved to a different room where they discussed "how the Potsdam Declaration should be handled. *Nobody at this meeting even so much as hinted that he wanted to have the Allied proclamation considered seriously* [emphasis added]." Nevertheless, they were unanimous on the idea that they should clarify the government's attitude "because of the shock this proclamation might bring the military personnel and the people." Sakomizu proposed that the prime minister make a statement at a scheduled news conference and those present discussed the best thing for Suzuki to say. "I do not mean to say that we composed every word of the text, but we did draft a very rough gist of the text, if I remember correctly."⁴¹

According to Sakomizu, Admiral Toyoda did not remember correctly, or at least not completely so. In Sakomizu's telling, the individuals named by Toyoda did meet and work out a statement for Prime Minister Suzuki to give in response to a planted question. However, the impetus for the statement came from the military men present, including Toyoda himself. These men, after a good deal of argument, persuaded Sakomizu that the government

40. Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no Ichimen*, 508. See also Tōgō Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan*, 313–14.

41. "G16. MIS, STATEMENTS OF JAPANESE OFFICIALS, DOCUMENT NO. 57670 SOEMU TOYODA, DECEMBER 1, 1949," partially reproduced in Michael Kort, *The Columbia Guide to Hiroshima and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 391.

needed to say something. They argued that such a statement was necessary in order to maintain the morale of the soldiers and sailors, especially those serving overseas. They “even went so far as to say that they could not maintain the discipline of the military” in the absence of a statement condemning the declaration. This was no doubt a deeply unsettling prospect to a man who would title his memoir of the militarist era *The Kantei [Prime Minister’s Official Residence] Under Machine Guns*. Keenly feeling the absence of the notoriously tenacious foreign minister, Sakomizu tried to get a message to Tōgō, but it never reached him. At last, Sakomizu was “driven into a corner and ended up taking the position that something had to be done.”⁴²

Suzuki himself remembered the situation similarly. According to Suzuki, the hard-liners in the military, backed by the force of public opinion, insisted that he “express thoroughgoing defiance and use the Declaration to rouse the country’s will to fight.” Some of the military men argued ominously that absent an official rejection “the situation would deteriorate.” So, he was “compelled” to answer a question about the ultimatum by dismissing it as something that did not “merit serious consideration.”⁴³

Contrary to Toyoda’s assertion, the military men presented Suzuki with far more than the “gist” of a statement. Rather, they crafted every word of it, clashing with Sakomizu the whole time. According to Sakomizu, they “revised it over and over again and with each revision it became ever stronger.” The others at the meeting vetoed every attempt Sakomizu made at toning down the language, such as inserting the phrase “for the time being” before the word *mokusatsu*.⁴⁴ Finally, as will be seen, Suzuki’s statement in its final form was almost identical to unofficial statements already leaked to the press. To anyone paying attention, this appeared to be exactly what it in fact was: an official confirmation of the rumors of rejection that hard-liners had floated the previous day. Sakomizu reported that the whole incident made “Foreign Minister Tōgō furious, driving him to despair.”⁴⁵

No doubt, part of the reason for this disaster was that those who demanded a forceful rejection and crafted Suzuki’s statement had erred in their priorities. Though some were aware that the international situation was of the utmost importance, they believed that the domestic situation was more urgent and that they had more time on the diplomatic front than in fact they

42. Sakomizu Hisatsune, *Kikanjūka no Shushō Kantei* (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1964), 229–31.

43. Suzuki Kantarō, *Suzuki Kantarō Jiden* (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1968), 292–93.

44. Sakomizu, *Kikanjūka no Shushō Kantei*, 231.

45. *Ibid.*, 229.

did. They had even bought into their own propaganda about the ultimatum being an act of desperation borne of war-weariness. The comments of both Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa and Prime Minister Suzuki bear this out.

Suzuki was actually far less reluctant to reject the Declaration than he suggested in his autobiography. At a cabinet meeting on August 3, Suzuki dismissed the counsel of an advisor who pointed out that business circles were in favor of the acceptance. Suzuki insisted that the issuing of the Declaration was a sign of weakness: “For the enemy to say something like that means circumstances have arisen that force them also to end the war. That is why they are talking about unconditional surrender.” Rather than yield, it was imperative that Japan stay the course: “Precisely at a time like this, if we hold firm, then they will yield before we do . . . You advisers may ask me to reconsider, but I don’t think there is any need to stop [the war].”⁴⁶

Navy Minister Yonai, a former premier, was the most senior member of the navy’s peace faction. However, under pressure from hard-liners in the service, Yonai, like Suzuki, issued a statement dismissing the Potsdam Declaration.⁴⁷ Addressing the navy, he said something to the effect of “the navy should press forward, unvexed by such a trifle.”⁴⁸ When questioned on the matter by Takagi Sōkichi, a subordinate who was uneasy with this approach, Yonai dismissed his concerns. “In a case like this, the first one to issue a statement shows they are the weaker. Churchill has fallen, the Americans are becoming isolated. The government will just *mokusatsu* it. There is no need for undue haste.”⁴⁹

In fact, there was no time to spare, but the only concrete threat in the Allied ultimatum read, “the prodigious land, sea and air forces of the United States, the British Empire and of China, many times reinforced by their armies and air fleets from the west, are poised to strike the final blows upon Japan.” Japanese leaders well understood that this was no empty boast, but also knew that it would take months for their enemies to effectively bring this power to bear. Ignorant of the successful test of the atomic bomb and of the

46. Quoted in Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 503.

47. Takagi Sōkichi, *Kaigun Taishō Yonai Mitsumasa Oboegaki*, ed. Matsumoto Jō (Tokyo: Kōjinsha, 1988), 144.

48. Ugaki Matome, *Sensōroku, Gekan*, ed. Handō Kazutoshi (Tokyo: PHP Editor’s Group, 2019), 479–80. See also Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, eds., Masataka Chihaya, trans., *Fading Victory: The Diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki, 1941–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 651–52.

49. Takagi, *Kaigun Taishō Yonai Mitsumasa Oboegaki*, 143–45. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s Conservatives had just lost the election to Clement Atlee’s Labor Party in the British General Elections.

imminence of Soviet belligerence, neither of which were mentioned in the Declaration, it seemed to them that they could deal with the Allies after they handled problems closer to home. The demand for surrender had outraged right-wingers. Hard-line elements in the military were growing restive. Sakomizu recalled, “At the time we were wholly unaware of the designs of the Allies, but domestically, we feared that had we not [issued the statement], the military would get out of control, take some precipitous action, and all would be lost. It could not be helped. I think it was a path that Japan had to take.”⁵⁰

His fears, as it would transpire, were entirely justified. When, just over two weeks later, word leaked out that the government had accepted the Potsdam Declaration, Sakomizu awoke to the sound of machine guns spraying the prime minister’s official residence, where Sakomizu was staying. It fell to Sakomizu to telephone Suzuki, who was at his private residence, warn him of the attack, and advise him to flee. Suzuki wisely heeded this counsel, escaping just moments before the extremists arrived. The rebels set fire to both structures.⁵¹

In this charged atmosphere, the government’s greatest concern about its response to the Potsdam Declaration was not how it was perceived overseas but how Japanese viewed it. In fact, it soon put its formidable domestic surveillance machinery to work on just that question. The *Tokubetsu Kōtō Keisatsu* or Special Higher Police, often called the *Tokkō*, were dispatched throughout the war years to keep tabs on the feelings and opinions of Japanese from various parts of society and they made reports on all manner of subjects. After Suzuki issued his statement, they compiled a report on the feelings of people toward the Potsdam Declaration and the government’s response to it.

The results of the investigation show that the government was largely successful in appeasing domestic hard-liners. There was an exception. One man, identified as a member of a right-wing group, clearly wanted something more bellicose and specifically identified *mokusatsu* as too weak, fearing it might be interpreted much as Kawai had suggested it should have been. In his view the Declaration was nothing more than a “ruse of the enemy” and the *mokusatsu* statement “may be interpreted as tacit acceptance (*mokunin*) both here and abroad . . .”⁵²

50. Sakomizu, *Kikanjūka no Shushō Kantei*, 232.

51. The classic account of these events and others that transpired on that day is Handō Kazutoshi, *Nippon no Ichiban Nagai Hi*, translated and published in English as *The Pacific War Research Society, Japan’s Longest Day* (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1980), 284–85, 294–96; Sakomizu, 305–7.

52. Awaya Kentarō and Nakazono Hiroshi, eds., *Haisen Zengo no Shakai Jōsei Dai Ikkann: Sensō Makki no Minshin Dōkō* (Tokyo: Gendai Shirryō Shuppan, 1998), 432.

Though some others, notably the agent preparing the report, felt that the government should have issued a stronger statement of rejection, the right-winger's belief of implied tacit acceptance was unusual if not unique. Most clearly did not see it that way. An anonymous dietman interviewed for the report had quite a different view. Denouncing the Declaration, he indicated his approval for the government's statement, and echoed what were fast becoming talking points among those calling for rejection. The Declaration was nothing more than "a stratagem of our enemies and its goal is to sap our country's fighting spirit while stemming the tide of opinion in their own countries which is toward the termination of the war." A businessman who shared the dietman's assessment of the situation approved of Suzuki's statement noting that "I think the measures taken by the government were right and appropriate."⁵³

Among extremists, grumbling was common. Admiral Ugaki Matome wrote in his diary that the government should have responded by demanding the unconditional surrender of the Allies.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, such responses were unusual and generally limited to those committed to a romantic nihilism which extolled national self-destruction. Ugaki himself responded to news of Japan's surrender by leading thirty other men on a failed kamikaze attack against American forces on Okinawa. (Six returned due to reported engine trouble.) Nevertheless, the government's response succeeded in placating most hard-liners. The *Tokkō* report concluded: "The general reaction of the people was to approve as absolutely correct the statement of the government that they would *mokusatsu* the Declaration as something unworthy of even a glance."⁵⁵

Though a domestic success, the statement was a foreign policy catastrophe. It effectively reversed the cabinet's decision and all of Tōgō's efforts had gone for naught, as the government capitulated to the hard-liners. Once all three of the false premises of Kawai's argument are identified and understood, it becomes clear there is no contradiction between the foreign ministry's welcoming of the opportunity presented by the Potsdam Declaration and Suzuki's fateful statement rejecting it.

Moreover, there can be no doubt that the statement was a rejection. As both Toyoda and Sakomizu attested, the *mokusatsu* statement was a meticulously debated and carefully crafted refusal of the Allied ultimatum. Moreover, this is evident upon examination of the statement itself, which

53. Ibid, 432, 434.

54. Ugaki, *Sensōroku, Gekan*, ed. Handō, 479–80. See also Goldstein and Dillon, eds., *Fading Victory* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 651–52.

55. Awaya and Nakazono, eds., *Haisen Zengo no Shakai Jōsei Dai Ikkai*, 425.

Kawai, amazingly, never actually quotes. The Japanese government's response did not hinge on the particular nuance implied by the word *mokusatsu*.⁵⁶ After being asked his thoughts on the Declaration, Prime Minister Suzuki answered that he regarded it as nothing more than a "rehash of the Cairo Declaration." Suzuki then added: "As for the government, we do not believe the Declaration merits serious consideration and we will simply *mokusatsu* it, resolutely pressing forward to carry the war to a successful conclusion."⁵⁷

Kawai asserts that by this statement, the government simply meant to withhold comment. However, going out of one's way to announce that one is going to withhold comment is in itself making a comment. In his memoir, Kase Toshikazu, a high-ranking foreign ministry official, made exactly this point. It was true, Kase conceded, that the cabinet had decided to "ignore" the Potsdam Declaration, "but to ignore it should have meant simply that we refrained from commenting on it. To state expressly that we would ignore the proclamation was entirely contrary to the purpose of the decision."⁵⁸ Admiral Takagi Sōkichi, aide-de-camp to Minister of the Navy (and former Prime Minister) Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa, raised a similar point. As discussed above, Yonai told Takagi that "The government will just *mokusatsu* it. There is no need for undue haste." "I see," Takagi then replied, "but why did we have to have the Prime Minister spout such nonsense?"⁵⁹ Why indeed?

This was precisely the question on the mind of writer Takami Jun. On August 7, 1945, after hearing of the bombing of Hiroshima, he talked of the event with his brother-in-law. Ruing the ineptitude of Suzuki's response, he said, "This whole *mokusatsu* affair was so totally futile. If they were going to *mokusatsu* it, then there was no need for a man who is, after all, the prime

56. Prime Minister Suzuki's full statement, as reported in the *Kyōto Shinbun*, came in the following exchange:

Q: What are the prime minister's thoughts on the Three-Power Joint Proclamation [the Potsdam Declaration]?

A: I regard the Three-Power Joint Proclamation as nothing more than a rehash of the Cairo Declaration. As for the government, we do not believe the Declaration merits serious consideration and we will simply *mokusatsu* it, resolutely pressing forward to carry the war to a successful conclusion.

See "Hōbakugeki ni Yurugaji, Hondo Hisshō no Seisan," *Kyoto Shinbun*, July 30, 1945, p. 1; "Hōbakugekika, Kanzen Tatakainukan," *Asahi Shinbun (Tokyo Morning Edition)*, July 30, 1945, p. 1; "Reisei ni Gun wo Shinrai Shi, Mate, Teki Gekimetsuno Kōki," *Yomiuri Hōchi*, July 30, 1945, p. 1; "Gun ni Ki Suru Tokoro Ari, Shinobe Teki no Bōbaku," *Mainichi Shinbun*, July 30, 1945, p. 1.

57. "Hōbakugeki ni Yurugaji, Hondo Hisshō no Seisan," *Kyoto Shinbun*, July 30, 1945, p. 1.

58. Toshikazu Kase, *Journey to the Missouri* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 211.

59. Takagi, *Kaigun Taishō Yonai Mitsumasa Oboegaki*, 143–45.



FIGURE 2. Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki Kantarō addresses a press conference on July 28, 1945. He took the occasion to announce the government's response to the Potsdam Declaration by answering a planted question. Note that he is reading from a prepared statement. *Source:* Photo: Kyodo News, item number 2015071700606.

minister of the nation, to go out of his way to say they are going to *mokusatsu* it." Like Kase, Takami believed the announcement defeated the entire purport of the statement. "If that was really the case, then he should have just kept his mouth shut. It's as if we are being governed by children.—In truth, this is a child's squabble."⁶⁰

Quite aside from the futility of the *mokusatsu* statement itself, the response included other comments. Suzuki characterized the Declaration as a "rehash of the Cairo Declaration." He also averred that the "government does not regard it as a thing of any great value." Finally, and most pertinently, he declared, "We will press forward resolutely to carry the war to a successful conclusion." Whatever ambiguity the word *mokusatsu* might have is clearly resolved by the context of the statement which concludes with a declaration of Japan's determination to fight on. In the same press conference Suzuki also asserted that he had "absolute confidence" in Japan's strategists and stated

60. Takami Jun, *Haisen Nikki* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 276.

that a recent reduction in rations was “effected in order to prepare us for a prolonged war.” He addressed the journalists after a number of other government spokesmen had already rejected the ultimatum, dismissing it as “propaganda” intended to offset the “war weariness” of the Allied nations.⁶¹

American media sources reported all these statements. They also noted that Suzuki’s statement had merely confirmed rumors already circulating in the Japanese press. The day before, the Japanese wire service *Dōmei* had reported that, “it had ‘authoritatively learned’ that Japan will ignore the Churchill-Truman-Chiang proclamation calling for unconditional surrender [*sic*].” According to a dispatch intercepted by the Federal Communications Commission, *Dōmei* had reported that “Japan will prosecute the war of Greater East Asia to the bitter end in accordance with her fixed policy, it was authoritatively stated.”⁶²

The “authoritative” source for this rumor was almost certainly the military, which ultimately literally dictated Japan’s response. Soon after news of the ultimatum broke, a Mr. Ōmori of *Dōmei* called at Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ). The man from IGHQ recorded cryptically in the IGHQ war log that he “thanked [Mr. Ōmori] and gave him what he wanted.”⁶³ The following morning, many Japanese newspapers carried similar items, announcing the issuance of the Potsdam Declaration, deriding it as *shōshi* (笑止), a term that Kenkyūsha’s Japanese-English dictionary defines as “laughable; ridiculous; ludicrous; absurd.”⁶⁴ *Asahi Shinbun* journalist Yoshitake Shin recalled that the story originated from the paper’s military affairs desk rather than the desk covering the prime minister’s office.⁶⁵

Prime Minister Suzuki’s actual statement, as well as the circumstances under which he delivered it make clear that the purpose of the statement was to reject the Potsdam Declaration. Moreover, the carefully scripted statement leaves no doubt that Suzuki was speaking for the government. In Suzuki’s response, he makes a deliberate and conspicuous change in subjects between the first and second sentences from “I” to “the government.” As reported in numerous newspapers on the morning of July 30, Suzuki

61. “Japan Officially Turns Down Allied Surrender Ultimatum,” *The New York Times*, July 30, 1945, p. 1.

62. Associated Press, “Radio Spokesman Reports Decision After Cabinet Considers Allied Terms,” *Johnstown [Pennsylvania] Tribune*, July 27, 1945 (Evening Edition), p. 1.

63. Gunjishigakkai, ed., *Kimitsu Sensō Nisshi, Gekan*, 745.

64. The major daily newspapers, *Asahi Shinbun*, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, and *Mainichi Shinbun*, and others all carried the word “shōshi” in their headlines, strongly suggesting some form of direction behind the scenes.

65. Suzuki Tamon, *“Shūsen” no Seijishi: 1943–1945* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2011), 154.

stated, “*As for the government (政府としては)*, we do not believe the Declaration merits serious consideration and we will simply *mokusatsu* it and press forward resolutely to carry the war to a successful conclusion [emphasis added].”⁶⁶ There can be little doubt that this was meant as an expression of the government’s policy and that the true intention of Suzuki’s statement was to announce the government’s official rejection of the Potsdam Declaration.

THE MEANING OF MOKUSATSU

Nevertheless, Kawai insists that Suzuki’s statement was misunderstood because of the nuance of the word *mokusatsu*. This is the second false premise of Kawai’s argument, namely that *mokusatsu* is an ambiguous term. It is not. Strangely, Kawai does not ever provide what should be a *sine-qua-non* for a cogent semantic argument: a dictionary definition supporting his interpretation. Neither does he provide an illustrative literary example of *mokusatsu* meaning what he purports that it does. He also does not cite any linguistic expert. The only evidence Kawai provides is his own authority, which, as it turns out, is considerably less than many of his readers likely assume.

Kawai was not a native speaker of Japanese. He made this clear in a 1926 essay on the Nisei, with whom, at that point, he identified culturally. Kawai wrote: “As to having advantage over people in Japan, we have the wonderful advantage of *being quite unable to speak the language or read their newspapers*, of being quite ignorant of their customs, history, or traditions, of holding different ideals, of thinking in different ways [emphasis added].”⁶⁷ Of course, Kawai was an intelligent man, and he spent a long time between that essay and his *mokusatsu* piece studying Japan and its language. He had also lived in Japan for eight years. Nevertheless, as late as 1949 he still composed a contribution to a Japanese-language periodical in English and had it translated into Japanese.⁶⁸ Clearly this argument requires something more substantial than Kawai’s own say-so.

More authoritative sources do not support Kawai’s assertions. In its 1940 Japanese-English dictionary Sanseidō defines *mokusatsu*: “shut one’s eyes to,

66. “Hōbakugeki ni Yurugaji, Hondo Hisshō no Seisan,” *Kyoto Shinbun*, July 30, 1945, p. 1. See also “Hōbakugekika, Kanzen Tatakainukan,” *Asabi Shinbun (Tokyo Morning Edition)*, July 30, 1945, p. 1; “Reisei ni Gun wo Shinrai Shi, Mate, Teki Gekimetsuno Kōki,” *Yomiuri Hōchi*, July 30, 1945, p. 1; “Gun ni Ki Suru Tokoro Ari, Shinobe Teki no Bōbaku,” *Mainichi Shinbun*, July 30, 1945, p. 1.

67. Kazuo Kawai, “Three Roads, and None Easy,” as quoted in Robert W. O’Brien, “Reaction of the College Nisei to Japan and Japanese Foreign Policy from the Invasion of Manchuria to Pearl Harbor,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Jan., 1945): 23.

68. See Kawai Kazuo, “Nihon no Chiriteki Gan,” *Maru* 2, no. 9 (September, 1949): 65.

ignore, cut.”⁶⁹ Kenkyūsha’s more authoritative 1942 dictionary defines it: “To take no notice of; treat (anything) with silent contempt; ignore by keeping silence.”⁷⁰ In neither of these definitions is there an implication that something is held back or hinting that something is pending. It is little wonder then why Kawai did not provide a dictionary definition supporting his argument. None existed. No more mystery surrounds his failure to include an illustrative literary example. No such examples exist.

Indeed, multiple translators would be surprised by his assertion that the word “has no exact equivalent in the English language” for they have employed it to render English works into Japanese. For example, Joseph Conrad’s translator, Iuchi Yūshirō used the term to mean “ignore completely” and “disregard as beneath his notice.”⁷¹ Aoki Yūzō and Koike Shigeru employed it to translate Charles Dickens’s phrase, “a bland unconsciousness of his existence.”⁷² Ōkubo Yasuo used the word to express Pearl S. Buck’s phrase “She would not speak to her or notice that she was in the house at all.”⁷³ *Mokusatsu* connotes contempt, and that, it seems, translates very well indeed. There is simply no nuance that suggests pending approval or even uncertainty in the term.

Language experts agree. Translator Nakamura Yasuo feels that far from being a word implying a desire for conciliation, *mokusatsu* is actually stronger than “ignore” and would be more appropriately rendered “ignore with contempt,” as it appears in the second edition of Kenkyūsha’s *Daiwaijiten*.⁷⁴ Kenneth Henshall, a noted Japan scholar and linguist who has several translations and language primers to his credit, discusses the word in the specific context of the bombing. He is dismissive of the notion that the Japanese government meant to imply anything by its statement except rejection. In line with Nakamura’s views, Henshall asserts that *mokusatsu* “basically means ‘to ignore with contempt’.” Henshall then noted the claim put forth by Kawai and others that Suzuki had simply meant “no comment at this stage”

69. *Sanseido’s New Concise Japanese-English Dictionary* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1940): 433.

70. *Kenkyūsha’s New Japanese English Dictionary: American Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 1256.

71. Joseph Conrad, *Secret Agent (Mittei)*, trans. Iuchi Yushirō (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1974), 35, 147.

72. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House (Kōryōkan)*, Vol. 4, trans. Aoki Yūzo and Koike Shigeru (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999), 374.

73. Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth (Sekai Bungaku Zenshū, Vol. 20)*, trans. Ōkubo Yasuo (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1965).

74. Torikai Kumiko, *Rekishi Wo Kaeta Goyaku* (Tokyo, 2001), 31.

but dismissed the claim on grounds of both semantics and context, pointing out that Suzuki's other comments eliminated any doubt that he had meant exactly what he said.⁷⁵ Chalmers Johnson similarly rejects the notion: "Since the characters for *mokusatsu* mean 'silent kill,' most informed commentators believe that the Allies did not mistranslate Suzuki. If he really meant 'no comment,' that is not what he said—and *mokusatsu* does not imply it, even obliquely."⁷⁶

These experts are unanimous and the reason for this is simple. *Mokusatsu* is not an ambiguous term. There are no cases in which it connotes the possibility of eventual approval or even acquiescence. *Mokusatsu* is used in a uniform manner to mean ignoring something contemptuously. One of the primary reasons that it has so little variation in meaning is that it lacks the most basic requirement for a word to develop complexity: age. According to Shogakkan's *Seisenban Nihonkokugo Daijiten* the first recorded use of the term was in Natsume Soseki's 1907 novel, *Nowake*. In other words, *mokusatsu* was all of one year older than the Japanese word for "airplane" and was less than half the age of Prime Minister Suzuki when he employed it in his announcement. Soseki used the term to describe the tragedy of a writer whose work is ignored by the world and has no impact.⁷⁷ Contemptuous dismissal is not merely implied; it is the reason that Soseki reached for those soul-crushing characters in the first place.

However, the most damning piece of evidence against Kawai's claim that "ignore" was a mistranslation comes from no less an authority than Kawai himself. At the time of the press conference Kawai seemed to have a very different reading of Suzuki's intentions than the one he later popularized. Kawai's essay omitted innumerable important details, but the most important of those was that among the English language news sources that translated *mokusatsu* as "ignore" was the *Nippon Times*, which carried news of the initial leak of the *mokusatsu* statement under the headline "Potsdam Declaration to Be Ignored in Japan."⁷⁸ Kawai himself was an editor of the *Nippon Times*.⁷⁹ "Ignore," it would seem, was a satisfactory translation to him at the time.

75. Henshall, *A History of Japan*, 206, n. 98.

76. Chalmers Johnson, "Omote (Explicit) and Ura (Implicit): Translating Japanese Political Terms," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 6, no. 1 (Winter, 1980): 89–115.

77. Natsume Sōseki, *Nihyakutōka, Nowake* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976), 145.

78. "Potsdam Declaration to Be Ignored in Japan," *Nippon Times*, July 29, 1945, p. 1.

79. Kawai, "Mokusatsu," 409.

However, as already noted, Kawai was not a native speaker. Perhaps he left out his own paper because of the embarrassment of being a part of the “tragedy of errors.” Perhaps he had simply naïvely followed the lead of other publications and now wanted to set the record straight, leaving his own small part in the drama unmentioned. Could it still be true that, as Kawai claimed, the “more perceiving sections of the Japanese public” understood that the government was, in fact, signaling the approach of peace?⁸⁰

Certainly not if those who were in the government are to be believed. Tōgō recalled that he voiced his “considerable dissatisfaction” with the announcement when he learned of it precisely because it was at variance with the previous day’s cabinet decision to withhold comment for the time being.⁸¹ In the recollection of Shigemitsu Mamoru, who both preceded and succeeded Tōgō as foreign minister and to whom would fall the unenviable task of signing the terms of surrender as the representative of the Japanese civil government, Tōgō considerably understated his reaction. Shigemitsu was similarly perturbed by Suzuki’s statement and saw no subtle intricacies in the language used. In Shigemitsu’s view, the *mokusatsu* statement was the product of pressure from hard-liners and had completely overturned Tōgō’s intent: “At the time the militarists were insisting on *mokusatsu* and Foreign Minister Tōgō was incensed upon hearing of the announcement.”⁸² Writing in English, Kase recounted, “The aged prime minister seems to have been influenced by the growing opposition [to those seeking to end the war], for, apparently in a moment of weakness he told the press that it was the policy of the government to ignore the proclamation entirely.” He lamented “Suzuki’s outrageous statement” as “a piece of foolhardiness” that was “the penalty of having an inexperienced man at the head of government.”⁸³

Another who detected no ambiguity, let alone hidden promise, was Dietman Ashida Hitoshi. Ashida had long since retired from the foreign ministry to pursue a career in politics, the media, and as a historian of diplomatic history. One of his works earned him a doctorate from the Tokyo Imperial University. After leaving the political world, Ashida also served as president of the *Japan Times and Mail* from 1933 to 1939. This paper would later

80. Ibid, p. 413

81. Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no Ichimen*, p. 508. See also Tōgō Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan*, 313–14.

82. Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Shōwa no Dōran, Gekan* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2001), 318. See also Mamoru Shigemitsu, *Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace*, trans. Oswald White (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 358.

83. Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 211.

become the *Nippon Times*, the paper that Kawai edited. Ashida kept in close contact with many of his former colleagues including Shigemitsu. After the war, Ashida would himself serve as foreign minister, first in the Katayama Tetsu cabinet, and then, after ascending to the top job, in his own government. On July 28, he recorded in his diary in English, “Read the text of the proclamation of 3 Powers (Britain, America, China). The cabinet declared categorical refusal of the proposal.”⁸⁴

Suzuki himself, clearly trying to minimize the strength of his statement, later paraphrased it as “I do not believe this declaration merits serious consideration.”⁸⁵ Most significant of all, Suzuki, expressing deep regret for having made his statement under pressure from the military, went on to twice characterize his response, without qualification, as a “rejection of the Declaration” (宣言拒絶).⁸⁶

The purport of these accounts makes clear that Kawai’s assertion that “ignore” was somehow a mistaken translation is untenable if not absurd. Moreover, some of these accounts are either in English or have been translated into English. All of them render *mokusatsu* as “ignore” or stronger. For example, Tōgō’s memoir was later translated into English by his son-in-law, who had long served as his personal secretary, and the attorney who represented him at the Tokyo war crimes trials. These men, who knew Tōgō’s mind as well as anyone could have, translated *mokusatsu* as “ignore.”⁸⁷ Kase translated the key phrase as “ignore the proclamation entirely.”⁸⁸ Notably, this is the same formulation (“ignore it entirely”) employed by the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service in its rendering of Suzuki’s statement for use within the U.S. government.⁸⁹ At least as far as Kase was concerned, the Americans got it exactly right. Ashida Hitoshi (writing in English) bluntly characterized the statement in even stronger language, calling it a “categorical refusal.” In his later diplomatic history, he paraphrased it using the word *mushi* (無視), defined in Kenkyūsha’s dictionary as “ignore;

84. Fukunaga Fumio, Shimokōbe Motoharu, eds., *Ashida Hitoshi Nikki 1905–1945, Vol. 4: 1937–1945*, entry for July 29, 1945 (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2012), 644.

85. Suzuki Kantarō’s original Japanese was “この宣言は重視する要なきものと思う”。See Suzuki Kantarō, *Suzuki Kantarō Jiden*, 292.

86. *Ibid.*, 293.

87. Tōgō Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan*, 314. Compare to Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no Ichimen*, 508.

88. Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 211.

89. FRUS Potsdam II, p. 1293.

disregard; neglect,” certainly in line with the translation to which Kawai objected.⁹⁰ There was no ambiguity in Japan’s response.

The final part of Kawai’s “tragedy of errors” narrative is that a Japanese refusal to comment would have been acceptable to the Allies, or at least interpreted positively enough that they would have refrained from their paroxysm of violence in the beginning of August. This assertion finds no support in the historical record. The Potsdam Declaration was an ultimatum whose stated deadline (“now”) was immediately upon receipt. It was no time to play coy. In fact, General Thomas Handy, acting chief of staff of the U.S. Army (while Chief of Staff General of the Army George Marshall was in Potsdam), had already ordered the atomic bombings “as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945,” on July 25, the day before Allied leaders issued the Declaration.⁹¹ In effect, though it was given no notice of the fact other than vague and seemingly boastful threat of “prompt and utter destruction,” the Japanese government had one week to capitulate. Anything short of unconditional acceptance of the ultimatum would not have significantly altered the course of events.

The Soviet Union, for its part, was almost frantic to enter the Asia-Pacific war and even unconditional acceptance would probably not have had any effect. The Soviets had been planning an attack for August 20th, but events at Potsdam and the news of the atomic bomb’s development made them fear an early Japanese capitulation so that they repeatedly accelerated their timetable.⁹² They would likely have had the same reaction to any perceived Japanese hint of impending surrender. When apprised of the initial Japanese offer of capitulation after the Soviets had joined the war, Foreign Minister Molotov immediately dismissed it and announced the Soviet Union’s intent to continue its offensive. When presented with the proposed American reply to the Japanese offer, he tried to put U.S. Ambassador Averell Harriman off to the next day. Harriman cabled back to Washington that Molotov “gave me the definite impression that he was quite willing to have the war continue.”⁹³ In fact, the Soviet Union continued hostilities after the

90. Ashida Hitoshi, *Dainiji Sekai Taisen Gaikōshi* (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1959), 674.

91. Tho[ma]s T. Handy, “TO: General Carl Spaatz, Commanding General, United States Army Strategic Air Forces,” July 25, 1945, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/542193>.

92. Borisu Suravinsuki (B.N. Slavinsky), *Nisso Sensō e no Michi (USSR-Japan: On the Way to War)*, trans. Katoh Yukihiko (Tokyo: K.K. Kyōdō News, 1999), ch. 6 and 7, esp. pp. 450, 485.

93. “The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Harriman) to the Secretary of State,” August 11, 1945 in FRUS 1945 6 BC/Far East, p. 629.

capitulation, essentially blaming the Kwantung Army for defending itself against continuing Soviet attacks in Manchuria and using this resistance as a pretext to press their offensive.⁹⁴ The Soviets attacked the Japanese garrison on Shumushu (Shumshu), the northernmost of the Kuril Islands, on August 18, three days after Japan accepted the Allied ultimatum.⁹⁵ In fact, Soviet forces continued operations even after the signing of the instrument of surrender on September 2.⁹⁶ Time was of the essence and “study” had never been an option. There is no conceivable scenario under which the sort of diplomatic coquetry suggested by Kawai would have stayed Allied hands or changed the subsequent course of events in any meaningful way. Moreover, there is evidence that Kawai was aware of this. An August 10, 1945, *Nippon Times* editorial denouncing the United States for bombing of Hiroshima forthrightly acknowledged “Japan’s failure to heed the recent demand for unconditional surrender [sic].”⁹⁷

Kawai’s account of Japan’s response to the Potsdam Declaration rests on three arguments. Upon examination, none are tenable. The account is controverted by the full text as well as the complete context of Suzuki’s response. Its central linguistic argument is manifest nonsense. It is shown to be false by the testimony of numerous figures who were either directly involved in or close to the events Kawai inaccurately describes. This includes the later statement of Suzuki himself, who straightforwardly described his statement as a “rejection of the Declaration.” Finally, it is implausible that the sort of noncommittal response Kawai described would have obviated either the atomic bombings or Soviet belligerence. Stated bluntly, Kawai’s “tragedy of errors” story is wholly devoid of historical merit.

KAZUO KAWAI

So, who was Kazuo Kawai and why did he concoct this story in the first place? As it turns out, the answers to these questions are closely related. Kazuo Kawai

94. “From Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, Manila, Philippines; To War Department; No: Z 507,” 17 August 1945, folder 43 1946 [sic] MacArthur Communications, box 08 Chairman’s File (Admiral Leahy), RG 218; Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, NARA College Park; “Executive Office; Operations Division; General Hall, 2904; Commander in Chief, Army Forces Pacific Command, Manila, P I,” 17 August, 1945 in *Ibid*.

95. “From Commander in Chief, Army Forces, Pacific Command, Manila, Philippines; To: US Military Mission, Moscow, Russia, No: Z 522,” 19 August, 1945 in *Ibid*.

96. Boris Suravinsuki (B.N. Slavinsky), *Nisso Sensō e no Michi* pp. 503–8.

97. “A Moral Outrage Against Humanity,” *Nippon Times*, August 10, 1945, p. 4.

was a man caught between two cultures and two generations. He was born in Japan in 1904, just three years before the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement.” In this informal pact, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt effectively prevented Japan from suffering the international humiliation of a formal legal ban on Japanese immigration, and in return the Japanese government agreed to “voluntarily” end the practice of granting visas to laborers seeking work in the United States. Kawai, the son of a Protestant minister, immigrated to America at the age of five.⁹⁸ He, like older immigrants, was forbidden from obtaining U.S. citizenship, while many of his peers, juniors, and even elders had citizenship as their birthright by virtue of the *jus solis* provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Nevertheless, he clearly identified culturally and linguistically with his second-generation Nisei neighbors and peers.

In 1926, shortly after his graduation from Stanford University, he wrote a well-covered article in the *Survey Graphic Magazine* titled “Three Roads, and None Easy” discussing the problems facing American-born Japanese (a group in which he, despite the technicality of his birthplace, seems clearly to have included himself). Facing discrimination in businesses and professions, their numbers were too small to support themselves. Some gave themselves up to lives of menial servitude. Some tried to go back to the home country, and the third group, with which he identified, buckled “down to the long and difficult task of trying to change conditions.”⁹⁹

Of an intellectual bent, Kawai enjoyed writing and speaking on topics of importance. In writing, his style is lucid, and his work is often insightful. He obtained a doctorate from Stanford and taught at UCLA in various roles from 1932 to 1941. As a teacher, he was engrossing enough to further sharpen the interest of a young man named Mike Mansfield, who would later become the U.S. ambassador to Japan.¹⁰⁰

Stanford University President David Starr Jordan was an avowed eugenicist and racist. In 1910 he published *The Blood of the Nation: A Study of the Decay of Races through the Survival of the Unfit*, in which he claimed: “A Greek is a Greek; a Chinaman remains a Chinaman. In like fashion the race

98. “Kazuo Kawai,” Death announcement and obituary from the Board of Trustees of Ohio State University, 17 May 1963 in Biographical file in the Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

99. “Kazuo Kawai Author of Article Printed in Survey Graphic,” *Daily Palo Alto News*, May 6, 1926, p. 1.

100. Oral History Number: 391-015, Interviewee: Mike Mansfield, Interviewer: Don Oberdorfer, February 18, 2000, Archives and Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, Mont.



FIGURE 3. Professor Kazuo Kawai pictured at his desk at Ohio State University in 1953. *Source:* Ohio State University Faculty Biographical Profiles. *Courtesy of* Ohio State University Archives.

traits color all history made by Tartars, or negroes [*sic*], or Malays.” The book was also a pacifist tract that lamented the loss of the good and vigorous stock of a nation in wasteful wars, citing the unfortunate example of France and its recent bellicose history: “It is claimed, on authority which I have failed to

verify, that the French soldier of to-day is nearly two inches shorter than the soldier of a century ago.”¹⁰¹

On the face of it, he seemed a very unlikely champion for Japanese immigrants, but he found them far superior to other Asians, a breed, indeed, apart. He also believed that, if properly educated, they could serve to promote goodwill between Japan and the United States, and peace prevented both races from losing their best men. Jordan argued, “The diffusion among our American universities of Japanese students, eager, devoted and persistent has been one of the most important factors in maintaining the mutual good will and understanding of the two nations.” In his view, Japanese educated in American institutions were a credit to both their people and their schools, “standing high in the estimation of their people at home, while retaining a keen interest and intelligent sympathy in all American affairs.”¹⁰²

Jordan was as good as his word. He mentored and assisted Yamato Ichihashi, a promising young Japanese immigrant. In 1913 Jordan hired Ichihashi as Stanford’s first non-white professor.¹⁰³ Ichihashi naturally became a celebrity among Japanese Americans; and Kawai, as president of the San Francisco chapter of the J.S.C.A. (Presumably Japanese Students’ Christian Association) sought him out to address their group meeting in Los Altos in September 1926.¹⁰⁴ Given Ichihashi’s position at Stanford and Kawai’s request, it is very likely that Ichihashi and Kawai were close and that Ichihashi became a mentor during Kawai’s advanced studies. This is significant because Ichihashi was one of two prominent academics recruited by the Intelligence Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Ministry to serve as Japanese agents of influence in the United States. Defending Japan in the court of public opinion became especially urgent after the Manchurian Incident and even more so after the eruption of full-scale war in China.¹⁰⁵ Agents had two targets, first workaday Americans, and second the Nisei community who were often altogether too

101. David Starr Jordan, *The Blood of the Nation* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910), 9–10, 17.

102. David Starr Jordan, “Relations of Japan and the United States,” in *Japan and Japanese-American Relations: Clark University Addresses*, ed. George H. Blakeslee (New York: G.E. Strechert and Company, 1912), 4.

103. David Palter, “Testing for Race: Stanford University, Asian Americans, and Psychometric Testing in California, 1920–1935” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Santa Cruz, 2014), 72.

104. “Los Altos Is Scene of J.S.C.A. Meeting,” *The Japanese American News*, August 22, 1926.

105. Yuka Fujioka, “The Thought War: Public Diplomacy by Japan’s Immigrants in the United States,” in *Tumultuous Decade: Empire, Society, and Diplomacy in 1930s Japan*, eds. Masato Kimura and Tosh Minohara (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 166–67.

Americanized in their views. In many cases young Nisei were among those calling for the strongest measures against the Japanese government for its actions in China.¹⁰⁶

Whether in the direct employ of the Intelligence Bureau or not, Kawai certainly behaved as if he were, publicly explaining Japan's position—always in measured language—at crucial times when Japan desperately needed an articulate spokesman. In early 1932, just after the Shanghai Incident, Japan was the target of international censure. During the incident Japanese naval aviators carried out history's first large-scale bombing of an urban population and anti-Japanese feeling was running high. Kawai spoke publicly on the subject twice, explaining that the incident was not part of any Japanese master plan but rather “due more to a sudden emergence of feeling at the Chinese boycott of Nipponese goods.”¹⁰⁷ After serious fighting broke out in the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, Kawai was quick to address audiences on the subject and let them know, “Japan has no imperial ideas, but a perfectly reasonable program for China—beneficial to both nations. Sympathizing with Japan's activities is not disloyalty to the United States!”¹⁰⁸

On January 1, 1938, Kawai took the opportunity of the new year to exhort the Nisei to produce “at least a few talented writers and artists from among their number.” He elaborated: “There is need for writers and lecturers and movie directors and every kind of capable holder of opinion who will do for Japan what Lin Yutang, Pearl Buck and others have done for China.” However, since in Kawai's view, neither Japanese nor American friends of Japan had such abilities, “the Nisei must produce such people.”¹⁰⁹ It seems not to have occurred to Kawai, and indeed he may not have known or believed, that the lack of a Nisei Lin Yutang or Pearl Buck may have had less to do with Japan's image problem than did the fact that, at the very time he was writing, Japanese troops were marauding the streets of Nanjing, looting, raping, and murdering at will more than two weeks after the city's fall.¹¹⁰

106. O'Brien, “Reaction of the College Nisei,” 26. See also Fujioka, “The Thought War,” 165.

107. “Kazuo Kawai Will Speak at Teacher's Association,” *The Samojar (Santa Monica Junior College) Corsair*, March 30, 1932, p. 1; “Kawai Speaks on Japanese Fracas,” *The Samojar (Santa Monica Junior College) Corsair*, April 6, 1932, p. 1

108. “Women in the News,” *Sotoyome Scimitar* (Healdsburg, California), September 23, 1937.

109. Kazuo Kawai, “Nisei Urged to Strive for American Realization of Japanese as Human Beings,” *Shinseikai Asabi Shinbun [New World Sun]*, January 1, 1938, p. 2.

110. Timothy Brook, ed., *Documents on the Rape of Nanking* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 62–63.

In Kawai's biographies, in his published articles, and his book, *Japan's American Interlude*, his account of the American Occupation of Japan, it is stated that he happened to be in Japan when the war broke out and was "unable to leave."¹¹¹ Kawai was indeed in Japan at the time of the war's outbreak, but his presence there represented a change in his plans. Kawai left for Japan in June 1941. However, the Nikkei press reported "his stay in Japan will be a short one as he expects to be back in time for the fall semester on the Westwood campus in September."¹¹² Kawai did not return. Instead, he became foreign news editor of the *Nippon Times* in December 1941, the very month of the Pearl Harbor attack.¹¹³ Something kept him there past his promised return, likely his new job as editor of the *Nippon Times*, at that time under the control of the foreign ministry. This was a position of great trust for a mere foreign university professor, who just happened to miss his scheduled return.

When Kawai wrote his story in November 1950, he had effectively been serving as a mouthpiece, paid or otherwise, for Japan's foreign ministry for nearly two decades. It is unlikely that he suddenly abandoned that role. In 1947 Kawai told the U.S. Strategic Bombing Service that the Japanese people did not really support the war, a claim that affected perceptions of popular support for the war in Japan even decades later.¹¹⁴ Shortly after the publication of his *mokusatsu* piece, Kawai was officially attached to the Japanese delegation to the San Francisco peace conference as a "technical advisor."¹¹⁵ From there, he proceeded directly to Ohio State University where he took up a position lecturing in political science. One of his first actions was to "speak on 'The Japanese Treaty'."¹¹⁶ As late as 1955, he was making the

111. Kazuo Kawai, *Japan's American Interlude* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), back jacket biography.

112. "Dr. Kazuo Kawai Sails for Orient on NYK Maru," *Shinsekai Asabi Shinbun [New World Sun]*, June 27, 1941, p. 7.

113. "Kawai, Kazuo" file in *The Ohio State University Evaluation Program: Basic Who's Who*, (handwritten) in "Kawai, Kazuo," Biographical file in the Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio; "Kazuo Kawai," Death announcement and obituary from the Board of Trustees of Ohio State University, 17 May 1963 in *Ibid.*

114. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Morale Division, *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japanese Morale*, 1947, p. 15; Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 298.

115. "Kawai, Kazuo" file in *The Ohio State University Evaluation Program: Basic Who's Who* (handwritten) in "Kawai, Kazuo," Biographical file in the Ohio State University Archives; "Dr. Kazuo Kawai to Lecture in Political Science," *The Ohio State University Lantern*, October 1, 1951, p. 1.

116. "Dr. Kawai to Discuss 'The Japanese Treaty,'" *The Ohio State University Lantern*, October 30, 1951, p. 6.

case that “Some revision of the present Japanese constitution probably cannot long be put off,” most saliently because “the doctrine of popular sovereignty” was “completely alien to Japanese thought,” a position that one cannot help but feel was quite in concert with that held by his old friends in the foreign ministry.¹¹⁷ The conclusion that Kawai was effectively writing for Japan’s foreign ministry when he penned the *mokusatsu* essay is nearly inevitable.

CONCLUSION

So, what message was Kawai trying to send in the *mokusatsu* piece? The piece is best understood as a plea for understanding and belief in Japanese good faith at a crucial time in U.S.-Japanese relations. John Foster Dulles, who would serve as the American point man in the negotiations for the final peace treaty, first traveled to Japan in June 1950, just before the outbreak of the Korean War. Those negotiations came to fruition at last in September 1951. Kawai’s essay was published in November 1950. Japan needed a soft peace, and they had some strong cards to play. Japanese bases were essential to the UN war effort, and Americans were right then fighting Soviet-trained and equipped soldiers from North Korea. If not for the “misunderstanding,” there would be no divided Korean peninsula and American men would not again be dying in foreign lands. That alone would have been a powerful tale. But Kawai’s story ends with an entirely bogus charge of Soviet perfidy being the primary culprit for this alleged misunderstanding. In Kawai’s telling, the “failure” of Americans “to discern the real attitude of the Japanese government” was “regrettable” but easily understood. However, he lambasted the Soviets for concealing from the Western Allies “Japan’s readiness for surrender” and “eagerness for peace.”¹¹⁸

Of course, the Soviets did mention the Japanese overtures to the Americans. In addition, the Americans were aware of them from radio intercepts. Thus, they were also aware that there was actually no Japanese readiness to surrender. Nevertheless, it would be hard to imagine a story better suited to win sympathy from Americans when it was most needed. What better agent to deliver it than the man who had been making Japan’s case to the English-speaking world since at least the time of the Shanghai Incident in 1932?

117. Kazuo Kawai, “Sovereignty and Democracy in the Japanese Constitution,” *The American Political Science Review* 49, no. 3 (Sep., 1955): 663.

118. Kawai, “*Mokusatsu*,” 414.

So, what does one make of Kawai and his *mokusatsu* “scoop”? He was almost certainly a covert spokesman for Japan’s foreign ministry for most of his adult life. He claimed to have been caught in Japan against his will, when he likely went there to take up a position as a propagandist, a role in which he indisputably served throughout the war. In many ways, he was a charlatan. But not in all.

Kawai was, in fact, Japanese. None of his activities betrayed his country. They served it. This was a legal and diplomatic fact about which Kawai himself had no choice. His adopted homeland gave him none because of its overtly racist citizenship laws. Had he returned to teach at the Westwood campus at the start of the fall semester, he would likely have been interned in Manzanar or Tule Lake for the duration of the war. That was essentially the fate of his mentor, Yamato Ichihashi.

However, despite his wartime efforts on behalf of Imperial Japan, Kawai soon found favor with the victorious Americans. His promotion to editor-in-chief of the *Nippon Times* in 1946 was the result of pressure from MacArthur’s GHQ.¹¹⁹ While in that position he simultaneously served as a guest lecturer for the U.S. Counter-Intelligence Corps in Tokyo. After returning to the United States, he worked as a “research consultant” at the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, and as a guest lecturer at the National War College in Washington, D.C.¹²⁰

From this position of trust, Kawai used his “tragedy of errors” fable as a means to paint men he knew in a better light. These were men whom he had befriended and with whom he had shared hardship and terror. He did so to help pave the way for a soft peace for his country and to facilitate an early reconciliation. He helped, in however small a way, to create an enduring and effective alliance between the nations that together comprised his complex binational identity, an accomplishment that no doubt gave some relief to the excruciating sense of alienation that had long been his lot and which was certainly no fault of his own. These are hardly searing indictments.

But that does not mean there are no indictments to be made. For we may very well sympathize with Kawai personally. We may even approve of his agenda, and possibly even condone his means. We may even agree that the

119. Memorial Service Announcement for Kazuo Kawai, *Ohio State University News and Information Service*, 7 May 1963 in “Kawai, Kazuo,” Biographical file in the Ohio State University Archives.

120. “Kawai, Kazuo,” file in *The Ohio State University Evaluation Program: Basic Who’s Who*, (typed) in “Kawai, Kazuo,” Biographical file in the Ohio State University Archives.

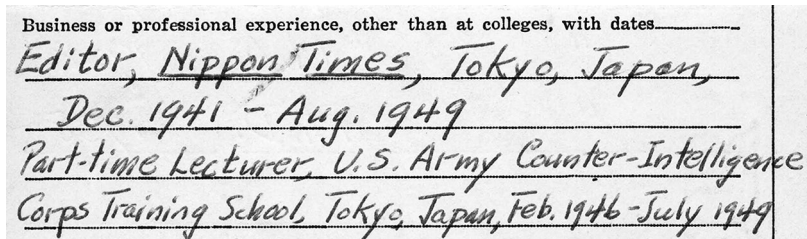


FIGURE 4. An excerpt from Kazuo Kawai's biographical information form for Ohio State University describes his employment while he was in Japan. *Source:* Ohio State University Faculty Biographical Profiles. *Courtesy of* Ohio State University Archives.

results, on balance, justified the subterfuge he used. None of that, though, means that we should treat his tale as if it were true or even plausible. It is neither. Ashida Hitoshi had it right. The Japanese government did in fact declare its “categorical refusal” of the Potsdam Declaration. It is important to not only understand that fact, but to understand why and how that flat rejection was enforced despite the best intentions of decent and judicious men in the foreign ministry and elsewhere in the Japanese government. Failure to do so only obscures the harsh realities of the war's end. It helps to turn it into little more than a maudlin melodrama, a morality play that encourages us to indulge in sanctimony and platitudes at the expense of sober analysis and hard thinking. It is long past time to acknowledge that the *mokusatsu* story is nothing but a hoax.

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