Ultimately, the question becomes whether the presented material histories fit Mack’s theoretical framework: that the value and the concept of modern Japanese literature are historically constructed by various powers (of which the most forceful ones are capitalism and the nation-state) and thus need to be questioned accordingly. Mack should be given credit for his awareness of the complexity and contradictory exceptions embedded in his findings. At times, his conscientious acknowledgement of complexities seems to unsettle his theoretical claims. For example, Mack points out that the divide between pure and popular novels established by the Akutagawa and the Naoki prizes could be considered unstable when one sees that Ibuse Masuji won the Naoki prize in 1937. Or, if one reads the contentious commentaries by the Akutagawa Prize judges in Bungei shunjū, it is difficult to imagine the value of modern Japanese literature naturalized by some transcendental consensus. The Akutagawa Prize might have contributed to the establishment of the canon of modern Japanese literature, yet not many (especially pre-war) prizewinners have survived as canonical to this day.

We may wonder who still holds onto the naïveté of viewing “literature” as heaven-sent rather than historically constructed. We may also wonder what happens after we learn that what we felt dear about literature was merely manufactured by various powers with dubious or even malicious intent. Mack does not provide a definite answer. Perhaps nothing happens. We constantly make value judgments, preferring this book over that. Knowing that it is part of the scheme to make Hollywood millionaires wealthier, we still go watch movies with a bucketful of unhealthy popcorn. We somehow suspend our historical knowledge about the “war criminal writer” Hino Ashihei and let his fiction so powerfully speak to us. Literature might well have been manufactured by extra-literary powers. Yet literature is already another power manufacturing us, the captivated reader. We could stop being captivated. Then, what?

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Good biographies clarify difficult lives. Alternatively described as spymaster, informant and tragic hero, Terasaki Hidenari’s life begs illumination. Combining previous analyses with MAGIC intercepts, State Department documents, press reports and memoirs (mostly in English), Roger Jeans’ portrait of Terasaki diverges from previous work yet explains reasonably how prior views coalesced. Jeans sees Terasaki as motivated by concern for
emperor and country, an analytical thread that integrates Jeans’ and previous assessments.

Elite schooling enabled Terasaki to join the Foreign Ministry. Posted to Washington in 1927, he met his future wife and married despite potential for real hardship. She had to confront anti-Asian feelings in her family and society and he had to consider relations potentially souring between America and Japan. Ominously, they married the November following the Manchurian Incident, after which Terasaki was sent to Shanghai. In favour of Japan’s seizure of Manchuria, Terasaki seems then to have been more an anti-communist and not a military expansionist. He feared Soviet encroachment and blamed the League of Nations for Japan’s withdrawal since the League was unwilling to confront the USSR. Transferred to Havana in 1936 he then helped establish an intelligence and propaganda network across the Caribbean before returning to China in 1939. There Jeans sees Terasaki as appalled by the Japanese military’s heavy-handed treatment of Chinese and the international community. Joseph Grew appears to corroborate this, because on the eve of Terasaki’s 1940 transfer back to the US, Grew noted Terasaki’s intelligence and pragmatism.

About half the book focuses on the year prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War. Closely connected to Japan’s Foreign Ministry elite through his elder brother and the Anglo-American clique, Terasaki was no mere functionary. Assigned an intelligence-gathering mission as well as a propaganda role, he helped establish a clandestine network among Americans opposed to the actions of their government vis-à-vis Japan, encouraging some to lobby their government to maintain friendly ties with Japan. This is one of the more intriguing angles of this study, as Jeans persuasively shows that rather than being more concerned with events in Europe, some American isolationists and pacifists were very interested in the Pacific, petitioning key figures accordingly.

Terasaki enjoyed a variety of American connections and through his wife could access others. Through the consulate Terasaki was also linked to Japanese businesses, some potentially in positions to gather intelligence. Not all of these contacts proved useful of course, but the picture that emerges is one of an active officer. Terasaki was also under orders to expand networks in Central and South America, and to be prepared to relocate headquarters there should war break out with the US. Diplomatic immunity provided Terasaki with some protection in these endeavours, but that did not stop American intelligence services from investigating, shadowing and even wiretapping him.

Jeans sees Terasaki as genuinely seeking to prevent war, even challenging more senior diplomats on policy. One of his greatest successes appears to have been helping prompt Roosevelt’s cable to the emperor on the eve of Pearl Harbour. The drumbeat, however, is inexorable, as Jeans contextualizes Terasaki’s actions with reference to wider events. Terasaki’s wife reported him
sobbing the afternoon of December 7, recognizing his efforts to have been in vain and frustrated with Japan’s military leaders. In fact, when repatriated to Japan Terasaki had garnered the reputation of being pro-American, which marginalized him for the duration of the war.

The book’s final section addresses the Occupation. Reunited with other foreign ministry men experienced working with the West, Terasaki was assigned as an intermediary with American officials and appointed to the emperor’s inner circle. There, as advisor and interpreter he helped negotiate the purges and possible abdication en route to carving out a new postwar role for the emperor. This he managed despite several strokes. Ironically, his notes from that era—especially regarding the emperor’s “monologue”—caused a popular stir and a critical reevaluation of the emperor when published in 1990.

Footnoted in detail, this is an informative study. Terasaki held key posts and found himself caught at cross-purposes at several junctures. As head of espionage and propaganda he took on roles necessitated by his position and loyalties, yet he used them to endeavour also to effect changes his conscience dictated. The strain took its toll; Terasaki passed away in 1951, not quite 50.

This is a straightforward, jargon-free biography aimed at teasing out the details of a complex life in challenging times. Accessible to undergraduates and the general public it illuminates both the road to Pearl Harbour and the road to Japan’s postwar system.

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Kaeko Chiba’s Japanese Women, Class and the Tea Ceremony offers a rare ethnographic glimpse into a thriving community of tea ceremony practitioners in northern Japan. Born into a family of tea teachers herself, the author not only draws on kin connections for access to the field, but also reflects on the balancing act involved in producing family-based ethnographies. The first part of the book employs this biographical tack to discuss how multiple identities are negotiated during fieldwork. The eye of the participant observer is trained on the experience of the tea ceremony, as Chiba depicts the social and sensual nature of the lessons that constitute the core of tea practice. In what is perhaps the most notable contribution of the book, Chiba eschews the often sanitized and idealized portraits of the ritual to engage the complexities confronting tea practitioners as they negotiate the hierarchical relationships and conform to the behavioural norms that constitute tea settings. The second half turns to gender and class