Joseph C. Grew *Ten Years in Japan* (1944)

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Joseph Clark Grew. (Source: Shōichi Saeki & Tōru Haga, Eds., *Gaikokujin ni yoru Nihonron no meicho - Goncharov kara Pinguet made*, Chuokoron-Shinsha Inc., 1987, p. 175)

Joseph Clark Grew was born on May 27, 1880, the third son of a prominent Boston family. He entered Groton School in 1892, where he met Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was 2 years his junior. He graduated from the school in 1898 and entered Harvard University. After graduating from the university in 1902, he traveled around East Asia and returned to the U.S. via Japan. In 1904 he took his first steps into diplomatic life as secretary of the Consulate General in Cairo, Egypt. In the United States, where professional foreign service career had not yet taken root, Grew's career was part of the history of the establishment of the professional diplomacy system. The following year, he married Alice Perry, a distant relative of Commodore Matthew Perry. After

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working in Mexico and Russia, he was temporarily stationed in Vienna, but basically remained in the US embassy in Berlin from 1908 until 1917, when the U.S. entered the First World War. During that time, he had a time to serve as Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin. After attending the Paris Peace Conference as a member of the U.S. delegation, he served as minister to Denmark and Switzerland before becoming Under Secretary of State in 1924. In 1927 Grew became Ambassador to Turkey, where he successfully concluded the U.S.-Turkey Commerce Treaty. In 1932, he was appointed Ambassador to Japan by President Hoover, the post he held until June 1942, when he left Japan following the outbreak of war between the U.S. and Japan. After the war, while still in the U.S., he served as chairman of the committee to build the International Christian University in Tokyo, and also established the Grew Foundation to encourage Japanese students to study in the U.S. In 1960, he was awarded the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun, First Class. He is the author of *Sports and Travel in the Far East*, *Report from Tokyo* and *Turbulent Era*. He died in 1965.

> After all, life is a succession of hurdles and once over them they look a great deal easier to negotiate than before one took off. Most of our troubles—the kind that will wear us out if we let them—are based on totally unnecessary apprehension.

Soon after his arrival in Japan, Joseph C. Grew, the U.S. ambassador to Japan, wrote this in his diary. He was passionate about sports while at Harvard, and may have actually competed in the high hurdles race. With this attitude of "fear is often greater than the danger," Grew began his ambassadorial duties.

As young graduate, Grew had traveled around East Asia and made a name for himself by hunting a giant tiger in China. At the time, he had stopped by Japan on his way home. However, when he returned to Japan as ambassador some 30 years later, the country was not what it used to be. The capital, Tokyo, had transformed into a metropolis with wide streets and large buildings. And the change was deeper than that.

When in Chicago preparing to go to Japan after receiving a transfer order, Grew heard the news of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi's assassination. The Lincoln, which Inukai ordered before his death, oddly enough became Grew's official car after his arrival to Japan. In September of the previous year, the Manchurian Incident had occurred and Japan had begun its actions in Manchuria. Thus, Japan had entered an era in which party politics had come to an end and the military was heavily involved in policymaking. Grew writes, "[O]ne thing is certain and that is that the military are distinctly running the Government and that no step can be taken without their approval." In this way, the crisis in East Asia had already begun when Grew arrived in Japan.

Known as *Ten Years in Japan*, Grew's "Diary" is more than just a diary, as is evident in its subtitle, *A Contemporary Record Drawn from the Diaries and Private and Official Papers of JOSEPH C. GREW United States Ambassador to Japan 1932–1942*. It was also not published as a "Memoir," as is clear from Grew's own preface, mentioned below. Until his return to the U.S. about 7 months after the outbreak of war between Japan and the U.S., Grew spent 10 years in Japan. His extensive diplomatic experience and knowledge of Japan were highly valued, and he

later played a major role in determining Japan occupation plans in the capacity of acting Secretary of State. This "Diary" provides a glimpse into the decade of experience that formed the basis of Grew's attitudes to and judgments about Japan.

The day he was invited to the Kabuki-Za Theater to see two plays, *Kiri-Hitoha* and *Kagami-Jishi*, Grew wrote down every detail of the actors, from their costumes to their body language, and added the following comments.

> [I]n America there is nothing that approaches or can be compared with the nationally venerated classical acting and dancing or such nationally venerated exponents as Utaemon and Kikugoro.

Grew also wrote the following about his first experience watching sumo:

> The sport is carried on as a Shinto rite, a priest being in the ring for every bout and striking a dramatic attitude when the contestants crouch; [. . .] the announcer of each match carries a fan and declaims in a high sort of chant.

"It is entirely ludicrous," Grew says, yet he manages to summarize everything from the gestures of the sumo wrestlers in the ring to the outcome of the match in a concise and pointed description.

Grew's hearing was impaired due to scarlet fever in his childhood. However, this was more than compensated for by the fact that he was a very observant man, and his descriptions of kabuki plays and sumo tournaments are a testament to Grew, the "astute observer." If Grew had come to Japan in a time of peace, he would have left behind another excellent Things Japanese (both in italics, if possible. Note: what I have in mind as a preceding work is Chamberlain's Things Japanese), given his keen eye for observation. Unfortunately, the tense situation at the time did not allow him to devote himself exclusively to his observations of Japanese culture. As tensions in East Asia escalated, such references to Japanese culture disappeared from Grew's diary. Instead, Grew's "images of the Japanese" are based often on Japanese foreign ministers and government officials, and sometimes on ordinary citizens.

Grew was once one of America's top diplomats, having served as Under Secretary of State in his mid-forties. However, the ambassador to Japan is merely the head of the Japanese branch of the U.S. government, and although he negotiates directly with Japan, he does not have the authority to make policy decisions. What is the mission of such a diplomat?

> My principal role here, as I conceive it, is going to be that of interpreter, and I shall hope to be able to interpret each country to the other in a way which will redound to the steadily increased mutual confidence of both. It seems to me that my chief problem will be in explaining your country to mine.

It was Ambassador Grew's mission to convey to Japan the true picture of his own country, and to convey to his government what he and his embassy staff had actually seen and heard about the real Japanese people. Accordingly, his diary and official correspondence to his home country frequently contain images of the Japanese people.

> Japan is a country of paradoxes and extremes, of great wisdom and of great stupidity, an apt illustration of which may be found in connection with the naval conversations; while the naval authorities and the press have been stoutly maintaining that Japan cannot adequately

> defend her shores with less than parity, the press and the public, in articles, speeches, and interviews, have at the same time been valiantly boasting that the Japanese Navy is today stronger than the American Navy and could easily defeat us in case of war.
>
> Their mental processes and methods of reaching conclusions are radically different from ours; the more one associates with them the more one realizes it; [. . .] The Westerner believes that because the Japanese has adopted Western dress, language, and customs he must think like a Westerner. No greater error can be made. This is one of the reasons why treaty commitments between the West and the East will always be open to misinterpretation and subject to controversy.

Japan's diplomacy is riddled with blunders, and even many in the upper echelons of the government do not know much about foreign countries. Since the battle is being waged on Chinese territory, Grew says, the American people would hardly consider it Japan's self-defense, yet they would send a completely meaningless goodwill mission to the U.S. to explain the state of the nation.

But, on the other hand, the American people also do not know exactly what is going on in Japan. So what can be done? The best way to find out is to actually visit Japan. Once there, they will see that it is not true that the pendulum is swinging between moderates and extremists in Japan, and that one day the pendulum will naturally swing back to the moderates and the crisis in East Asia will subside. As early as 1935 (Shōwa 10), the year before the attempted coup known as the February 26 Rebellion, Grew wrote in his diary that appeasement measures to curry favor with Japan would strengthen Japan's conceit and make Japan even more aggressive, a stance that would become the basis of his attitude toward Japan. However, he was never "anti-Japanese."

> One can dislike and disagree with certain members of a family without necessarily feeling hostility to the family itself. For me there are no finer people in the world than the best type of Japanese.

Among these "finer people in the world" were Saitō Makoto and Hirota Kōki. That is why Grew was so saddened by the loss of Saitō in the February 26 Rebellion, and why he set out to save Hirota, who was sentenced to death by hanging at the Tokyo Tribunal after the war.

But it was not only people in important positions that Grew respected or was moved by. One day, while walking his dog with his youngest daughter, his dog fell into a moat. Deciding that he could not rescue the dog by himself, Grew sought an officer, and returned to find his dog trembling in the street amidst a circle of people. He was told that a young cab driver and a delivery boy, who were passing by, risked their lives to rescue the dog and left without telling their names.

He also gives an account of how, when the U.S. Navy gunboat Panay was sunk by a Japanese bombing attack after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, letters and donations arrived at the U.S. embassy from all levels of the Japanese population, from government officials to schoolchildren. They wanted to express their apologies and regrets for the mishandling of their country's armed forces as best they could.

Grew's mission to avert a U.S.-Japan conflict and bring peace to East Asia ultimately failed with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8 (December 7 in the U.S.), 1941. Japan had committed "national hara-kiri," as Grew had feared.

Grew, who was interned at the outbreak of war, wrote in his diary on February 19, 1942, as follows.

> Appointed to Japan ten years ago today. They have been an interesting ten years, and despite the final failure of my mission I would not now willingly have given up that experience even in the light of events.

Grew certainly could not have overcome the hurdle of preventing a U.S.-Japan conflict, but no one could have done better than he did in the circumstances of the time. Although Grew himself did not speak Japanese, he had several close associates, including Neville and Dooman, who were fluent in the language. Furthermore, Grew was always trying to learn, through embassy officials, about ordinary citizens whom he could not meet in person.

When Grew returned to the U.S., he was old enough to retire, but his mother country would not allow him to stay idle because of his outstanding knowledge of Japan. In his capacity as Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, Grew gave speeches throughout the United States. In the 250 speeches he is said to have given in his first year, Grew emphasized the belligerence of the Japanese people and the efficiency of their military forces, and stressed that the U.S. must not underestimate them and must overwhelmingly defeat Japan. However, the content of his speeches gradually began to change. He made a clear distinction between the Japanese people and the Japanese military, and began to concentrate his efforts on making the American people recognize the Japanese as human beings. In response to the popular belief that "The only good Japanese are the dead Japanese," he went around spreading examples of pacifists in Japan, even those under the control of the military.

In May 1944 (Shōwa 19), Grew was appointed director of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, the same month this "Diary" was published, and for 2 months in a row it was the number two bestseller. The intent of the publication is clear from the preface.

> This book aims to present to our people and, I hope, to the people of all the United Nations, a more accurately focused view of Japan than is now widely held, for only through a correct conception of that country and its people can we approach with intelligence the difficult problems which will have to be solved after our military victory is complete. [. . .] The present book will not have served one of its purposes, however, if it does not bring home to my readers the fact that there are many Japanese today who did not want war, who realized the stupidity of attacking the United States, Great Britain and other United Nations, and who did everything in their power to restrain the military extremists from their headlong and suicidal aggressions. [. . .] men who courageously but futilely gave all that was in them and ran the gravest dangers of imprisonment if not of assassination—indeed several were assassinated—in their efforts to stem the tide or, let us say, to halt the tidal wave of insane military megalomania and expansionist ambition.

Grew considered the rebuilding of Japan and the re-establishment of friendly relations between Japan and the U.S., rather than the destructive and punitive treatment of Japan, as the last task of his life and urgently devoted his efforts to it. Although Grew was widely criticized as an "appeaser" for insisting that the continuation of the Emperor system was indispensable for an early end to the war and the reconstruction of Japan. However, from the end of 1944, as Under Secretary

of State (acting Secretary of State), he gained the understanding of Secretary of War, Stimson, and became one of the driving forces behind the process to realize Japan's surrender on August 15 of the following year.

Grew retired from public service at the end of the war against Japan, and died at his home in Manchester, Massachusetts, on May 25, 1965 (Shōwa 40), two days before his 85th birthday. The New York Times reported the old diplomat's death on its front page.