

A Global Forum for Naval Historical Scholarship

## International Journal of Naval History

---

August 2005

Volume 4 Number 2

J. Charles Schencking, *Making Waves: Politics, Propaganda, and the Emergence of the Imperial Japanese Navy: 1868-1922*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Terrance Rucker

The George Washington University

Washington D.C.

USA

---

J. Charles Schencking's analysis of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) is a welcome addition to the small number of English-language monographs about the military that rely on Japanese-language primary sources. While paying homage to the groundbreaking Mark Peattie and David Evans study, Schencking moves beyond the technical and strategic details of naval expansion to describe how IJN officers found common cause with Diet politicians. Regarding naval expansion, Schencking argues that both groups resented the dominance that leaders such as Yamagata Aritomo and Katsura Taro used to fill the army and senior-level ministers' offices with loyalists. In an effort to deemphasize the army, Schencking focuses on Yamamoto Gonnohyoe, "the father of the Imperial Japanese Navy," as a political strategist at a level similar to the most talented politicians of prewar Japan, Hara Takashi and Ito Hirobumi.

Schencking places IJN within a context that modernizing navies in the 1890s faced; the challenge of competing with other government bureaucracies for resources to build a first-rate, blue-water navy. In the case of Japan, institutional rivalry and regional rivalry between Satsuma and Choshu pervaded political and military affairs of Meiji and Taisho Japan. With the formation of the Diet in 1890, competition between Choshu army

men, Satsuma navy men, and politicians concerned with domestic constituencies changed the political landscape. Although Yamagata did not care for politicians interfering with the military's "right of supreme command," in foreign affairs, IJN officers such as Yamamoto understood that the Diet controlled the purse of the empire. They also understood that army officers held the upper hand because of the influence of Yamagata and his clique of army officers and politicians who dominated the government. To ensure its survival, IJN officers realized that tactics such as seeking alliances across bureaucratic lines and the influence of public opinion on the Diet were important to check the interests of the army.

In a style reminiscent of Arthur Marder's analysis of the Royal Navy in the 1890s, Schencking shows how the IJN perpetuated jingoist sentiments after naval victories to bolster its image as the first line of defense for the empire. After the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, Schencking convincingly describes how jingoists in the general public, in the halls of the Diet, and the business world placed army officials on the defensive in the public sphere and in budgetary battles. Indeed, Schencking argues that the acquirement of appropriations became *the* primary focus for some of Japan's leading admirals and naval statesmen between 1898 and 1922. Despite setbacks such as the Imperial Defense Policy of 1907 and the Siemens Scandal of 1914, the relationship between the IJN and the Seiyukai continued to deliver dividends which culminated in the 1916 8-8 Fleet budget.

Although Schencking discusses propaganda, his allusion to the term is somewhat misleading; for this reviewer, public relations would be the more appropriate term. His descriptions of how the IJN influenced public through public displays such as fleet maneuvers and commemorative props such as postcards and posters are convincing. The deliberate cultivation of relationships between naval officers and influential Diet members with VIP treatment helped the IJA in its budgetary battles. Although Schencking provides a lot of detail about the intra-party budgetary battles, some of the reading is dense without prior exposure to works such as Peter Duus's *Party and Politics in Taisho Japan* or Stewart Lone's recent biography of Katsura Taro. In his discussion of

how the idea of South Seas colonization helped the IJN win budgetary battles, Schencking cites Mark Peattie's 1988 study of how the South Seas was a malleable image for the IJN, entrepreneurs, and imperialists. Unfortunately, his allusion to Peattie is confusing because he does not clearly explain how the South Seas relates to the IJN's budgetary trench battles or public relations strategy.

Overall, Schencking shows how the IJN projected and controlled its image to the public in a manner similar to modern political strategists. The IJN was in a permanent campaign to check the army's bureaucratic expansion, promote its own expansion, and remain relevant to the Diet and the general public. What the IJN understood was that its institutional survival was connected to its ability to mature as an institution in the volatile politics of Imperial Japan.



The Editors  
International Journal of Naval History  
[editors@ijnhonline.org](mailto:editors@ijnhonline.org)

© Copyright 2005, International Journal of Naval History, All Rights Reserved