

**‘OUR ISLANDS ARE BEING VIOLATED
ONE AFTER THE OTHER’:
EMPEROR HIROHITO’S PRAYERFUL REPORTS TO HIS
IMPERIAL ANCESTORS, OCTOBER 1937 – AUGUST 1945**

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Editor’s Note: Because of the intricate linguistic material included in this article, some of the font sizes are unusually large to preserve the integrity of the original material.

On September 9, 2014, Japan’s Imperial Household Agency released *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* (True Documents of the Shōwa Emperor, 昭和天皇実録). The official day-by-day account of the Shōwa Emperor’s life and times, *Jitsuroku* totals roughly 12,000 pages and sixty-one (unpublished) volumes. Twenty-four years in the compiling, it draws upon some 3,000 separate documentary source materials.¹ Many of those source materials,

¹ This article cites the unpublished volumes of *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*, which were available to researchers in the Imperial Household Agency’s Archives and Mausolea Department between September and November 2014. Readers who do not have access to them should consult the published volumes. Publication by Tokyo Shoseki is an ongoing process that began in 2015; it takes place each March and September and is scheduled for completion in 2019. (One published volume incorporates numerous unpublished volumes). Published volumes at time of writing include Kunaichō [Imperial Household Agency], ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-1: ji Meiji 34-nen itaru Taishō 2-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2015); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-2: ji Taishō 3-nen itaru Taishō 9-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2015); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-3: ji Taishō 10-nen itaru Taishō 12-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2015); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-4: ji Taishō 13-nen itaru Shōwa 2-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2015); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-5: ji Shōwa 3-nen itaru Shōwa 6-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2016); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-6: ji Shōwa 7-nen itaru Shōwa 10-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2016); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-7: ji Shōwa 11-nen itaru Shōwa 14-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2016); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-8: ji Shōwa 15-nen itaru Shōwa 17-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2016); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō*

such as the diary of wartime Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Kido Kōichi, have been available to researchers for decades.² Yet, at least a few dozens of the cited materials, including for example the diary and papers of wartime Grand Chamberlain Hyakutake Saburō, remain otherwise inaccessible to researchers.³ Herein lies *Jitsuroku*'s principal point of scholarly value, for its in-depth use of source materials means it is a goldmine of hitherto-unknown historical facts centering on the Shōwa Emperor.⁴

jitsuroku, dai-9: ji Shōwa 18-nen itaru Shōwa 20-nen (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2016); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-10: ji Shōwa 21-nen itaru Shōwa 24-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2017); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-11: ji Shōwa 25-nen itaru Shōwa 29-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2017); idem., ed., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku, dai-12: ji Shōwa 30-nen itaru Shōwa 34-nen* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2017).

² Kido Kōichi Kenkyūkai, eds., *Kido kōichi nikki* [Diary], 2 vols. (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1966).

³ Regarding the significance of the Hyakutake papers and diaries, see Chadani Seiichi, 'Sensō no jidai to tennō' [The war and the emperor], in Furukawa Tadahisa, Chadani Seiichi, Mori Yōhei, eds., *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' kōgi: shōgai to jidai o yomihodoku* [Lectures about 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku': deciphering his life and times] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2015), 52–77.

⁴ The outpouring of scholarly analysis of *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* is testament to its scholarly value. See Handō Kazutoshi, Hosaka Masayasu, Mikuriya Takashi, and Isoda Michifumi, *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' no nazo o hodoku* [Solving the Mysteries of 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku'] (Tokyo: Bunshun Shinsho, 2015); Hosaka Masayasu, *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' sono omote to ura* ['Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' on and beneath the surface], 2 vols. (Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2015); Toyoshita Narahiko, *Shōwa Tennō no sengo nihon – kenpō anpo taisei ni itaru michi* [The Shōwa Emperor's postwar Japan: the road leading to the constitution and the security system] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015); Kurihara Toshio, *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' to sensō* ['Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' and the war] (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2015); Katsuoka Kanji, *Shōwa Tennō no inori to daitōa sensō: 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' o yomihodoku* [The Shōwa Emperor's prayers and the Greater East Asian War: deciphering 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku'] (Tokyo: Meiseisha, 2015); Handō Kazutoshi, *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' ni miru kaisen to shūsen* [The Opening and Ending of the War as Seen in 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku'] (Tokyo:

This study draws from *Jitsuroku* a select few of these hitherto-unknown facts. It examines, in their entirety, those prayerful reports reproduced in *Jitsuroku*, which the emperor delivered to his Imperial ancestors between the outbreak of Japan's war in China on July 7, 1937 and the end of World War II on August 15, 1945. *Jitsuroku* reveals that the emperor delivered at least forty-six prayerful reports during the war. Of the forty-six wartime prayers which it mentions, *Jitsuroku* reproduces the texts of five.

Month	1937 (post- Jul. 7)	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945 (until Aug. 15)
Jan.	--	Jan. 2	Jan. 3	Jan. 3	Jan. 3	Jan. 3	Jan. 3	Jan. 3	
Feb.	--		Feb. 11	Feb. 9	Feb. 11	Feb. 11	Feb. 11	Feb. 11	Feb. 11
Mar.	--				Mar. 21	Mar. 21		Mar. 21	
Apr.	--	Apr. 3	Apr. 3		Apr. 3	Apr. 3	Apr. 3	Apr. 3	
May	--								
Jun.	--								
Jul.						Jul. 30			Jul. 30*
Aug.									Aug. 2*
Sept.	Sept. 23	Sept. 24	Sept. 24		Sept. 23		Sept. 24	Sept. 23	--
Oct.	Oct. 17*	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	--
Nov.					Nov. 23				--
Dec.	Dec. 25		Dec. 25	Dec. 25	Dec. 9* & Dec. 25	Dec. 12*		Dec. 25	--

Table 1.1 Prayers mentioned in *Jitsuroku*

Iwanami Panfuretto, 2015); Hara Takeshi, *'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' o yomu* [Reading 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku'] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015); Otabe Yūji, *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku' hyōkai: hirohito wa ika ni shite Shōwa Tennō ni natta ka* [Evaluating 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku': How Did Hirohito Become the Shōwa Emperor] (Tokyo: Keibunsha, 2015); Furukawa Tadahisa, Chadani Seiichi, Mori Yōhei, eds., *'Shōwa tennō jitsuroku' kōgi: shōgai to jidai o yomihodoku* [Lectures about 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku': Deciphering His Life and Rimes] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2015).

It is precisely these five prayerful reports, which this article discusses: one from October 17, 1937; another from December 9, 1941; two separate prayers from December 12, 1942; and a fifth prayer which was delivered on July 30, 1945 and repeated three days later. Table 1.1 provides a comprehensive list of all forty-six prayers mentioned in *Jitsuroku*; starred items are the five prayers recorded in *Jitsuroku* and reproduced and translated in this essay. By delving into the emperor's prayerful sincerity, this essay purports to provide insights into the emperor's innermost thoughts at key moments in Japan's wartime history.

It is perhaps necessary to add a few words about the prayers themselves. There are three kinds of prayers reproduced. The first, known as 'otsugebumi' (御告文), involved the emperor praying in either the Imperial palace's ancestral shrine or Mie Prefecture's Ise Grand Shrine. The second, known as 'kotowakete' (辞別), were delivered by the emperor during the course of a longer 'otsugebumi' prayer. In the third, known as 'gosaimon' (御祭文), the emperor dispatched an imperial messenger to a shrine to pray on his behalf. Whichever form his prayers took, the Shōwa Emperor self-consciously patterned his prayers after a set of ancient Shinto ritual prayers known as *norito*. His prayers, like the original *norito*, employ an archaic, hybrid Sino-Japanese written form, called *semmyōtai*, which includes particles and inflections written small, in phonogram orthography.⁵ This study reproduces the prayers in four forms, including (i) the *semmyōtai* form in which they appear in *Jitsuroku*, (ii) in modern-day Japanese, (iii) in Roman lettering, or *romaji*, and (iv) in English-language translation. It also provides a brief headnote for each prayer. The headnotes are designed to enable readers to contextualize the prayers.

⁵ For translations of the *norito*, the oldest of which date back to the seventh and eighth centuries CE, see Donald L. Philippi, *Norito: A Translation of the Ancient Japanese Ritual Prayers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); and Felicia Gressitt Bock, *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era*, (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972), 65–105. For a brief discussion of *semmyōtai*, see Edwin A. Cranston, 'Asuka and Nara Culture: Literacy, Literature, and Music,' in Delmer Brown, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 1, Ancient Japan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 485–486.

Prayer 1: *Kotowakete*, October 17, 1937⁶

The emperor delivered this prayer approximately three months after the opening of Sino-Japanese hostilities on July 7, 1937. Days after the outbreak of fighting, on July 11th, Army Minister Sugiyama Hajime and Army Chief of Staff Prince Kan'in Kotohito informed the emperor that peace should be obtainable within weeks. The emperor nonetheless expressed his misgivings. He was concerned lest the army had taken up the fight against the wrong enemy. He fretted about the army's preparedness "if the worst should happen and if the Soviet Union used military force [even as the fighting continued in China]."⁷ On July 31, an attentive Emperor Hirohito listened as the Army General Staff's Operations Bureau Chief Major General Ishiwara Kanji spoke of the "urgent need to ... withdraw troops, as soon as possible, by means of diplomatic negotiation."⁸ Yet, when the fighting spread to Shanghai in early August, the emperor concluded that "the situation could not be helped," and that it was "difficult to bring the situation under control by means of diplomacy."⁹ Even so, the emperor by mid-August was voicing his concern with "the army's strategy" and spoke of the "dangers of expanding the incident to China in its entirety."¹⁰ It was against this backdrop that the emperor delivered the following *kotowakete* prayer in the Imperial palace's ancestral shrine (*kashidokoro*).

Document 1.1: *Semmyōtai*

辭別氣氏白左朕中華民國止心平協世氏東亞乃安久穩爾
 共爾榮伎事曾夜爾日爾思奉礼然爾此平彼得悟良泥
 加爾加久爾事平橫布留隨爾今次乃事變曾起利氣慨伎
 事爾奈故此乃由平告奉利氏祈請奉良波海爾陸爾空爾身母

⁶ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*, vol. 24, 146. Daily entry, October 17, 1937.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 90. Daily entry, July 11, 1937. See also Terasaki Hidenari and Mariko Terasaki Miller, *Shōwa Tennō dokuhakuroku: Terasaki Hidenari goyōgakari nikki* [The Shōwa Emperor's Monologue: Imperial Consultant Terasaki Hidenari's Diary] (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1991), 35–36.

⁸ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*, vol. 24, 103. Daily entry, July 31, 1937.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 108. Daily entry, August 12, 1937.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 24, 114. Daily entry, August 18, 1937.

棚知^{良受}勤^美勞^久我^賀軍人^平守給^比幸給^比彼^乃国^{平志氏}
 深^久省^美疾^久悟^{良志}給^比一速^久東^平亜^無窮^爾平和^{米志}
 給^{倍止}恐^美恐^母白^須

Document 1.2: Modern Japanese

辞^{こと}別^わけて白^あさく朕^あ中^あ華^わ民^わ国^こと心^こを協^あせて東
 亜^あの安^おく^だい^い穩^さに共^さに榮^さむ事^さをこそ夜^よに日^ひに
 思^{おも}奉^もれ然^{しか}に此^こを彼^か得^え悟^ごらで加^かに加^か久^くに
 事^じを横^よふるが随^ずに今^い次^じの事^じ変^へぞ起^おりける
 慨^うき事^じになも故^ゆ此^この由^ゆを告^こ奉^へりて祈^い請^ね奉^へ
 らはく海^うに陸^りに空^くに身^みも棚^ね知^ちらず勤^ねみ勞^らぐ
 我^わが軍^{ぐん}人^{じん}を守^ま給^かひ幸^{しあ}給^かひて彼^かの国^{くに}をして深^ふ
 く省^{しやう}み疾^{しやく}く悟^ごらしめ給^かひて一^い速^{そく}く東^{とう}亜^あを無^む
 窮^{きゆう}に平^{へい}和^わめしめ給^かへと恐^{おそ}み恐^{おそ}みも白^ます

Document 1.3: Roman Lettering

kotowakete mōsaku chin chūkaminokoku to kokoro o awasete tōa no yasuku
 odai ni tomo ni sakaemu koto o koso yoru ni hi ni omoitatematsure sa ni kore
 o kare tokusatora de ka ni kaku ni koto o kamafuru ga mama ni konji no jihen
 zo okorikeru uretaki koto ni na mo yue kono yoshi o tsugematsurite kisei
 matsurahaku umi ni kuga ni sora ni karada mo tanashirazu isoshimi negu
 waga ikusabito o mamoritamahi sakaetamahite kare no kuni o shite fukaku
 kaerimi toku satorashimetamaheto ichihayaku tōa o tokoshie ni
 tairakekunago meshime tamahite to kashikomi kashikomi mo mōsu

Document 1.4: English Translation

We take up a new theme and humbly say: We offer our thoughts, night and day, about cooperating with the Republic of China for East Asia's tranquility and prosperity. We are unable to have them understand this, and although We are prepared to do much, this incident has occurred. It is deplorable. Accordingly, We offer this prayerful report. Our toiling servicemen on the sea, on the land, and in the air are oblivious of life and limb. Bestow protection and blessings on them. As for the other nation, grant that it may, on deep reflection, soon understand. Also, grant without delay eternal peace and tranquility to East Asia. We humbly speak these words.

Document 2: *Otsugebumi*, December 9, 1941¹¹

Japan opened war against the United States and Britain with dramatic suddenness on December 7, 1941. *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* provides ample evidence of the emperor's concerns and frustrations in the weeks, months, and years between the opening of the undeclared war in China and the war against the Anglo-American powers. The emperor was particularly exercised when the cabinet of Konoe Fumimaro in September 1940 concluded a military alliance with Nazi Germany. He opposed the alliance precisely because it raised the possibility of war against the Anglo-American powers. To cite but one example of the emperor's disdain for the alliance with Germany: the emperor in July 1939 lashed out at Army Minister Itagaki Seishirō for his advocacy of a military alliance with Nazi Germany. The emperor said unequivocally that such an alliance was "against his will," and he criticized the army for its "maneuvering" to that end. He ended the audience with a stinging assessment of Itagaki's "competence."¹²

Despite his concerns, the emperor fulfilled his responsibilities as commander-in-chief once war began. For example, on December 7, 1941, the emperor awoke at 2:50 a.m. – some forty minutes before his navy launched the Pearl Harbor attack – and dressed in full naval uniform.¹³ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* sheds no light on why the emperor should have woken so early and why he should have dressed in naval uniform, but it seems eminently plausible to suggest that his actions were connected to his navy's Pearl Harbor attack. In this regard, historian Yamada Akira offers a threefold

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 29, 143. Daily entry, December 9, 1941.

¹² Ibid., vol. 26, 85. Daily entry, July 5, 1939.

¹³ Ibid., vol. 29, 137. Daily entry, December 8, 1941.

suggestion: the emperor may have been involved in some ritual or ceremony relating to the attack, the emperor may have had an audience with a naval officer and received an eleventh-hour report on the attack, or the emperor may well have prayed for victory.¹⁴

Its silence on the matter of Hirohito's early-morning December 7 activities notwithstanding, *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* includes the full text of the prayerful report which Hirohito delivered on December 9, 1941. Scholars have long known that the emperor prayed to his ancestors on this date. According to Kido's diary (which was published in 1966) a "special festival" was held on December 9, 1941 in the Imperial palace's ancestral shrine (*kashidokoro*), so that the emperor could "report on war against the United States and Britain."¹⁵ Until now, however, the contents of that message remained unknown.

Document 2.1: *Semmyōtai*

掛卷^母恐^伎賢所^乃大前^爾恐^美恐^美白^左朕天津日嗣
 知食^{志々}以^与來皇祖^平始^米御世御世^乃聖謨^乃隨^爾四
 海皆同胞^止弥睦^毘睦^爾弥親^{志美}親^{麻志米}夙夜心^平竭
 志身^平致^{志々}由久利奈^久去^志十二年支那^乃事變起
 利奴故一速^久大東亞^平和^{米牟}關係淺^{加良}国々^爾事謀
 利志其^乃甲斐無^{伎乃美}阿多奈^布影年^爾月^爾深^{利奴}猶
 母有^利有^止留手段^平尽^{志々}日^爾異^爾風荒^美浪高^久遂^爾
 我国^左危殆^{久古}成^{爾氣}斯^久有^礼甚遺憾^{志久}有^礼已^{牟倍}有
 良事^{止奈}思^保食^志今度米^国英^国對^止氏戰^比開^平久事^止

¹⁴ Yamada Akira, 'Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku no gunjishiteki bunseki' [Military History Analysis of *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*], *Sundai Shigaku* 156 (February 2016): 114–115.

¹⁵ *Kido nikki*, vol. 2, 933. Diary entry, December 9, 1941.

成^{利爾}是^平以^氏大前^平齋^伎祭^利此由^平告奉^留事^平平
 良氣^久安^久聞^志食^爾海^爾陸^爾空^爾射向^布敵等^平速^爾伐^平
 良氣^比皇御国乃大御稜威^平四表八方^爾伊照^利徹^{良志}給
 無窮^爾天下^平調^{波志}恐^美恐^母白^須

Document 2.2: Modern Japanese

かけまく ^{かしこ} かしこ ^{もう} もう
 掛巻も 恐き賢所の大前に恐み恐みも白さ
 く朕天津日嗣知食ししより以来皇祖を始
 め御世御世の ^{おおみはかりごと} 聖 謨 の随に四海皆同胞と
 弥睦びに睦び弥親しみに親ましめむと ^{あけくれ} 夙夜
 心を竭し身を致ししに由久利奈くも去し十
 二年支那の事変起りぬ故一速く大東亜を和
 めむと関係浅からぬ国々に事謀りしに其の
 甲斐無きのみかは ^{ほとほと} 阿多奈ふ影年に月に深り
 ぬれども猶もと有りと有る手段を尽ししも
 日に異に風荒み浪高く遂に我国さへ危 ^{ほとほと} 殆
 くこそは成にけれ斯くし有れば甚遺憾しく
 は有れど已むべくも有らぬ事となも思ぼし
 食し今度米国と英国とに対ひて戦を開く事

と成りにき是を以て大前を齋き祭りて故此
 由を告奉る事を平らげく安らげく聞食して
 海に陸に空に射向ふ敵等を速に伐平らげ皇
 やか御国の大御稜威を四表八方に伊照り徹
 らしめ給ひて無窮に天下を調はしめ給へと
 恐み恐みも白す

Document 2.3: Roman Lettering

*kakemakumo kashikoki kashikodokoro no ō mae ni kashikomi kashikomi mo
 mōsaku are amatsu hitsugi shiroshime shishi yori irai sumemioya o hajime
 miyomiyo no ōmihakarigoto no manima nishikai harakara to iya mutsubi ni
 mutsubi iya oyashimi ni oyashimashimemu to akekure kokoro o tsukushi mi
 o itashishi ni yukurinaku mo inishi tōamarifutatose shina no jihen okorinu
 kare ichihayaku daitōa o nagomemu to kakawari asakaranu kuniguni ni koto
 hakari shi ni sono kai nakinomi ka wa hotohofu kage toshi ni tsuki ni
 fukamarinuredomo naomo to ari to aru sube o ozukushi shite mo hi ni ke ni
 susami name takaku tsui ni wagakunisa e hotohotoku koso ha nari ni kere
 kakushi areba hanahada urewashiku ha aredo yamu beku mo aranu koto to
 na mo omoboshimeshi kotabi beikoku to eikoku to ni mukahite ikusa o hiraku
 koto to nariniki koko o mote ō mae o itsuki matsuri te kono yoshi o
 tsugematsurukoto o tairageku yasurageku kikoshimeshite umi ni kuga ni sora
 ni imukafu adadomo o sumiyaka ni uchitairage sumeramikuni no ōmitsu o
 yomoyamo ni iteri tōrashime tamahite tokoshie ni amenoshita o
 totonohashimetamaheto kashikomi kashikomi mo mōsu*

Document 2.4: English Translation

Humbly, We approach the palace sanctuary in prayer. With awe and reverence, We humbly speak these words: Ever since We ascended the Imperial throne, we have night and day devoted my body and soul to the Imperial reign's founding ideals of universal brotherhood, harmony, and friendship. Yet, in 1937, the incident in China occurred unexpectedly. To pacify Greater East Asia quickly, Japan has consulted with closely connected nations. Their untrustworthiness has grown with the passage of time. Although we've taken all possible steps, the winds get rougher and the waves

have become taller with each passing day and now endanger Our nation. This is awfully lamentable, yet it is not something I think we can avoid. Now, it has come to pass that we have opened hostilities against the United States and Britain. We dedicate this to You and we worship You. We report this to You. Govern this world so as to bring it peace and tranquility. On the sea, on the land, and in the air, rain blows on the enemy. Bring peace promptly. Grant that the Imperial nation's august virtues shine out in all directions and grant the world eternal harmony. We humbly speak these words.

Document 3: *Otsugebumi*, December 12, 1942 (Delivered at the Outer Shrine at Ise Grand Shrine)¹⁶

Japanese forces enjoyed stunning successes in the early stages of the war against the Anglo-American powers. Southeast Asia, in its virtual entirety, quickly fell within Japan's so-called Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* offers little on the emperor's reaction to these battlefield successes. It is nonetheless well known that he was considerably exercised by Japan's initial victories. For example, Kido's diary records a gleeful emperor commenting on March 9, 1942, on Japan's forces having recorded victories almost "too quickly."¹⁷ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* does not shed much light on the question as to when the emperor recognized Japan's war fortunes as having turned; it nonetheless records an interesting conversation between the emperor and Kido on December 1, 1942. The emperor spoke of Japan having "unavoidably taken up arms" against the United States and Britain. He spoke also of his desire to thank the gods for Japan's subsequent battlefield victories. There remained, moreover, much for which he wanted to pray, including his own wartime leadership, East Asian "stability," and "world peace." Perhaps most importantly, he wanted to pray for "final victory."¹⁸ He delivered just such a prayer (reproduced below) on December 12, at Ise Grand Shrine (in Mie Prefecture).

Document 3.1: *Semmyōtai*

掛卷^母恐^伎豊受大御神^乃大前^爾恐^美恐^美白^母左^久去年
乃此月^乃八日已^{牟倍}無^久米^久国^母及^久英国^爾對^比氏^戰平^開志^利

¹⁶ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*, vol. 30, 216–217. Daily entry, December 12, 1942.

¹⁷ *Kido Nikki*, vol. 2, 949. Diary entry, March 9, 1942.

¹⁸ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*, vol. 30, 209. Daily entry, December 1, 1942.

朕^賀軍人^波海^爾陸^爾空^爾身^母棚知^良受^猛毘^進美^敵乃^拋
 禮^島々^国々^平次^々爾^戡定^氣乃^美加^波日^爾月^爾和^志惠^氏或^波
 大海^原爾^寇布^艦船^平擊^破利^追攘^比氏^偉自^倍戰^果平^拳氣^志波^美
 專^良廣^伎厚^伎恩^賴止^奈母^思保^志食^須故^此由^平告^氣奉^利辱^美
 奉^留為^氏今^日乃^此日^禮代^乃御^幣帛^奉利^齋祭^利拜^美
 奉^留狀^平字^豆奈^比給^比殊^爾心^中深^久祈^請奉^良久^波
 今^志此^類母^有良^奴大^戰乃^最中^由々^志伎^時運^爾有^禮波^国
 内^愈拳^利一^心爾^撓麻^勵美^直道^爾聖^謨平^張弘^米成^遂
 氣^志給^比愈^古廣^留皇^軍乃^行手^平弥^益々^爾守^幸波^給比^速
 氣^久敵^等平^事向^氣給^比天^壤乃^共隆^由留^皇国^乃大^御稜^威
 平^八紘^爾伊^照利^輝加^志給^比無^窮爾^天下^平調^米給^止
 白^須事^平聞^食世^止恐^美恐^母白^須

Document 3.2: Modern Japanese

かけまく かしこ
 掛卷も 恐きも 恐き 豊受大御神の大前に 恐
 み 恐みも 白^{もう}さく 去年の此月の八日 已むべく
 も 無く 米国及英国 に対ひて 戦を開きしより
 朕が軍人は 海に 陸に 空に 身も 棚知らず 猛び
 進みて 敵の 拋れる 島々国々を 次々に 戡定^{うちさだむ}
 けしのみかは 日に 月に 和し 恵まひ 或は 大海

原にあだ寇ふ艦船を撃破り追攘いみひて偉じき戦果
 を挙げしは専ら広き厚き恩頼となも思ぼし
 食す故此由を告げ奉りはずかし辱み奉ると為て今
 日の此日礼代の御幣帛奉りて齋祭り拝み奉
 る状を宇豆奈比給ひ殊に心中深く祈請奉ら
 くは今し此類も有らぬ大戦の最中由々志き
 時運にし有れば国内こぞ愈挙り一心にたお撓まず励
 みて直道に聖謨を張弘め成遂げしめ給ひ愈
 広がる皇軍の行手を弥益々に守幸はへ給ひ
 て速けく敵等を事向けしめ給ひ天壤の共隆
 ゆる皇国の大御稜威を八紘に伊照り輝かし
 給ひて無窮に天下を調はしめ給へと白す事
 を聞食せと恐み恐みも白す

Document 3.3: Roman Lettering

*Kakemakumo kashikokimo kashikoki toyouke daijingū no ō mae ni kashikomi
 kashikomi mo mōsaku kozo no kono tsuki no yōka yamubekumonaku beikoku
 mata eikoku ni mukahite ikusa o hiraki shiyori are ga ikusabito wa umi ni
 kuga ni sora ni karada mo tanashirazu takebi susumite ada no yoreru
 shimashima kuniguni o tsugitusgi ni uchisadamuke shinomi ka wa hi ni tuski
 ni nagoshimegumahi aru ha ō unabara ni adafu ikusabune o uchiyaburi
 oiharahite imijiki isao o agheshi wa mohara hiroki atsuki mitamanofuyu
 tonamo omoboshimesu kare kono yoshi o tsugematsuri hazukashimi matsuru
 to shite konjitsu no kono hi iyashiro no miteguratate matsurite iwai matsuri
 ogami matsuru sama o uzunahi tamahi koto ni kokoro no uchi fukaku kisei
 matsurakuha imashi kono tagui mo aranu taisen no sanaka yuyushiki jiun*

nishi areba kokunai iyoiyo kozori hitotsukokoro ni taomazu hagemite naokimichi ni ōmihakarigoto o harihirome nashitogeshime tamahi iyoiyo hirogoru sumeramiikusa no yukute o iya masumasu ni mamorisaki hae tamahite suniyakeku adadomo o kotomukeshime tamahi ametsuchi no tomoni sakayuru sumekuni no ōmitsu o amenoshita ni iteri kagayakashime tamahite tokoshie ni amenoshita o totonohashime tatahe to mōsu koto o kikoshimese to kashikomi kashikomi mo mōsu

Document 3.4: English Translation

Humbly, I approach the Outer Shrine in prayer. With awe and reverence, I humbly speak these words: Last year, on the eighth day of this month, We unavoidably opened hostilities against the United States and Britain. Oblivious of life and limb, Our servicemen on the sea, on the land, and in the air drive onward. Not only do they suppress disorder in enemy islands and lands, they pacify them. They defeat and drive away enemy ships on the open seas. They deliver excellent battlefield results. This is all entirely due to the Gods' divine grace. With thanks, We report this to You, and We make this offering today. Acquiesce in Our prayers of worship. In particular, We pray from deep in Our heart, at this critical juncture in the midst of this incomparable great war, that You might grant ever greater domestic unity. We also pray for the realization of Your plans. Bestow protection and blessings along the way of Our ever-spreading Imperial forces. Grant that they may quickly confront their enemies. Grant also that the Imperial nation's august virtues, which grace heaven and earth, shine across the world's eight corners. Grant the world eternal harmony. We humbly speak these words.

Document 4: *Otsugebumi*, December 12, 1942 (Delivered at the Inner Shrine at Ise Grand Shrine)¹⁹

This is the second of two prayerful reports which the emperor delivered on December 12, 1942. The two prayerful reports are for the most part identical: the emperor delivered the first at Ise Grand Shrine's Outer Shrine, and the second only moments later at the Inner Shrine. The emperor addressed this second prayerful report directly to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu (who is believed to dwell in Ise Grand Shrine's Inner Shrine). It is interesting to note that he specifically attributed all Japan's battlefield victories to her support.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 30, 217–218. Daily entry, December 12, 1942.

Document 4.1: *Semmyōtai*

掛卷^母恐^伎天照坐皇大御神乃大前^爾恐^美恐^美白^左
 去年^乃此月^乃八日已^{牟倍}無^久米^久国^母及英国^爾對^比戰^平
 開^{牟志}朕^{与利}賀^良軍人^波海^爾陸^爾空^爾身^母棚知^良猛^毘進^美
 敵^乃拋^礼島々^留国々^平次々^爾戡^美定^志日^乃月^爾和^志
 患^麻或^波大海原^爾寇^布艦船^平擊破^利追攘^比偉^自戰^倍
 果^平拳^氣專^良皇大御神乃阿奈々比給^比扶^氣給^布
 恩^止頼^母思^保食^須故此由^平告^氣奉^利辱^美奉^留為^氏今
 日^乃此日^礼代^乃御幣帛奉^利斎祭^利拝^美奉^留狀^平宇
 豆奈比給^比殊^爾心中深^久祈請奉^良今^志此類^母有
 良^奴大戰^乃最中由々志^伎時運^志有^波国内愈^利一
 心^爾撓^麻勵^美直道^爾聖謨^平張弘^米成遂^氣給^比愈^廣
 古^留皇軍^乃行手^平弥益々^爾守幸^波給^比速^氣敵等^平事
 向^氣給^比天壤^乃共隆^由皇国^乃大御稜威^平八紘^爾
 伊照^利輝^加給^比無窮^爾天下^平調^波給^倍白^須事^平聞
 食^世恐^美恐^美白^須

Document 4.2: Modern Japanese

かけまく かしこ
 掛卷も 恐き天照坐皇大御神の大前に恐み
 恐みも白さく去年の此月の八日已むべくも
 無く米国及英国に對ひて戰を開きしより朕

が軍人は海に陸に空に身も棚知らず猛び進
 みて敵の扱れる島々国々を次々に戡定けし^{うちさだ}
 のみかは日に月に和し恵まひ或は大海原に
 寇ふ艦船を撃破り追攘ひて偉じき戦果を挙げ^{あだ}
 げしは専ら皇大御神の阿奈々比給ひ扶け給^{いみ}
 ふ恩頼となも思ぼし食す故此由を告げ奉り
 辱^{はずかし}み奉ると為て今日の此日礼代の御幣帛
 奉りて斎祭り拝み奉る状を宇豆奈比給ひ殊
 に心中深く祈請奉らくは今し此類も有らぬ
 大戦の最中由々志き時運にし有れば国内愈
 挙^{こぞ}り一心に撓^{たお}まず励みて直道に聖謨を張弘
 め成遂げしめ給ひ愈広ぐる皇軍の行手を弥
 益々に守幸はへ給ひて速けく敵等を事向け
 しめ給ひ天壤の共隆ゆる皇国の大御稜威を
 八紘に伊照り輝かし給ひて無窮に天下を調
 はしめ給へと白す事を聞食せと恐み恐みも
 白す

Document 4.3: Roman Lettering

*Kakemakumo kashikoki amaterashimasusume ō mikami no ō mae ni
 kashikomi kashikomi mo mōsaku kozo no kono tsuki no yōka
 yamubekumonaku beikoku mata eikoku ni mukahite ikusa o hiraki shiyori are
 ga ikusabito wa umi ni kusa ni sora ni karada mo tanashirazu takebi susumite*

ada no yoreru shimashima kuniguni o tsugitusgi ni uchisadake shinomi ka wa hi ni tuski ni nagoshimegumahi aru wa ō unabara ni adanafu ikusabune o uchiyaburi oi-harahite imijiki isao o agesi wa mohara sume ōmikami no ananahi tamahi tasuke tamafu mitamanofuyu to namo omoboshimesu kare kono yoshi o tsugematsuri hazukashimi matsuru to shite konjitsu no kono hi iyashiro no miteguratare matsurite iwai matsuri ogami matsuru sama o uzunahi tamahi koto ni kokoro no uchi fukaku kisei matsurakuha imashi kono tagui mo aranu taisen no sanaka yuyushiki jiun nishi areba kokunai iyoio yokozori hitotsukokoro ni taomazu hagemite naokimichi ni ōmihakarigoto o harihirome nashitogeshime tamahi iyoio hirogoru sumeramiikusa no yukute o iya masumasu ni mamorisaki hae tamahite sumiyakeku adadomo o kotomukeshime tamahi ametsuchi no tomoni sakayuru sumekuni no ōmiitsu o amenoshita ni iteri kagayakashime tamahite tokoshie ni amenoshita o totonohashime tatahe to mōsu koto o kikoshimese to kashikomi kashikomi mo mōsu

Document 4.4: English Translation

Humbly, I approach the Sun Goddess in prayer. With awe and reverence, I humbly speak these words: Last year, on the eighth day of this month, We unavoidably opened hostilities against the United States and Britain. Oblivious of life and limb, Our servicemen on the sea, on the land, and in the air drive onward. Not only do they suppress disorder in enemy islands and lands, they pacify them. They defeat and drive away enemy ships on the open seas. They deliver excellent battlefield results. This is due entirely to the Great Imperial Goddess Amaterasu's support. With thanks, We report this to You and We make this offering today. Acquiesce in Our prayers of worship. In particular, We pray from deep in Our heart, at this critical juncture in the midst of this incomparable great war, that You might grant ever greater domestic unity. We also pray for the realization of Your plans. Bestow protection and blessings along the way of Our ever-spreading Imperial forces. Grant that they may quickly confront their enemies. Grant also that the Imperial nation's august virtues, which grace heaven and earth, shine across the world's eight corners. Grant the world eternal harmony. We humbly speak these words.

Document 5: *Gosaimon*, July 30, 1945 and August 2, 1945²⁰

The final wartime prayer recorded in *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku* is of particular interest. Its plea for the crushing of Japan's enemies comprises much stronger language than the emperor's earlier wartime prayers (reproduced above). This is more noteworthy because this prayer was delivered only days before Japan's surrender in World War II. This being the case, a critical historian Herbert Bix has cited this prayer and asked rhetorically: "What was [Hirohito] thinking?"²¹

Historian Hara Takeshi has sought to address precisely that question. He suggests that the dispatch of an Imperial messenger to pray for victory at this late hour reflected the desires not of the emperor but of his mother, the Empress Dowager Teimei. Hara argues that the emperor had already concluded the war was lost and therefore saw little point in praying for military victory; conversely, the empress dowager was (like many in the army) adamantly opposed to surrender. Hara also notes that the imperial messenger visited not Ise Grand Shrine (where the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and progenitor of the Imperial line is supposed to reside), but instead Usa Jingū Shrine and Kashiigū Shrine. Hara assigns significance to the latter shrine, which enshrines Queen Jingū (r. ca. 201–269 CE). For one thing, Queen Jingū had, according to Japan's oldest surviving written records, led successful military expeditions against an overseas enemy (the Korean kingdom of Silla). This was a compelling precedent for the Empress Dowager who, in July-August 1945, continued to hope for victory over the United States and its allies. Hara also notes that the Empress Dowager Teimei (when still empress) had traveled to Kashiigū Shrine and composed a poem professing her fidelity to Queen Jingū. To restate Hara's basic argument: this wartime prayer reflects the desires of the Empress Dowager Teimei more closely than it does those of the Shōwa Emperor.²²

²⁰ *Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*, vol. 34, 23. Daily entry, July 30, 1945.

²¹ "Selective History: Hirohito's Chronicles," *Japan Times*, October 11, 2014 (accessed May 15, 2019, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/11/national/history/selective-history-hirohitos-chronicles/#.WTnq3OuGOUk>).

²² Hara, '*Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku*' o yomu, 150–153.

5.1 *Semmyōtai*

辞別氣左氏白久今志例母有良奴大戦乃最中勁敵倍々荒毘
 熾烈志久猖獗比氏帝都乎始米国内乃所々乎日毎夜毎爾
 襲倍留乃美加波我賀島嶼乎次々爾侵志遂波本土平母寇波牟止須留勢阿利
 当爾皇国乃興廢爾繫留甚由々志伎戦局爾有礼婆国内尽
 一心爾奮起知有良牟限利乎傾竭志氏敵国乎撃破利事向
氣志米牟止奈母思保志食須嚴志伎神靈弥高爾降鑑志氏神奈我良明
 駿乎発頭志給比速氣久神州乃禍患乎禳除伎聖業乎成
 遂氣志米給倍止祈請奉世良給布大御旨乎聞食世止恐美母恐美母白須

5.2 *Modern Japanese*

辞別ことわけて白たぐいさく今たぐいし例たぐいも有らぬ大戦の
さなかつよきますます 最中 勁敵倍々荒さかんにはげび熾烈たけりくるしく猖獗たけりくるひて帝
 都を始さかんにはげめ国内の処々を日ごと夜ごとに襲へ
 るのみかは我が島嶼を次々に侵し遂には本
 土をも寇はむとする勢まさあり当に皇国の興廢
 に繫る甚由々しき戦局にし有れば国内
ことごとく 尽 一心かたむけつくに奮起ち有らむ限りを傾竭し
 て敵国うちやぶを撃破り事向けしめむとなも思ぼし
 食いつくす嚴ふりてらしき神靈弥高かんながらに降鑑して神奈我良

明駿を発顕し給ひ^{すむや}速^{はらいのぞ}けく神州の禍患を
 禍除き聖業を成遂げしめ給へと祈請奉ら
 せ給ふ大御旨を聞食せと恐み恐みも白す

5.3 Roman Lettering

*Kotowakete mōsaku imashi tagui mo aranu ōmikusa no sanaka tsuyoki
 masumasu arabi sakamihageshiku takerikuruhite teito o hajime kunuchi no
 shosho o higoto yogoto ni osoheru nomi ka wa waga shimajima o tsugitsugi
 ni okashi tsui ni wa hondo o mo adanahamu to suru ikioi ari masa ni
 sumekuni no kōhai ni kakaru hanahada yuyushiki senkyoku ni shi areba
 kunuchi kotogotoku hitotsukokoro ni furuitachi aramu kagiri o
 katamuketsuku shite adanokuni o uchiyaburi kotomukeshimemu tonamo
 omoboshimesu itsukushiki shinrei iya taka ni furitera shite kannagara meiken
 o hatsugen shi tamahi sumuyakeku shinshū no kakan o harainozoki seigyō o
 nashitogeshimetamahe to kisei tatematsurase tamafu daigyoshi o
 kikoshimese to kashikomi kashikomi mo mōsu*

5.4 English Translation

We take up a new theme and humbly say: In the midst of this unprecedented great war, the fierce rage of Japan's formidable foes increases exponentially. Not only are there attacks day and night on the imperial capital as well as places all across the nation; our islands are being violated one after the other. At last, the momentum is such that the home islands will be invaded. It is an exceedingly grave war situation and Japan's destiny is truly connected. May the nation wholeheartedly rouse itself, and may it move to crush the enemy. Magnificent divine spirit, descend from Your seat on high and manifest Your godly virtues. Grant also accomplishment of the sacred task of the timely elimination of the Land of the Gods' calamities. We offer this prayer, and We ask that You govern in accord with Your purport. We humbly speak these words.

Conclusion

Researchers should find much interest in the prayers reproduced in this article. The language in which these prayers are written provides one point of real interest. The *semmyōtai* in which the emperor's wartime prayers

are written provide tangible evidence of the existence of a sacred or liturgical language used in Japan's Imperial court. In this regard, it might be noted that the emperor's wartime use of this archaic written language is not unlike (to cite but one example) the Catholic Church's reliance on Ecclesiastical Latin. This, then, points to another subject of interest that emerges: the emperor's duties combined the positions of head of the Japanese government and the commander-in-chief of the armed services. He was also responsible, as emperor, for significant religious duties, including frequent prayers to his imperial ancestors. The prayers under examination in this study reveal that he discharged at least this aspect of his religious duties in earnest.

Finally, researchers will also find value in analyzing these prayers in order to shed light on the Shōwa Emperor's innermost thoughts at key moments during World War II. His lament in October 1937 concerning the Chinese Nationalists' refusal to countenance Japan's supposedly peaceful intentions suggests an unwillingness to admit to the belligerence of Japan's Imperial army. Some eight years later, in July-August 1945, the fear he expressed at the forthcoming invasion of the home islands is very nearly palpable. The "sacred decision" for surrender which he delivered two times on August 9 and again on August 14 should come to mind.

The emperor's "sacred decision" came on the heels of both the atomic attacks against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Soviet entry into the war against Japan. These twin shocks convinced the emperor that Japan had irretrievably lost the war. They also shook Japan's policymaking processes, making possible the emperor's direct intervention in that process. Over and above the arguments of his military advisers, including War Minister Anami Korechika, Army Chief of Staff Umezu Yoshijirō, and Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda Soemu, Emperor Hirohito chose surrender. His actions in the endgame of war remain the subject of ongoing scholarly debate. Rather than wade into that debate, it might simply be noted on the basis of the emperor's own wartime prayers, that Hirohito himself believed his sacred decision was based firmly on the will of his ancestral gods.

