

The significance of this trial is difficult to exaggerate. Its judgment, both in time and scope, goes far beyond that of the Nuremberg trial. The President of the Tribunal went so far as to say at the beginning of the proceedings, "there has been no more important criminal trial in history". This statement could certainly be upheld by one criterion alone, namely, its major contribution to history. The accused in varying degrees were held responsible for their share in decisions ranging over the whole field of military, diplomatic, economic and political affairs during a period of almost twenty years. Of necessity the judgment had to survey thoroughly and extensively Japanese history in the years delimited by the indictment. Thus the transcript of the court will provide the historian with rich material for a study of modern Japan. The real value of this material, which must be sifted out from the vast bulk of the whole transcript, consists chiefly of hitherto secret documents which might otherwise never have seen the light of day, together with the testimony of witnesses.

Secret Documents

Some of the more important witnesses were such senior statesmen as Shidehara, Okada, Yonai, former diplomatists Arita and Nomura, former generals Ueda, Tada, Kagesa, Ugaki; and Tanaka (Ryukichi). Among the roster of interesting witnesses was also the puppet Emperor of Manchoukuo, Henry Pu Yi and the exotic figure of a general from Outer Mongolia. Many of the accused took the witness box themselves and through their defence counsel gave their version of their political responsibilities; the subsequent cross-examination by the prosecution sometimes resulted in damaging evidence being given not so much against the accused in the witness box as against some of his colleagues in the dock.

Some of the important documents contained in the transcript are records of Imperial conferences and Liaison conferences; memoranda and secret notes on Japanese policy towards China from 1932 to 1939; plans for total warfare and economic regimentation in many parts of East Asia dominated by Japan; proof of a wide narcotic traffic designed not only to demoralize the Chinese but to finance the puppet state of Manchoukuo.

The transcript also contains communications exchanged between Ambassador Nomura in Washington and his government during the fateful days before Pearl Harbour; there is a record of peace feelers towards China; the reasons behind Tojo's resignation in 1944 and the abortive plan to send Prince Konoye to Moscow in July, 1945, to open peace negotiations.

Of the Japanese Government documents those which seem to have been most fully preserved and will be of special interest to students of Far Eastern international affairs are the Japanese Foreign Office records, of which the pre-1941 section is fairly intact. There are also the records kept by the Ministry of the Imperial Household of Imperial conferences and meetings of the Privy Council. Some of the Home Ministry files contain reports of the secret police.

Saionji-Harada Memoirs

Among the most valuable of the private documents are the Saionji-Harada memoirs and the diary of Marquis Kido. Neither has been published yet and they are only in very rough translation and in a form which is awkward to read, but even a cursory examination reveals their great value to the historian.