
Japanese organisational decision making in 1941

Omi Hatashin

SILS, Waseda University,
1-6-1 Nishi-Waseda, Shinjuku-ku,
Tokyo, 169-8050, Japan
E-mail: hatashin@aoni.waseda.jp

Abstract: This paper discusses a Japanese decision-making process leading to a decision to wage war against the USA and Great Britain in December 1941. A hypothesis, which is based on solid sources, as shown in this paper, is that the Japanese leaders did not really want the war, but for a number of organisational and bureaucratic reasons, they failed to stop the movement towards it. These reasons, including the chain of command issues, are capable of explaining what has been happening in recent years, for example, at Olympus and in Japan's nuclear power industries. Just as banks and energy companies are overprotected and their reckless conduct indulged because they are seen to be too big to fail, so were the imperial army and navy.

Keywords: Japanese organisational behaviour; decision-making; decision to go to war; World War II; crisis management; chain of command; Emperor Hirohito; Tojo; constitutional conventions; dependence on paternalism.

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Biographical notes: Omi Hatashin is a Lecturer at Waseda University, Japan. After reading law in Tokyo University, he took his PhD in England in 1999 and was called to the English Bar in 2003. He published, among other works, 'Crime and culture: corporate crime and criminal justice in a different cultural environment' in Minkes and Minkes, *Corporate and White Collar Crimes* (2008, Sage, London) and *Private Yokoi's War and Life on Guam 1944–1972*, (2009, Global Oriental, Folkestone). He is interested in comparative law and politics.

1 Introduction

This article gives a historical account of the Japanese decision-making process leading to the decision for war against the USA and Great Britain in December 1941. That process has implications for management today, whether that of Japanese companies or that of business or other organisations in a 'cross-cultural' environment. It is intended to show how the decision-making process took place in such a way that Japan became involved in a disastrous war, which Japanese leaders themselves did not really want. Why did this happen? It will be suggested that there are two fundamental reasons: one is related to the 'Japanese patterns' of organisational behaviour; the other is something which is

characteristic of much of organisational decision-making. The latter might explain the former.

The organisational dimension does not seem to be explored fully in the two seminal accounts of the role of the Emperor in the war decision, by Large (1992, pp.102–115, 129–131) and Bix (2000, pp.387–437). Large (1992, pp.3–4) points out great difficulties finding reliable sources for the role of the Emperor. A similar Japanese ‘culture of concealment’ continues to ambush foreign CEOs of Japanese companies today, e.g., Wilfried Porth, whom Daimler Chrysler appointed the managing director of a lorry manufacturer which it had acquired from Mitsubishi Motors in 2003, and more recently, Michael C. Woodford, appointed president of Olympus, a manufacturer of cameras and precision equipment, in February 2011 and sacked in October for his whistle-blowing. He had demanded that some high managerial agents resign based on a PricewaterhouseCoopers investigation he had commissioned (Clark, 2011).

Even so, analyses of Japan’s decision-making process concerning the last war continue to sell well today in Japan, and NHK’s recent TV programmes, based on some new and old sources, which brought to life the navy’s roles in making the decision to go to war were no exception (NHK, 2011). Audience comments included: “The same errors are being committed in my company today”; “I had thought that these people belonged to a different age and had different ideas from ours, but I realise that they thought and conducted themselves just like us” [NHK, (2011), p.380]. The process will be illustrated by occasional references to today’s subsisting practices, where appropriate.

2 Japanese organisational behaviour

It ought to be stressed at the outset that something which this article describes in terms of Japanese ‘culture’ may not be unique to Japan at all and could be explained by other reasons. While there is no space here to discuss and analyse many examples in detail, for the sake of expediency the following stereotypical and simplified features of Japanese organisational behaviour are of overarching relevance in this article:

- 1 A division between one’s ‘true wishes’ which tend to remain unexpressed (*honne*) and something which one feels he ought to say ‘ostensibly’ or ‘publicly’ as a member of an organisation or a community (*tatemae*) (Nakane, 1993).
- 2 Dependence (*amae*) on a person in a parental position who could understand and act on one’s unexpressed true wishes (*honne*) (Doi, 1981).
- 3 The style of organisational decision-making by a person in a parental position who will make a decision from the top downwards after hearing, and taking into account, the views of junior members who have expressed what they felt they ought to say, but which are not binding on him, because he is expected to take into account the unexpressed ‘true wishes’ of the members. A decision which is made in this way is called ‘the voice of heaven’ (*ten-no-koye*), and the same style of decision-making is observed by a senior Japanese judge, Sono’o (2011, p.11), for example, in the making of contested provisions of the law officers’ draft bill for the Civil Procedure Code in 1889 and recently for the Civil Enforcement Code in 1978. This style best suited the ultranationalist expectation of the role of the Emperor, whose Japanese title means ‘king of heaven’ or ‘king of universe’ (*tenno*), and who was regarded as a

kind of *paterfamilias* or *patergentis*, ‘the father of the nation’ in the analogy of a household [rather in tune with the Aristotelian, and therefore non-Japanese, evolution theory of a body of citizens under a king (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b16-28)], or indeed as a god, before 1946.

- 4 A somewhat confused distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ in the sense that it tends to be regarded as one’s ‘public’ duty to maintain the harmony of a community to which one belongs, while it tends to be regarded as ‘selfish’ to act on one’s own individual ethical conviction, however right, just and reasonable it might be for the interests of wider communities. This makes whistle-blowing particularly difficult and costly.
- 5 Age seniority matters more strongly in the Far East than in the West. As of 12 October 1941, both of the Chiefs of the General Staff were 65 years old, Tojo 57, Konoye 50, and Hirohito 40. Hirohito was the youngest of the members of ‘the board of directors’.

A key theory in this paper is that the top managerial officers of the army and the navy were tacitly expecting (*honne*) that their Emperor would be kind enough to stop the war (i.e., dependence on paternalism), which their organisational ‘face’ had compelled them to propose ostensibly (*tatemae*). Within the army and navy, people put ethical priority on the maintenance of their immediate organisations’ ‘face’ over and above individual moral conviction and wider national interests. The Emperor remained utterly passive for a number of reasons, perhaps including an almost subconscious physiological reason that he was the youngest member of the ‘board of directors’, and thereby failed to stop the war. In short, Japan waged the war because of the lack of managerial leadership.

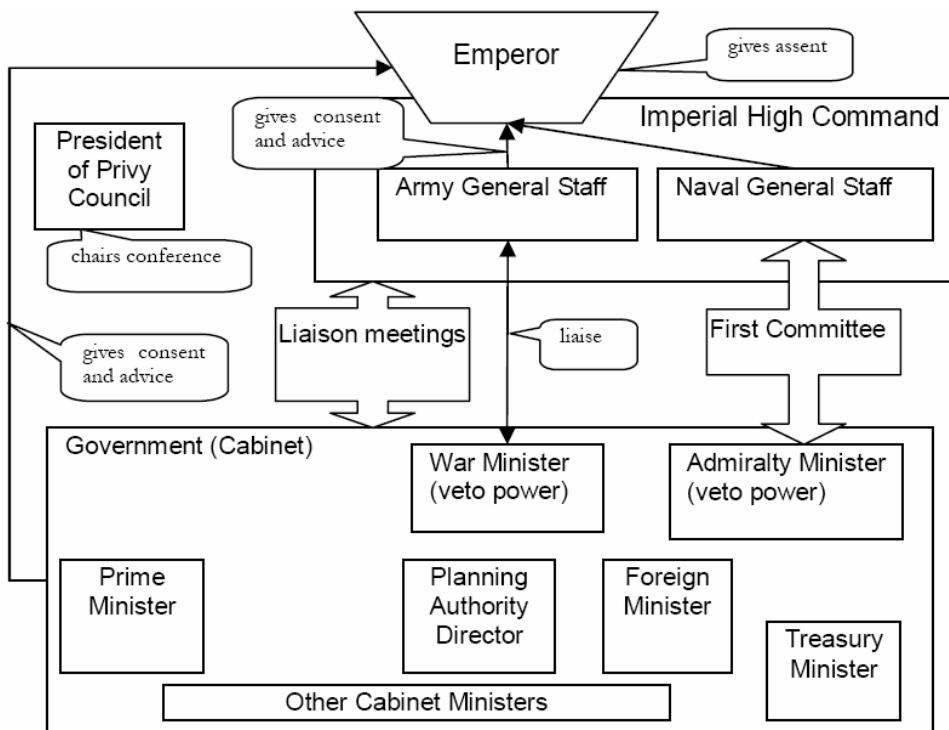
3 The army’s intentions

Post-war testimonies of the navy leaders concerning the events in the last week of Konoye’s Cabinet, around 10–16 October 1941, gave revealing testimonies of the army’s true wishes (*honne*): for example, the War Minister, Lieutenant-General Tojo, informally approached the Admiralty Minister, Vice-Admiral Oikawa, and asked him to say that the navy could not possibly fight the Americans [Shinmyo, (1976), p.181]. The contemporary Chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Nagano, too, was asked in private by his army counterpart, General Sugiyama, to say that the navy could not fight the USA [Shinmyo, (1976), p.140]. Around the same period, General Hata, the then Supreme Commander of the Japanese Expeditionary Forces in all the theatres in China made it known to the Cabinet Office that he was happy to withdraw from China [Shinmyo, (1976), p.126]. The Chief of Staff of the Japanese Expeditionary Force in Northern China, Atomiya, visited and requested the Admiralty Minister to avert the war against the USA, saying that the forces in China were happy to withdraw [Shinmyo, (1976), p.126]. The army’s records are not entirely contradictory: Tojo suggested to his navy counterpart, “if you have changed your mind, we shall go along with it”; and Tojo had ‘a casual chat’ (*zatsudan*) with the Army Chief, saying “we have to change our mind if the navy do not feel strong enough to fight” [Sugiyama, (1967), p.351].

The army’s ostensible position (*tatemae*) was manifested on 12 October 1941, in a meeting of the Prime Minister, the War Minister, the Admiralty Minister, the Foreign

Minister, and the Planning Authority Director. The Admiralty Minister (Vice-Admiral Oikawa) asked the Prime Minister to decide whether to make peace or war, and Prime Minister Konoye said he would like to continue diplomacy. This made the War Minister (Lieutenant-General Tojo) very angry, because the army's true desire (*hone*) was to withdraw from China on the ground of the navy's weakness, as shown above. Tojo remarked that the Prime Minister could not overturn the resolution of the imperial conference (Figure 1 and Appendix) of 6 September 1941 [Sugiyama, (1967), pp.345–347], in which it was decided that if there was no reasonable prospect of success in negotiations with the Americans by the first ten days of October 1941, the imperial high command and government should make up their mind to fight the USA and Great Britain, and the armed forces should ready themselves to fight by the last ten days of October [Sugiyama, (1967), p.312].

Figure 1 Imperial conference



Tojo declared that, in order for him to be able to tell the Chief of the General Staff (General Sugiyama) to stop his war preparations, Tojo had to be given absolute assurance to his own personal satisfaction that the Americans would accept the Japanese minimum terms down to every detail; that the Japanese army had a right to stay in China for counter-communist purposes, which meant, Tojo added, in practice, indefinitely. Tojo went on to say that the army could not possibly withdraw from China because Tojo would not be able to persuade and control the army's young and impetuous officers, and stressed that he had been experiencing great difficulties dealing with such people [Sugiyama, (1967), pp.345–347]. Still, the Planning Authority Director, who was a

uniformed army officer, cautioned Tojo that Japan's policy was dependent on the success of Germany and Italy [Sugiyama, (1967), p.347].

Konoye explained to Tojo why the war had to be avoided; Konoye wanted to have a clear strategy to bring the war to a satisfactory end under the worst possible circumstances before waging it, and referring to the making and the ending of the war against Russia, Konoye asked Tojo,

“If we were to fight Great Britain and the United States, who on earth would be able to mediate between them and us?”

Tojo stressed the importance of risk taking and accused Konoye of defeatism. At the end of the day, War Minister Tojo told Prime Minister Konoye to step down in favour of a certain member of the ‘divine’ imperial family who was an army general, and Tojo continued to ask the navy informally to change their mind [Konoye, (1946), pp.94–97].

Tojo’s unparliamentary attempts at extorting the navy’s concession and the navy’s evasiveness led to the collapse of Konoye’s cabinet, and later, of the empire itself. Tojo’s remark about ‘young and impetuous officers’ revealed the true motive behind the army’s insistence for the sake of their organisational ‘face’ that they could not give up their *fait accompli* in China. The motive was a fear that War Minister Tojo himself might be killed in a mutiny. Indeed, following the murder of a Prime Minister in 1931 by an agent of those who disliked the London Naval Treaty of 1930, ‘young and impetuous officers’ murdered another Prime Minister in 1932, Tojo’s War Ministry colleague in 1935, and a great number of government and business leaders in 1936 (Appendix). Michael Woodford’s comments concerning the difficulties of being the CEO of a Japanese company help illustrate the relevant Japanese ‘culture’, which still persists today:

“Status quo is still very powerful in Japan. When you change something, you close something, or withdraw from something, you will get resistance based on [the] predecessor’s decisions, especially when something is seen as sacrosanct or a holy cow.” (Tabuchi, 2011) [Woodford was sacked.]

In the last quarter of 1941, not only Konoye but also Tojo himself was confronting such resistance in the army based on their predecessors’ decisions. Tojo knew that no soldier would give up any portion of territory which they had seized by shedding their blood without shedding blood; only the sailors who served the Emperor by risking their lives had some authority in the eyes of the soldiers. Better still, owing to the education of his time, Tojo’s true wish (*hone*) was implied in his desire to have a member of the imperial family as the Prime Minister: to engage the religious authority of the Emperor to change the existing policy. In fact, Konoye was the Prime Minister at this critical juncture, precisely because of his family’s historical matrimonial relations with the imperial family. (He is often referred to as ‘Prince’, but this is strictly speaking inaccurate, since he was not a member of the direct line. He was the eleventh cousin once removed of Hirohito). Konoye was expected to be able to exert the imperial authority without actually exposing the Emperor himself to the play of real politics.

In this context, Konoye’s performance itself was somewhat responsible for his loss of confidence among the army people. Earlier, on 13 September 1941, the diary entry of a lieutenant-colonel at the Army General Staff had noted that Konoye’s ‘culture of concealment’ was running the risk of ambushing every stakeholder:

“[Today] a liaison meeting was convened [between the Imperial High Command and the Cabinet (Figure 1)], which decided our telegram answers to US questions concerning the purpose of the proposed meeting between Prime

Minister Konoye and President Roosevelt. Our answers mentioned our ‘military presence in China against Communism’, but I am afraid this language is too obscure to convey our intentions, because Prime Minister Konoye’s intentions seem to me to be to decide everything between himself and Roosevelt. It is obvious that Prime Minister Konoye and Foreign Minister [Admiral] Toyoda want to get our army thoroughly out of China. The problem has been how to pull the reluctant army all the way out of China. Their idea seems to be to make a peace process at the summit and then impose it upon the army. If so, why do they hesitate to discuss the idea here and now at *this liaison-meeting?* If they continue to manoeuvre behind the scenes, at the end of the day when the hard issues have come to the fore, they would invite so intense a resistance that they would have to give up cabinet. I am afraid, then, not only our people and armed forces but also the Americans would suffer difficulties...” [Tanemura, (1952), pp.82–83] (The words in square brackets are those of the present author).

To be fair to Konoye, he had a formidable task of putting the Chiefs of the General Staff and cabinet ministers together to run the government effectively as a team, given the fact that each of the army and the navy had power, as a matter of constitutional convention, to prevent any cabinet from being formed and to destroy any cabinet which displeased them, by withdrawing their respective cabinet delegates. Tojo’s argument, above, implied that the Chief of the General Staff was like his superior. The navy had its own General Staff, and had a similar topsy-turvy organisational structure. Indeed, by convention, Japanese cabinet ministers did not need to be members of Parliament, and tended to be selected from among the senior first division members of the permanent civil service in each respective department. Konoye was formerly the Speaker of the House of Peers. But he had no government departmental affiliation of any kind to back him up, so that in his own cabinet, which was a committee of delegates of government departments, he was alone and a stranger.

Even so, the critics of Konoye’s roundabout approach made a good point. Konoye should have expressed his true plan (*honme*) so that the army and the navy could also express their honest views (*honme*), as opposed to something which their ‘face’ compelled them to say (*tatemae*). Only then could they do business together.

In summary, the army leaders’ policy objective was to save the army’s organisational ‘face’ concerning their withdrawal from China by blaming the navy’s inability to fight the USA. The navy was most reluctant to concede this. The prime minister was not robust enough to exert his quasi-imperial authority to offer ‘cross-cutting’ managerial leadership, which would have cut across departmental boundaries.

4 The navy’s intentions

There was a precedent in which the navy had managed to pull the Japanese army out of Russia and thereby eased tension with the USA: Admiral Kato signed the Washington Naval Treaty 1922, formed a cabinet and succeeded in pulling the Japanese army out of Russia’s Far East by 25 October 1922. Therefore, it was somewhat ‘constitutional’ to expect the navy to restore law and order. However, the mutiny of 1936, which massacred the cabinet of Admiral Okada, who was then trying to cut the defence budget, represented a great source of fear on the part of the navy leaders, too.

More fundamentally, there were elements in the navy itself who deeply resented the Washington and London Naval Treaties. For example, the Naval Defence Policy Committee, also known in elitist terms as ‘First Committee’ (Figure 1), was urging the Japanese navy to waste no time in beating the US navy before its power became too vastly superior for Japan to do so, as a result of the said Treaties [NHK, (2011), pp.97–101]. In June 1941, some time before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, this Committee went as far as to recommend the Chief of the Naval General Staff to “make a military advance into Thailand and French Indochina as soon as possible so that Japan can attack the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands as soon as they ban their oil exports to Japan” [NHK, (2011), pp.90–92]. The Navy First Committee’s report could be identified as Japan’s ‘Hossbach memorandum’.

This Japanese Hossbach memorandum was apparently based on the following assumptions: Great Britain would surrender to Germany sooner or later; the destruction of the US fleet in the Pacific would deprive the USA of their will to fight; the occupation of the Dutch East Indies by itself would guarantee enough oil supplies to Japan for the purpose of sustaining its economy as well as the war in China. By the imperial conference of 6 September 1941, it was decided that Germany alone was sufficient to beat the Soviet Union. As Loasby (1976, p.42) puts it, although in a somewhat different context, “One may be able to optimise a model; one cannot optimise a situation”.

In fact, the four captains comprising the First Committee drafted the report, because they were seeking promotion within the navy echelons; they knew what kind of argument pleased the late Admiral Togo’s disciples; they knew that their skills in helping squeeze more budget spending from the treasury would be highly appreciated; in other words, their report bore the character of being a piece of expert evidence for budgetary purposes; and by the nature of things, officers were only tested on their abilities to fight under any specific given circumstances [NHK, (2011), pp.107–109]. One of the captains was surprised to realise therefore that the Japanese occupation of southern French Indochina, in accordance with their own plan, actually invited the USA to ban their oil exports to Japan, and thus triggered the condition to wage war on the part of Japan, and he was amazed to realise thereafter that their war plan was actually put into practice so faithfully and uncritically by the empire’s top management [NHK, (2011), pp.96–97].

This testimony is somewhat reminiscent of the following remarks of a former recall co-ordinator of Ford reflecting on the case of their fatally defective model of the Pinto:

“Before I went to Ford I would have argued strongly that Ford had an ethical obligation to recall. After I left Ford I now argue and teach that Ford had an ethical obligation to recall. But while I was there, I perceived no strong obligation to recall and I remember no strong ethical overtones to the case whatsoever.” [Gioia, (1992), p.388]

In an organisation, there is always a risk that functionaries tend to interpret their responsibilities too narrowly.

Similarly, Vice-Admiral Oikawa, who was the Admiralty Minister as of the Five Ministers’ meeting of 12 October 1941, confessed after the defeat that he ought to have said ‘no’ to the war against the USA on that occasion. He was unable to say no for two reasons. Firstly, he was educated not to admit his weakness, in particular, by the specific conduct of the late Admiral Togo. Admiral Togo had commanded Japan’s combined fleet against the Russian Armada in May 1905, and as such, was subsequently deified while

alive by the navy. Secondly, Oikawa was advised not to become a scapegoat of Prime Minister Konoye [Shinmyo, (1976), pp.178–180].

By 12 October 1941, the Chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Nagano, had already taken the step of advising the Emperor to implement the recommendation of the navy's First Committee, arranging fleets in a battle formation and requisitioning ships for war. It was therefore difficult for the Admiralty Minister to say something which was not consistent with the advice which his senior officer, namely, the Chief of the Naval General Staff, had given in audience with the Emperor. In this respect, Oikawa remembered how Admiral Togo had rebuked Oikawa's superior officer who was the Navy Chief back in 1931, when the Chief tried to prevent the navy from aiding the army, which was then secretly manoeuvring to conquer Manchuria, and said the action would "jeopardise Japan's relationship with the US". Admiral Togo angrily confronted the Chief's US-Japanese-relationship remark, saying that the Admiral had always been telling the Emperor that he could even fight the Americans; "Are you suggesting", said Admiral Togo, "that I have been telling His Majesty a lie?" [Shinmyo, (1976), pp.178–180].

This was a very emotional argument on the part of Admiral Togo, and things of this nature effectively prevented subsequent naval leaders from making rational argument, and from vetoing the war which they generally knew to be suicidal.

Today, Olympus' sacking of Michael Woodford suggests that a similar practice continues. *The New York Times* has reported, "Mr Woodford's plight highlights the sway that outgoing executives ... continue to hold at Japanese companies, often serving as powerful chairmen – a practice that makes it difficult for new management to bring about big changes" (Tabuchi, 2011).

5 The Emperor's intentions

To cut a long story short, the army and the navy were playing a game of chicken, i.e., a game in which two players decide who is a coward (chicken): for example, they drive two cars head on at full speed and see which car is going to turn in order to avoid a collision. The army desired to exploit the navy's weakness in order to save the army's 'face' in withdrawing from China, while the navy pretended to be ready to attack the USA, in order to save their 'face' and force the army to make compromises on China. If both of them maintained their ostensible positions (*tatemae*), their collision would lead to war against the USA, which both of them knew to be suicidal. Both of them implicitly expected, however, that the Emperor, as the father of the nation, would be kind enough to take into account the army's and the navy's true wishes (*honne*), even if they remained unexpressed, and to help the nation by giving a top-down decision to stop. For the army and the navy, the Emperor was the best person to do so, because no Japanese ultranationalist was expected to kill the being whom they worshipped as god.

However, the Emperor Hirohito, who had visited the court of King George V of the United Kingdom in May 1921 before assuming the office of Regency in November that year, did not consider it constitutionally proper to act of his own accord in this instance. The following episode is intended to illustrate Hirohito's conduct in the real decision-making process: e.g., the adoption of the imperial conference resolution of 6 September 1941 to wage war if diplomacy had failed by the first third of October [Oka, (1996b), pp.905–906; Konoye, (1946), p.85].

The day before, the Prime Minister obtained the draft resolution and showed it to the Emperor, who was so upset by its content that the Prime Minister suggested that the Emperor summon the Chiefs of the General Staff. The Emperor put the following question to the Army Chief, General Sugiyama:

“General Sugiyama, I remember that you were the War Minister in 1937. At that time, you said, did you not, you were going to settle the disturbances in China in a month? Four years have passed since then without any settlement. You are now proposing to fight the United States across the Pacific. The Pacific Ocean is larger than China, is it not?” [Konoye, (1946), pp.85–86]

Sugiyama (1967, p.310) remembered the Emperor’s wording somewhat differently but to the same effect. The Army Chief explained that he had to fight while he had oil reserves. The Emperor asked him, “Are you sure to win?” The Army Chief purported to say, “No, but we may; we should not hesitate to fight to make a longer peace than to avoid a war to make a shorter peace” [Sugiyama, (1967), pp.310–311]. The contemporaneous diary of a naval officer suggests that the Army Chief had difficulties persuading the Emperor. Then, the Navy Chief intervened and humbly asked for permission to speak, which the Emperor granted. Admiral Nagano said,

“Suppose that we have a patient who is suffering from a disease which is sure to kill him if no surgery is done in time. If the chance of rescuing him by timely surgery is 70 per cent, we have to perform it, have we not? If the patient dies after competent surgery, we cannot help it. That is his destiny.”

In the Admiral’s view, the patient was Japan’s empire and the surgery meant the war against the USA; he argued that time was running out, and they had to perform the surgery before it was too late. The Emperor’s countenance appeared softened and he said, “I see your point”. The Prime Minister suggested an amendment to the agenda of the imperial conference of the following day as a result of this informal consultation, but the Emperor declined [Itoh, (2000), p.557]. While different sources give different accounts of the same audience and the imperial conference, i.e., the Prime Minister [Konoye, (1946), pp.86–87], the Emperor’s secretary [Oka, (1966b), p.905], the army [Sugiyama, (1967), pp.310–311] and the navy [Itoh, (2000), p.557], on the whole, they appear more complementary to each other than contradictory.

At the formal imperial conference the following day, the Lord President of the Council, on behalf of the Emperor, asked the Government and the Command, “which is more important in your draft resolution, war or peace?” The Admiralty Minister, Vice-Admiral Oikawa, said peace, while the Chiefs of the General Staff remained silent. The Emperor regretted that the Chiefs failed to answer, and recited a poem by his grandfather, Mutsuhito, who is better remembered by the title of his reign, *Meiji*, which means, ‘the enlightening government’. His poem meant in essence,

“Why are there disturbances whilst we believe every corner of the world is our friend?”

The Emperor asked the Chiefs what they thought of it. After a long silence, the Chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Nagano said that he agreed with the Admiralty Minister. The Emperor told the Chiefs to co-operate with the Cabinet to make sure that diplomacy succeeded, while giving his assent to the resolution [Konoye, (1946), pp.87–88; Oka, (1966b), p.905; Sugiyama, (1967), pp.311–312]. Reciting a poem was a conventional custom of the Emperor (*Mikado*) during the period in which the practical

governor of Japan was the *Shogun*, when the successive *Mikados* had to be cautious not to mention political items. The Emperor seems to have believed that this medieval custom of Japan suited his modern constitutional position.

In comparison, the British Monarch has the right to be consulted, to encourage or to warn [Bagehot, (1963), p.111] and s/he would not go any further. Still, there is some room to manoeuvre. For example, from November 1910 to August 1911, King George V did not oppose outright, in fact, did agree in principle, but managed not to follow in practice, Prime Minister Asquith's advice to create hundreds of Liberal peers for the purpose of outnumbering the opposition in the Lords to the Parliament Bill purporting to remove the Lords' veto power. The King first requested general elections, and then waited and saw whether or not the Lords rejected the Bill before acting on the Prime Minister's advice [Bradley and Ewing, (1997), p.268]. The Lords passed the Bill on 10 August, and on the 18th, the King gave his assent, enacting the Parliament Act 1911. It is not known whether or not George V told Hirohito about this process. Even if the King did, it is difficult to know how accurately the story was conveyed by the interpreter, and how much attention was paid by the future emperor to which details. Even if the Parliament Bill episode was unknown to Hirohito, however, he had some general knowledge of British Parliamentary politics, which could, in theory, have given him an option to insist that he would like to hear the views of the Peers and of freshly and freely elected members of the House of Commons before giving his assent to the war. This would have had some delaying effects, at least, and there was, in retrospect, probability that such delaying tactics could have averted the war. In reality, it does not seem that the Emperor was aware of such an option. The option was, to that extent, revolutionary in Japan at that time. Alternatively, the Emperor was, perhaps, persuaded by the Navy Chief's view that time was running out.

The Japanese proceedings above show that the Emperor declined to act on the advice of the Prime Minister on one occasion. The relationship between the Emperor and the Prime Minister was not that the Emperor helped the Prime Minister control the uniformed military officers, but that the Prime Minister served the Emperor almost as an attendant. The Chiefs of the General Staff had been refusing to take any order from the Prime Minister by invoking Article 11 of the Constitution, "The Emperor shall command his Army and Navy" (Figure 1). The army and navy were so powerful that their abusive conduct was indulged. The only solution to their abuse of the constitution would have been the Emperor's order in the style of the 'voice of heaven'.

While Hirohito refused to give an order, as distinct from questions, the Chiefs of the General Staff remained absolute and accountable to themselves. And as Lord Acton put it, "absolute power corrupts absolutely". The concept of the professional independence of the General Staff from politics had been abused since Hirohito's grandfather, the Meiji Emperor's sacred rule, and Hirohito acquiesced in this.

Indeed, as Shillony (1973, p.218) noted, the Meiji Emperor was merely 15 years old at the time of British-sponsored Japanese regime change in January 1868 (Gregorian), and *his* armed forces were entirely new to him. The constitutional defect of the new regime in its civil-military relationship seems to be a common legacy of any foreign sponsored regime change, like the one in Libya in 2011, which was bound to suffer from difficulties maintaining a coalition of a very heterogeneous group of people who happen to join the common purpose of overthrowing a common enemy from quite different motives, and who have little experience in politics but nevertheless happen to be given extremely powerful weapons which they have never had before.

While the Emperor Hirohito remained neutral, the army's and navy's chicken game relentlessly continued while accelerating their speed, destroying Konoye's cabinet on their way, by 17 October 1941. The Lord President of the Privy Council and surviving and available former Prime Ministers, met the Emperor's Permanent Private Secretary (*naidaijin*), Kido, who acted as their secretary, to nominate a single candidate for Prime Minister, and they agreed with Kido's proposal: Tojo. Konoye's resignation and Kido's nomination of Tojo are too complex to discuss here in any detail, but the caution of the late Saionji (1849–1940) seems to have stayed deeply in the minds of his successors, i.e., Konoye and Kido: back in November 1937, Saionji was concerned about the army's desire to exploit the imperial authority for their earthly purpose of putting those on the military front in China under its control [Harada, (1951b), pp.137, 140]. "If His Majesty gives an order", said Saionji, "and is disobeyed, what can be done? This *must* be the worst possible circumstance" [Harada, (1951b), p.140]. Kido was, therefore, searching for someone who could enforce the Emperor's true will and fight through for peace to the end. In the final analysis, Kido seems to have decided that Tojo's loyalty to the Emperor could be counted upon for this purpose [Oka, (1966a), pp.34–35].

Indeed, on 18 October 1941, upon being appointed Prime Minister, Tojo appointed himself War Minister and Interior Minister, too, which latter was thought necessary in case he made peace [Oka, (1966a), p.36]. Tojo resigned from being the Interior Minister only ten weeks after he went to war [Ohye, (1991), p.212]. Tojo's initial assumption of police duties suggests that Tojo was trying to prevent and suppress any potential mutiny and terrorism, which he feared any troop withdrawal would entail. It cannot be known how far Tojo honestly believed that there was any realistic possibility for the Americans to agree with the Japanese terms. There were, however, two very realistic possibilities in which Tojo's government might decide to withdraw not only from Indochina but also from China: one was the navy's change of mind, and the other was the Emperor's order in the style of 'voice of heaven'. Tojo had personally witnessed a good precedent of the latter: the mutiny of 1936 was suppressed by the Emperor, who forced the reluctant army leaders to suppress it. The mutineers either committed suicide or surrendered without armed resistance after the Emperor's order was communicated to them [Shillony, (1973), p.218]. The Emperor was proven to be their absolute commander.

On 30 November 1941, the day before the final decision to go to war, one of his younger brothers, Prince Nobuhito of Takamatsu, approached the Emperor to discuss chances of winning the war. Takamatsu was a member of the Naval General Staff, and as such, realised that his colleagues were afraid that they had not enough oil to fight the USA [Chihaya, (1995), p.14]. "I fear", said the Emperor, "we might well be defeated". "If you think so", said the Prince, "why not stop it now?" The Emperor did not respond because he thought, "As a constitutional monarch, the concurrent opinion of the Government and the Command must be given my assent; if I do not agree, Tojo will resign, a big coup d'état will follow, and drive the nation into utter chaos" [Terasaki and Terasaki-Miller, (1991), pp.75–76]. Hirohito thus clung to the role of a constitutional monarch, apparently for two different motives. Firstly, he did so as a matter of principle. Secondly, he feared Tojo's desertion and a threat to his own safety.

On the first point, when the Emperor addressed Takamatsu's concerns to the Chief of the Naval General Staff and the Admiralty Minister, asking them whether or not they could fight through a long war, they boasted that there was nothing to worry about; that everything was perfect, in respect of human and material resources to fight through any length of war; that they did not count on Germany's success in Europe, and were ready to

fight as soon as the Emperor gave the order [Ohye, (1991), p.218]. It is difficult to believe that they gave the Emperor any satisfaction. However, there might have been a personal factor in his decision-making. Takamatsu was taller and better eye-sighted than Hirohito [Bix, (2000), the seventh photograph]; so was Hirohito's other younger brother, Chichibu, who was also more popular in some quarters, including among 'young and impetuous officers' [Shillony, (1973), pp.108–109]. If Hirohito had been suffering from an inferiority complex, jealousy might have forced him to cling, in a spontaneous emotional reaction, to his superiority as the monarch, to which he put the adjective 'constitutional' in order to justify his refusal to act on his brother's informal advice. Sometimes, without doubt, factors such as this can influence decision-making.

On the second point, Tojo's preparations for the troop withdrawal, and Hirohito's fear of Tojo's desertion, suggest that the Prime Minister and the Emperor had learnt quite different lessons from the shared experience between them, i.e., the mutiny of 1936. Hirohito feared it as 'high treason' against himself in person [Harada, (1951a), p.140] potentially in favour of his brother, Chichibu [Large, (1992), pp.49–50, 67, 113], while Tojo witnessed the effectiveness of the Emperor's order in procuring the mutineers' surrender. That the Emperor had such an authority was confirmed again when everything was too late in August 1945. The Emperor's order successfully procured the surrender of Japanese soldiers, who had been notorious for their readiness to carry out *kamikaze* suicide assaults or at least their unwillingness to surrender under the most hopeless circumstances, because of the Agricola-like army education exhorting them to die for honour rather than to cling to life in shame as prisoners of war [Straus, 2004; Hatashin, (2009), pp.194–195]. Cf. "... *honesta mors turpi vita potior*, ..." (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 33.6).

The Emperor trusted Tojo to some extent because Tojo had been on his side during the mutiny of 1936. The Emperor, however, believed that Tojo would not remain loyal if he vetoed the war. The reality seems more likely to have been that the Emperor had a *loyal* soldier on his side at the time of the crisis, but the Emperor was unable to *trust* him so unconditionally, and gave the imperial assent to the war, in order to keep the soldier on his side for fear of a mutiny, and thereby ruined the nation.

Plato (or 'an Athenian') said, after discussing whether courage in a war against aliens is superior to that in a civil strife, "... the highest virtue ... is trust and confidence in time of difficulties (εστι... [ή μεγίστη ἀρετῇ] πιστότης ἐν τοῖς δεινοῖς)" (Plato, *Laws*, 630C). The Greek word, *πιστότης*, is often translated as 'loyalty', but Liddell and Scott (1996, p.1408) do not regard it as so one-sided and have 'good faith'.

6 Conclusions

The process and the outcome are shown by this historical account, to have been embedded in the specific conditions of Japan. Central to these was the paradox of a 'divine emperor' who tried to cling to the passive role of constitutional monarch while making nothing accountable to Parliament, and who was too far detached from Japanese society to appreciate the common Japanese 'culture' of organisational behaviour, characterised by the triad of the dependence (*amae*) on paternalistic decision-making, the 'voice of heaven', which was expected to take into account the tacit true wishes (*honne*) of individual members, rather than their organisations' ostensible positions (*tatemae*). The lingering influence of retired predecessors played significant roles in the process, and

is still seen in Japanese companies, political parties and the civil service, today. But the process also fits with the nature of organisational decision-making as such, irrespective of cultural characteristics. Thus, the Japanese experience reflects the difficulty of securing coherent ‘joined-up’ decision-making, the fact that there are joint purposes to be dealt with and the problems of information. In a sense, the Japanese decision to go to war was the result of their managerial officers’ mutual buck passing, loss of confidence and the resultant collapse of leadership. There was the case of a failed management, unwilling to impose internal discipline, indulging in adventurist foreign policies based on misconceptions characterised by Loasby’s pertinent comment.

The Japanese example gives the following lessons for management. Firstly, independence of mind is crucial for senior managerial officers, and their decision-making should not be unduly fettered by views of retired predecessors. Secondly, the relationship of trust and confidence between managerial officers is critically important at a time of crisis. Thirdly, any larger complex organisation is advised to organise and discipline itself so as to minimise the risk of family emotional factors influencing managerial decision-making.

Prudent readers might detect a parallel between Japan’s decision to go to war against the USA in 1941 and the post-war Japanese decision to build no less than 60 nuclear reactors (including at least five research reactors) throughout the chain of active volcanic islands that makes up Japan, one of the most volatile parts of the Ring of Fire, under which at least the two continental plates of Eurasia and North America and the two oceanic plates of the Pacific Ocean and the Philippines Sea are colliding with each other. Even a person unfamiliar with the Court of Appeal ruling on the case of *Associated Provincial Picture Houses Limited v Wednesbury Corporation* [1948] 1 KB 223, would still be prompted to say, “they have ... come to a decision [which] is so unreasonable that no reasonable authority could ever have come to it” (at 230 per Lord Greene MR). Some readers might wish to change the word ‘unreasonable’ for ‘irrational’. The privatised regional monopoly power generators, who have statutory immunity from the forces of the free market, are behaving just like the imperial army and navy. After the disastrous end of the war, an influential MP, Nakasone, who grew up under the influence of his naval predecessors intoxicated by their victory over Russia and by the grandeur of the status of being a Permanent Member of the Council of the League of Nations, desired to develop the potential for Japan to become a nuclear power. He worked with his former Interior Ministry colleagues to formulate a government policy under which the regional power monopolies purchased favourable expert evidence and the consent of extremely poor local councils and landowners in remote parts of Japan to keep building nuclear power stations and reprocessing factories, while concealing, suppressing and marginalising the honest views of a great number of nuclear physicists, geologists, seismologists, volcanologists, engineers, journalists, politicians, judges, free-market-oriented regulators, industrialists pursuing geothermal, solar and other alternative energy sources, and doctors who had looked after victims of exposure to radioactivity in Hiroshima and Nagasaki [Koide, 1991, 2011; Hirose, 2010, 2011; Koga, (2011), pp.33–34]. The regional power monopolies, just like the former imperial armed forces, believe that nobody is more powerful than them [Koga, (2011), p.33], and they keep employing and pensioning retired senior regulators under very generous terms [Koga, (2011), p.99]. The monopolies tacitly expected that Mother Earth would be kind enough to keep calm. The earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011 manifested that nature is not so kind. Even then, the regional power monopolies, through their rich channels of political patronage, exploited

un-Parliamentary factionalism of the two Houses to change the Prime Minister, without elections, in order to procure his decision to restart surviving nuclear reactors while lessons from the meltdowns of a number of nuclear reactors in Fukushima remain yet to be learnt, let alone implemented in the other reactors. These people still remain too obsessed with their present immediate organisational interests to see any interest in the future generations of the wider world. It is like waging war against Planet Earth.

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Appendix

Chronology

<i>Month</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Events</i>
Apr 29	1901	Hirohito born
Mar–Sep	1921	Hirohito visits England, Europe and the USA
Nov 4	1921	Prime Minister Hara killed over Russian Question
Nov 25	1921	Hirohito assumes Regency
Feb 6	1922	Washington Naval Treaty
Oct 25	1922	Japanese withdrawal from Russia
Dec 25	1926	Hirohito succeeds to the throne
Jun 4	1928	Japanese army kills Tsang Tsolin in Manchuria
Jun 28	1929	Emperor dismisses Prime Minister Tanaka
Apr 22	1930	London Naval Treaty
Nov 14	1930	Prime Minister Hamaguchi shot, dies Aug 26, 1931
Sep 18	1931	Japanese invasion of Manchuria
Mar 1	1932	Unilateral declaration of independence of Manchuria
May 5	1932	Naval officers kills Prime Minister Inukai
Sep 15	1932	New Prime Minister recognises Manchuria
Aug 12	1935	Army officer kills Tojo's senior colleague
Feb 26	1936	Army regiments massacre Admiral Okada's Cabinet
Feb 29	1936	The mutiny suppressed by Emperor's order
Jul 7	1937	Sino-Japanese War breaks out
Nov 17	1937	Imperial High Command established
Jan 11	1938	First Imperial Conference ('IC 1') dismisses the German-mediated peace terms with China
Nov 30	1938	IC 2 sanctions making a puppet government in Nanking
Sep 1	1939	Germany invades Poland. World War II breaks out.
Sep 19	1940	IC 3 sanctions the signing of the Axis Treaty
Nov 13	1940	IC 4 sanctions peace terms with the puppet in Nanking
Jun 22	1941	Germany invades the Soviet Union
Jul 2	1941	IC 5 sanctions occupation of southern Indochina
Sep 6	1941	IC 6 makes up its mind to wage war against USA and GB and sets time limit of early October for negotiations
Oct 17–18	1941	Prime Minister changes from Konoye to Tojo
Nov 5	1941	IC 7 sets new time limit of late November for negotiations with the USA
Dec 1	1941	IC 8 sanctions the war against USA and GB
Dec 7/8	1941	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and other Allied targets
Aug 8	1945	Soviet invasion of Manchuria
Aug 9	1945	Emperor decides to accept Allied terms for surrender provided that Japan's constitution (<i>kokutai</i>) is kept intact
Aug 14	1945	Emperor decides to surrender on an understanding that the USA is not seeking to overthrow his dynasty