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The International Minimum: Creativity and Contradiction in Japan’s Global Engagement, 1933-1964 (Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute Columbia University)

Jessamyn R. Abel

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The International Minimum is a history of internationalism, imperialism, and the performance of diplomacy in Japan at a time when new global norms required a minimum level of international engagement. Jessamyn Abel illuminates deep and nuanced connections between modes of diplomacy across periods of aggressive imperial expansion and times of peace from the 1930s to 1960s. Dispelling common assumptions of discordance between imperialism and internationalism, she convincingly demonstrates ways in which these worldviews complement each other. She offers innovative perspectives on the standard narrative of JapanAEs approach to multilateral cooperation in three ways: by seriously considering those international activities conducted outside of formal statelevel relations, by exploring cultural forms of international engagement, and by asserting the importance of rhetoric in cultivating what was then referred to as an ointernational mind.o In clear and polished prose, Abel identifies a continuous evolution of internationalist thought and activity in Japan that extends across the dark valley of war and the historiographical schism of defeat, bringing new modes of multilateral cooperation. Her book traces the practice and rhetoric of internationalism through epochal moments of JapanAEs twentieth-century international history, examining its withdrawal from the League of Nations and admission to the United Nations, the failed and successful attempts to host a Tokyo Olympiad, and wartime and postwar regional conferences in Tokyo and Bandung, Indonesia. Unpublished documents in government and private archives, together with the public discourse found in popular journals, books, newspapers, advertisements, poems, and songs, reveal historical layers of thought that helped delineate the realm of thepossible in imperial and postwar Japanese foreign policy. By bringing together materials of high diplomacy and mass culture, Abel offers a new view of internationalism and Japanese diplomacy since the early twentieth century.

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