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Revisiting the History of Postwar Japan

*Christopher Gerteis and
Timothy S. George*

Of course Japan matters. It was the first non-Western nation to have a constitution and to industrialize. It avoided being colonized and became a colonial power itself. It plunged into a devastating war that killed tens of millions in East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific and ended with Japan as the first and only nation to suffer the horrors of nuclear warfare. In defeat, Japan arose from the ashes of war to become an even greater industrial power while simultaneously establishing itself as a vibrant, pacifist, and contentious democracy. Japan's spectacular economic growth made it a model for its neighbors and even, at the height of its economic dominance and hubris in the 1980s, a model for business leaders in the Americas, Europe, and Pacific Asia. By the early 1990s, the collapse of mammoth real estate and stock market bubbles launched the nation on two decades of stagnation or fitful growth, deflation, and soul searching. And then, on 11 March 2011, the state's anemic response to the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in northeastern Japan heightened popular debate over whether the nation was doomed to a slow decline or might yet be able to recover its vigor and discover a new path and new purposes.

The flurry of media coverage that erupted after the Tōhoku Earthquake in March 2011, known in Japan as the Great East Japan Earthquake, focused an intense global interest on Japan, interest that then faded just as it had during the long recession of the 1990s. International media interest in Japan during the affluent decade of the 1980s arose from what appeared to be the start of an era that would be defined by Japan and East Asia's Tiger Economies. And then the bubble burst. While financial reports seem to regularly declare Japan "out of recession," media discussions in and outside Japan after

March of 2011 remained haunted by the devastation inflicted by one of the strongest earthquakes in recorded human history. Yet the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster that swept across eastern Japan seem to have merely intensified the preceding two decades of political paralysis at the top, and a sense of frustration and hopelessness at the bottom.

Politicians, intellectuals, and philanthropists have all publicly wondered whether Japan really matters anymore. Of course Japan matters—but not in the way most journalists, commentators, business leaders, and politicians have been talking about it these last few decades. The problem lies in how media attention more than scholarly debate has driven the discussion of what lessons Japan has and has not yet learned from its successes and failures. Actual scholarship on Japan generally receives less attention than it ought. While many members of the international media are often eager to report on the successes and failures of Japan, a disturbing majority prefer to explain the so-called secrets of Japan's success, and many public failings, as resulting from a quaint culture defined by its relationship with the traditional and not at all by social, political, or even economic forces that shape the contemporary world.

These sorts of media reports have deflected attention from some very real problems, such as how the Japanese state will finance the reconstruction of the quake-devastated Northeast—much less ensure the welfare of a population that is anticipated by 2020 to be comprised of more septuagenarians than teenagers. This is a shame not only because of the missed opportunity to discuss Japan in a meaningful way, but also because Japan's achievements since the end of the nineteenth century remain a highly relevant yardstick for policy makers, business leaders, and citizenry across the globe. Having been the first Asian nation to achieve modern economic power, by blazing paths that have had substantial influence on the developing world, Japan in the twenty-first century has become the first nation in Pacific Asia to struggle with the consequences of declining industrial significance. While this is an unwanted and perhaps dubious honor, it is no less the fact that Japan shares its current trajectory with many highly industrialized societies even while remaining a model of achievement for much of the developing world.

Japan is not the only nation to face the sorts of problems we have generally thought characteristic of a postindustrial society. There is yet much to be learned from the mistakes and successes of a society that, despite everything, still features the highest standard of living in East Asia. Indeed, most of the highly industrialized nations of Europe and the Americas have faced the social, economic, and political problems that arise in the wake of high youth unemployment, aging populations, industrial decline, financial crises, and even natural disasters. Why so many of us worry about whether or not Japan matters is in itself a worrying question, motivated by a fear that the standard of living enjoyed by most Japanese since the 1960s was only sustainable by ever-expanding production built on the premise that

Japan was the world's industrial base. With decreasing birth rates and a general shift of industrial production overseas, many Japanese have come to believe that the inevitable result is the end of affluence and the start of a long decline into irrelevance.

While one aim of this book is to offer comparative contexts for Japan's recent history in a way that may prove useful in understanding the world's emerging industrial and postindustrial societies, there are, however, problematic antecedents to this endeavor. Making Japan matter has long been the purpose of the field of Japanese Studies. At the height of the Cold War, the United States government sponsored a series of scholarly workshops presenting modern Japan and Turkey as alternatives to the Marxist models under consideration in much of the developing world. Both Japan and Turkey took paths that significantly diverged from those predicted by the "modernization theorists" who decided the course of much of our field with a series of workshops held in Kyoto and Tokyo, and the rapid, unexpected growth of the Japanese economy significantly shifted the global balance of economic power. By the 1980s, intellectual fashions had shifted to decrying Japan's unprecedented economic success. The so-called "Japan-bashers" of the 1980s made the contradictory claims that a unique culture, ethnocentric outlook, and collusive relationships said to characterize Japanese society gave "Japan, Inc." an unfair advantage in the global marketplace.

The "Cold War" and "Trade War" frameworks failed to provide nuanced consideration of what it meant for Japan to experience the first 40 years of the postwar era. It often takes dramatic turning points or conceptual breakthroughs to make us see the past more clearly, and to see it as truly past. For much longer than necessary, Japan's experiences after 1945, or after the Allied Occupation ended in 1952, were not seen as appropriate subjects for study by historians. Despite professional disdain, even animosity, toward those who wrote the history of Japan since 1945, two things emerged to lend credibility to the study of postwar Japan as history. The first was the sense that an era had ended for Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the death of Hirohito, the bursting of the financial bubble, the end of the Cold War, and the economic development of China.

The second was the publication in 1993, as that awareness of historic change was setting in, of *Postwar Japan as History*, a pioneering collection of essays that inspired a new generation of historians to look at Japan since the war through a wide variety of lenses.¹ The feeling that times had changed, which had set in over the several years since the book was first conceived, made it all the more timely and added to its impact on the field. The "Japan-bashing" by pundits and leaders of business and government in the 1980s may have been replaced since the 1990s by "Japan-passing" as they flocked to China, but at the same time, thanks partly to *Postwar Japan as History*, there has been an explosion of innovative scholarship on postwar Japan. The book moved the discussion of Japan beyond the

then-dominant narratives by introducing a nuanced historical consideration of what it meant for Japan to experience rapid economic growth during the first 40 years of the postwar era.

As the field took shape in the mid-1990s, a renaissance of scholarship began to suggest new frameworks for thinking about the society, politics, economy, and culture of postwar Japan. Some scholars even found room for the modernization narrative of the 1960s, despite its Cold War origins, since by the 1980s it had become a defining myth for the postwar national consciousness. The naturalization of the ideas constructed by the modernization theorists of the 1960s made Japan matter in a way that it had not mattered before. That even the Japanese came to see Japan's "economic miracle" as part and parcel of what it meant to be Japanese was a construct made real by the power of belief as much as by the wealth created during the rapid economic growth of the postwar era. Indeed, the past two decades of lament over the decline of Japan might be seen as an expression of the power and persistence of the modernization mythology.

At several points in Japan's modern trajectory—particularly 1868, when its centralized feudal system was replaced by a centralizing and modernizing imperial government, and 1945, when its land, people, and governing ideology were devastated—it has been fashionable for some to argue that it was starting anew with a clean slate; that it had "no history." The triple disasters of March 2011 have similarly been described as a break with the past. This collection of essays cannot attempt to predict how or whether those disasters will change Japan or the ways its history is told. But it is the consensus of the contributors to this volume that, whatever directions Japan takes now, it will be building on its past, particularly its experiences, accomplishments, and failures in the period since 1945. Our purpose here is to sample some parts of that experience—and of the extensive and thought-provoking study of Japan since the mid-twentieth century that has flowered in the past two decades—in the hope of better understanding where Japan is and what trajectories it may follow from here.

This book is divided into four sections, in which the authors individually explore issues of civic life, the legacies of war and military occupation, the emergence of a postindustrial economy, and the interaction of public memory with the social, political, and economic trajectories from the postwar to the post-bubble eras. The intellectual boundaries where history leaves off and other disciplines begin can be complex to navigate, and therefore these essays are necessarily interdisciplinary in their consideration of the simultaneous transformations that defined the emergence of contemporary Japan. They examine the historical context to the social, cultural, and political underpinnings of Japan's postwar and postindustrial trajectories.

By reengaging earlier discourses and introducing new veins of research, they raise questions about the extent to which the history of Japan since 1945 might yet serve as an indicator for the economic and social trajectories partly shared with the late-capitalist, heavily industrialized societies of

Europe, North America, and Pacific Asia. Often integrating gender, class, and race within thematic narrative frames, the multidisciplinary essays explore topics that range from the postwar histories of the plight of Japan's disabled veterans of World War II and the rise of women's professional organizations within the political machinations of electoral politics, to the recent histories of the state's efforts to formulate industrial policy and foster financial reform, to the contemporary context of resource management strategies within Japan's rural communities.

These essays encourage us to take fresh looks at the ways the Japanese and those outside Japan have defined and understood its postwar paths. They also insist that there are no simple answers to the question of when or whether the postwar period has ended, or what the decisive turning points since 1945 have been. In complicating these questions by approaching them from a multiplicity of angles, the authors may even offer some hints as to what to look for as debates develop about whether the disasters of 11 March 2011 constituted a decisive turning point in postwar Japanese history.

Part One

Civic Imaginations

Japan's war in Pacific Asia from 1931 to 1945 wrought the greatest bloodshed the region had ever known, with a total cost in lives that may have reached as many as 20 million people dead.¹ Yet, the domestic experience of war, culminating with the incendiary bombings of Tokyo and Osaka and nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, also brought death and hardship to many ordinary Japanese. In the wake of Japan's surrender in August 1945, war crimes tribunals tried, convicted, and hanged only a handful of the political and military leaders who were most responsible for the war. While issues of war responsibility remained unresolved, the people and government of postwar Japan were remarkable for their ability to convert the experiences of the wartime era into productive, long-lived alliances with many of Japan's former enemies.

Positioning themselves in the dual role of proconsul and tutor, the mostly American officials of the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945–52) translated their social and political vision of democracy into a constitutional monarchy for Japan that embraced the rights of free speech, gender equality, and a minimum guaranteed level of cultured living. While the Allied Occupation is often characterized as a “New Deal” for Japan, reactionary strains within American political discourse, in particular the rise of anti-Communism and the onset of the Cold War, also had tremendous repercussions for Japan. As consequence, there are numerous historical problems from this era with which scholars must grapple, some of which we have discussed in the introduction to this book.

One persistent myth about Japan is that it has suffered for its lack of a historical tradition of an engaged citizenry. Yet, the Meiji, Taishō, and even the early Shōwa eras (1868–1912, 1912–26, and 1926–31) witnessed

considerable political activity, some of it quite radical. And the postwar years saw an even greater level of civic engagement. Indeed, the postwar era was a model of democratic capitalism even though the citizen movements of the era are rarely remembered. As a result, the postwar era is largely remembered within the narrow, sometimes stultifying context of the “economic miracle” narrative.

While the 1950s are customarily thought of as the era that saw the emergence of one-party rule by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the same period also saw an upsurge in civic organizations and mass movements at odds with the state. From the efforts by the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to see the end of the nuclear arms race to the unionization struggles led by coal miners who sought to force their employers to provide basic safety equipment and pay fair wages, the 1950s were indeed witness to social and economic turmoil at odds with the middle-class family lives most often portrayed by television and motion picture melodramas.

By 1960, the political dissatisfactions of millions of Japanese had grown into a national movement calling for the rescinding of military treaties with the United States that most Japanese believed to have been agreed to without popular consent. These dissatisfactions grew by the end of the decade into national movements calling for the end of Japanese support for the Vietnam War and the reversion of Okinawa from American to Japanese sovereignty, while local civic movements focused on industrial pollution in Minamata and resistance to state encroachment upon the rights of farmers in Narita. The national social movements of the 1960s were squelched by extraparliamentary and occasionally extrajudicial action, as well as by co-optation; yet, many of the politically active refocused their civic engagement onto more local concerns.

The social movements from the late 1950s to the early 1970s defined the outer boundaries of democracy in Japan. Citizen involvement in national political movements, enthusiastic for the first 15 years of the postwar era, hit several road blocks between 1960 and 1970 that demarcated what has customarily been characterized as a decline in participatory democracy and the consolidation of one-party rule. Although leftist political movements exerted considerable influence on postwar politics, the center-right emerged as the more powerful force. The formation of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1955 marked the beginning of an era of conservative politics that remained the norm until 2009.

Part One features chapters exploring how Japan’s postwar democracy translated into—or was defined by—local practice by examining the shape of civic engagement that developed in local communities nonetheless influenced by the national politics that flowed to and from the capital city. By reconstructing narratives of civic life in a historically significant satellite of Tokyo and two towns deep in Japan’s rural periphery, each examines from a different angle the structures of civil society that emerged within the postwar constitutional order. Running against a tide of literature that depicts

postwar Japan as a nation driven by an interventionist state in league with vertically integrated marketing and banking systems, the chapters in this section reconstruct a more accurate portrait of civic life in postwar Japan than those focused on the national center.

“Civic Imaginations” explores what Japan’s postwar democracy meant at the local level. Laura Hein, Timothy S. George, and Martin Dusenberre each examine the shape of civic engagement that developed in communities outside Tokyo that were nonetheless influenced by the national politics of the capital city. Chapters by George and Dusenberre also explore the boundaries of the nostalgic longing for “traditional” village Japan that accompanied the rise of the “*furusato*” (native place) movement in the 1990s. By reconstructing narratives of civic life and regional identity, these chapters examine from a different angle the structures of civil society that emerged within the postwar constitutional order.

Part Two

Legacies of War and Occupation

If anything has been proven by the endless debates about when or whether the “postwar” has ended, it is that Japan has never escaped the long shadow of its Asia-Pacific War. The “postwar” was declared over many times, including when the Allied Occupation ended in 1952, again when the nation’s GNP regained its prewar peak in 1955, when Japan’s economy passed that of West Germany in 1968 to become the third largest in the world after those of the two superpowers, once again in the 1980s when Japan was the world’s largest creditor and foreign aid donor and home to the world’s ten largest banks, and in 1989 when the Shōwa emperor died after 63 years on the throne.

Yet, there remained ever-present reminders that the war was not buried in the past. Okinawa was occupied and administered by the United States until 1972. Former victims of Japan’s invasion of the Asian continent reacted in anger in the 1980s and after, when textbooks in Japan called that invasion an “advance” and Japanese politicians denied that there had been a Rape of Nanjing. Such discontent again appeared when Asia’s former “comfort women,” forced into sexual slavery by Japan during the war, spoke out for the first time to demand compensation and apology. Throughout the postwar and into the twenty-first century, many Koreans and Chinese repeatedly insisted that Japan had never fully apologized for its actions.

Even the scenes of devastation left by the earthquake and tsunami in 2011 revived for many Japanese strong public memories of the hard times that followed in the wake of surrender in 1945, as did the Heisei emperor’s decision to address the Japanese people in the immediate aftermath of the March 2011 disasters as his father had done 66 years earlier.

The decision by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East of 1946–48—the “Tokyo War Crimes Trial”—to blame a small number of top leaders (not including the emperor) for the war further discouraged most Japanese from considering their individual responsibility for the nation’s actions. Many came to think of the war as a tragedy that had happened *to* them, brought on by those above. Even more so for later generations, the shadow of the war was something bequeathed to them by others and with which they simply had to live.

Japan’s two constitutions—the Meiji constitution of 1890, and the current constitution in effect since 3 May 1947—were both literally handed to the Japanese people from above, the former from the Meiji emperor and the latter from their postwar occupiers. The Allied Occupation, the legacies of the war, and the new constitution were an infrastructure that the Japanese could do little to change. What they could control, however, was how they responded to them, and what meanings their responses gave to them. In doing so, they were writing new chapters in the story of Japan’s continuing redefinition of its modern identity and its place in the world, a process that had been ongoing since the 1850s.

Conventional periodizations of history, which tend to focus on decisive breaks in 1868, 1945, and 1952, can obscure as much as they illuminate. David Obermiller shows how Okinawa experienced a much longer and very different sort of occupation, and how it complicated questions of national and regional identity. The ethnographic emphasis in American views of and policies toward Okinawa had a decidedly colonial flavor. So, too, did American attempts to shape the ways Okinawans defined themselves and remembered their past. Katarczyna Cwiartka describes the continuity in food shortages and distribution systems across the assumed great divide of defeat in August 1945. By focusing on patterns of distribution and consumption, she shows that actual practices did not always change immediately in the wake of changes in rulers, laws, and policies. Wartime mobilization strategies were found useful by citizens and occupiers alike in the early years after the war.

In the postwar period, marginalized groups with grievances, like all Japanese, were no longer subjects but citizens, with a much greater space for political activism. They could, in theory, choose between attempting to win seats at the tables of power to enable them to participate in making policies that affected them, or simply attempting to win recognition and compensation from “those above” (*okami*). The nurses described by Sally A. Hastings chose the former path, organizing and electing representatives to the National Diet. She shows us the complicated nature of such gender and occupational politics, which involved not simply female nurses rebalancing their power vis-à-vis male doctors and politicians, but also contestations between nurses and midwives. Tetsuya Fujiwara’s disabled veterans chose to demand recognition, but in doing so they also had to contend with some of their own, the “white gown” beggars who threatened to undermine their attempts to avoid social and economic marginalization.

Part Three

State Policy for a Late-Capitalist Society

Journalist and oft-quoted “Japan expert” Karel van Wolferen, in his title for a controversial book, characterized the essence of Japan’s rise to global prominence as *The Enigma of Japanese Power*. What he was referring to was not military but rather economic power. Written at the height of Japan’s economic success, van Wolferen’s book was an attempt to explain how Japan came to be the second largest economy in the world. Japan’s postwar “economic miracle” is indeed an important subject for historical study, and the Japanese “success story” has been both envied and resented throughout the world. Japan’s rapid rise to global economic prominence was by far the most famous of all its postwar accomplishments, yet many scholars and pundits have, since the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s, sought to distance themselves from their earlier praise for Japan’s accomplishments by aiming harsh criticism at the state’s failure to effect economic recovery. There is, of course, an important back-story to this narrative.

Pundits and scholars often assert that economic policy was the secret of Japan’s postwar economic success. Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato’s 1960 income-doubling policy, in part precipitated by the strong showing by labor in the social protest movements of the 1950s, combined with the rapid

economic growth of the middle and late 1960s to dramatically increase the standard of living of most Japanese households. By the end of the 1960s, the three Cs—car, “cooler” (air conditioner), and color television—were the longed-for icons of Japan’s new material wealth. Unprecedented economic growth also enabled managers to refrain from mass layoffs while asserting that the company should be able to expect an ever greater commitment in return. Indeed, Japan’s unemployment rate remained well below 3 percent until the late 1980s.

By the mid-1970s, most blue- and white-collar families had, or would soon have, the car, color TV, and air conditioner that served as three key indicators of their social and economic aspirations. By the 1970s, the majority of Japanese considered themselves to be middle-class, but middle-class affluence at the height of the economic boom of the 1980s took on a level of opulence unparalleled in modern history. But even at the height of the bubble years of the 1980s, it was becoming clear that Japanese affluence was built on unsustainable social, economic, and environmental models laid bare by the frenetic pace at which many Japanese sought to consume the trappings of extravagances theretofore unaffordable—from Gucci hand bags to gold-leaf sushi.

The economic bubble burst in 1991. Housing prices plummeted and suicide rates skyrocketed. Along with the increasingly bleak economic outlook came cultural and social issues that included the re-emergence of teenage prostitution (*enjo kōsai* or compensated dating) and increasing rates of unemployment and homelessness. Japan’s long nineties, also known as the lost decade, stretched well into the twenty-first century. In 2002, the national unemployment rate exceeded 5 percent for the first time since the early 1950s. When disaggregated, the data revealed a more troubling concern: the average unemployment rate for persons aged 15–24 was double that for the overall population. All through the decade preceding the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake, aggregate wages continued to decline, the ratio of part-time temporary to full-time regular workers rose, and the unemployment rate hovered around 5 percent. Meanwhile, critics blamed the state for having failed to develop viable social health and welfare strategies for the ageing population while simultaneously failing to provide adequate employment training for the nation’s youth. Instead, pundits and politicians seemed keen on laying claim to their filial status while blaming young people for being too lazy to work.

The chapters of this section explore how state policy initiatives of the postwar era have shaped, to varying degrees of success, the economy and society of post-bubble Japan. “State Policy for a Late Capitalist Society” reconstructs state policy initiatives of the postwar and post-bubble eras as means of examining the ways in which the state has attempted to address some of Japan’s most pressing policy problems. By examining the recent historical trajectory of industrial, fisheries, and financial policies, the chapters collectively examine how state policy initiatives, although not publicly

praised and not always for the better, nevertheless effected considerable changes to the relationship between the postwar state and producer. Bruce Aronson and Lonny Carlile focus specifically on economic policies centered in Tokyo that, with varying degrees of success, attempted to address the interconnected milieu of pressing economic and social problems. Narrating geographical and topical territory akin to those of the chapters by Martin Dusinger and Timothy S. George, Satsuki Takahashi paints a portrait of fisheries policies for rural Japan that illustrates quite plainly the persistence of Japan's historical rural/urban divide. All three chapters suggest ways in which the precedents of post-bubble policy may yet continue to shape the relationship between state and society in the wake of the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake.

Part Four

Looking Out, Looking Back

The fears and uncertainties of the 1990s and beyond, compounded by the triple disasters of March 2011, had no real precedents in Japan's modern history. In the Meiji period (1868–1912), the national goals were clear, and neatly summed up in the slogan “rich nation, strong military” (*fukoku kyōhei*). Japan was engaged in a survival struggle to avoid colonization and to become strong enough not only to resist the great powers but also to become one of them. Its military and industrial might grew fast enough to enable it to defeat China and take Taiwan as its first colony in 1895, and to defeat Russia in 1905 and annex Korea in 1910—and then to launch an ultimately disastrous assault on China, Southeast Asia, and the United States in the 1930s and 1940s.

After the defeat, the goals had to change, but before long they became equally clear. Rebuilding and recovery were the initial goals, of course. But in 1960, Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato announced his plan to double real income by the end of the decade. In return for dedicating themselves to the new god of GNP growth and renouncing the divisive labor and political strife that had ended earlier that year with the passage of the revised US-Japan security treaty and quashing of the strike at Mitsui's Miike coal mine, Japanese would be rewarded with affluence that would enable enhanced consumerism.

Before long, Japan was held up as a model for the development of other countries, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, and Malaysia was among

the first to adopt a “Look East” policy explicitly rejecting the western model in favor of that attributed to Japan. In 1979, Ezra Vogel published *Japan as Number One*, with the subtitle *Lessons for America*. Soon, executives from the United States were visiting their former pupil and junior partner to learn the secrets of its success, while Japanese hubris was reflected in the bits of gold foil one could order sprinkled on sushi at exclusive restaurants. Japan was seen, and saw itself, as the successful pioneer and model in solving the problems of late-industrial capitalism, from urban crowding to labor-management relations to industrial pollution.

The confidence, and the certainty about national goals, slipped away in the 1990s. The bubble burst, the Cold War ended, the population aged, rural areas hemorrhaged population and struggled to stay alive, and China continued its spectacularly rapid economic growth even longer than Japan had. Japan struggled to find its direction in what suddenly seemed to be a new and unfamiliar version of modernity, or postmodernity. There was much talk about the “Galapagos-ization” of Japan, a turning inward, a giving up of grand dreams, and an acceptance that Japan’s global role and importance might shrink to the point where the nation would be ignored rather than copied by the rest of the world. It was no surprise that one response was to remember—or imagine—a time when things had been different.

Christine Yano takes us back to a time when the sky was the limit, when the world was about to become Japan’s oyster. Showing the way in the joys of global travel, leisure, and cosmopolitanism were Japanese stewardesses for Pan Am, who traveled abroad even before the relaxation of currency restrictions in 1964 allowed other Japanese to follow. America became a different sort of model, offering employment and freedom for young women and lessons in the consumption of leisure travel and media for a generation who had not known the war, or who seemed to have forgotten it. Christopher Gerteis reminds us, however, that the past was not always so easily left behind. The NYK shipping line’s redefinition of itself as Japan left the twentieth century and entered the twenty-first included new “corporate social responsibility” practices that involved the presenting of its past. Its attempt to focus on the supposed glitter, cosmopolitanism, and good relations with Asia up through the interwar years, and to paint itself as a passive victim of the Pacific War, only served to demonstrate the difficulty of escaping the shadow of the war and of reshaping the past to serve the present.

Hiraku Shimoda’s description of the *Project X* television series argues that there may be dangers inherent in the nostalgia for the golden age of Japan’s “greatest generation,” the everymen (rarely are women foregrounded) who sacrificed and struggled to create the products on which growth and affluence were built. In the “good old days” of high growth, the series asserts, when “death from overwork” (*karōshi*) was not yet a legally recognized cause of death, inventiveness, nose-to-the-grindstone determination, production,

and consumption gave Japan its purpose and identity. The message was appealing in the uncertain times of the early twenty-first century.

Unfortunately, imagined golden ages can never be recovered. The sages of old, be they the Duke of Zhou put forward as a model by Confucius, or the inventors of Cup Noodles or the Walkman, cannot show Japan how to solve the unprecedented problems of today. Even after the many crises that swept Japan in the wake of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, some still seemed to think that it would be possible to turn back the clock or simply stay the course. These included the nuclear power industry, some elements of the Liberal Democratic Party, and more than a few in the Democratic Party of Japan. Others were pushing in new directions. Among them were the richest man in Japan, Son Masayoshi, the Korean-Japanese entrepreneur and CEO of SoftBank, who pushed for the building of a massive solar power network to replace Japan's dependence on nuclear power. Another was Mikitani Hiroshi, CEO of the internet company Rakuten, who advocated a thoroughgoing internationalization of Japanese corporate culture. Whether these or other ideas could bring back Japan's optimism, and again make it the sort of model it was for a time in the late twentieth century, remained to be seen.