

## A Note From Guest Editor Gerald L. Curtis

THE ARTICLES IN THIS special section on Japan cover a wide range of issues — from growing inequality in Japanese society to issues of civilian control over the military, from the need for domestic political institutions to respond more effectively to Japan’s new social and economic realities to the challenge of adjusting Japan’s foreign policy to accommodate the new realities of politics in East Asia. And of most immediate and profound importance, the need to shape new economic policies to deal with the worst recession since the end of World War II.

Among the authors in this collection of articles are distinguished senior scholars — Richard J. Samuels, Hitoshi Tanaka, Paul Sheard, Heizo Takenaka — whose names will be well known to many readers, and younger scholars — Margarita Estévez-Abe, Takako Hikotani, Sota Kato, Sawako Shirahase — who are leaders of the upcoming generation of political scientists, sociologists and international relations specialists studying Japan. In reading these articles, readers will understand why the senior scholars enjoy the outstanding reputations they do and why the younger ones are drawing attention for the important contributions they are making to our understanding of contemporary Japan’s political economy and foreign policy.

The common theme running through these essays can be characterized as “transforming Japan,” or “Japan on the cusp of change” or,

as the title adopted by *Global Asia* suggests, “reinventing Japan.” Each of the articles makes the point that Japan is being confronted by the need for fundamental change.

New problems of social inequality and the holes that have appeared in the Japanese government’s safety net. The urgency of responding to the rise of China by redoubling efforts to strengthen an East Asian community and to reinvigorate the US-Japan alliance. The desire to create new political institutions and embrace new economic policies in the midst of a financial crisis. These are all on Japan’s agenda.

As these articles demonstrate, the image of Japan as unchanging has never been as inappropriate as it is today. Japan is going through a great transformation comparable to the periods following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and the end of World War II. It took about 20 years to consolidate each of those two previous transformations. The Meiji Constitution was adopted in 1889, 21 years after the Restoration. It was only in 1964 that Japan hosted the Olympics and drew the world’s attention to its emergence as a vibrant democracy and economic superpower, 19 years after the end of the war.

The current transformation began in the mid-1990s after the collapse of the economic bubble. A similar 20-year pattern would suggest that a “reinvented” Japan will emerge sometime around 2015. People who believe that Japan is somehow static will be caught by

surprise when this new Japan emerges, and policymakers will have missed the opportunity to help shape Japan’s evolution if they do not understand the depth and breadth of this transformation.

I am delighted that as Guest Editor I have been able to call on people whose scholarship and quality of mind I admire to contribute to this volume. Despite the fact that they are all extremely busy and very much in demand, each one responded graciously and generously to my request to write for this issue of *Global Asia*. And each got his or her article in on time! To all, I express my deepest appreciation.

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