



Reimagining Japan

By Richard P. GREENFIELD



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To borrow a phrase from a movie, this volume is like a box of chocolates. Any book with 80 essays would be, perhaps even should be. When the essayists range from famous historians (John Dower) to cultural commentators (Ian Buruma and Alex Kerr), with a large supporting cast of well-known and not so well-known CEOs and other commentators, there will be bite-size nuggets and jaw-breakers.

Some are truly surprising: an interview with Bobby Valentine about his years managing a baseball team in Japan has a depth that some of the corporate commentary lacks. An interview with the creator of a very popular *manga* gets straight into the creative process and how popular art reflects contemporary concerns. An essay on how to rebuild and restructure suggests, of all things, looking to the Nordic countries as an example, a surprise and yet conceptually well thought out.

The book comes from McKinsey & Company and there is commentary from a number of their current and past employees. The project itself was clearly conceived before the Tohoku Quake, but enough of the contributors had time to include observations and McKinsey added extra insertions so that there is no sense of the book having been overtaken by the event, which is not a small achievement given the scope of the topic (the reimagining includes almost everything, from primary education to senior care and many things lying between those two poles).

Reading the book is almost like entering into a very long dialogue with a host of speakers, and if anything, part of the problem for any reader is that there are some the reader wishes to hear more from and others who could easily be skipped over.

The success of any collection like this hinges on whether it starts enough conversations and debates. Yet at the same time, perhaps because the issues have a resonance they did not have when the project was first conceived, it is necessary to ask if that is, in itself, enough.

There are two very good illustrations of this. Many essays mention the current fiscal situation, and the need to bring it under control. That is well and good and totally predictable. Not a single essay goes on to propose even such a mild revenue-increasing step as legalizing all forms of gambling (despite the fact that Japanese who want to gamble in casinos have nearby options in many countries now), to



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say nothing of legalizing and taxing soft drugs (the prohibition against which, and associated court and prisons costs, are all social costs, to say nothing of the tax-free enrichment of various gangs). These are steps that have been taken in other countries, most notably in most of the EU countries and so this is not an uncharted area where Japan would be alone and making a pioneering step.

Another current debate in Japan that will have very large and lasting effects is the choice of the next-generation fighter for the Self Defense Forces. The debate over that choice should be loud and long, not only because the expenditure will be huge, but because the actual necessity has not been questioned in a substantive way.

Some of the contributors to this volume are very familiar with military history as well as the current military and political situation in East

Asia, so the debate is not beyond their expertise.

It is not a question of asking the contributors to make a recommendation in the choice of which fighter should be chosen. But a mandate to reimagine is a mandate to reimagine. Japan currently faces China on very unequal terms in sea power. That gap is only going to get larger in the near term as China grows more familiar with operating aircraft carriers and coordinating larger-scale blue-water operations. This means that Japan cannot engage China on a ship-to-ship, plane-to-plane basis, no matter what fighter is chosen.

Yet the issue has not been raised, either in this volume or out loud publicly, why Japan is not pursuing research into small, smart drones. Mao himself once said an aircraft carrier is a very large target. The future may not belong to the best-equipped manned aircraft of any sort, but to a cluster of drones, remotely operated, firing hypersonic missiles that will be capable of destroying even larger capital ships.

Such a solution would play to existing Japanese strengths in miniaturization and design, and would avoid a huge outlay that the country cannot afford.

Would it have been outside the scope of this volume? Of course not, but perhaps the success of this volume will encourage the publisher to reimagine *Reimagining Japan, Volume II*. **J.S**

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