

# **Contemporary Japan**

## Challenges for a World Economic Power in Transition

edited by

Paolo Calvetti, Marcella Mariotti

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## Introduction

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This volume is the third of the series *Ca' Foscari Japanese Studies*, a collection of contributions from scholars engaged in common research or debates with the academic staff of Ca' Foscari University of Venice. In particular, the present book is the result of the collaboration between the faculty of the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University and several researchers from other international institutions on a project examining various aspects of the contemporary Japanese society during a period of crisis along with other dramatic changes in economic, political, and cultural fields.

In fact, in recent years, as many other developed countries, Japan has faced the rapid changes characterizing the post-global world, *vis-à-vis* the economic crisis, as well as the new geopolitical equilibrium amongst the Asian countries after the economic and military rise of China. Moreover, the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster of March 2011 poses a series of questions about energy management, social solidarity, and emergency management along with the problems of confidence in the national safety system that Japan has had to cope with.

The volume comprises three sections: Japan's International Relations; Cultural Theory, Fine Art and Philosophy; Language and Communication.

In the first section, Steffi Richter, in her contribution «*Kizuna?*» *Reflection on Japan after 'Fukushima'*, focuses on the energy and nuclear industry, revealing that the 'success story' of Japan accompanying technical progress was not an 'independent' output, but was already a part of global forces since the 1950s. Her study also affirms, that the recent anti-nuclear protests are part of a transnational and transversal acting 'multitude', demonstrating that another kind of *kizuna* (solidarity) does exist.

Alessio Patalano's article *Sea Power and the Geopolitics of Sino-Japanese Security Relations in the East China Sea* deals with the importance of the East China Sea for bilateral interactions between China and Japan. It investigates the strategic role of the East China Sea, how it transformed over time, and how this evolution informed and continues to inform security policy and bilateral relations in more recent times.

Concluding the first section is Andrea Revelant's paper titled *Regional Integration in East Asia: Can Japan Be a Leading Player?* Within the frame-

work of the growing commitment on the part of national governments in East Asia towards regional cooperation for trade, finance and security, the author investigates the institutionalisation of intra-regional relations, with a focus on the role of Japan, in order to assess the country's past achievements, and possible further contributions.

In the second section, a broad variety of topics are presented: Iwabuchi Kōichi's *Re-imagining 'Japan': Beyond the Inter-national Governance of Cultural Diversity* focuses on the re-imagination of Japan as a cultural entity under the emerging governance of an inter-national cultural connection within the process of globalisation in which the national entities are considered as the unit of global cultural diversity. The paper critically explores how Japan, together with other nations, is re-imagined in an exclusive manner in a inter-national global cultural governance. As a counterpoint to this, Toshio Miyake, in his essay *Towards Critical Occidentalism Studies: Re-inventing the 'West' and 'Japan' in Mangaesque Popular Cultures*, deals with the reproduction of the imagined geography of the 'West' in contemporary Japan. He examines Occidentalism, its hegemonic identification and othering process, paying particular attention to emerging Japanese subcultures enacting a parodic and sexualised re-invention of Westernness and Japaneseness.

In her essay *A New Frontier in Art: From Calligraphy to Performance* Rossella Menegazzo analyses the new form of performative acts that recall the instinctive gesture of the *zenga* masters, while also adding at the same time the qualities of new media, technologies and internationalized art trends, and using calligraphy, writing or typographic fonts while exploiting the richness of Asian languages.

Andreas Regelsberger introduces the innovative work of Okada Toshiki, the founder of the theatre company Cheltfish in *Those in Darkness Drop from Sight: Precarity in the Theatre of Okada Toshiki*, analysing the social background of Okada's plays, which are characterized by their strong interest in the so-called 'lost generation' made up of the young Japanese that was hard-hit by the economic crisis following the collapse of the bubble after 1989.

Lastly, Matteo Cestari's contribution *Nihilistic Practices of the Self: General Remarks on Nihilism and Subjectivity in Modern Japan* provides some hints for a critical discussion of the question of nihilism in Japan from a cultural and philosophical viewpoint.

The third section brings together six different contributions all related in a broad sense to the Japanese language. Barbara Pizziconi analyses *Japanese Discourses on Nuclear Power in the Aftermath of the Fukushima Disaster* offering observations on the discursive positioning of various social actors in the weeks and months following the disaster. She argues that the anti-nuclear grassroots movements and the fora of institutional news media and social media, facilitated the reshaping of the whole discursive space surrounding the nuclear as well as blowing up a few myths such as the 'cleanness', 'safety' and 'cheapness' of the nuclear power propaganda.

The focus of Endō Orië's paper, *Earthquakes and Language: Words and Expressions that Resulted from the Tōhoku Earthquake*, is on new Japanese words, in particular onomatopoeia, that came into being after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster. After comparing data from the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake and 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, Endō comes to the conclusion that the kind of linguistic output reflects the unique characteristics of each earthquake. One section of the paper deals with new words that were produced as a result of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, and tracks the process causing these words to become fixed in the Japanese language.

The essay on «*Keitai shōsetsu*»: *Mobile Phone Novels* by Paolo Calvetti is a description of the so called 'mobile phone novels' seen from a linguistic point of view. This article illustrates the specific characteristics of the language used in a selection of *keitai shōsetsu* and is an attempt to understand whether the use of a new writing tool and of a new communication system has modified the language in terms of vocabulary, syntax and orthography.

Aldo Tollini's *An Ancient Writing System for Modern Japanese* deals with 'the adequacy of a writing system to the society it serves'. It is intended to examine how the mixed logophonographic *kanji-kana majiri* writing system presently used in Japan works in modern Japanese society and discover whether it fulfils its task or whether it causes difficulty in learning.

*Japanese Language Learning thorough Authentic Materials* by Marcella Mariotti addresses a key issue in Applied Linguistics concerning the limits imposed by copyright laws have on teaching and learning processes using authentic materials. Bearing in mind the fundamental role of shared online materials under copyright as a source and support for students' motivation, the paper reveals the extreme conflict between student practices and Japanese copyright laws.

Concluding the third section is the review article by Patrick Heinrich and Masiko Hidenori titled *Japanese Sociolinguistics: A Critical Review and Outlook*. It provides a critical overview in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of current research trends in Japanese sociolinguistics and the tension between what the author defines as 'mainstream sociolinguistics' and 'interdisciplinary sociolinguistics', while also taking also into consideration the Japanese state ideology which stressing linguistic, cultural and historical unity going back to an ancient past.

For the realisation of this volume and of activities prodromal to the project - in particular, the international conference *Contemporary Japan: Challenges facing a World Economic Power in Transition*, held in Venice in March 2011 - we wish to express our gratitude to The Japan Foundation for its generous support and to all our colleagues, in particular Marcella Mariotti, and to the editorial staff at Ca' Foscari University that made the publication of this work possible.