

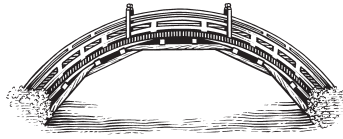
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Richard J. Samuels's

*3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013

ISBN: 978-0-8014-5200-0 (hardcover)



*Alexis Dudden*

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## Making Sense of the Disaster

*Alexis Dudden*

Now a word in Japanese, “3.11” is the date when the earth’s tectonic forces physically reconfigured Japan. Nearly three years since the March 11, 2011, nightmare began, the Japanese government has confirmed the deaths of 16,000 people; in addition, several thousand more remain missing and presumed killed by the devastation unleashed from the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and the monstrous tsunami that ensued. Three of the six reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant experienced meltdowns, and according to official statistics, 282,000 people are still refugees within Japan, unable to return home. Many have moved from the country’s northeastern Tohoku region because of infrastructure damage, while many more have dispersed because radiation levels in their houses and villages exceed acceptable norms. Fear and mistrust concerning what the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) deem “safe” levels of radiation propel them as well.

With characteristic clarity, intellect, and scholarly rigor, Richard Samuels has engaged this unfolding maelstrom head-on to produce *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*. Moving categorically through three areas—security, energy, and local public administration—Samuels argues that thus far the political fallout from this unimaginable trifecta of disasters has been not only imaginable but also predictable. Samuels explains of post-3.11 Japan that “political actors spun stories to help make sense of the disaster, always in ways consistent with what they already ‘knew’ to be true” (p. 184). His elaboration brings him to conclude that “3.11 was simply the continuation of normal politics by additional means” (p. 185). Throughout the book, Samuels thoughtfully explicates his thesis of continuity over rupture: the Japan in which “those who thought the utilities were villains before 3.11 insisted that 3.11 proved their point. Those who believed the DJP [Democratic Party of Japan] was a collection of incompetent parvenus...now had additional evidence...[and] supporters of the Japan-U.S. alliance and of the Japanese military renewed their claim that they were right all along” (p. 184–85). Writing most specifically about security, he emphasizes that, “in short, there was no major Tohoku dividend—either for the war-fighting capacity of Japanese troops or for the U.S.-Japan alliance” (p. 109).

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All this notwithstanding—and what will likely be his pathbreaking contribution to assessments of 3.11—Samuels’s own detailed examination of the rescue and relief operations conducted by the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) suggests that if we wait just a little bit longer, the “dividend” for the SDF may be rather lucrative indeed. In short, Samuels describes how during 3.11 a discursive shift took place alongside the troops’ actions, one that has continued to secure widespread buy-in for the SDF throughout Japanese society in ways that—if not entirely new—have greatly expanded the level of support beyond anything seen before 2011 in the post-1945 era.

The SDF’s moment in the 3.11 spotlight shapes the book’s fourth chapter, “Dueling Security Narratives,” in which Samuels establishes three categories of responses to what took place: “wake-up call” (comments from those largely on the right who urged the nation to get “in gear and prepare for its real enemies”), “proof of concept” (views held by centrists who saw “the deterrent power of the alliance” in the SDF’s performance working together with U.S. troops), and “disarm” (the largely leftist perspective “that Japan’s soldiers get more shovels than guns”) (p. 83–86). Next, Samuels views these categories through secondary prisms that interrogate what we might glean for the future place and function of the SDF in Japanese society. Taken as a whole, the analysis ties in well with his previous work on the Japanese military, as well as with other analyses of the “soft” changes that were already afoot within the SDF long before March 11, 2011, in order to make its existence more palatable to Japanese society in general.<sup>1</sup> New, though, is the fourth chapter’s thick description of the “narratives” surrounding SDF troops working on their own and together with U.S. forces in Operation Tomodachi during the disaster’s aftermath. Examples run the gamut: A retired National Police Agency official explained that the SDF’s work during 3.11 was proof that “the SDF is no longer a bastard child (*shoshi*).... Its real job is ‘national defense,’ so let it defend the homeland” (p.84). On the other hand, Waseda University law professor Mizushima Asaho observed that “the crisis offered Japan the chance to reaffirm its original peaceful and productive postwar identity” and argued that “if the SDF is transformed into a globally active, nonmilitary relief force that assists neighbors in times of need, ‘no country will any longer have reason to attack Japan’” (p.87). The chapter’s analysis underscores how this entity of Japanese society bears the greatest potential for a redefined future as a result of its involvement in the 3.11 crisis. Although changes in the energy sector may ultimately prove the most profound—especially given possibilities

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<sup>1</sup> On this point, Sabine Frushtuck’s work is most germane.

such as the megasolar farms proposed by entrepreneur Masayoshi Son—the pace of such shifts will likely be far slower. Put differently, Samuels is wholly correct in the judgments he makes concerning the practical capabilities and legal status of the SDF right now—that there has not yet been a “major Tohoku dividend.” Yet his examination brings into relief ways in which public discussion of the SDF’s role in Japanese society has changed to the extent that it is now commonplace for opinion-makers and leaders across the political spectrum to summon the “good” that the SDF does for Japan.

This shift alone, albeit still at a discursive level, marks an important break. Elements of Japanese society that heretofore have avoided even mentioning the SDF’s existence—the emperor being a primary example—as well as its overt detractors in the media and activist communities who have espoused solidly pacifist interpretations of Article 9, point to the reality that society’s discussion of the SDF has moved on: the SDF is now an indispensable element of the terrain in contemporary Japan. Since 3.11, images of Japanese troops in action have gained positive connotations for millions more Japanese, as evidenced by the bestselling picture albums of troops doing relief work, among other things. Although Samuels might prefer more clear-cut definitional guidelines for the SDF’s role in Japan to have emerged already, one way or another, his analysis usefully sets the terms for the Article 9 debate in play today.

In each of the areas that the book interrogates, 3.11 urged Japanese people across society to voice opinions, question information, and make their preferred stories heard. Arguably, this was the healthiest possible response to a truly awful series of events. This leads one to consider, however, some of the more chilling aspects of the proposed “secrecy” legislation afoot in the Diet. Given the ten-year prison sentences these codes threaten for those who would dare to question aspects of the country’s nuclear power industry, among other areas being defined as too secret for the public to interrogate, is it too much to wonder whether Samuels would have been able to elicit the reactions he captured had he waited a moment longer to write? His interlocutors confront countless challenges in their lives that are not directly related to the Fukushima nuclear power plant, yet collectively they make clear that this element of the triple crisis defines all other aspects of Japan’s post-3.11 future. The possibility that much of the evidence Samuels gathered could be silenced remains an important challenge for Japanese society to confront as well.

## Japan Could Change While Staying the Course

*Michio Muramatsu*

**R**ichard Samuels's book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* is the best academic book to date on the triple disaster because of both the insightful academic questions it raises and the thoroughness of its earthquake-related information. It also is among the most provocative books I have ever read, posing the crucial question to Japan: Why has the opportunity of this crisis not produced change? While contemplating this important question, however, I wondered whether perhaps it was good that Japan did not change that much as a result of the crisis. I learned a lot from reading this book, but sometimes found myself being a bit skeptical of its criticism of Japan's choice to "stay the course" rather than "put it in gear."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, I wondered, Japan is changing in a piecemeal way, and perhaps it was predictable from the beginning that the probability of great change would not be high.

To understand what happened, Samuels smartly chose three policy areas: national security, energy policy, and local governance. These not only are the areas that he knows best from his own academic research, but they also are where Japan faced the most important difficulties during 3.11. The damage from 3.11 was unprecedented. According to the World Bank, it represents the largest economic loss from one disaster since 1965.<sup>2</sup> In the first week after the incident, people suffered shortages of food, water, and gasoline, among other things. Help and support came from abroad as well as from all over the country, as the largest number of volunteers in Japanese history was mobilized. Although he points out some of the positive aspects of the response, Samuels nonetheless is very critical of the early stages of the government's risk management under the Kan cabinet. Two years and some months later, numerous debates are underway about changes in various policy areas. However, Japan has still not "geared in" the course for change.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2 introduces these public narratives that followed from 3.11. Samuels also considers a third option proposed by some that he calls "reverse course," which requires that "we undo the structures and assumptions about progress that led to the catastrophe in the first place" (p. 26). However, it is not a realistic scenario, and thus I do not discuss it here.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Economist*, "the World Bank put the economic damage resulting from the disaster at as much as \$235 billion, around 4% of GDP. That figure would make this disaster the costliest since comparable records began in 1965." See "Natural Disasters: Counting the Cost," *Economist*, May 21, 2011.

Chapter 2, which is titled “Never Waste a Good Crisis,” and chapter 3, “Historical and Comparative Guidance,” were to me the key chapters for understanding this book. Chapter 2 sets the stage for the argument that Japan chose to “stay the course” rather than “put it in gear.” Samuels explains that the first few years after a crisis constitute a critical period during which leaders may “enjoy a greater range of choices” than usual and in which new institutions and structures could emerge (p. 24). The events and experiences of 3.11 were shocks of a magnitude equal to or greater than what had produced changes to the system in the past. According to Samuels, we should presume that “significant adjustments follow sudden, major challenges to a previously stable system” (p. 24).

In contrast with chapter 2, where Samuels argues for a direction of change, chapter 3 provides very objectively the comparative framework to read the subsequent chapters (with chapter 4 focusing on security, chapter 5 on energy, and chapter 6 on local governance). The book considers a range of historical examples of natural disasters, including Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005; the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, China; Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008; and the 1995 earthquake in Kobe. These examples may not be exhaustive, but they are deeply researched. Samuels clearly is knowledgeable and must have worked hard to collect and present the information about these disasters in a very interesting way. His analysis of the Sichuan earthquake, for example, is a small case study of Japan-China diplomatic relations in a difficult time. Although he concludes that the relationship did not ultimately improve from such diplomacy, the case study still suggests how a disaster can function as a diplomatic tool.

Drawing on a quote by White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel to “never waste a good crisis” (p. 26), Samuels has analyzed 3.11 to see how Japan has made use of its “good crisis” to recover from the damages. He reviews the past two years since the earthquake in each of the three policy areas to assess whether any changes have occurred. In energy policy, he notes that Masayoshi Son proposed alternative technologies to nuclear energy and argued for the introduction of the feed-in tariff used in Europe (pp. 140–42). Although this proposal has not been realized as originally proposed, it did stimulate Japanese policymakers and the Kan cabinet to suggest repricing the cost of electricity in Japan that has allowed the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and the other eight monopolized electricity companies to benefit from the existing legal framework.

In addition, for the first time Japanese journalists picked up the theme and focused on the political structure in the energy sector—that is, the so-called

“iron triangle” that defends the status quo. The extent to which the tsunami or earthquake caused the huge damages, including the loss of lives, as well as the extent to which TEPCO’s mismanagement caused these consequences, is controversial. If it was the earthquake rather than the tsunami that broke the electrical wiring network at the Fukushima plant, TEPCO’s responsibility is larger. There are a lot of debates on responsibility, prices, effectiveness of alternative energies, and so forth still underway in the energy policy arena.

After analyzing the daily newspaper reports and conducting many interviews with high-level officials and journalists, Samuels finally concludes that on energy policy Japan has adopted the strategy of staying the course. He sees some shift of political influence away from TEPCO by way of forcing the company to adopt a more open-disclosure policy. Samuels observes another small change in that localities now have more input in building new reactors and restarting existing ones. But he also observes that the Japanese government decided to continue nuclear exports. Only six months after 3.11, for example, Japan Atomic Power Company signed an agreement with Vietnam to conduct a feasibility study for introducing nuclear energy.

Security is another policy area where the book provides detailed and insightful analysis. Few Japanese political scientists would be able to accomplish this quality of research on security and natural disasters in such a short period of time. Reflecting on the mishandled response and the consequent human costs in the Kobe earthquake in 1995, Samuels notes that both the local governments and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) were quick to respond after 3.11. It is true that well beforehand national and local authorities had become more prepared for disasters. For example, the SDF and local governments had engaged in a number of rescue drills, and tsunami operation manuals had been improved. However, the actual rescue operations in which the SDF was involved in the immediate days after the disaster could not have been imagined. Concerning the exercises and preparations, Samuels concludes that “there cannot be enough of them, and they cannot be too complex” (p. 91).

Another important element was the SDF’s work with the U.S. military during the response. The Japanese people thanked the Americans greatly for the support of their military, which helped save many Japanese lives and whole towns in some cases. All Japanese know the phrase “Tomodachi Operation.” According to an opinion poll, 95% of respondents supported the actions of the SDF in the areas of eastern Japan, and 88% agreed that it was appropriate for the SDF to work closely with the U.S. military (pp. 92–93).

Based on these experiences during the rescue operations and the resulting shift in public attitudes toward the U.S. military and the United States, Samuels

thinks it is natural to assume that the Japanese government would change its policies and the issue agenda between the two countries. But he finds only a small shift toward joint operations within the military command, with Japan seeming to have learned lessons about the importance of the rotation of troops and commanders and the provision of support services. Samuels does not see real changes in government policies to resolve U.S. basing issues, strengthen security infrastructure, or create genuine interoperability between U.S. and Japanese forces. Again, Japan would stay the course.

It does not seem necessary in this review essay to discuss much about the third policy area, local governance. There have been discussions over the past twenty years about placing regional governments above prefectural governments, on the one hand, and increasing local participation, on the other hand. Samuels nicely distinguishes between one trend of trying to put local governance into a larger institutional framework, which he terms “supersize me,” and another trend toward more local influence, named “localize me” (pp. 160–70). However, I do not think that there will be significant changes in the central-local government framework in the near future. Samuels, for his part, intuitively appears to know this and seems to have not invested as much time analyzing this policy area as the previous two. The emergence of local-local agreements for emergencies is a new phenomenon, but one that can still be understood within the existing local governance framework.

On the whole, my sense is that Samuels is frustrated. He took the logic of a “good crisis” scenario and began research on 3.11, tracing what happened within the two years or so after the disaster. He should be praised for his academic achievement of distilling so much of the relevant literature into such a comprehensive and authoritative book in a short time. Perhaps the most important characteristic of this book is its timeliness. The materials used are fresh and lively and belong to narratives that should not be lost. On the other hand, there is a danger in writing fast. Some of the trends described may disappear, even though this would not damage the work as a whole. For example, Osaka mayor Toru Hashimoto was popular at the time *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* was written, but his influence has declined quickly since then. Likewise, Koizumi Junichiro, the former prime minister, very recently has been campaigning for abolishing the use of nuclear energy. In this kind of disaster, stories cannot be considered completed. Two years is a very brief time frame for writing about such a big event and may be too short to see its real impact.

A big concern that I had in reading the book is that Samuels did not discuss the larger political implications of his good crisis scenario. For example, is he



suggesting that Japan adopt a more centralized framework in order to bring about greater change? Or is he thinking of the possibility that a strong leadership would emerge in such a crisis?

I would approach the question of politics and change in a different way. Given the limited political tools in Japan, piecemeal change is what we can expect following a crisis, when available resources must be used to support refugees and compensate severe accident-related losses. However, when serious incidents are ongoing, they usually stimulate more change over time, while maintaining good practices like the public trust shown in the immediate days after the crisis. It may be worth mentioning that the earthquake happened under the newly in power and politically unskilled Democratic Party of Japan. My hope is that the bottom-up, piecemeal accumulation of small changes will lead Japan to greater change. To this end, a large number of Japanese social scientists are engaged in research on 3.11 through a grant from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. I am one of them. This book will be among the most important resources guiding our efforts.

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### 3.11 and the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Building on Success for the Next Generation

*Suzanne Basalla*

**R**ichard Samuels' provocative and engaging book, *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*, offers a timely and broad framework for examining Japan's response to the complex disaster caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Samuels asks whether Japan is on a path for restoration or for renaissance, and while he judges that it is "too early to know," he argues for the value of understanding why either outcome may be in the offing and shows why elements of both outcomes are likely to persist. A reader seeking a neat, unambiguous argument will be disappointed by the number of questions Samuels raises that remain unanswered. But for those looking for a current account of Japan's

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response to the 3.11 disasters, this book is an excellent English-language resource. The assembled statistics and case studies will undoubtedly serve future researchers well as they tackle the issues discussed here. Samuels concludes that many observers (and he humbly includes himself in this category) overestimate the transformational potential of crises and suggests that we should not be surprised that Japan has basically chosen to “stay the course” rather than adopt what he calls a “put it in gear” narrative (p. 26).

That Samuels generally concludes that Japan’s observed change thus far is neither a game changer nor structural does not in any way detract from the value of his analysis. He offers a useful framework for exploring dueling narratives of change, focusing on leadership, risk, and community in the context of security, energy, and local governance. Samuels brings a rich set of data to this analysis. He has assembled an impressive review of statistics, reports, and interviews, drawing on bilingual sources, social media, a broad network, and years of experience. Even for those of us who lived through some of the events Samuels describes, the comprehensive approach offers new insights and perspective. The book also includes a fascinating chapter on historical examples of how Japan dealt with previous large-scale disasters; the parallels it draws to the country’s recovery from the Kanto earthquake of 1923 (and the U.S. military’s “disaster diplomacy” at the time) prove quite revealing. Samuels’s explanation of the dynamics between central and local leaders provides some of the freshest and most provocative insights of the book. Having had the privilege of visiting some local communities in Tohoku after the disaster, I, too, was struck by the extent to which the quality of local government can mean the difference between life and death for its citizens. Describing the extensive horizontal cooperation among local governments (the scale and impact of which I had no idea about before reading this book), Samuels says of the solidarity among local governments, “there was something special in this development” (p. 170), which he later calls the “biggest untold story” after 3.11 (p. 196). His account reminds us why it is critically important that we include local leaders, from mayors to governors, in our understanding of Japan’s leadership and factor them in when we think about Japan’s future.

On 3.11, I was serving as senior advisor to U.S. ambassador John Roos and had a front-row seat to much of the U.S.-Japan coordination that the book details. Samuels captures well the breadth and scale of U.S. official support to Japan, much of it through the U.S. military’s Operation Tomodachi. The military’s immediate response, eventually involving the nearly 20,000 troops, 140 aircraft, and 20 ships cited by Samuels, was massive and meaningful. Additional support poured in from across the government, reflected in the

145 officials who joined the U.S. embassy to help coordinate efforts. This was coupled with an outpouring of civil-society and private support from Americans that highlighted just how special and unique the U.S.-Japan relationship really is.

In describing the initial challenges in establishing coordination between the U.S. and Japanese governments, Samuels references some of the more sensational reports of tensions as a frustrated U.S. government pushed Japan's Kan administration for better access and more timely information. Many accounts of friction during those early days mistakenly suggest that at issue was a U.S. "demand" that American experts be placed in the *kantei* (prime minister's office) and a Japanese refusal on grounds of protecting sovereignty. This misses the point, which was the countries' different approaches to utilizing experts when decisions needed to be made in real time based on partial information while an incident unfolded. In the U.S. approach, experts worked with the decision-makers (they certainly worked closely with Ambassador Roos) on-site and helped reach, communicate, and modify decisions as the situation evolved.<sup>1</sup> The United States sought to place experts not only where they could be the most helpful and receive the most relevant information to assist in U.S. decision-making, but most importantly where they could share their expertise with Japanese officials. This approach did not immediately mesh with Japan's, as Samuels conveys. Once the communication channels were streamlined with the Hosono Group, however, coordination went much more smoothly (p. 23).<sup>2</sup> None of this should be surprising: both governments had to integrate information, assessments, and capabilities from within their governments, private sectors, and civil societies—many of which do not normally work together.<sup>3</sup> The broader point is that the two sides did quickly establish excellent coordination mechanisms and were therefore able to work together to support Japan's response efforts.

While I found that the book's account of U.S.-Japan cooperation generally tracked with my recollection of key decisions and activities, my own take on the implications of the U.S. response in terms of what Samuels calls "disaster diplomacy" is different. He lists a number of cynical motivations variously

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of lessons that some of these experts learned from 3.11, see C. Norman Coleman et al., "Recovery and Resilience after a Nuclear Power Plant Disaster: A Medical Decision Model for Managing an Effective, Timely, and Balanced Response," *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 7, no. 2 (2013): 136–45.

<sup>2</sup> As Samuels describes, Japanese politician Goshi Hosono led a dialogue framework as the U.S.-Japan key institutional problem solver and solution coordinator and the "highest decision-making body for Japan-U.S. cooperation" (p. 23).

<sup>3</sup> My colleagues and I shared some of the lessons from this coordination. See Suzanne Basalla, William Berger, and C. Spencer Abbot, "Managing Foreign Assistance in a CBRN Emergency: The U.S. Government Response to Japan's 'Triple Disaster,'" *Joint Force Quarterly* 68 (2013): 25–31.

ascribed to the U.S. response (p. 103), none of which track with my experience. Indeed, I was in awe watching the top-down, all-encompassing, unequivocal, and immediate response from the U.S. government, and I am confident that the United States responded in this way simply because it was the right thing to do for our friends. While Samuels does not necessarily endorse the more cynical motives, he does examine the “Tohoku effect” on the alliance and generally finds the results disappointing. However, perhaps Samuels examined a too limited and transactional set of measures. Even in the specific field of security cooperation, developments such as the robust 2+2 security statement in October 2013 suggest more progress than he found when the book went to print. More importantly, I think the goodwill generated through U.S.-Japan cooperation after 3.11 has carried forward to an overall strengthening of the bilateral relationship, which has seen the redoubling of commitment by both governments, as well as the private sector, to invest in strategic relations. In this sense, I think the U.S.-Japan alliance has benefited from a Tohoku effect. Indeed, unlike many of the examples of failed disaster diplomacy cited in the book’s comparative review, the United States has made a conscious effort to stay engaged in Japan’s long-term recovery after 3.11 and to ensure that there is an infrastructure to nurture the foundational relations between the two countries that proved so necessary in the crisis response. One successful example is the TOMODACHI Initiative, which is a public-private partnership led by the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and the U.S.-Japan Council, supported by the government of Japan, and funded by the contributions of many Japanese and U.S. companies.

Overall, Samuels does an excellent job examining the lessons Japan learned after 3.11 and how it has acted (or not acted) on those lessons. I would value his similar assessment of what the United States has learned and how it has acted on these lessons. Undoubtedly, there are a number of important implications for U.S. disaster response and consequence management. One of the key lessons, I hope, has been the importance of ensuring that the foundational relations between the two countries that made U.S.-Japan cooperation after 3.11 such a success are maintained for the next generation of Americans and Japanese. In the almost three years since 3.11, I have been gratified to see a deep and sustained commitment to investing in that next generation from both U.S. and Japanese leaders in government, civil society, and businesses.

Samuels concludes his book by comparing a more pessimistic and a more optimistic interpretation of Japan’s lack of transformational change thus far. He seems to sympathize more with the optimism evoked by a close observer of Japan’s response, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, who describes a robust Japanese democracy filled with the emergence of well-informed, active citizens. I share

that optimism, but would even go further to suggest that since 3.11, Japan's leaders, civil society, and American friends have been planting the seeds of change in the next generation, and that Japan will certainly see the fruits of these investments both domestically and in the context of U.S.-Japan relations. Whether or not that is what Samuels considers a "renaissance" remains to be seen, but there is no doubt in my mind that the novelty of the 3.11 crisis and the adaptive leadership it engendered will, over time, shape a generation.

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### 3.11 and Japan's Shift to Smart, Distributed Power

*Andrew DeWit*

**R**ichard Samuels's book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* is, to date, the most authoritative English-language study of the impact of history's costliest natural and man-made disasters on Japan's political economy of energy and the implications for intergovernmental relations. The book uses a narrative approach, deftly outlining the institutional terrain prior to 3.11 and presenting the key actors and core arguments for a return to business as usual versus alternatives advanced by reformists. Samuels maps Japan's fights over energy and regional governance, providing a valuable resource for examining those linked conflicts in the larger context of accelerating global paradigm shifts in energy and the character of the city regions that consume the vast majority of it. In Japan, as is true elsewhere, energy is the fundamental economic sector. For decades predictable and taken for granted, energy is suddenly dynamic, with disruptive change being spurred in particular by communities' search for resilience and sustainability in the face of multiple crises.

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**NOTE** ~ This review essay draws on Andrew DeWit, "Just Gas? Smart Power and Koizumi's Anti-Nuclear Challenge," *Asia-Pacific Journal*, December 16, 2013 ~ <http://japanfocus.org/-Andrew-DeWit/4049>.

Samuels's considerable background in research and writing on Japanese energy and local government left him better prepared than most concerning what to pay attention to in the confusion following 3.11. He neither takes sides nor picks winners, save in betting on expanding opportunities for the local governments who star in his account (p. 197). This detachment allows Samuels to explicate the broad range of interests wanting to rebuild the disrupted *status quo ante* as well as the challengers who swiftly rose to prominence amid the chaos.

His analysis shows us that prior to 3.11 Japanese energy policymaking was dominated by a “nuclear village” centered on the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI); the utilities; the nuclear industry; cooperative political, business, media, and academic elites; and advocates in the communities hosting nuclear plants. Japan's power economy—the world's third-largest—featured the most profound monopolization of any developed country, not just in terms of generation and transmission assets, along with the rules governing them, but also via dense and dangerously complacent political and business alliances in the national capital and throughout the country. Compact and powerfully incentivized, the nuclear village had seized control over fiscal, regulatory, and other resources and had driven a nuclear energy paradigm into the core of Japanese policymaking. The dominant discourse, inscribed in energy, environmental, and economic-growth policy, depicted nuclear power as the cheapest, most reliable, and most realistic option, declaring it also to be completely safe as well as the bedrock of energy security. Prior to 3.11, Japan's nuclear program was thus set to expand from under a third of electrical power production to reach over half of the nation's power generation by 2030. In a country with scarce conventional energy resource endowments, oceans away from increasingly precarious and expensive fossil-fuel supplies, the government-backed nuclear paradigm possessed immense resources, credibility, and political momentum, enabling it to obfuscate a startling record of accidents, cover-ups, cost overruns, and other scandals.

Samuels details how the shock of 3.11 shattered this structure of interests and its commanding narrative, delivering a particularly large blow to the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), the world's largest private utility. The nuclear village continues to be eroded by public opposition to its vision, the already monumental and still-mounting costs of the Fukushima Daiichi reactor meltdowns, and the spread of renewable and efficiency alternatives among local governments, households, businesses, and other rapidly multiplying “prosumers” (producers and consumers) of energy. Even the subsequent return of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), headed by an explicitly pro-nuclear

prime minister, has yet to contain this momentum for an energy shift. Samuels's account is thus invaluable for understanding much of what is at stake in Japan's post-crisis clash between centralized and distributed power (or more generally, distributed energy resources).<sup>1</sup>

While Samuels scrupulously avoids taking sides, his work illustrates how the “creative destruction,” so to speak, of 3.11 has given Japan a chance to be a leader in the global transition from centralized to distributed power. He sketches the quick defections from the core of the nuclear village as firms such as Toshiba, Hitachi, and Marubeni began “repositioning themselves” (p. 139). Developments have since surged on multiple fronts: in September 2013, just two and a half years after 3.11, Japan's 16 trillion yen power market featured over 100 independent power producers, including such new entrants as Toyota. A year before, in September 2012, that number was 64.<sup>2</sup> And Japan's feed-in-tariff policy support for diffusing renewables, described at length by Samuels (pp. 141–45) and effective from July 2012, saw over 4 gigawatts (roughly equivalent to four large nuclear reactors) of new renewable capacity deployed in the first year. Moreover, Japanese domestic shipments of solar cells and modules during July–September 2013 leapt to 2.075 gigawatts, over triple the 627-megawatt level of a year earlier.<sup>3</sup> These data points are just a few indicators of the speed with which Japan's energy landscape was changing even as Samuels was writing about it.

The book also points out that metropolitan Tokyo became one spearpoint of a growing local movement to reduce reliance on monopolies such as TEPCO and instead contract with new entrants, produce power locally, and press for deregulation of the power sector (pp. 139–40). Deregulation is now official policy, but local governments—such as the 36 prefectures and 17 designated cities (those with populations over 500,000) grouped in their respective Natural Energy Councils—are advocating an accelerated time frame and greater institutional transparency. Most local governments have more or less

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<sup>1</sup> Centralized and distributed power are distinguished by the geographic and economic concentration of electrical generating capacity versus its dispersal. The former is most strongly symbolized by nuclear plants but also includes large-scale fossil-fuel power plants and an extensive one-way grid. By contrast, distributed power sees much smaller-scale generation distributed over a wider area, opening the door to flexibility, falling costs, and increasing equity through renewables, radical efficiency, interactive “smart” grids, and broader participation in the power economy.

<sup>2</sup> Aaron Sheldrick, “In a Sign of Reforms to Come, Newcomers Snap at Heels of Japanese Utilities,” Reuters, September 14, 2013 ~ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/14/us-japan-utilities-idUSBRE98D0D20130914>.

<sup>3</sup> Ishida Masaya, “Taiyou denchi no shukkaryou ga zennenni de 3-bai ni, hatsudenjigyoyou wa 10-bai no 75-man kW” [Solar Cell Shipments Thrice Previous Year, Utility-Use Up 10 Times to 750,000 Kilowatts], *Smart Japan*, December 5, 2013 ~ <http://www.itmedia.co.jp/smartjapan/articles/1312/05/news026.html>.

ambitious measures to spur solar, wind, small hydro, geothermal, biomass, and other renewable energy initiatives, together with power cuts through advanced LED lighting and other efficiencies, that expand local employment and business activity.

Another example of this disruption of pre-3.11 centralized power is the new energy plan advanced by the city of Kyoto on November 15, 2013. Following Fukushima Prefecture's targeting of 100% renewables by 2040, Kyoto is the first among Japan's twenty designated cities to draft a roadmap to eliminate its dependence on nuclear power. Stressing the role of information and communications technology (ICT), Kyoto's plan relies on 15% conservation and a tripling of renewable power by 2020.

Kyoto stands out for its explicit anti-nuclear sentiment, but the emphasis of hundreds of other local governments on "local production-local consumption" (*chisan chishou*), backed up by collaboration with central agencies, illustrates how the impact of 3.11 continues to distribute effective authority in energy policymaking by diffusing power generation, conservation, and storage. This is in sharp contrast with the situation prior to 3.11, when few local energy plans set robust targets for distributed power and efficiency.

Another area disrupted by 3.11 is Japan's smart-city program. The smart-city approach integrates the increasingly miniature, versatile, and inexpensive ICT capacity held, for example, in a smartphone with large-scale urban infrastructure such as power and energy, administration, waterworks, transportation, healthcare, and waste treatment. Somewhat akin to sensory organs and a nervous system, ICT sensors measure and monitor an increasing range of phenomena relevant to managing these resource- and energy-intensive infrastructures. The sensors deliver real-time information on the urban ecosystem, allowing for greatly enhanced efficiency, interactive power grids, and other facilities that seemed distant prospects even a few years ago.

Samuels briefly describes Japan's smart cities (p. 145), noting METI's central role in coordinating four large-scale projects in conjunction with some of Japan's biggest industrial concerns. Prior to 3.11, Japan's smart-city initiative centered on building a low-carbon and more efficient model in a few cities, with a focus on export opportunities. METI officials and other policymakers were constrained by the larger context of the monopoly utilities, the centralized and nuclear paradigm in the power economy, and other strictures of the pre-disaster status quo. Samuels shows us how the METI-led effort quickly began to morph after 3.11, with the patent evidence of the vulnerability of centralized power and the sudden imperatives of conservation and local resilience. He notes that the disasters expanded local governments' and central agencies' incentives to



take part in the accelerating fusion of ICT, distributed energy, efficiency, and other aspects of the smart-city model (pp. 138–40, 195–97). Indeed, Japan’s government-sponsored smart-city projects have since increased from 22 to well over 100.<sup>4</sup> As is the case globally, there is no reliable count. The number of projects is growing too rapidly and diversely, with many communities implementing a broad range of smart applications, while others confine theirs to one or a few areas of infrastructure.

Smart cities were recognized as a growth sector even before 3.11, which is one reason METI and other agencies had the initiatives Samuels mentions. In September 2010, Nikkei BP Cleantech Institute, based on a survey of one hundred selected global projects then underway, projected an energy-related market of about 3,100 yen cumulative between 2011 and 2030; but it also forecast that the market would exceed a cumulative 5,000 trillion yen with inclusion of the broad range of smart infrastructure, including water, housing, and other areas.<sup>5</sup> Enabled by the rapid diffusion of increasingly inexpensive ICT, distributed energy, and robust public policy, and impelled by the desperation of Hitachi, Toshiba, Toyota, NEC, IBM, GE, Microsoft, Bechtel, Philips, Siemens, AT&T, and myriad others to innovate toward the most competitive business model, there are now thousands of projects worldwide and a market whose scale and growth defy calculation. This accelerating evolution is reshaping urbanization in response to many of the risk factors highlighted by the tragedy of 3.11: the vulnerability to increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters, the systemic weakness of centralized power and other infrastructures, lethargic national governments dominated by vested interests like the nuclear village, and the mounting costs of conventional resources.

One of the key advantages enjoyed by Japan, but overlooked in Samuels’s book because it simply was not part of the discourse, is the role of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) in shepherding the “smartening” of local governments nationwide. Alarmed at Japan’s comparatively low diffusion of and declining competitiveness in ICT, the MIC has elaborated an ICT-centered growth plan since 2004. This initiative received enormous impetus from 3.11, just as the shock of Hurricane Sandy has convinced New York City’s officials to emphasize distributed power and other elements of resilience. Thanks in particular to MIC’s groundwork, ICT-centered growth

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<sup>4</sup> Kosuke Sato, “Sumaatoshiti jitsugen ni muketa torikumi to kongo no kadai” [Issues and Projects Toward Realizing the Smart City], Japan Research Institute, Paper, no. 2013-03, April 30, 2013 ~ <https://www.jri.co.jp/MediaLibrary/file/report/researchfocus/pdf/6743.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> “The Smart City Market Will Be Worth a Cumulative Total of 3,100 Trillion Yen for 2011–2030—Nikkei BP Cleantech Estimates Based on Its Research on 100 Smart Cities Worldwide,” Nikkei BP, Press Release, September 27, 2010 ~ <http://www.nikkeibp.com/news/100927.html>.

became official cabinet policy in June 2013 and is being pursued nationwide in Japan rather than only in particular regions endowed with the right mix of incentives and resources. Japan's case thus contrasts sharply with, for example, the lamentable lack of a smart and resilient recovery in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Japan's recovery remains a work in progress, one fostered by the proliferation of intergovernmental linkages that Samuels discusses in detail (pp. 151–79). Because much was inchoate while the book was being written, he could not address the role that a mobilized Japanese civil society might play in shaping the smart-city paradigm and the scope of centralized nuclear power within it. The current LDP cabinet seems to want all of the above, as it were, meaning a return to the nuclear paradigm plus maximizing opportunity in the smart and green-energy revolutions.

Yet doing both was problematic prior to 3.11 and likely remains so because of scarce resources, the speed of change, and the trajectory of distributed power. Thus, what Japanese civil society has done and will do seems critical. As Samuels points out, outrage at the nuclear village saw Japanese citizens link up through social media and then vote with their feet in mass demonstrations, disrupting a return to business as usual (pp. 131–34). In conjunction with local government leadership, consumer cooperatives, credit unions, and other networks, the Japanese public is becoming a key player in building distributed energy. What unfolds next in Japan is likely to matter a great deal, as the global smart-city paradigm is teetering between top-down approaches, wherein big business and a technocratic public sector drive the design, and bottom-up approaches that center on input from citizens and responsive local communities. Like citizens everywhere, the Japanese face the choice of either mobilizing even more deliberately to build resilient and democratic communities or becoming even more atomized, passive residents of cities shaped and controlled by technocrats and multinational firms. So whether a further legacy of 3.11 is a Japanese-style sustainable, equitable, and democratic smart-city modernity remains to be seen. But at the very least, the nuclear village's pre-3.11 paradigm appears to be history.

## Long-Awaited Self-Rule on the Horizon?

*Nobuo Fukuda*

What would truly fundamental change mean in Japanese politics today? In the wake of the deadly earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, in which more than twenty thousand people were killed or went missing, what else could Japanese leaders and citizens have thought, said, and pursued than the discourse, policies, and deeds that Richard Samuels articulately recorded in his latest book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*? While reading this well-researched and fair-minded account of Japan's epochal experience, those were the questions that came to my mind.

Samuels is right when he states that "3.11 changed few minds within Japan's chattering classes" (p. xi). Political entrepreneurs across the wide spectrum scrambled to define exactly what had happened, to name villains and heroes, to prescribe creative solutions, and to sell their long-cherished agendas for change (or no change) to the public. In the three policy areas closely studied in the book—national security, energy, and local governance—Samuels concludes that it was the political actors and pundits who advocated for "staying the course" who prevailed. Apparently, no fundamental change has materialized as an immediate result of 3.11.

Interestingly, the author sees the most lasting changes after 3.11 coming from Japan's local governments. He highlights a number of prefectures and municipalities that sent thousands of officials to badly affected localities in Tohoku and assisted their counterparts in the region for many months. Along with the novel horizontal collaboration crafted by a few prefectures and big cities, such as the Kansai Regional Union, their swift assistance initiatives enhanced the prominence of some ambitious local politicians, including Osaka mayor Toru Hashimoto and Nagoya mayor Takashi Kawamura (see pp. 154–57, 179).

From his comparative study of large-scale natural disasters in the past, Samuels finds that central governments around the globe have always tried to reassert their authority following a disaster, while local actors have resisted and demanded greater autonomy in the process of recovery. In Japan, it has been more than a decade since the Regional Autonomy Law was revised, wherein local governments were granted equal status with the central government for

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the first time in the nation's history. Nevertheless, the devolution of power and resources has progressed slowly, as Samuels suggests by directing our attention to the well-known catchphrase in Japan "30 percent autonomy." In that context, the empowerment of governors and heads of major municipalities after 3.11 should certainly be seen as a step toward change in Japan's political system.

Even in less prominent examples, we can find just as important signs of change. Katashina is a small village in Gunma Prefecture, located 110 miles north of Tokyo at the foot of Oze National Park. The village is a popular ski resort in the Kanto region and hosts nearly three hundred mostly small- and medium-sized hotels. On March 14, 2011, just three days after the earthquake and tsunami devastated its northern neighbors, Katashina invited residents of Minami Soma to take shelter in the village. Minami Soma, which is about 170 miles north of Katashina, was a coastal town in Fukushima that had been gravely affected by both the tsunami and the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. Displaced people moved in from Minami Soma on March 18. Katashina, a village with a population of only five thousand, accommodated as many as one thousand "refugees" for months. It is noteworthy that the initiative originated with dozens of village youths who busily e-mailed each other on March 11 and discussed what they could do for their unfortunate neighbors. The village assembly and mayor supported their idea and quickly appropriated 100 million yen (roughly \$1 million), which was mainly used to help feed the guests.

Recently, I spoke with about a dozen organic farmers in a village in northern Fukushima. The village was more than 60 miles away from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi plants, and the farmers said that their farms were not as badly contaminated with radioactive materials as those closer to the reactors. Nevertheless, as the farmers kept producing crops, milk, and eggs, they found higher radioactivity levels in some of their products, such as shiitake mushrooms, and gave up selling them. Because the village is in a mountainous region with a lot of snow, the farmers benefit from ample melt water, which brings down enriched and nutritious soil from the surrounding forests. But now they are deeply concerned about the water's quality, given that some elements like cesium will stay radioactive for decades. As radioactive particles are carried in the streams and concentrated in the ground, their farmland could become increasingly contaminated for several decades.

For Fukushima residents, worse or even the worst may be yet to come. In the prefecture's municipalities, including the capital Fukushima and populous Iwaki, the incumbent mayors have lost their re-election bids one after another

since 3.11. According to news reports, many voters blame the municipal administration for the stalled decontamination.

Obviously, the most fundamental difference between 3.11 and previous natural disasters, which Samuels thoroughly addresses in chapter 3, is the impact of the nuclear accident. Grave concern about the fallout has been widely shared by the citizens living beyond Fukushima's borders as the radioactive contamination drags on. More than one thousand days after 3.11, surveys find that around 60% of the nation's population still opposes the restart of Japan's 50 nuclear reactors, all of which remain shut down as of late November 2013. Despite the insistence by utilities, business communities, and pro-nuclear prime minister Shinzo Abe that the reactors be restarted soon, they have been left idle because public opposition is too strong, according to Eiji Oguma, a sociology professor at Keio University.

For the past 60 years, many social scientists have lamented that the persistent political culture of *okami suuhai* or *okami danomi* (unconditional esteem for or reliance on the state apparatus) has prevented Japan from embracing a more robust form of democracy. Because the U.S. Occupation Forces ruled postwar Japan indirectly by using the surviving remnants of the imperial bureaucracy, the authoritarian state apparatuses escaped from total reform almost unscathed. Central government officials who had been appointed as prefectural governors and municipal government heads in prewar Japan rebranded themselves as democratic politicians after the war. As critics point out, Japanese voters have willingly elected those elites and subsequently been ruled as they used to be.

It is true that the once-vaunted state bureaucracy had long been discredited. At the same time, however, Japanese citizens still placed much faith in elites, as Samuels observes. After 3.11, this ambivalent relationship has been shifting, and we now see the disconnect between citizens and the state growing. As the nuclear crisis continues, people seem to be finally realizing that "okami danomi" cannot be a solution. But where, then, should they turn? People also understand that mere antagonism toward the state will get them nowhere.

I recall the young activists in Katashina seeing themselves as part of the village's political community and the village administration as a useful vehicle in implementing their ambitious plan. Of course, it is too early to conclude that the nation is finally exhibiting self-rule. Nevertheless, there have been many instances of citizens taking bottom-up approaches to relief and assistance, such as in Katashina, across the archipelago after 3.11. Structural and transformative change can only take place when the citizens come to feel that they are represented by the state and establish truly cooperative relationships with its apparatuses.

### 3.11 and Policy Advocacy in Japan

*Sheila A. Smith*

The magnitude of Japan's 2011 triple disaster took our breath away and shook the foundations of Japanese confidence in their government. All of us have heard countless stories from the media, friends, and those who continue to suffer displacement, stories that are still accompanied by the memory of those searing images of devastation and loss that were transmitted across the globe as the tsunami followed the 9.0-magnitude earthquake. Who can forget the daily coverage of the effort to prevent a catastrophe at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant?

Ultimately, however, it was the mobilization across Japanese society to respond to the needs of the people of Tohoku that colored our understanding of what the disaster meant, not only for Japan but for all of us around the world who are vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. The strengths of the Japanese people were abundantly clear—calm and resilient, the residents of Tohoku sought safety and medical attention, and later waited for help to arrive from their government.

Only two and a half years later, Japan seems well on the way to recovery. The Japanese economy is beginning to grow again, the political disarray that preceded the earthquake and resumed so quickly thereafter seems diminished, and while far from easy, the adjustment to significantly reduced nuclear power has been costly but less painful than many might have imagined. Tohoku remains to be fully rebuilt, however. The scars of the tsunami's powerful grip on the landscape are still there. Approximately 290,000 people still live in temporary housing, and proposals for how to imagine new towns and villages along the coast remain deeply contested and vastly underfunded.

So what did 3.11 mean for Japanese priorities? Did it really matter? What are the lessons for a society that has been struggling for decades with economic and social reform? Did 3.11 reinforce or challenge Japanese assumptions about the future? Richard Samuels, in his new book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*, refocuses our attention on the legacy of that tragic—but galvanizing—moment and what it meant for Japanese governance.

Samuels offers a masterful analysis of what happened in Japan after the immediate shock of the triple disaster had subsided and Japan's policymakers

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had to contend with its impact. The narrative that emerged in the political debate after March 11 is the book's main focus. In chapter 2, Samuels persuasively demonstrates that stories of disaster, replete with emotional urgency, create a shared demand for change. Japanese understanding of 3.11—what Samuels refers to as the narrative of that disaster—was also infused by three other elements: the failure of Japan's national leadership, an awareness of the nation's vulnerability, and the deep sense of community that allows the Japanese people to be resilient in the face of disaster.

This complex narrative then became fodder for policy advocacy. Citing others who have written on natural disasters, Samuels cautions us to examine our own expectations about the impact of 3.11. Disaster breeds the desire for reform; the need for hope encourages new schemes promising prevention and transformation. Yet these expectations, Samuels points out, must ultimately come to rest on the day-to-day political tussle over whose ideas are better. In chapter 3, he also cautions us to not see Japan's 3.11 experience solely on its own terms but rather recognize that, as a geological reality, Japan has faced such disasters earlier in its history, at times with equally devastating consequences. Moreover, geology and geography aside, Samuels shows how the intense Japanese criticism of the government's response to 3.11 has parallels in other contemporary societies facing similar devastation, including the United States after Hurricane Katrina and China after the Sichuan earthquake.

*3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* also seeks to link the broad themes of the lessons learned in Japan to the policy debate that came afterward, as Japanese national and local governments sought to regroup:

Like all catastrophes, 3.11 generated pain and imagination, heroes and villains. Political entrepreneurs with motivation and resources were quick to do battle for control of the event. They spun narrative explanations for the tragedy across a broad horizon of meanings and values, all conforming to their existing preferences for change tailored to what they believed would be effective with the Japanese public. (p. 45)

Samuels ventures deeply into three dimensions of public policymaking—national security, energy, and local government—to show how the story of 3.11 was deployed in the ensuing policy debate. Rich empirical texture, including in-depth interview materials from national bureaucrats, local mayors, TEPCO management, and civic activists, provides the sense that the reader is there in the moment at the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) command center, a Diet hearing, or an anti-nuclear demonstration.

This comprehensive analysis of Japan's triple disaster demonstrates without a doubt that the Japanese experience during and after 3.11 did not necessarily change the minds of those who already had set ideas about the policies that should guide Japan. Indeed, in each case study, it becomes abundantly clear that very few advocates in Japan, either within or outside government, dramatically altered their basic political position on issues as a result of the disaster, and many still found it necessary to fall back on their quibbles with each other.

This is a lean book, tightly argued and concisely presented. Samuels navigates across complex issues and guides the reader to the relevant actors and preferences that have driven the policy debate in Japan. That he could so easily recognize the normative underpinnings of the Japanese debates on national security, energy, and local autonomy speaks to his past scholarship and careful analysis of the dominant voices in these public policy arenas.

The best books, however, leave us asking for more. So let me share some of my cravings after putting down *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*. The first was I wanted more history. One of my favorite parts of the book was chapter 3, especially the sections on earlier Japanese disasters and the ideas they produced. While there was certainly enough material in this book to demonstrate the echoes from the past in the 3.11 narrative, I would have relished a full chapter on the politics that emerged after the 1923 Kanto earthquake or even the 1995 Kobe-Awaji disaster. Likewise, I would have liked Samuels to elaborate more on the interesting contrasts with disaster responses by the U.S. and Chinese governments. Public criticism was heaped on George W. Bush, Naoto Kan, and Hu Jintao (and Wen Jiabao), world leaders with vastly different ideas about how to govern and with vastly different resources at their disposal, reminding us that place and ideology have little bearing when tragedy of this magnitude strikes. Neither democratic nor authoritarian governments, it seems, are good at managing the unexpected,

Finally, Samuels uses an important concept in this book, one that I think needs greater attention in the analysis of Japanese politics and policymaking: the notion of a political or policy entrepreneur. Much of the literature on Japanese policymaking focuses on the institutions that shape preferences, and rightly so, given that so much of the story of how Japan works depends on the institutional frame within which actors operate. Over time, scholars have identified moments of transition in that institutional frame and the drivers of institutional change. On the policymaking side, however, we need greater scrutiny of patterns of advocacy and how they affect policy outcomes, and here Samuels offers rich detail on policymakers' use of the



3.11 narrative to shape the public's vocabulary on Japan's choices. I could not help but wonder, however, if the balance of credibility in the world of policy ideas shifted. The events of 3.11 and the attempt to manage their aftermath fundamentally destroyed the public's trust in some (e.g., TEPCO, scientists, and the Democratic Party of Japan) and gave others far greater voice in the debate over public policy (e.g., nonprofit organizations, local governments, and the SDF).

These new entrants into the policy mix will undoubtedly change the tenor of policy advocacy in Japan, if only by amplifying their voice (and thus their perspective) in the public debate. The televised images of the SDF and the governors in charge of the aid effort in towns and villages along the northeast coast changed the balance of credibility within the Japanese government. The experience of so many outside government coming together to cope with the consequences of the disaster amplified the voice of civil-society advocates and participants. Corporations, big and small, saw their responsibility in society differently as work schedules were altered, lights were dimmed, and consumer demand was reduced. Although those who had dominated the policy debate prior to 3.11 continued to seek to dominate it afterward, there are other ways we can look for evidence of change in the policy landscape. Leadership and ideas from across Japanese society emerged to challenge the government's choices. New advocacy coalitions are visible in the three policy areas that are analyzed in *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*, but other policy issues may offer similar evidence.

Samuels offers us a wonderful intellectual journey through the national debate in Japan that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake. The richness of the three policy case studies demonstrates a depth of knowledge and analytical understanding of Japan's contemporary policy challenges that few can replicate. Looking ahead, we will need to monitor the new voices and coalitions forged as a result of this experience to see whether 3.11 really made a difference in the way Japan governs itself. Samuels has given us the much-needed conceptual map to light the way.

## Author's Response: 3.11 and the Fog of Politics

*Richard J. Samuels*

It has been almost three years since 3.11—36 months that have stretched out the longest and most painfully for the surviving victims. Many observers have spilled much ink trying to understand and evaluate what happened in Tohoku and what it would mean for Japan and the world. I am grateful to *Asia Policy* for assembling a group of thoughtful analysts to reflect on my early appraisal of the catastrophe. I would like to use their assessments to revisit that understanding of 3.11 and its impact.

As I wrote in the book—and as Michio Muramatsu reminds us—a master narrative for 3.11 has yet to be written. Sheila Smith puts it more directly. She wonders: “Did it really matter?” One way to judge is by revisiting 3.11 from the distance afforded by the passage of additional time. How might my conclusions have been different if I had written the book three years after the catastrophe instead of just 18 months later? Which of the dueling political entrepreneurs who tried to brand the 3.11 catastrophe have been rewarded with policies that conform to their preferences? Has Japan really “stayed the course,” or has it embarked on a new one—either forward in a new direction or “back to the future”?

Andrew DeWit’s apt characterization of “the speed with which Japan’s energy landscape was changing even as Samuels was writing about it” is a good place to begin. He is correct to point to the electric power revolution in Japan, to its acceleration after 3.11, and to its consonance with “global paradigm shifts in energy.” By shrinking and smartening, Japan’s electric power sector seems to be catching up to the rest of the world’s utilities, which had already begun adapting to disruptive technologies as well as to changing consumer, regulatory, and voter preferences even absent a 3.11-scale challenge.

Japan’s “energy shift” seems most prominent at the local level. Following Masayoshi Son’s creative lead, local governments are generating revenues by using the post-3.11 feed-in tariff (FIT) to induce businesses to build large-scale renewable-power projects on vacant municipal land. Municipalities receive rent for the land and additional tax revenue, while the residents get clean, low-cost power and investors enjoy subsidized, low-risk returns. In fact, renewables increased by 25% in the first year after FIT was enacted.

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Change in the Japanese electric power sector—including a toughened regulatory authority and a shift away from the utility-centric programs offered by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) toward “micro-electric power companies”—has proceeded despite the utility companies’ natural resistance to change, a resistance abetted in December 2012 when Japanese voters decisively ended the hold of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) on governance. Although polls showed overwhelming opposition to nuclear power, voters returned Japan’s most avidly pro-nuclear and pro-utility party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), to power, and TEPCO shares rebounded immediately. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the DPJ’s policy of zero nuclear power “groundless,” accelerated efforts to export nuclear plants, appointed nuclear power advocates to key cabinet posts, removed anti-nuclear members of the Basic Energy Plan commission, and reduced the FIT price for new investments in renewables. Although METI approved solar-power generation facilities with output capacity equivalent to about twenty nuclear reactors (22 gigawatts), only about one-tenth of the newly approved facilities have actually started producing electricity.<sup>1</sup> Structural change and renewable growth have been slowed by a loophole in the FIT legislation, and some investors have abandoned their projects after encountering difficulty connecting to the grid and gaining access to panels.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the breakup of the vertically integrated monopoly system is under formal discussion in METI councils. The “creative destruction” of hidebound utilities is finally coming to Japan, and Alexis Dudden may be right when she says that “changes in the energy sector may ultimately prove the most profound.” But evidence is mixed on the pace of and impetus for change.

Suzanne Basalla’s comments raise similar questions about the impact of 3.11 on Japanese security policy and on the Japan-U.S. alliance. She attributes recent shifts in Japan’s force posture and the deepening of the alliance to the unprecedented and effective cooperation of the U.S. military and the Japan Self-Defense Forces in the weeks and months after the catastrophe. By most accounts, bilateral coordination was exemplary, even considering some front-end hiccups.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Japan), Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, “Saisei kanou enerugii hatsuden setsubi no donyuuu joukyou wo kouhyou shimasu” [Official Announcement of the Situation Regarding Introduction of Renewable Energy Electric Power Generation Equipment], November 18, 2013 ~ <http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/saiene/kaitori/dl/setsubi/201307setsubi.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 8, 2013; and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (Japan), Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, “Heisei 25 nen kamiki kouba ritchi doukou chousa kekka (sokuhyou) no gaiyou” [Outline of the Results of a Survey of the Trends in Factory Siting During the First Half of 2013 (Bulletin)] ~ <http://www.meti.go.jp/statistics/tii/ritti/result-2/h25kamikisokuhou.pdf>.

But her full glass may actually be half empty. Shifts that were easy to imagine after 3.11 did not come directly in its wake. A short list includes relocation of U.S. marines from Okinawa to the mainland, defense budget increases, consolidation of the Ground Self-Defense Force's command structure, forward motion on the Futenma base relocation, creation of a Japanese amphibious unit, and creation of a National Security Council. Other long-awaited changes, such as the reinterpretation of the constitution to allow collective self-defense, remain stalled.

Change has required two additional catalysts not mentioned by Basalla, both of which occurred after the book went to press: consolidation of power by the more conservative Abe and confrontation with Beijing in the East China Sea. Moreover, despite unprecedented levels of support for the Japan-U.S. alliance among the Japanese public, Tokyo has dragged its feet on trade negotiations and allowed relations with the Republic of Korea—the United States' other major ally in Northeast Asia—to deteriorate. In addition, Prime Minister Abe visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, despite clear signals from top Washington officials—including Vice President Joe Biden—that the U.S. government wished him not to further provoke China or Korea.

Notwithstanding the enormous goodwill generated by the U.S. response to 3.11, the Senkaku/Diaoyu imbroglio has engendered repeated questions about Washington's influence, capability, and commitment in East Asia. Japanese editorialists and elites ask if Washington will cut (budgets) and pivot to the region as promised, or if it will cut and run in the face of fiscal constraints and declining public support for "globo-cop" missions.<sup>3</sup> Nor has the afterglow of Operation Tomodachi mitigated Japanese concerns about the future of extended deterrence. In short, although the U.S.-Japan "friendship" has been well-earned and is high-sounding rhetorically, and while there has indeed been what Dudden calls a "discursive shift" in discussions of the Japanese military, common interests and common adversaries continue to shape international relations in general and U.S.-Japan relations in particular. However positively disposed they are toward one another, allies—particularly weaker ones like Japan—can never be reassured enough because their strategic environment never stabilizes for long. It is hard, therefore, to imagine that Operation Tomodachi alone, rather than in association with Chinese provocations and

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the December 7, 2013, editorial in the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* and the November 19, 2013, editorial in the *Sankei Shimbun*. Similar concerns were expressed during interviews with diplomats and military officials in the preparation of Richard J. Samuels and James L. Schoff, "Japan's Nuclear Hedge: Beyond 'Allergy' and Breakout," in *Strategic Asia 2013–14: Asia in the Second Nuclear Age*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Abraham M. Denmark, and Travis Tanner (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2013), 233–64.

a shift to the right, was responsible for recent alterations to Japan's national security posture and reaffirmations of alliance solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

Has 3.11 induced any shifts in Japanese citizens' views of their own communities and leaders, two of the four central tropes in the book? There is limited evidence that Japan's vaunted social solidarity may be fraying. More than a hundred decontamination workers have been arrested in Tohoku for shoplifting, looting, brawling, and other petty crimes, and a central government official was suspended for blogging that the Japanese public was being forced to foot the bill for reconstruction for political reasons, even though there is nothing worth rebuilding in the underpopulated region.<sup>5</sup>

Localities were so prominent in my account of 3.11 because they anticipated just this sort of central contempt for local conditions. It was hard not to be impressed by the number of relief officials dispatched to the service of Tohoku governors and mayors by fellow local governments acting ahead of the center. Some 1,500 such "horizontal" secondees are still in place today, but their numbers are shrinking due to budget cuts and the demands for disaster resources at home.<sup>6</sup>

Relatedly, Nobuo Fukuda echoes Sheila Smith's remark that 3.11 "shook the foundations of Japanese confidence in their government" by pointing out that there has been a marked "disconnect between citizens and the state." In one poll taken nearly two years after the catastrophe, about half the Japanese respondents indicated that they trust local government but only one quarter of respondents said that they trust the central government.<sup>7</sup> We know from other polling data that most Japanese oppose increased public works spending for disaster prevention and that nearly two-thirds feel that the reconstruction budget was "wasted."<sup>8</sup>

Even if funds have not been wasted, reconstruction certainly has been slow. Twenty municipal governments in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima will fail to complete reconstruction projects by March 2016, the fifth anniversary of the disaster. Unable to wait, many residents have relocated outside the area, and those who stayed have registered their discontent in local elections. In

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Green recently reviewed these changes and attributed none to 3.11. He agreed that there is "growing Japanese anxiety about U.S. capabilities and intentions in Asia." See Michael J. Green, "Japan is Back: Unbundling Abe's Grand Strategy," Lowy Institute for International Policy, December 13, 2013 ~ <http://lowyinstitute.org/publications/japan-back-unbundling-abes-grand-strategy>.

<sup>5</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 26, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> *Jiji Press*, September 7, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 20, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, December 28, 2012; and *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, August 11, 2013.

Fukushima Prefecture, where some 150,000 residents still live as evacuees, incumbent mayors lost elections in Fukushima, Koriyama, Tomioka, and Iwaki in 2013 alone.

Nowhere is public opinion more focused than on the dangers resulting from the meltdown and cleanup of TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi reactor, another important issue raised by Fukuda and Dudden. Indeed, one of the most noteworthy developments in the past year and a half has been the publication of relatively optimistic assessments of the health effects of the meltdown. Ken Buesseler, an oceanographer at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, has argued that authorities should continue to monitor radioactivity in the area near the crippled reactors, but that "the dose from Fukushima cesium is...insignificant [and] much lower relative to other, more common sources, such as dental x-rays."<sup>9</sup> Scientists who advised the U.S. government during the Fukushima nuclear crisis acknowledge the massive problem of containing radioactive matter passing through the area near the crippled reactor, but take the unpopular position that Prime Minister Abe's claim to the International Olympic Committee that everything is "under control" is actually legitimate. In their judgment, stabilization of the nuclear fuel has been successful, and the reactor's potential for overheating will continue to diminish.<sup>10</sup>

The "grave concern about the fallout" to which Fukuda refers cuts two ways. Some argue that for most citizens this concern itself is a greater danger than the fallout. Physicists David Roberts of the U.S. State Department and Ted Lazo of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) insist that "stress can be at least as harmful as the radiation exposure itself."<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, a peer-reviewed examination of the radiation risk conducted by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) suggests that "it is unlikely to be able to attribute any health effects

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<sup>9</sup> See Ken Buesseler, "FAQ: Radiation from Fukushima," Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, August 28, 2013 ~ <http://www.whoi.edu/page.do?cid=94989&pid=83397&tid=3622>.

<sup>10</sup> Reid Tanaka and David Roberts, "Waterworld: How Worried Should We Be about Fukushima?" *Diplomat*, December 9, 2013. Three-quarters of Japanese did not believe Abe's claim to the International Olympic Committee that the radioactive water problem at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is under control. See *Asahi Shimbun*, October 7, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> David Roberts and Ted Lazo, "Fukushima, from Fear to Fact," Project Syndicate, July 18, 2013 ~ <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/reducing-misinformation-after-public-health-crises-by-ted-lazo-and-david-roberts-5aae3502217098a40fddbde>.

in the future among the general public and the vast majority of workers.”<sup>12</sup> Investigative journalists who have now had the chance to comb official records find this to have been the early, but apparently underreported, conclusion of U.S. government officials as well.<sup>13</sup>

While this critical issue is being sorted out, several other questions await fuller investigation and beg for better answers. For one thing, we still have much to learn about Japanese leadership during the crisis, particularly regarding the role of Prime Minister Naoto Kan. That he was the only principal actor whose views on nuclear power changed in response to the catastrophe makes Kan an outlier worth special attention. So do many of his policy successes, despite his villainization by political enemies. Kan’s personal “energy shift” has now been followed by that of former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi and a growing number of LDP politicians. We should be less puzzled by the predictability of most policy entrepreneurs who would “never waste a good crisis” than by the willingness of others to abandon long-held views and lead in new directions.

The second puzzle concerns political mobilization. Despite the size and visibility of the nuclear accident, it took a surprisingly long time for protests against nuclear power to reach critical mass. It was not until mid-July 2012, some sixteen months after the meltdown—and only after an unpopular decision to restart Japan’s reactors—that thousands of protesters became tens and hundreds of thousands of protestors in sustained weekly demonstrations, forcing the DPJ to endorse a zero-nuclear option. But those protests, the largest public demonstrations in Japan in half a century, are in policymakers’ rearview mirror; only several hundred protestors now gather in monthly demonstrations in front of the prime minister’s office in central Tokyo. The rhythms and reach of Japan’s civil society need fuller illumination.

These issues, taken together, point us toward how to improve our understanding of the future of democratic politics in Japan. The enduring lesson of 3.11, at least for analysts, is that we need more and better research

<sup>12</sup> The final UNSCEAR report is still unpublished. For preliminary summaries, see “No Immediate Health Risks from Fukushima Nuclear Accident Says UN Expert Science Panel,” UN Information Service, May 31, 2013 ~ <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2013/unisinf475.html>; and “No Immediate Health Risks from Fukushima Nuclear Accident Says UN Expert Science Panel,” UN Environment Programme, May 31, 2013 ~ <http://www.unep.org/NewsCentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2716&ArticleID=9518>. For a rebuttal, see Physicians for Social Responsibility et al., “Annotated Critique of United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) October 2013 Fukushima Report to the UN General Assembly,” October 18, 2013 ~ <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/critique-of-unscear-fukushima.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> See Paul Brustein, “Fukushima’s Worst-Case Scenarios,” *Slate*, September 26, 2013 ~ [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2013/09/fukushima\\_disaster\\_new\\_information\\_about\\_worst\\_case\\_scenarios.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/09/fukushima_disaster_new_information_about_worst_case_scenarios.html); and David Ropeik, “Fear vs. Radiation: The Mismatch,” *New York Times*, October 21, 2013 ~ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/22/opinion/fear-vs-radiation-the-mismatch.html>.

on the correlates of leadership and protest. That we still know too little may be a consequence of our going about our inquiries descriptively, without placing them squarely in their fuller comparative and theoretical contexts. Sheila Smith is right to ask for more history. We should all ask for better theory as well.

My mentor and old friend Michio Muramatsu suggests that I might have become “frustrated” by the hackneyed rhetoric of crisis and the brakes it applied to institutional change in the areas I studied. Wonderment is more like it. Like each of the participants in this roundtable, I continue to wonder how 3.11 will affect Japan. It was, after all, the largest natural disaster to befall Japan in the living memory of everyone but the diminishing few nonagenarians who were toddlers when Tokyo shook in 1923. All of us in this roundtable are familiar with theoretically grounded expectations for change at moments when stable institutional equilibria are punctuated by exogenous events such as war, depression, and natural disaster. We are all trained to look for political leaders who will frame catastrophic events and use them to tilt history in the direction of their choosing. And, as the conversation here reveals, we all wonder about how to know change when we see it, since seeing change clearly through “the fog of politics” is always so difficult. It is no wonder that we have to keep at it. ♦



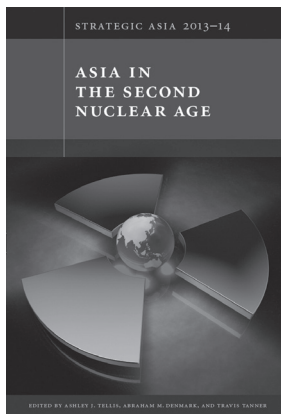


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Edited by Ashley J. Tellis, Abraham M. Denmark, and Travis Tanner

The National Bureau of Asian Research • October 2013 • 428 pp  
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