Mark R. Mullins and Koichi Nakano, eds., *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan: Political, Religious, and Sociocultural Responses*

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Collections of papers taken from conferences, particularly from targeted conferences, often have what appears to be a solid focus but also sometimes seem to have such a wide range of interests and interpretations that much of the focus gets diffused. This book has both characteristics. In the acknowledgments, the editors state that all but one of the papers in the book come from a conference held in 2013, "Japanese Responses to Social Crisis and Disaster, 1995 and 2011." In their introduction, they note that the 1995 and 2011 disasters had both natural and human components and suggest that there is substantial value in looking at the disasters together, from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The work is divided into four sets of responses: political responses (four chapters); religious responses (three chapters); social responses (three chapters); and cultural responses (two chapters), which the writers use in the literary, not the anthropological sense. Noting that Japan has been identified as having a strong statist tradition, they suggest a thesis that "it is of particular interest, therefore, to observe and analyze the various responses to major disasters, in other words, crisis moments when normalcy is suspended as the state retreats and leaves society and individuals in uncertain conditions" (4). This statement immediately raises the question about why, particularly in a crisis situation, the state retreats.

The question of "retreat" is partly, and indirectly, addressed in the political response chapters. In the first chapter, Koichi Nakano argues that the bureaucratic state has been using disasters to move to the right, toward economic liberalism and political illiberalism, at least since the 1980s (I would suggest earlier). Crises have been exploited to achieve political ends and, to some extent, the actual dealing competently with such crises is secondary. Ria Shibata, in the fourth chapter in this section, furthers this argument with a discussion of the use of these disasters by conservative politicians to strengthen a sense of national and nationalist identity, particularly through historical revisionism. She notes the increase in levels of conflict with both China and Korea following both disasters. An interesting observation is the conservative use of a "victim mentality" to promote and strengthen a nationalist identity.

Rikki Kersten moves the argument in another direction. She argues that the Operation Tomodachi response, the joint humanitarian and disaster relief missions by the US military and the Japanese Special Defense Forces, was what seem to be state (or two-state) responses to the disasters and, at the same time, presenting arguments for changing security policies. Changes could include substantially increasing the Special

Defense Forces (constitutional issues do not seem to be a problem for the Abe administration) or shifting it in a number of ways.

Jeff Kingston swings back with a quite strong denunciation of the rather spectacular incompetence exhibited not only by Tokyo Electronic Power Company (TEPCO—a semi-monopolistic, semi-public corporation) but also by a host of conservative politicians, state bureaucrats, other companies, and nuclear scientists. Here we have something of a statist "retreat" as well as an enormous muddying of the waters, leaving individuals impacted by the disasters with misinformation upon which they had to make decisions in life-threatening situations. He goes on to note that TEPCO and the state actors were not only not held responsible in any meaningful way, but also that there was a new law passed in December 2013 that allowed further mystification and disinformation under the label of state security.

The second grouping of chapters deals with religious responses, which may seem like a rather odd sequence. The rationale focuses on the government response to the Aum Shinrikyo incident because of the very rapid response to the sarin gas attack in contrast to the inadequate responses to the natural disasters. Mark Mullins does a very nice transitional chapter that deals with the relationship between organized religion and various political agendas. Barbara Ambros and Tim Graf follow this up with examinations of the responses of religious organizations to the various disasters. In particular, they examine both physical and spiritual aspects of disaster relief on the victims and religious practitioners, as well as the institutions themselves.

In the section on social responses, Simon Avenell leads off with an interesting analysis of volunteer efforts, often quite ineffective, in the wake of the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, particularly focusing on foreigners and ethnic minorities. While there were numerous problems with the volunteer responses to the 1995 disaster, many of the "lessons learned" were carried over to the volunteer responses in the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, making them far more effective than in 1995.

David Slater, Love Kindstrand, and Keiko Nishimura switch gears a bit in examining social media expansion between 1995 and 2011, contributing to the greater effectiveness of mobilization of volunteer activity and political protests in the latter case. They note that social media provides an incredibly nimble framework, which may allow it to survive government attempts at control simply by being too quick. They wisely end their essay with a note of caution about how far and in which direction the expansion of social media will go.

Phoebe Holdgrun and Barbara Holthus examine the impact, both real and imagined, of radiation, particularly in areas of food safety, as it affected families both in the immediate area and much further afield, such as Tokyo. They raise a number of interesting questions about women, in one sense fulfilling their roles as mothers protecting their families, while in another becoming politicized in response to government misinformation. This is an issue that still has ripples in Japanese society, with some families breaking up because the mother, with children, refuses to live in an area that is perceived as dangerous, like Kanto.

The last section, cultural responses, deals with the literary figures influenced by the 1995 and 2011 disasters. Rumi Sakamoto analyzes the political response of Kobayashi Yoshinori to the 2011 disaster, in which he moves away from the more conservative Liberal Democratic Party, where he had been a rather standard nationalist. However, Kobayashi maintains his nationalist position by arguing for a strong Japanese military.

Rebecca Suter's discussion of Murakami Haruki is a bit complicated. She points out that Murakami has long been portrayed as "apolitical," focusing on individual experiences rather than broad social patterns. However, she argues that the 2011 disaster seems to have pushed Murakami, like Kobayashi, into a position of being highly critical of the government's reaction to the disaster, specifically the proliferation of misinformation and the policy to try to restart the nuclear power plants without much in the way of concerns for safety.

Individually, this strong set of essays increases our understanding of various aspects of the disasters of 1995 and 2011. I would like to note that several of the contributors are PhD candidates (or were at the time of publication), which suggests a healthy flow of young scholars into the field. However, I found the work to be somewhat unfocused. There is little or no discussion of the rather obvious topic, namely that Japan does not have an effective national disaster relief system in place specifically to deal with these major events, which come every decade or so. Another topic deals with volunteers, as several of these contributions point out. Volunteer responses have improved between 1995 and 2011, but why is Japan depending on volunteers at all? I think it is obvious that the volunteer efforts are highly laudatory, but I have a hard time seeing reliance on volunteers, on an ad hoc basis, as a coherent national policy. Rather, this collection of essays has further reinforced my opinion that it is high time that Japan has a national response system, with skilled workers, appropriate equipment, and prepositioned emergency supplies to deal with disasters that will inevitably occur in the future.

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