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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.