

Preface

My first contact with Japan was in Los Angeles at the height of Japan's economic boom (later seen as "bubble"). It was an outwardly self-confident Japan I experienced, often telling America how it needed to reform its inefficient and profligate ways. As a young student anxious about my own future, I was drawn to learn more. In Japan, however, I learned and read that under this confident exterior was a nation deeply questioning what was at its essence, and what it should seek to project to others. Bookstores in the 1980s were full of lengthy pseudo-academic treatises on what it meant to be Japanese—the so-called *nihonjinron* (treatises on Japaneseness). Any student of Japanese trade policy at the time would see the effect of this self-conceived unique identity on policy. METI (then MITI) trade ministers were famous for their assertions that foreign skis had to be tested on unique Japanese snow, that Japanese stomachs digested foreign beef differently, and that "not a single grain" of foreign rice could be allowed to pollute Japanese cuisine.

Times have changed. Japan's national self-confidence was shattered by the collapse of the "bubble economy," fueling a new, yet related, literature on what place Japan had in the world if not to spread its superior economic practices. The death of the Showa emperor, Hirohito, and end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (if not the Cold War in East Asia related to North Korea and China) further pushed Japan to reconsider its identity. As this process continues, Japan's security practices are being transformed. Japan may not ever become "normal" from the perspective of a foreigner, but the process by which it seeks to become so nevertheless can be understood.

The past sixty years of Japanese historical development have been a time of

incredible social change and great economic success, and as well, a continuing battle to imagine and reimagine Japan's place in a hostile world. At the turn of the new century Japan faces not only a new domestic demographic and political composition, but a shifting and dangerous international environment as well. In this context it is seeking either to build a new security identity to ground its defense policies or to reform the security identity that contributed so much to the previous half century of peace and prosperity. This book explains the politics of this fundamentally political process in Japan and, more broadly, suggests some theoretical insights that can be applied from the Japanese case to other states grappling with security issues in the past and into the twenty-first century.

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