



Junji Banno and Jiro Yamaguchi. *The Abe Experiment & the Future of Japan: Don't Repeat History.*

Translated by Arthur Stockwin. Renaissance Books, Folkestone, Kent, 2016. pp. xiv + 147.
Notes. Index.

Hb. £45. ISBN 9 7818 9882 3216

Ronald Dore. *Cantankerous Essays: Musings of a Disillusioned Japanophile*

Renaissance Books, Folkestone, Kent, 2015. pp. xx + 185.

Hb.£19.95. ISBN 9 7818 9882 3193

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Books on serious subjects in Japan tend to be accompanied by a small pamphlet with a debate or discussion between the author or authors and one or more other scholars in the field. As well as providing publicity for the book, the aim is to tease out some of the themes and to put them into a wider context. The first book under review derives from this tradition although it is a stand-alone debate between a senior historian, Junji Banno, born in 1937, and a much younger social scientist, Jiro Yamaguchi, born in 1958. Banno was a student activist in his early days, an opponent of the 1960 revision of the Japan-USA Security Treaty. Like others, he settled down to a quieter academic life at the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo. Both authors have published widely, and three of Banno's works are available in English. They see a major swing to the right in Japanese politics since the resurgence of the Liberal Democratic Party and the return of Shinzo Abe as Prime Minister in December 2012. Abe is the first Japanese PM born since WWII but they see him as a figure more rooted in pre-War ideology than in the modern world. In economics and social matters, he looks back to the old imperial system where the people counted for little and bureaucrats knew best. He wishes to take Japan away from what he sees as a US-imposed Constitution. In particular, he wants to remove the constitutional restrictions on the Japanese military. The authors think that he

has no understanding of the wider effects of such policies. In particular, they are concerned about the lack of real understanding of the effects of the War. The Japanese, they agree, are too bound up with the War as it developed after December 1941, tending to concentrate on the War against the Anglo-Saxons. But Japan's War was more complicated than that; war with China dates from at least 1937 or even 1931. Unlike the former, which ended with the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the War with China petered out. This has left the Japanese people and their leaders with very little understanding of the effects of the China War and why the issue of Japan becoming 'a normal nation' in military terms plays badly in Asia.

There is some hard-hitting stuff in Banno and Yamaguchi, but they appear positively staid beside the distinguished British sociologist, economist and Japan specialist Ronald Dore, whose essays cover some of the same ground. As he indicates in his Introduction, he rather enjoys being cantankerous and no doubt, at 91, he feels that he can say what he likes. He too has little time for Abe or for his social and international politics. His essays on China and North Korea may surprise some, for he casts doubts on the Japanese position over issues such as the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands issue and North Korean abductions. It is not only Japanese politics that comes in for scrutiny. There is much on international economics, sometimes tinged with regret that his views did not get the attention now given to those of Thomas Piketty and others. He is scathing on the overproduction of qualifications and what he sees as empty scholarship. His views on the Non-Proliferation Treaty are unorthodox; for him it is past its sell-by date and should be replaced. Neither does he accept the conventional view of why Russia under Putin behaves as it does. For him, NATO expansion lies at the root of the problem. Dore will make you think even if he annoys you in the process.

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