This double issue, Volume 22, inaugurates our editorship of the re-vamped journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ), now called *Contemporary Japan* and formerly known as *Japanstudien*. Founded in 1989 by Professor Josef Kreiner, who was also the DIJ’s founding director, this journal underwent several transformations as the DIJ gained recognition as a centre of scholarship and international encounters in the world of Japanese Studies. *Contemporary Japan* takes this process one step further. When it first appeared, *Japanstudien* was an outlet for the work of DIJ staff, while *Contemporary Japan* reaches out to the scientific community at large. It is a peer reviewed journal that only publishes articles that have passed the scrutiny of qualified specialists.

This is my opportunity to thank those who helped to make this step possible by lending their expertise: the twelve scholars who agreed to serve on the editorial board. The fact that out of twelve invitations we received twelve positive replies was a great encouragement to go ahead with this project. We rely on their judgement and look forward to working closely together with the board in the years ahead.

The composition of the board reflects the range of relevant academic disciplines involved in Japanese studies. Modern-day Japan is an object of scholarly research from several different points of view spanning subject areas from the social and political sciences and economics to the humanities. *Contemporary Japan* aims to provide a platform for multifaceted discussions of Japan from a cross-disciplinary perspective allowing research carried out in a particular discipline to be informed by findings in related fields.

*Contemporary Japan* is focussed on our time and aims at deepening our understanding of Japan’s domestic situation and its position in the world. At the same time, we acknowledge that in many instances extant conditions must be appreciated against the background of historical de-
velopments. Indeed, Japan’s modern history is one of the principal reasons why it has attracted more scholarly attention than most other countries outside the Western world. It was the first non-Western country to embrace capitalism and, in view of the imperial powers’ material superiority, embarked on a course of decisive and rapid modernization. In the course of the necessary adjustments during the turbulent Meiji decades, Japan all but reinvented itself. Many observers believe that at the present time Japan faces similar challenges.

Japan is in the midst of far-reaching changes that go well beyond the confines of a single discipline. There are three major forces underlying these changes: (1) population decline and ageing, (2) economic globalization, and (3) an ideological sea change. The latter is only now taking shape, but it seems to include diminishing trust in the politico-economic system and the market as a panacea for all ills, without a clear alternative being discernible. In the course of the last decades, many of the guiding principles that were taken for granted in Japan ever since the end of World War II lost their shine or had to be discarded altogether. The all-middle class society collapsed; economic growth has at best paused; the collective optimism and the will “to catch up” have faded away; the family-based society is rapidly being replaced by the “disconnected society” (*muen shakai*); and the pre-eminence of Japanese technology is challenged by serious competitors. Uncertainty prevails in Japan today, in ideological and economic terms, as well as in foreign policy. Only by observing and investigating how society, the economy, government and culture adjust to these changes can we hope to gain a sense of where Japan is headed. That is what we hope *Contemporary Japan* will do.

A distinguishing feature of *Contemporary Japan* is that while all volumes will include unsolicited papers on any topic concerning contemporary Japan, many will also feature a specific topic for which a call for papers will be issued. In both cases we favour submissions that report on empirical research, propose new theoretical modes or are in other ways thought-provoking and contribute to developing the field of Japanese Studies. Areas of interest include Japanese society, gender studies, cultural studies, economics and business, politics and international relations, religious studies, modern history, linguistics, literature and media studies, and popular culture.

We hope that in this wide field *Contemporary Japan* will prove a useful rallying point. Suggestions and new ideas from readers and contributors will help us to realize this objective.

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