Why Japan Matters

Rediscovering why Japan matters to the world

The Concept
During its two “lost decades” of stagnation and drift, Japan came to be regarded as a global has-been, offering the world little more than a grim cautionary tale of complacency and decline. But today, the world is taking a renewed look at Japan. Economic, political and social troubles elsewhere have brought a growing recognition of Japan’s strengths, and its still enormous potential as the world’s third-largest economy. At the same time, the shifting balance of power in its own geo-political neighborhood has also appeared to give Japan a new resolve to reverse its long slide, and assert its relevance in a suddenly less certain, more multipolar world.

This is the moment that we would like to explore more deeply in the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation’s research project Why Japan Matters. The project has two broad goals. One is to reveal how Japan — not just its national government, but its people, its companies, and its ideas and values — is already contributing to the world, often in more ways than observers abroad and in Japan itself realize. The other is to seek out areas in which Japan could potentially offer even more, and exert a greater global influence commensurate with its still formidable economic heft. We aim to come up with constructive criticisms and creative proposals to allow Japan to more fully realize its vast potential, and play a more active role in upholding the global liberal order.

The Structure
The project has assembled an international and diverse research team of prominent academics, journalists, lawyers and consultants to serve as authors for the “Why Japan Matters” publication. They will write on a wide range of topics, from global civilian-power diplomacy to inbound foreign tourism, disaster resilience to education, reforms in corporate governance to the growing global popularity of Japanese designers, artisans and chefs. The team will avoid retelling well known stories like “Cool Japan.”

“Might this be the time for Japan to step forward and play a larger global role?”

-Martin Fackler, Editor/Director of the WJM Project.
Former Tokyo Bureau Chief, New York Times

We want to hear why you think Japan matters: whyjapan@rebuildjpn.org