Asia's Flying Geese: How Regionalization Shapes Japan *by Walter F. Hatch. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2010. 304 pp. $24.95.*

This is not an easy book to read. It is filled with the author's self-deprecatory remarks, such as: "the results of my fieldwork are neither extraordinary nor groundbreaking" (p. 88), and "[this] book does not break completely new ground" (p. 247). As if to confirm such statements, the book is littered with quotes from other writers, so that the author's own contributions tend to be buried under them. That is a shame, for the book does undertake something important, that is, delineating factors that account for Japan's economic troubles that began in the 1990s and continued into the new century.

The economic "miracle" of the 1950s and the 1960s, fueled by rapidly expanding export trade, came to an end in the 1970s, during the oil shock and the energy crisis; but the country seemed to recover rather quickly, and after the crucial Plaza Accord of 1985 that resulted in a vast appreciation of the yen against the dollar, Japan emerged as a financial as well as a trading giant in the world economy. But then it stumbled, and within a few years began to lose its economic leadership position, falling behind China and apparently about to be overtaken by such others as India and Brazil.

The book links this phenomenon to Japan's domestic political economy and its ties to Asia, the two factors that are summed up in the terms "relationism" and "regionalization" in the author's presentation. He portrays an intimate system of networks among Japan's officials and businesses, which, when confronted with the challenges of globalization after the 1980s, resorted to building an Asian regional economy defined by a "flying geese" formation. According to this formula, the nation's elites sought to retain its economic position through a regional system of social and business networks. The strategy did not work, however, because the "relationism" proved too rigid to enable Japanese businesses to compete with Western and Asian newcomers working without such constraints. Western nations exported their capital to Asia and established factories, and in time, Asian countries began to produce their own goods for exporting purposes. The intimate networks of officials and business elites in Japan proved too inflexible to cope with the new situation. The domestic system did not allow for technological innovations or small-scale initiatives to compete in Asia, and in the meantime, public finance was in a shambles, as tax revenue did not keep up with skyrocketing expenditures for public works and social programs. In the age of fierce global competition for labor and markets, the worst strategy was to maintain the old ways of doing things, and yet that was what the Japanese held onto until Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi appeared on the scene in 2001 and began dismantling the age-old edifice.

The era of "elite regionalization" finally came to an end. This, the author argues, augurs well for Japan. "Exposed more fully to the strong winds of globalization, Japan is finally undergoing structural change in the domestic institutions of its political economy" (p. 222). It remains to be seen whether such cautious optimism will prove to have been prescient.

The book, then, is about a country's failure to adapt to globalization. Too much rigidity, too much reliance on long-standing networks, both domestically and regionally—these are not adequate approaches to global competition. The book makes this very clear. One only wishes that these important perspectives were presented more systematically and in a straightforward chronological fashion without cluttering the book with constant back-tracking and repetitiousness and with all sorts of references to secondary work.

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Adrift: Charting Our Course Back to a Great Nation *by William C. Harris and Steven C. Beschloss. Amherst, NY, Prometheus Books, 2011. 266 pp. $25.00.*

The "big picture" political book has become a staple of political campaigns, in which high-profile politicians diagnose the full range of problems besetting the country and present their broad agenda for change; Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope* is perhaps only the best known of these volumes. Authors without such a preexisting audience tend to either rely on a single "big idea" to tie together their books or else provide original data with detailed policy analysis in order to persuade readers. Thomas L. Friedman's various concept-driven books fit into the prior category, while the work of most rank-and-file social scientists falls into the latter mode.

Adrift: Charting Our Course Back to a Great Nation fits none of those categories, which all too often works to its disadvantage. The book offers the kind of "big picture" analysis that campaign books provide, but without the built-in platform enjoyed by high-level politicians or government officials or their ability to effect change. Its focus on a full spectrum of contemporary problems is certainly ambitious. But in the absence of either a single "big idea" to advance (other than the now-common lament that the United States is "adrift") or newly collected and analyzed data to present, *Adrift* cannot achieve the "clarion call" effect that the authors are reaching for.

The volume appears to be mostly driven by author William C. Harris, who speaks in the first person in the preface, where he notes that "to bring this book into reality, I turned to Steven C. Beschloss," who is a journalist. It draws heavily upon Harris's experiences working in Arizona and Ireland and as a scientist and as the President and CEO of Science Foundation Arizona, and less clearly from Beschloss.

Adrift ranges widely across different manifestations of American decline, with short chapters laying out core challenges and then offering prescriptions for effective government, more-responsive politicians, excellence in the classroom, immigration policies that attract talented people, an improved climate for employment, regaining the edge in innovation, and effective leadership.