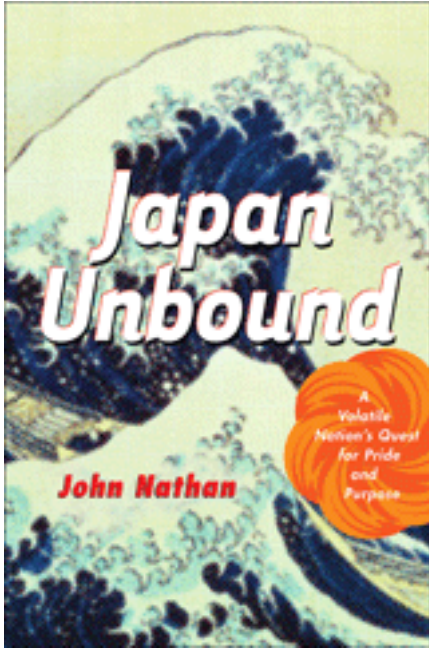


Press Release

Japan Unbound

by John Nathan

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About the Book

"Japan feels like a bewildered giant," writes John Nathan in *Japan Unbound: A Nation's Volatile Quest for Pride and Purpose* (Houghton Mifflin; publication date: February 18, 2004). The second-largest economy in the world, home to the largest city on the globe, Japan is still stumbling from a decade long recession. Its schools, youth, families, and workforce are suffering a profound loss of stability.

Today's Japan is a roiling, tragicomic realm, where the governor of Tokyo prefecture spouts anti-American invective and ultranationalist propaganda. The collapse of traditional loyalties between employers and employees ushers in entrepreneurship and a mysterious spate of "exhaustion death," by which businessmen suddenly expire without apparent cause. The school system is in crisis, as test scores plunge dramatically, and an epidemic of violent crime shows no sign of letting up.

Nathan relates these and other drastic changes in the culture with immediacy and élan, through a series of illuminating profiles. He speaks to teachers at a middle school in a quiet residential neighborhood outside Tokyo and witnesses firsthand the violence and aggression displayed by students in their classrooms. He meets with families in urban and rural areas, and finds that community — the traditional basis for a substantial sense of self — has in many cases been eroded by new trends in business. He shares his notes from a meeting at Right WayStation, a "career transition service" that was founded in 1994 in response to a building wave of corporate layoffs. The company's clients are taught proper employer-employee etiquette through mock interviews, including every detail from the appropriate number of bows to the manner in which the prospective employee should enter the employer's office ("three knocks on the door: four is too insistent two is what we use to determine whether a toilet stall is occupied").

Nathan recounts the sea changes in business. He interviews Carlos Ghosn, the Brazilian president of Nissan, once scorned as an outsider, now hailed for reviving a moribund giant, and Tomoko Namba, a tough and ambitious young woman who abandoned her family and home (as well as sleep and weekends) to move up through the ranks and eventually start her own very successful Internet company. Namba is an example of the growing class of entrepreneurs — young businessmen and women who convey vitality, excitement, and hopefulness about the future. All are characterized by a fearless, unstoppable determination to launch themselves against the force exerted in Japanese society by the group.

Nathan profiles several leaders in culture and politics. We meet Yoshinori Kobayashi, a demagogue and ultranationalist cartoonist. His series called *The Arrogant-ism Proclamations*, informed by the notion that arrogance is the only antidote powerful enough to rouse Japan from its subservience to foreign ideologies and foreign interests, has sold more than twenty million volumes. Politicians like Shintaro Ishihara, the governor of Tokyo and the country's most powerful nationalist, and Yasuo Tanaka, hero and champion of the burgeoning Japanese left, are also featured.

All this upheaval has significant ramifications for The United States. Our political and economic ties with Japan are among the most important and intimate we have in the world. But as Nathan shows, Japanese are rejecting their traditions wholesale, and they view their fifty-year-old connection with the United States with growing antagonism. This is evident throughout society. Hollywood blockbusters are losing Japanese audiences, some of the largest English conversation schools have closed, and even fashion places a new emphasis on traditional costumes from Burma, Thailand, and China, as opposed to Western garb.

While the crisis in Japan is very real, the country's transformation isn't without its hints of promise. As Nathan writes, "Japan's economy is stalled, but the society is in motion." The country is throwing off the chains that have long's rights, entrepreneurship, women artistic creativity, and effective democracy. In *Japan Unbound*, Nathan disputes conventional wisdom about Japan and replaces it with a brilliant and at times alarming vision of a country brimming with pride, uncertainty, creativity, fear, and hope.

About the Author

John Nathan, the Takashima Professor of Japanese Cultural Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, has translated the novels of Yukio Mishima and Kenzaburo Oe into English, and has written the definitive biography of Mishima. His previous book, *Sony: The Private Life*, received wide acclaim, including a spot on *Business Week's* list of the best books of 1999. Nathan contributes to *The New Yorker* and other publications.

Acclaim for *Sony: The Private Life* by John Nathan

"There are enough unforgettable characters, great lines, and killer scenes to make [this] an entertaining story — one that kept me glued to my seat." — Sylvia Nasar, *New York Times*

"A masterly portrait . . . insightful, probing, and extremely well written . . . this is as good as it gets." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"A vivid and fascinating glimpse into the Japanese soul of this most un-Japanese company . . . Nathan's talents as interviewer and synthesizer are formidable." — Ronald Dore, senior research fellow, London School of Economics

"*Sony* provides an unusually readable and accessible depiction of how this lattice of winks and nods succeeds in accomplishing its goals." — *San Francisco Chronicle*

"If there is a better business book this year, we will be very lucky." — *Newsweek*

"An electrifying epic . . . well written and entertaining." — *Financial Times*

Talking Points for *Japan Unbound* by John Nathan

- In September 1990, the Tokyo Stock Exchange lost 48 percent of its value in four days, a crash that dwarfed the "Black Monday" of 1987.
- In 1993, the land bubble burst in Japan, creating the largest asset deflation in the history of modern capitalism.
- Still mired in its longest recession in postwar history, Japan is perceived by many observers as having permanently lost its footing in the world; some argue that the country is in the process of devolving into a third-world nation.
- Every morning in Tokyo and other cities around Japan, thousands of unemployed white-collar workers set out from home in their business suits, as though they were commuting to work as usual. Recently, movie theaters in Tokyo have begun to schedule first screenings at an unheard-of 9:30 a.m. for those who prefer to sit alone in the dark with their mortification.
- The youngest segment of the juvenile community in Japan, children between the ages of eleven and fifteen, are increasingly the perpetrators of the most violent and perverted crimes. In the first eleven months of 2001, juvenile crime increased 12.5 percent over the previous year to 920,000 incidents, a postwar high.
- In the United States, suspension from school is a legal option; in Japan today, suspension and expulsion are taboo under any circumstances. Promotion is based on attendance only, and holding a student back is very rare: a high school student can graduate with failing grades in all subjects if he has attended classes 50 percent of the time.
- Japan's entrepreneurs have not emerged from the ranks of the unemployed. (Expulsion from the embrace of a corporate family is a terrible blow to confidence and self-esteem.) They tend to be not only mavericks but quintessential outsiders who have never fit in or even wanted to belong.
- Yoshinori Kobayashi, a demagogue and ultranationalist cartoonist who came on the scene in the early 1990s, has become incredibly popular. His series called *The Arrogant-ism*

