



## Japan and the Shackles of the Past (What Everyone Needs to Know)

By R. Taggart Murphy

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**Japan and the Shackles of the Past (What Everyone Needs to Know)** By R. Taggart Murphy

Japan is one of the world's wealthiest and most technologically advanced nations, and its rapid ascent to global power status after 1853 remains one of the most remarkable stories in modern world history. Yet it has not been an easy path; military catastrophe, political atrophy, and economic upheavals have made regular appearances from the feudal era to the present. Today, Japan is seen as a has-been with a sluggish economy, an aging population, dysfunctional politics, and a business landscape dominated by yesterday's champions. Though it is supposed to be America's strongest ally in the Asia-Pacific region, it has almost entirely disappeared from the American radar screen.

In *Japan and the Shackles of the Past*, R. Taggart Murphy places the current troubles of Japan in a sweeping historical context, moving deftly from early feudal times to the modern age that began with the Meiji Restoration. Combining fascinating analyses of Japanese culture and society over the centuries with hard-headed accounts of Japan's numerous political regimes, Murphy not only reshapes our understanding of Japanese history, but of Japan's place in the contemporary world. He concedes that Japan has indeed been out of sight and out of mind in recent decades, but contends that this is already changing. Political and economic developments in Japan today risk upheaval in the pivotal arena of Northeast Asia, inviting comparisons with Europe on the eve of the First World War. America's half-completed effort to remake Japan in the late 1940s is unraveling, and the American foreign policy and defense establishment is directly culpable for what has happened. The one apparent exception to Japan's malaise is the vitality of its pop culture, but it's actually no exception at all; rather, it provides critical clues to what is going on now.

With insights into everything from Japan's politics and economics to the texture of daily life, gender relations, the changing business landscape, and popular and high culture, *Japan and the Shackles of the Past* is the indispensable guide to understanding Japan in all its complexity.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Tag Murphy knows so much about Japan that he can be elegantly spare and thematic in his analysis. He clearly loves the people there so much that he can be highly critical of many of their institutions. He is so serious about the country that he can be playful and earthy in his approach. This is a very well-informed, equally well-written book that I highly recommend to anyone dealing with or thinking about Japan." --James Fallows, *The Atlantic*

"When I started visiting Japan in the early 1990s, I looked for a book that would explain to me the country's history. I wasn't interested in what restaurant to visit, or in a dry recitation of dynastic succession, but in the historical interplay of the country's politics, economics, and culture, Taggart Murphy, who previously wrote a definitive study of Japan's bubble economy, has written that book, and it comes as well with a provocative thesis about the breakdown of the American relationship with Japan. Anyone interested in Japan or in the U.S.-Japan relationship should read this book." --John Judis, Senior Editor, *The New Republic*

"Japan is not a free country, and this book tells you why. It is present-day Washington's biggest and most significant vassal, dwarfing any European country. It has adopted America's enemies to its own detriment, inviting future disaster for the region and possibly the world. By the time that Murphy's book gets to that crucial part of recent history, not yet told in any other book, he readies the reader for these shackles by offering a tapestry of the integrated political-economic strands, along with cultural institutions, under the feet of Japan's bureaucrats, politicians, bankers and industrialists." --Karel van Wolferen, author of *The Enigma of Japanese Power*

"Murphy sheds much light on Japan's current dependence upon the U.S. for maintenance of its political system and its future prospects, closing with an in-depth analysis of the current administration." --*Publishers Weekly*

#### About the Author

**R. Taggart Murphy** is Professor of International Political Economy at the MBA Program in International Business at the Tokyo campus of the University of Tsukuba. He is the author of award-winning books on modern Japan and a number of articles in publications from *The New Republic* to the *National Interest* and *The New Left Review*. A former investment banker, he has also taught at the university's main campus, was a Non-Resident Senior Visiting Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and is a coordinator of the web's leading clearing-house for serious writing on Japan, *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*.

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