



Can Japan Rise Again?

by **Patrick J. Buchanan** ([more by this author](#))

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We can thank Providence that the earthquake was not 150 miles closer to Tokyo, else Japan's dead might number in the millions.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan calls it the worst crisis since World War II. Yet, horrendous as it is, it does not, thus far, compare with that. For the earthquake dead are not 1 percent of those who perished in World War II.

Between 1942 and 1945, Japan was stripped naked of an empire that embraced Formosa, Korea, Manchuria, the entire [China](#) coast, all of French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), the Philippines and the Western Pacific out to Guam and south to Guadalcanal.

She sustained 2 million military dead and 500,000 to a million civilian dead under U.S. carpet-bombing that reduced her great cities to smoldering rubble and [Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#) to atomic ash.

Yet, 25 years after the most devastating defeat in modern history, Japan boasted the second largest and most dynamic economy on earth.

Under the proconsulship of Gen. MacArthur, Japan rose to her feet, renounced war and reached an annual growth rate of 10 percent by the 1960s, 5 percent in the 1970s, 4 percent in the 1980s. Smaller than Montana and with fewer resources, she created an economy half as large as the U.S. and in many ways technologically superior.

An extraordinary accomplishment of an extraordinary people.

At the end of the 1980s, Japan seemed poised to surpass America.

It did not happen. The last two decades were lost decades, with [Japan's economy](#) shrinking to a third of that of the United States. Last year, Japan was overtaken as the world's second largest economy by China. Beijing now produces more automobiles and has a trade surplus with America that dwarfs that of Japan.

In 1988, eight of the 10 largest companies in the world were Japanese. Today, Japan does not have one company in the top 20 and only six in the top 100. Her national debt is 200 percent of gross

domestic product.

Can Japan come back from this earthquake and 20 years of economic stagnation and political malaise to recover the dynamism she exhibited in the decades after [World War II](#)?

To do so will require a far greater miracle. The reason for such pessimism may be summed up in a single word: [demography](#).

Japan has 127 million people, her highest population ever. Yet, the United Nations projects that 25 million Japanese will vanish by 2050. Why? Japan is the oldest country on earth, with a median age of 45 and a fertility rate below zero population growth for 40 years.

To sustain a population, the fertility rate of its women must be 2.1 children. Japan's rate, 1.27 children per woman, is not two-thirds of what is required to replace her present population.

In 1960, when Japan was striding to overtake West Germany as the No. 2 economy, 49 percent of her people were under 25 years of age. Less than 8 percent was over 60.

Today, only 23 percent of Japan's population is under 25, more than 30 percent of all Japanese are over 60, and Japan's [median age](#) has shot up to 45. Japan is projected to lose 3 million people this decade, and nearly 6 million in the 2020s.

To put it starkly, Japan is aging, shrinking and dying.

In 2050, less than 19 percent of all Japanese will be under 25, while 44 percent will be over 60. The [median age](#) will reach 55, and this assumes a U.N.-projected rise in the fertility rate that is nowhere in sight.

Writing on the decline in Japanese students in U.S. universities, *The Washington Post* reports: "The number of children (in Japan) under the age of 15 has fallen for 28 consecutive years. The size of the nation's high school graduating class has shrunk by 35 percent in two decades."

Where have all the children gone?

Yet what is happening to Japan is not unique to Japan.

Russia's population is shrinking at two to three times the pace of Japan's. She is losing half a million people a year. Germany and Ukraine are running Japan a close race. Only immigration from Africa, South Asia and the Middle East enables Britain to project [population growth](#). Native-born Brits are departing and dying.

Indeed, every one of the East Asian and European nations that scored highest on the international tests for math and science has a fertility rate that assures an aging and shrinking population.

Where is world population growth to come from?

Between now and 2050, Africa's population will double to 2 billion. Latin America and Asia will add over a billion people.

Just six nations, Muslim and poor -- Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, [Pakistan](#) and Turkey -- are expected to add almost 500 million people to their combined populations by 2050.

If demography is destiny, the sun is not only setting in the Land of the Rising Sun. The sun is setting in the West.

Mr. Buchanan is a nationally syndicated columnist and author of Churchill, Hitler, and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World, ["The Death of the West,"](#) ["The Great Betrayal,"](#) ["A Republic, Not an Empire"](#) and ["Where the Right Went Wrong."](#)

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