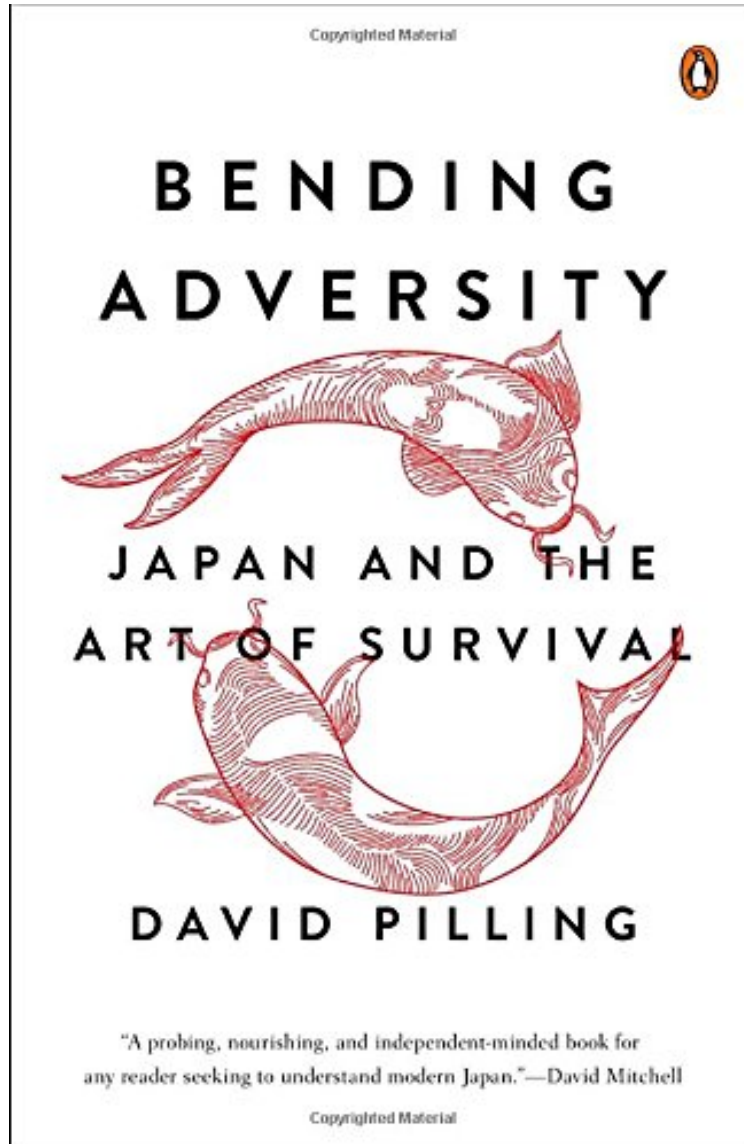


(Library ebook) Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival

Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival

David Pilling

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David Pilling : Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. To Instruct and To Delight By Anne Mills "To instruct and to delight", which Horace called the aim of the poet, is at least as appropriate for the non-fiction author. All too often, instruction spills over into lecturing and any delight is swamped by turgid prose. David Pilling's "Bending Adversity",

however, is a sterling example of just how instructive and delightful non-fiction can be. Mr. Pilling, the Financial Times Tokyo bureau chief from 2002 to 2008, has an expert knowledge of Japan's economic and political systems. He also shows a perceptive appreciation for Japanese history and its culture. Finally, he is a gifted and entertaining writer, who can focus on touching vignettes or on complex ideas with equal precision. This is perhaps the best book I have read about Japan in quite a while; I strongly recommend it to anyone who is interested in where Japan is now. Mr. Pilling begins and ends with the triple shock of March 2011 -- the earthquake, the tsunami, and the release of radiation from the Fukushima nuclear plant. He brilliantly describes what the stricken area looked like after the disaster, and how people behaved during and after the crisis. They behaved very well, which brings him to his trope of "bending with adversity". The Japanese as a people, a friend tells him, are not destroyed by calamity, because they adapt, move on, and begin again. He explores this idea through the last 150 years of Japanese history, when violent change (the opening of Japan, Japan's defeat in World War 2) provoked dramatic adaptation. The middle part of the book discusses Japan's economic situation, and Mr. Pilling very pertinently points out that reports of its death have been exaggerated. He quotes a British parliamentarian, visiting Tokyo in the mid-2000's. Stunned by the brilliant lights and hyperactivity of the capital, the MP said "If this is a recession I want one". Japan has lost ground relatively, in part because of falling prices and a declining population: price-adjusted GDP per capita has held up much better than other measures. And this is reflected in the fact that in absolute terms Japan still enjoys very high living standards, very low crime, and a low unemployment rate. This isn't to say there are not problems. There are, and Mr. Pilling shows how some of these impeded recovery from the 2011 disaster, and may in fact have contributed to it. A cosy bureaucratic/business establishment acts to paper over, to conceal, to misdirect. Politics remains ineffective; it is two decades since the bubble collapsed, but many of the reforms that could have alleviated or avoided it remain undone. And Japan's external relations are increasingly problematic, in large part because of the rise of China, but also because of Japan's unwillingness to confront its past. Still and all, Mr. Pilling's exploration of Japan is much more hopeful, and much less cliched, than much other recent writing on Japan. His book is well worth reading.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. History of Modern Japan Book Review - Dakota Darkstar By Dakota Darkstar David Pillings book *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival* made a strong argument for the incredible ability of Japan to seemingly rise time and again from the ashes and rubble of adversities and complete ruptures to society that it has faced and the focus of Pillings book continues to face throughout its history. While attempting to pinpoint any aspect of a culture and argue for its ever-present effect in a cultures history is anything but daunting, let alone attempting to do so in a mere 300 page book, it is nonetheless an imperative process to explore as history is far more than simple dates and events. To quote a valued professor of mine, History doesnt occur in a vacuum. Further reinforced by Pilling, cultures are not immutable. Like language they evolve and adapt, though they may take generations to do so. To seek to explain the history of a country let alone its future on the basis of supposedly fixed national characteristics is to succumb to a determinist view of the world. We should challenge some of the assumptions that give rise to such opinions. This is the goal of Pillings book, to look into the heart of Japan and get in touch with its people and understand the personality of a nation who is arguably perhaps the most skilled country in the Art of Survival. The only criticism that I can offer to Pilling would be to write a longer book, though I understand his focus on the more recent events of triple shock of 2011, I would have liked if he had discussed more about Jared Diamonds, ideologies and the Tokugawa period of Japan. Though as a journalist, living interview-able people are equally important and Pilling did very well collecting and synthesizing his sources to produce a very effective argument for Japans ability to Bend Adversity.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. David Pilling does a great job to show the adversity that Japan overcame economically ... By Nathan David Pilling does a great job to show the adversity that Japan overcame economically and socially throughout Japans history. He not only shows how Japan was able to overcome those adversities but explains why it mattered that they did. He writes about Japans ability to bend adversity in a way that invites the readers to do more research. He gives just enough information with specific situations that go along with them to allow the readers to understand parts of Japans economic and social history. The way he writes not only invites the readers to do more research to learn but gets them to think critically about Japans social and economic history. It gives insight to how Japan could adapt and bend adversity in the many ways they did. His book is a great way to briefly summarize adversity Japan faced whether it was economically or socially. Although he does a great job showing adversity in Japan, the fluidity of his book could have been better. He could have made it so that the topics were more together than separated in his book. Even then it was overall, still, an easy book to read and comprehend.

[A]n excellent book... The Economist Financial Times Asia editor David Pilling presents a fresh vision of Japan, drawing on his own deep experience, as well as observations from a cross section of Japanese citizenry, including novelist Haruki Murakami, former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi, industrialists and bankers, activists and artists, teenagers and octogenarians. Through their voices, Pilling's *Bending Adversity* captures the dynamism and diversity of contemporary Japan. Pillings exploration begins with the 2011 triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown. His deep reporting reveals both Japans vulnerabilities and its resilience and pushes him to understand the countrys past through cycles of crisis and reconstruction. Japans survivalist mentality has carried it through

tremendous hardship, but is also the source of great destruction: It was the nineteenth-century struggle to ward off colonial intent that resulted in Japans own imperial endeavor, culminating in the devastation of World War II. Even the postwar economic miracle the manufacturing and commerce explosion that brought unprecedented economic growth and earned Japan international clout might have been a less pure victory than it seemed. In *Bending Adversity* Pilling questions what was lost in the countrys blind, aborted climb to #1. With the same rigor, he revisits 1990 the year the economic bubble burst, and the beginning of Japans lost decade to ask if the turning point might be viewed differently. While financial struggle and national debt are a reality, post-growth Japan has also successfully maintained a stable standard of living and social cohesion. And while life has become less certain, opportunities in particular for the young and for women have diversified. Still, Japan is in many ways a country in recovery, working to find a way forward after the events of 2011 and decades of slow growth. *Bending Adversity* closes with a reflection on what the 2012 reelection of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and his radical antideflation policy, might mean for Japan and its future. Informed throughout by the insights shared by Pillings many interview subjects, *Bending Adversity* rigorously engages with the social, spiritual, financial, and political life of Japan to create a more nuanced representation of the oft-misunderstood island nation and its people. The *Financial Times* David Pilling quotes a visiting MP from northern England, dazzled by Tokyos lights and awed by its bustling prosperity: If this is a recession, I want one. Not the least of the merits of Pillings hugely enjoyable and perceptive book on Japan is that he places the denunciations of two allegedly lost decades in the context of what the country is really like and its actual achievements. The *Telegraph* (UK) Pilling, the Asia editor of the *Financial Times*, is perfectly placed to be our guide, and his insights are a real rarity when very few Western journalists communicate the essence of the worlds third-largest economy in anything but the most superficial ways. Here, there is a terrific selection of interview subjects mixed with great reportage and fact selection... he does get people to say wonderful things. The novelist Haruki Murakami tells him: When we were rich, I hated this country... well-written... valuable. *Publishers Weekly* (starred): "A probing and insightful portrait of contemporary Japan."

From *Booklist* An earthquake, a tsunami, and a nuclear meltdown made 2011 a particularly rough year for Japan, revealing long-running worries about seismic instability, economic vulnerability, and the need for political reform. Yet the nation has recovered well, continuing as a major economic and geopolitical power. Pilling, a *Financial Times* correspondent to Japan for seven years, examines the extraordinary resilience of the Japanese people and institutions through recent disasters and more historical catastrophes. Even as it continues to recover from the angst of having lost its way as a leader in technology, Japan draws on a culture that recognizes the opportunity to transform bad fortune or bend adversity. Pilling talked to a broad cross section of Japan young and old, industrialists, bankers, teachers, students, shopkeepers for a vibrant portrait of triumph over adversity. He details Japans constant trade-offs between, on the one hand, stifling conformity and a paternalism that protects citizens from the harsh realities of market forces and, on the other, a surprising ability to adapt to change en masse even as it also balances its relationships with the U.S. and China. --Vanessa Bush James Fallows, *The New York Times* Book The ground-zero disaster reporting will command the attention of any reader. Pilling vividly recreates the waves of different sorts of destruction... For me, these scenes powerfully recall John Herseys Hiroshima--and although the causes were obviously different, in each case the longest-lasting source of damage came from radiation... Pilling is eloquent and direct. *The Los Angeles Times* [Pilling] is a splendid writer. Readers already familiar with Japan will learn more, or at least learn to think about it differently; those new to it could ask for no better starting place... Pillings *Bending Adversity* is an important and urgent read. The *Financial Times* David Pilling quotes a visiting MP from northern England, dazzled by Tokyos lights and awed by its bustling prosperity: If this is a recession, I want one. Not the least of the merits of Pillings hugely enjoyable and perceptive book on Japan is that he places the denunciations of two allegedly lost decades in the context of what the country is really like and its actual achievements. The *Telegraph* (UK) Pilling, the Asia editor of the *Financial Times*, is perfectly placed to be our guide, and his insights are a real rarity when very few Western journalists communicate the essence of the worlds third-largest economy in anything but the most superficial ways. Here, there is a terrific selection of interview subjects mixed with great reportage and fact selection... he does get people to say wonderful things. The novelist Haruki Murakami tells him: When we were rich, I hated this country... well-written... valuable. *The Observer* (UK) Authoritative and entertaining... [Pilling] deftly manages the trick of illustrating grand sweep with small anecdote... This book makes a good fist of disentangling the curious charms of the Japanese and for helping outsiders to understand them a little better. *The Economist* The result is *Bending Adversity*, an excellent book for which 3/11, as the event is known in Japan, is as much pretext as subject matter. For Mr Pillings thesis is that, horrifying though it was, the triple disaster three years ago was neither a game-changing event nor truly novel... This will be a disappointment to all those who liked to think that 3/11 could bring about the third great transformation in the countrys modern history. The first two were the opening up of Japan following the restoration of imperial rule in the 1860s, and the economic and democratic miracles after 1945. Yet in both cases an old regime had collapsed, making a new start unavoidable. Todays situation, as Mr Pilling rightly perceives, is quite different. Japanese culture is one of evolution, not revolution: one that seeks advances through myriad small steps rather than great leaps forward. Japan

Times"[Pilling] has written a superb book on contemporary Japan that, better than any other I have read, manages to get the reader inside the skin of Japanese society" *The Times (UK)*"For anyone who wants to know more about the worlds third largest economy its history, its changing social patterns and its uneasy relationship with its neighbours this is an essential read; a wonderful combination of informed analysis, lively conversation and personal anecdote." *New Statesman (UK)*"Pillings command of structure is enviable...The stories have visceral power and are beautifully told." *The Guardian (UK)*"[A]n authoritative and entertaining attempt to explain the mysteries of [Japan]" *The Spectator (UK)*"[Pilling] does an excellent job of reappraising those lost years of economic deflation and social and political stagnation" *Publishers Weekly*(starred):"A probing and insightful portrait of contemporary Japan." *Kirkus s*:A sweeping view of contemporary Japan portrays its complexities and potential for change. The authors articulate and diverse interviewees scholars and teenagers, housewives and politicians vividly and passionately testify to Japans cultural contradictions, ambitions and strategies for survival. *Booklist*:"A vibrant portrait of triumph over adversity." *Evan Osnos*, staff writer of *The New Yorker*:David Pillings vivid and humane account of Japan is the book we needed. He seamlessly unites moments of thunderous drama with scenes of exquisite serenity, revealing the dynamic at the heart of the country he knows so well. He blends precise analysis and unobtrusive firsthand reporting, allowing his cast of writers, farmers, and pols to struggle, on the page, with Japans era of fragile power and its search for renewal. *The Observer*(UK):Authoritative and entertaining... [Pilling]deftly manages the trick of illustrating grand sweep with small anecdote... This book makes a good fist of disentangling the curious charms of the Japanese and for helping outsiders to understand them a little better. *The Telegraph*(UK):Pilling, the Asia editor of the *Financial Times*, is perfectly placed to be our guide, and his insights area real rarity when very few Western journalists communicate the essence of the worlds third-largest economy in anything but the most superficial ways. Here, there isa terrific selection of interview subjects mixed with great reportage and fact selection... he does get people to say wonderful things. The novelist *Haruki Murakami* tells him: 'When we were rich, I hated this country'...well-written... valuable. *David Mitchell*, author of *Cloud Atlas* and *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*:"Bending Adversity is a superb reappraisal of the so-called 'lost decade(s)' of contemporary Japan. David Pilling combines a historian's breadth of vision, an anthropologist's clearheadedness, an investigator's knack of knowing what questions to ask, an economist's grasp of the circuitry of money and a top-notch journalist's curiosity about the human effects of political causes. The result is a probing, nourishing and independent-minded book for any reader seeking to understand modern Japan and its unsure place in the world. I recommend *Bending Adversity* without qualm." *Ryu Murakami*, author of *Coin Locker Babies*:Whether writing about the bubble and its aftermath, persistent deflation, or the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster, Pilling uses individual stories to starkly reveal the truth about Japan. *Edward Luce*, author of *In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India*:Writers on Japan tend to get either its economy or its culture. David Pilling is that very rare craftsman who gets under the skin of both and can magically bring them alivesometimes in the same sentence. In an age of narrow specialism, Pillings writing reminds us why there is no substitute for high-caliber journalism. If you had time only for one book on Japan, you should start and finish with Pillings. *Kenneth B. Pyle*, the Henry M. Jackson Professor of History and Asian Studies, University of Washington:David Pilling is a gifted writer. From many years of reporting, he has crafted an absorbing and perceptive portrait of contemporary Japan and its people. I am impressed by the insights he draws from interviews with a cross section of Japanese leaders and citizens. If you could read only one book on todays Japan, this should be it. *Gerald L. Curtis*, Burgess Professor of Political Science, Columbia University; author of *The Logic of Japanese Politics*:"David Pillings *Bending Adversity* is a major accomplishment. In lucid and engaging prose he takes the reader inside Japan, providing a needed antidote to the popular view that recent Japanese history is mostly one of adversity and failure. He offers a remarkably thoughtful and balanced appraisal of an extraordinary country. I highly recommend *Bending Adversity* to anyone interested in understanding how Japan became one of the worlds leading economies and why it is likely to retain that position for many years to come." *Karel van Wolferen*:"Pillings book reads like a (very well written) travelogue, not only crisscrossing Japan but also through wandering into its history. I can, again and again, immediately wistfully identify with the atmosphere he evokes. He does so, much of the time, through letting thousands of Japanese speak, who relate what they saw and thought of the subject matter he touches on. It is very serious in parts, as when he reports on the 2011 tsunami calamity and Fukushima catastrophe, and what it demonstrated about Japanese resilience. He is sometimes playful, and at other times explains things by raising points, which while tempting disagreement at first make you think again. This is Journalism of a high order, with scholarly excursions, evenly paced and never boring. When coming to the end of the book you feel that in this thorough survey he has covered practically all the things cognoscenti would consider most relevant to know about the Japan of today and recent past." *Yoichi Funabashi*, PhD; Chairman, *Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation*:"This is the first, groundbreaking rendition to come out on Japan's Lost Decades. David Pilling, one of our era's most perceptive observers and journalists on Asia, has described the age in a manner both profound and engagingreminiscent in this vein of *John Dower's* great opus, *Embracing Defeat*." *About the Author*David Pilling is the Asia editor of the *Financial Times*. He was previously the Tokyo bureau chief for the FT from January 2002 to August 2008. Pillings reporting from Japan and his weekly column on Asia have won several prizes, including from the Society of Publishers in Asia Awards and the UKs

Editorial Intelligence Comment Awards. He lives in Hong Kong.