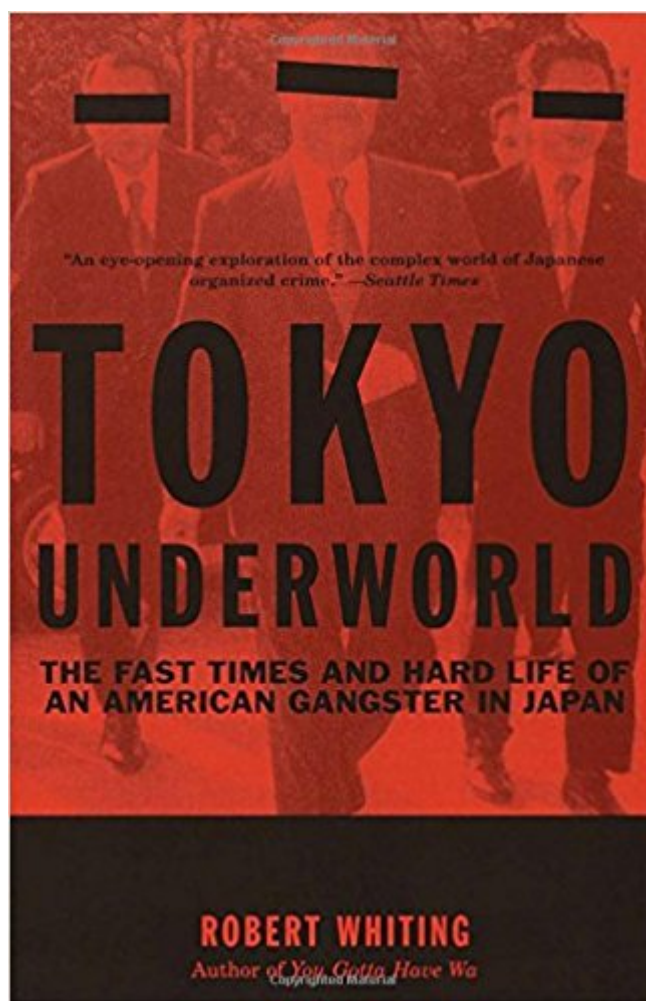


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# Tokyo Underworld: The Fast Times And Hard Life Of An American Gangster In Japan



## Synopsis

"A fascinating look at some fascinating people who show how democracy advances hand in hand with crime in Japan."--Mario Puzo In this unorthodox chronicle of the rise of Japan, Inc., Robert Whiting, author of *You Gotta Have Wa*, gives us a fresh perspective on the economic miracle and near disaster that is modern Japan. Through the eyes of Nick Zappetti, a former GI, former black marketer, failed professional wrestler, bungling diamond thief who turned himself into "the Mafia boss of Tokyo and the king of Rappongi," we meet the players and the losers in the high-stakes game of postwar finance, politics, and criminal corruption in which he thrived. Here's the story of the Imperial Hotel diamond robbers, who attempted (and may have accomplished) the biggest heist in Tokyo's history. Here is Rikidozan, the professional wrestler who almost single-handedly revived Japanese pride, but whose own ethnicity had to be kept secret. And here is the story of the intimate relationships shared by Japan's ruling party, its financial combines, its ruthless criminal gangs, the CIA, American Big Business, and perhaps at least one presidential relative. Here is the underside of postwar Japan, which is only now coming to light.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this compelling history of the rise of Japanese organized crime since the end of World War II, Robert Whiting, author of *You Gotta Have Wa* (an excellent book on Japanese baseball), demonstrates that Americans have only themselves to blame for the omnipotence of the yakuza in Japanese politics and society and the rebirth of conquered Japan as one of the world's great financial giants. Whiting's real-life protagonist, Nick Zapetti, arrived in Tokyo during the days of the

postwar occupation and decided to stay. Jolted from a budding career in low-rent confidence games by a lingering bout of insolvency, Zapetti opened a restaurant on a whim. Against all odds, Nicola's Pizza became the Tokyo hotspot in the '50s for expatriates, ballplayers, entertainers, and politicians, and inevitably, the local mob. Zapetti's erstwhile adventures as a semi-honest restaurateur in a strange land frame the book's real story: the savage backstabbing and dirty dealing of Tokyo's business community, which overlaps so seamlessly with the yakuza at times that it's difficult to see where one entity ends and the other begins. Whiting expertly details the evolution of "the Great Transfer of Wealth," as he calls it (the shifting in funds from American to Japan), and explains why American foreign policy (and its fear of communism) may have unwittingly allowed it to happen. Whiting's writing is illuminating and engaging, and his conclusions belie the simplistic protectionist rhetoric heard from both sides of the fence. As for Zapetti, he eventually became a Japanese citizen and took his wife's last name. In poor health and dogged by the financial ruin of his pizza empire, Zapetti turned rabidly anti-Japanese: "You ever see the movie Rio Bravo?" Whiting quotes Zapetti as asking one of his foreign customers one night. "You remember the scene where the leering cowboy throws the money into the spittoon ... and Dean Martin, who's the town drunk, crawls after it? That's Japan's fantasy image of us. They want us to beg like Dean Martin." --Tjames Madison

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Whiting's probe of Japan's gangsters, corrupt entrepreneurs and political fixers reads like a James Bond thriller yet manages intelligently to illuminate the seamy underside of Japan's postwar economic boom. At the heart of his colorful tale is swaggering, thickset Nick Zappetti, a tough from East Harlem's Italian ghetto who arrived in U.S.-occupied Japan in 1945 as a 22-year-old marine sergeant. Zappetti stayed on to become a black marketer, branched out into illegal banking, pimping and armed robbery, then launched a Tokyo pizza restaurant, Nicola's, which became a favorite night spot for mobsters, diplomats and movie stars. After decades of booze, debauchery, multiple marriages, gangland ties and lawsuits, he lost control of his restaurant-chain empire to his former Japanese partner and to his Japanese fourth wife. Zappetti died in 1992, nearly bankrupt and consumed with hatred for the Japanese, whom he saw as arrogant swindlers intent on taking over America. Whiting (*You Gotta Have Wa*), an American journalist who lives in Tokyo and writes a weekly column for the Japanese press, sets Zappetti's rise and fall against juggernaut Japan's financial ascendancy over the U.S. and its current slide into economic malaise. In this critical, revealing look at a half century of U.S.-Japan relations, he blames General MacArthur's occupational government?with its massive embezzlement, theft, fraud and black marketing?for

creating the environment that allowed Japan's organized crime syndicates to join forces with its ruling political and business elite, aided by strategic financial aid from the CIA. Eight pages of b&w photos. Agent, Amanda Urban. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An author who attempts to tell the story of an era via an individual's biography is likely to strike out. Robert Whiting succeeds magnificently, thanks not only to the writing ability he showed off earlier in his baseball books but also to his painstaking efforts to cross-check with many, many other sources besides his main subject. Tokyo Underworld stands as one of the best histories of the postwar period in Japan.

A great book about an American soldier who became a Tokyo gangster, millionaire and restaurateur as well as the history of Japan in its post war period. The book primarily follows Nicholas Zappetti an American soldier who was stationed in Japan just after WW2 and how through his criminal activities and business dealings became one of the richest and most dangerous foreigners living in Japan. The book also jumps around and explains Japan's history with the Yakuza and its complex relationship with Japanese society from business to politics. This is nonfiction book and is great read. If you have any interest in Japanese culture or stories about the mafia or the criminal world read this book. They honestly need to make this story into a film.

This is the Japan your mother would have warned you to stay away from if she had known it existed. Most westerners don't. But journalist and long-time resident Robert Whiting peeks behind the shoji to show us a sleazeball world of crooks, both petty and big-time, operating hand in hand with Japan's pervasive government-industrial complex, often in cahoots with corporate America and the CIA. Tokyo Underworld opens right after the surrender, when a devastated nation, reeling from the shock of Hiroshima, clung precariously to life. Tokyo had been flattened by the bombing raids. Food was scarce, consumer goods nonexistent. In this barren soil a black market sprang to life within days of the surrender and was soon flourishing, trading in contraband wares smuggled in or diverted from the supply chains of the occupying forces. Enter Nick Zappetti, a small time hood from the Bronx, who remained in Japan after his discharge from the US Army. Operating on the principle that every calamity contains an opportunity, Zappetti made his first big score by smuggling a precious shipment of lighter flints into Japan. With Zappetti as the central figure, Whiting recounts the story of Japan's recovery and rise to superpower status, focusing on the netherworld of crime.

Given his own background, growing up in the mean streets of the Bronx where mafia bosses were the most highly respected figures, it was only natural for Zappetti to forge links with shady characters. These included Rikidozan, the ex-sumo wrestler whose exploits as a professional wrestler made him a figure of mythic dimensions in postwar Japan. Rikidozan's staged triumphs over American adversaries helped, according to Whiting, a defeated and dishonored nation to recover its self-esteem, thus setting the stage for the economic boom of the 80s. Zappetti mixed out-and-out crime (he served prison time for armed robbery following an infamous diamond heist) with quasi-legitimate enterprises. The most noteworthy of these was Nicola's, a pizza restaurant in Tokyo's glitzy, cosmopolitan Roppongi district. At Nicola's, international film stars and the Crown Prince of Japan rubbed elbows with politicians and crooks. The intense and long-lasting popularity of Nicola's made Zappetti enormously rich and notorious, with a list of contacts ranging from gang bosses to members of the Japanese Diet. Other ventures didn't fare so well: a mink farm in Japan's northernmost island was a dismal failure. The reason? Japanese women didn't wear mink. Another farming venture ran aground. The same goes for Zappetti's marriages to Japanese wives. One of these, to a 19-year-old beauty queen, lasted only a few months and cost him ¥30 million in alimony. Whiting's previous books on Japanese baseball (one of which was named Sports Book of the Year by Time Magazine) are only superficially about baseball: they are insightful studies of Japanese society as seen through the window of the foreign game that verges on a national obsession. Whiting's analysis of how they have adapted the game shows us what makes the Japanese tick. The author brings the same bicultural sophistication and insider's insight to Tokyo Underworld as he does to baseball. His intimate relationship with Zappetti during the latter's last tell-all years adds a dimension rarely seen. No one but Whiting could have written this book, which makes it all the more valuable for its unique viewpoint. (Full disclosure: I was friends with Robert Whiting in the 70s in Japan before his first book earned him an international reputation). While Japan's criminal underworld may operate in the shadows, easily overlooked or ignored, it is impossible to underestimate its influence on the national life at every level--from sports, entertainment, and the mizu shobai world of bar hostesses and prostitutes, to government and big business. Politicians and businessmen with ties to the underworld were key players in the Lockheed scandal that rocked Japan in the 70s: Lockheed hired former drug smuggler, war criminal and underworld power broker Yoshio Kodama as a 'consultant' to grease the wheels in a deal where Lockheed paid more than \$3 million in bribes to Prime Minister Tanaka and other government officials to insure that its aircraft was chosen over its Boeing rival for All Nippon Airways. Tokyo Underworld is a fairly dense read, exhaustively researched (over 200 interviews) and packed with

facts and information (Notes and Sources runs to 45 pages). Though it isn't always light reading, Tokyo Underworld provides a fascinating glimpse of the seamier side of Japanese society, along with a view of postwar US-Japan relations that won't be found in most histories of the period.

I enjoyed the book as it provided insight into the various characters, however, I was looking for something that focused more on the crime side of their story.

Ran across this book on Japanese society New York, and had to read it. I was there off and on during the years of 1948 to 1966. This book took me back in time and showed me things happening right in front of my eyes. Our government, and their mistakes, had a lot to do with Japan's wacky way of running their country. I knew a few of the people running around with a joint missing from the little finger. This book is an eye opener that leads right up to today. Funny, I don't remember ever eating pizza in Japan. R McKenna

I really enjoyed reading this book. I enjoyed the fact that this wasn't a boring read, and I didn't know what to expect next. By reading this book I was able to read just how different the laws were versus ours in the U.S. The book also gives a brief history lesson on the occupational stage of Japan during world war II. In my opinion this was a good book that touched on almost every aspect of Nick Zappetti's life. I would recommend this book to friends.

Interesting read which also highlights Japanese economic/political/judicial/criminal relations during the 50 year period from the end of WWII.

Great Book for learning about the Yakuza in Tokyo and the general underbelly of it. Great informing book

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