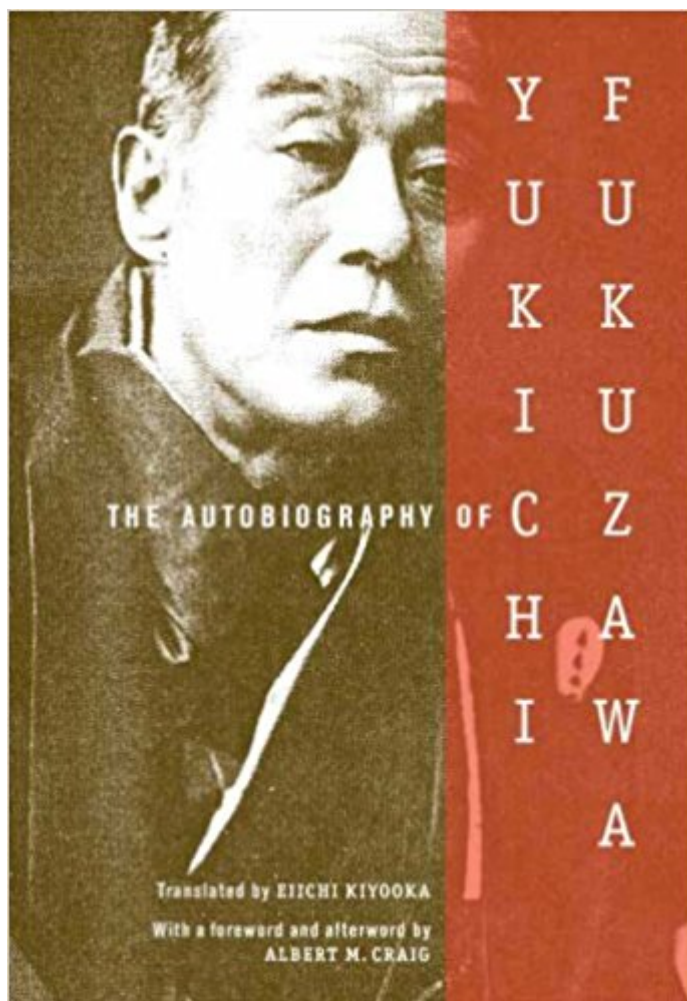


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The Autobiography Of Yukichi Fukuzawa



Synopsis

Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901) was a leading figure in the cultural revolution that transformed Japan from an isolated feudal nation into a full-fledged player in the modern world. He translated a wide range of Western works and adapted them to Japanese needs, inventing a colorful prose style close to the vernacular. He also authored many books, which were critical in introducing the powerful but alien culture of the West to the Japanese. Only by adopting the strengths and virtues of the West, he argued, could Japan maintain its independence despite the "disease" of foreign relations. Dictated by Fukuzawa in 1897, this autobiography offers a vivid portrait of the intellectual's life story and a rare look inside the formation of a new Japan. Starting with his childhood in a small castle town as a member of the lower samurai class, Fukuzawa recounts in great detail his adventures as a student learning Dutch, as a traveler bound for America, and as a participant in the tumultuous politics of the pre-Restoration era. Particularly notable is Fukuzawa's ability to view the new Japan from both the perspective of the West and that of the old Japan in which he had been raised. While a strong advocate for the new civilization, he was always aware of its roots in the old.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As readable as it was a century ago... refurbished with Craig's excellent introductory and terminal essays and a number of appendixes. (Donald Richie Japan Times)

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Japanese --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I wanted to read this book because 1 of my children graduated from Keio University and another one is a student there right now. It's a great school in that they encourage their students to think outside of the box. For these reasons, I had more than a passing interest in reading this autobiography by the founder of this famous university. I really enjoyed it. Much more than I expected. The book was written well over 100 years ago, but it's still fresh on many levels. The English translator did a good job and I wonder if it's even better in Japanese. I found myself laughing at certain things, especially regarding his personal and frank observations about society and also himself. On another level, we can see the way Japan once was regarding the caste system between the various classes, with the samurai being at the top of the pecking order. However, even among the samurai there were class distinctions in which small children of higher class samurai families would boss around much older children of lower ranking samurai families. Fukuzawa disliked this caste system and discusses it with keen insight. Fukuzawa was also one of the few Japanese to travel to America at this time, and his visit to Brown University was an important model when he was laying down the academic foundation for Keio University. By the time you finish the book, Fukuzawa comes across as a really nice man you'd like to have a drink and a long chat with.

Yukichi Fukuzawa is on the money. Quite literally, actually. He is the face on the Japanese equivalent of the hundred-dollar bill, which is fitting because he was the Japanese equivalent of Benjamin Franklin. A man completely ahead of his times, innovative and far-thinking, yet he never sought personal or political power, and in fact gleefully surrendered his samurai status and refused his clan-paid salary in order to just be an individual. Smack in the middle of civil war, when the armies of the Tokugawa Shogun fought against the armies trying to restore the Meiji Emperor to power, Fukuzawa founded a University. Education, liberation from ignorance, these were the ideals he worked for, not who would be king. His pen was his sword. "The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa" is an extraordinary achievement, not only because of Fukuzawa's own extraordinary life but also for its readability. The guy was a writer, first and foremost, and he knew that the value of any book, any testament of beliefs, was inherent in how many people would pick it up and read it. He specifically wrote in simple, entertaining prose because he wanted the poorest and least-educated person to be able to pick up his works and enjoy them thoroughly, rather than have them be pondered over and studied by obtuse academics. Fukuzawa lays out his life from his earliest stages, bitterly hating the feudal system that meant he had to bow and scrape to anyone who outranked him, regardless of that person's ability. He saw education as a means out of this proscribed lifestyle, and pursued the study of the Dutch language, which at the time was the only

foreign interaction with Japan. His shock when he actually meets foreigners in the open port of Yokohama, and realizing that none of them spoke Dutch and that Holland was actually an unimportant country was a bombshell to the young Fukuzawa. From then on, the study of English obsessed him. He sailed on the first official Japanese mission to the US, founded Keio University based on English education, and tried to silently prod Japan out of its nationalistic frenzy and into the modern world. Because it is an autobiography, of course, Fukuzawa is free to paint whatever portrait of himself that he wants. There are no "warts and all" revelations here, and even when he tries to describe his faults he comes off as more of a charming rogue than anything else. There are controversies with Fukuzawa, of course, and you will find none of them here. He gives you his personal philosophy of life, tells you how he tried his best to live up to it, all the while giving you a window into one of Japan's most dramatic periods of history. Anyone interested in Japanese history should read this book. It is that simple. Fukuzawa may be one of the most important figures ever to emerge from Japan, and his influence is still felt to this day. The sheer pleasure to be had from reading "The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa" is a double bonus, and makes this book essential.

This is the best book I ever read as assigned reading in college, and I continue to reread it every year. In fact, I try to have a few (used) copies around the house to give to friends. Fukuzawa was an amazing person, and the book is delightful in many ways. My favorite part is when, as a young student of the Dutch language in Osaka, he visited Yokohama and discovered that most foreigners were speaking a different language, English. He came back to Osaka and tried to persuade his fellow students to switch to English but nobody would listen. "The important documents will always be translated into Dutch!", they said. Undeterred, Fukuzawa went on to learn English more or less by himself. A whole string of 'firsts' followed -- he opened the first English school in Japan, was part of the first Japanese delegations to the U.S. and later to Russia, and wrote the first widely distributed book about "Things Western." A true iconoclast, he gave away his samurai swords and forbade bowing in his school as a waste of time. I am eternally grateful to Edwin O. Reischauer for assigning this book in his Introduction to Japanese Culture class at Harvard.

Used at Western Washington University around 2008. Very interesting book. Like most people, I rely on honest product reviews to make purchase decisions. Because the experience of others has been so helpful to me, I try to provide honest, helpful reviews to assist other shoppers in selecting the right products for them. I hope my review has been helpful to you!

not to much to say about a required reading

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