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A Daughter Of The Samurai



Synopsis

Born into a high-ranking samurai family at the onset of the Meiji period, Etsu Sugimoto's own life mirrored the radical shifts her country faced. Originally destined to be a priestess, she instead became the arranged bride of a Japanese merchant in Cincinnati, later returning to Japan with her daughters as the nation modernized swiftly.

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Customer Reviews

Interesting account of one person's life during the Meiji-period life.

well written and interesting/ It ends up in the air.

I came across this book via reviews for another book, and promptly bought it. Beautiful, and extremely informative as well. I live in modern day Japan (;) and I am not Japanese, so reading this provided me with a wealth of information that I would likely not have ever had access to in just this way; as if my own family members and friends were explaining customs and traditions to me, as a

child, and as a adult. It is a fascinating voyage into the customs and traditions of a by-gone Japan. What makes it even more interesting (and likely why the book even exists) is that the author had a childhood education beyond what most girls were offered due to her father's desires, and a multicultural education for reasons of marriage later on in life. She then went on to live for some time in the United States. Her daughters were born there, and her daughters were partially educated in the United States, then in Japan, then in the U.S again. The observations the author makes along the way are of course subjective, and rather pointed, yet she is entirely aware of this- and given that the two cultures are so vastly different, even subjective observations have a great deal of flat-out truth to them. As someone who has lived in "cultures other than "my own" for the greater part of my life, I found this book moving and enlightening and easy to identify with. Like the "godown", it is a real treasure of explanation into the samurai foundations of Japanese mentality, with a particularly precious insight from a oft-displaced woman's first hand experience of it. Highly recommend.

A story told gently, but with strength. A personal story of a girl to womanhood during the Meiji era. It covers the history of a samurai family from the chaotic period which ended the era of the Shoguns

to reinstating a ruling Emperor. Full of stories which explain old Japanese traditions and how some conflicted with and some complimented Western ways. Born into a noble and strict family the author finds herself betrothed, then sent to Tokyo for a "Western" education; before being sent to America to marry a Japanese man. Her married life in America and her daughters born there opens her mind to the importance of understanding and friendship between the two lands.

This is a beautiful work by a woman who saw two worlds and could see beauty in both of them. She was born in the aristocratic society of nineteenth century Japan and describes it with the bittersweet pathos of those that know their place in the world is coming to an end. She is raised in the values of this society and taught to cherish elegance and a sense of beauty. Later she marries and moves to America and learns to value freedom. And learns that both places in different ways value courage and resilience. The Etsu speaks with a poet's heart, telling of her love for her father and mother and grandfather. And for her children. Indeed there seems to be no one she does not love. She also tells of her love of both her birth land and her adopted land. I was saddened to have to learn that she was forced to live to see both her beloved nations at war, and the land of her ancestors in ruins. With all that she tells charming tales of the customs and folktales of the Japan gone by. As well as a rare glimpse of America from the eyes of someone totally unfamiliar with it's ways, being from a country that had been isolated within living memory. There are also moments of humor. For instance, we learn that chewing gum is supposedly all the rage at the palaces of European monarchs, according to one caterer at a party she attends in Japan; and a similarly plebian Japanese product is equally "promoted" by an advertiser in American stores. This book is not just a thing to learn with, but a thing of beauty and well worth your time.

I've just finished reading this gentle, powerful book in my late mother's 1929 copy. Having studied, taught about, and lived in Japan for many years, I'm surprised I haven't come across this book in other books and courses on Meiji Japan, samurai traditions, the transition from feudal to industrial society, and the challenges of living in two cultures. The author was a highly educated woman who wrote gracefully and evocatively in English and also, at one time, taught Japanese at Columbia University, in New York. The descriptions of her childhood in what is now Niigata Prefecture, as the daughter of a high-ranking former samurai; and of her bucolic married life in a suburb of Cincinnati and engrossing and highly illuminating.

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