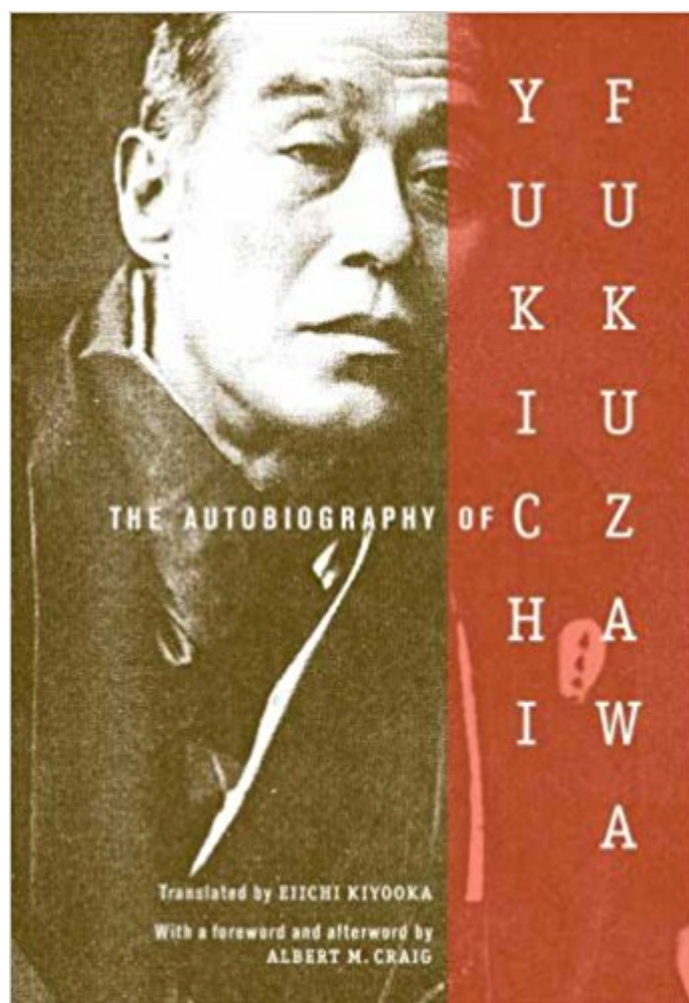


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The Autobiography Of Yukichi Fukuzawa



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.

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Customer Reviews

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.

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