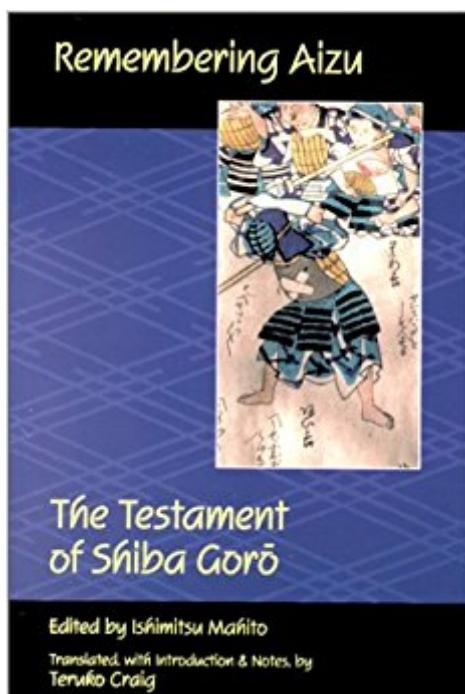


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Remembering Aizu: The Testament Of Shiba Goro



Synopsis

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 is most often seen as a glorious event marking the overthrow of Tokugawa feudalism and the beginning of Japan's modern transformation. Yet it had its dark side. The Aizu domain in northeastern Japan had staunchly supported the old regime. For this it was attacked by the new government's forces from Choshu and Satsuma in the autumn of 1868. Its castle town was burned to the ground, and during a month-long siege, whole families perished. After defeat, the domain was abolished and its samurai population exiled to barren terrain in the far north. Shiba Goro was born into an Aizu samurai family in 1859. He was just ten years old at the time of the attack, which claimed most of his family. In the cruel world of exile, he lived with his father on the edge of starvation, struggling to survive. Eventually making his way to Tokyo, he became a servant, and though born in an enemy domain, gained entrance to a military school of the new regime. Shiba's abilities were recognized, and he rose through the officer ranks to become a full general - a singular distinction for an Aizu samurai in an army dominated by former samurai of the Choshu domain. Remembering Aizu tells of Shiba's earlier years. It is an extraordinary story that provides insights and material for a social history of the Restoration and its aftermath. But above all, it is a vividly rendered personal account of courage and determination, loss and remembrance.

Book Information

Paperback: 168 pages

Publisher: University of Hawaii Press (August 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0824821572

ISBN-13: 978-0824821579

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #120,394 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > Japan #145 in Books > History > Asia > Japan #1149 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military

Customer Reviews

A remarkably well-conceived text that is gripping, even suspenseful.... It has many revealing things to say about male-female relations, parent-child ties, child-rearing practices, childhood customs, and the importance of hierarchy, patronage, and personal contacts in nineteenth-century Japan.--

"Journal of Asian Studies"[A] masterly translation....An engaging and human-centered account of a crucial period in Japanese history.-- "Monumenta Nipponica"An important reminder that the Japanese nation-state emerged from a heterogeneous and divided region after years of tense struggle.-- "Pacific Affairs"This is a vividly told story, which provides a strong counterpoint to the view of the period that we get from standard sources ... a smooth and very readable translation, with a useful new introduction and additional notes-- "Asian Studies Review"

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This is a fairly short book, which I found fascinating. There is a very useful introduction which gives the historical context and details on Shiba's family. The memoir takes place during the early years of the Meiji era, when Japan was undergoing an upheaval and transformation from a feudal state to a modern country. Gorōfū Shiba, son of an upper class samurai family, lost his mother, grandmother and 2 sisters during the punitive war against Aizu province. His father and 3 brothers survived, but they were separated, though they managed to keep close ties. He lived from the ages of 10 to 15 as an underpaid servant. At 15 he was accepted into a military school, and his fortunes took a better turn. He eventually retired as a general. This memoir covers his life from about 8 to 16. It is simply but well told, and often quite moving. It offers a glimpse into Japanese life in those turbulent times not well known in the West. I highly recommend it.

excellent memoir on the fall of the aizu samurai clan

This work was a required read for a course on Japanese history course, and provides an interesting perspective for cultural studies through time.

This unassuming book is such a treasure to help understand the realities of being a samurai in the latest stages of the Tokugawa period. This is not simply an academic textbook, although I am sure scholars with an 'F' in their Myer-Briggs type, will really enjoy the intimacy offered here by Shiba. I hope this gets picked up by Penguin or Vintage as a genuine classic of literature for future generations. If you are interested in social histories, then give this a go. Despite the losses and challenges in his life, Shiba constantly demonstrates honour, humility, and empathy for others in his life. A heart warming and informative read.

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