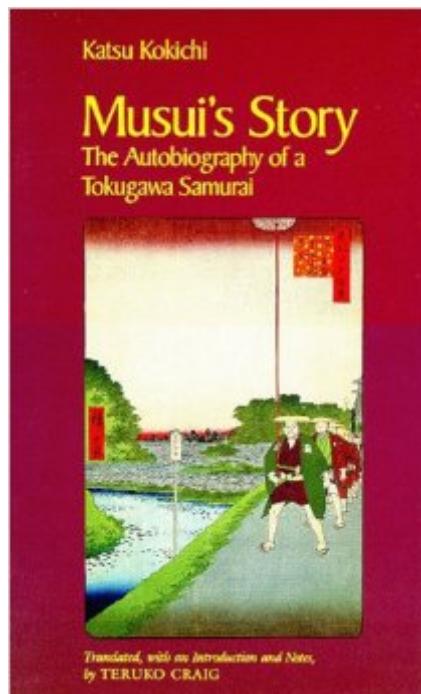


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Musui's Story: The Autobiography Of A Tokugawa Samurai



Synopsis

A series of picaresque adventures set against the backdrop of a Japan still closed off from the rest of the world, Musui's Story recounts the escapades of samurai Katsu Kokichi. As it depicts Katsu stealing, brawling, indulging in the pleasure quarters, and getting the better of authorities, it also provides a refreshing perspective on Japanese society, customs, economy, and human relationships. From childhood Katsu was given to mischief. He ran away from home, once at thirteen, making his way as a beggar on the great trunk road between Edo and Kyoto, and again at twenty, posing as the emissary of a feudal lord. He eventually married and had children but never obtained official preferment and was forced to supplement a meager stipend by dealing in swords, selling protection to shopkeepers, and generally using his muscle and wits. Katsu's descriptions of loyalty and kindness, greed and deception, vanity and superstition offer an intimate view of daily life in nineteenth-century Japan unavailable in standard history books. Musui's Story will delight not only students of Japan's past but also general readers who will be entranced by Katsu's candor and boundless zest for life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

During the 1840s in Japan, Katsu Kokichi wrote his own life story in this book, which was translated into English by Teruko Craig. During the late period of the Tokugawa era, Katsu Kokichi came from a lower-class samurai family with a stipend of 100 koku of rice. Katsu became a rebel child during his earlier life and he has run into trouble numerous times throughout his lifetime. There are nine chapters in this book with the addition of Craig's introduction in which he gives the historical

background of Katsu. Through the book, there is a moral insight on why samurai declined in the mid-1800s. By looking at Katsu's life and his surroundings in Tokugawa Japan, the role of samurai, how Katsu broke the code of samurai, why he behaved in dishonorable ways, and three small evidences for the decline of a samurai is analyzed. The role model of a samurai was to be on his best behavior, not commit any acts of crimes which would disgrace his lord or his family, and to show his loyalty to his shogun and to his emperor. The samurai would set an example for his offspring or for his students in which they would soon become better samurai and honorable warriors. The son of a samurai would go to school to take lessons to be an educated swordsman and a skilled horse rider. In Katsu's book, the commoners or a fellow samurai had respected, honored, and treated Katsu family fairly as a samurai after he became known for helping out a few people in the critical situations, which was part of a samurai's honorable ways. But, whether samurai does something unwise or disgraceful in his own personal time, he not only dishonored himself but to his entire family house. This is what happened with Katsu when he broke the code. With Katsu's lifestyle, breaking the code of a samurai is contemplated.

Who writes an autobiography? Most people who write them are people of note, movers and shakers in their realms and time-periods, people with something to say. Rarely do we get to read the autobiography of a general loser, someone who is by no measure a good person, and someone completely beyond admiration. Welcome to Musui's world. Musui, also known as Katsu Kokichi, was a low-ranking samurai and general good-for-nothing who never thought beyond his immediate needs, and did his best to attain something for nothing when ever possible. He started out bad, as a schoolyard bully who used his status as a samurai to push around lower-ranking kids. The older he got, the worse he got, and all means to control him or teach him respect failed, including his father locking him in a cage and forcing him to read classic military treatise. He was eventually adopted off into another family, which brought along with it a bride and a meager salary. It was never enough to keep up with his habit of visiting prostitutes in the Yoshiwara pleasure districts, so he was soon a leader amongst the black market, working with local extortionists and hoodlums, selling swords and working every possible kind of confidence racket. Now, everything in this book should be taken with a grain of salt. Katsu was a grand liar with an enormous ego, who bluffed his way into money and out of trouble on a regular basis. His tales of his exemplary swordsmanship, his acts of kindness, his ability to drink bottle after bottle of sake without ever getting drunk, smacks as more wish-fulfillment than the true character of an unrepentant rogue. The translator, Teruko Craig, has added some notes on the accuracy of Katsu's tales, and surprisingly some of the most fantastic

adventures are backed up by other sources.

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