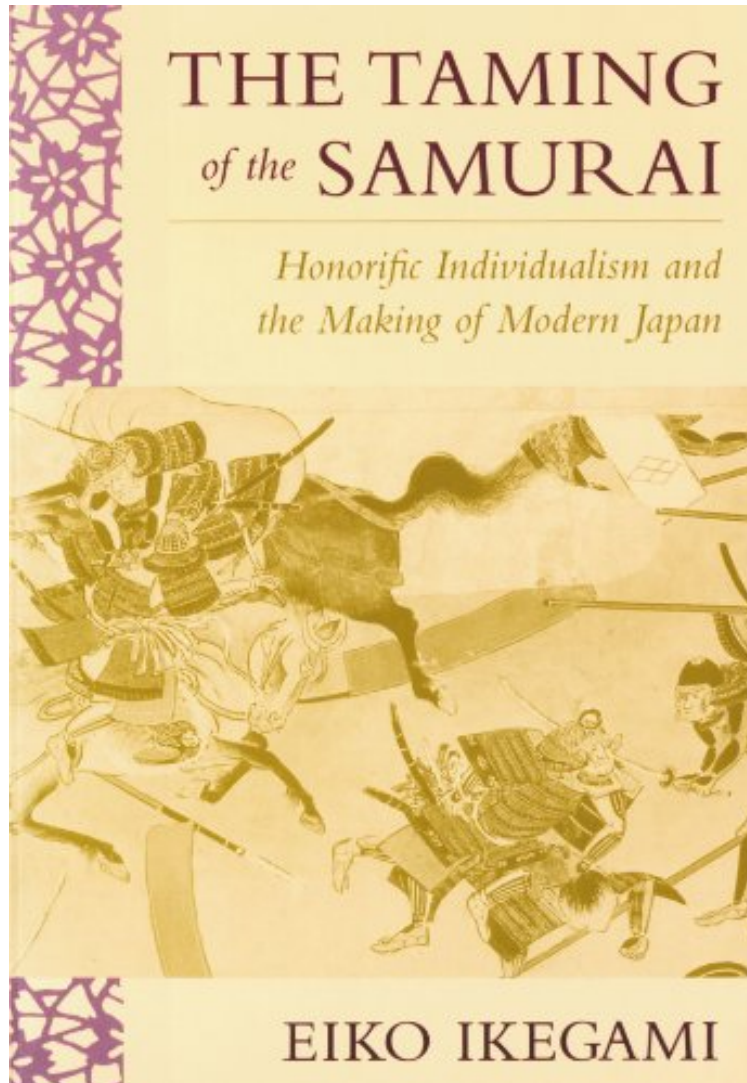


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The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan

Eiko Ikegami

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Eiko Ikegami : The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan:

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful. A modern classic, essential to understanding JapanBy W. D ONEILProfessor Ikegami examines the evolution of the samurai as a social institution from its beginnings nearly 1,000 years ago up to the formal dissolution of the samurai in the late 19th century, as well as the continuing influence

of samurai society on modern Japan. She shows that the concept of honor was central to the samurai throughout their history, but also demonstrates that their concepts of honor changed greatly. The samurai are presented not as distant, inscrutable creatures of a mysterious culture but as human beings constructing and living within a society adapted to their needs and circumstances. Their combination of ferocity and refinement are made comprehensible. Along the way she presents important and insightful analyses of such familiar aspects of samurai life as ritual suicide, bushido, the *Hagakure*, and the story of the revenge of the 47 ronin. The book begins with a section in which Ikegami sets out her analytical structure and theses. This may seem dry to some, but it is important in introducing concepts that run through the subsequent narrative. The bulk of the book consists of a chronologically arranged history of the development of samurai society, based in a wide range of Japanese and western sources. The book is well written and has many touches to aid the reader (such as reminders of the meanings of key Japanese terms and avoidance of unexplained jargon). Nevertheless, the density of the argument and facts demand careful and thoughtful reading. As the title should suggest, this is not a book for the novice, unfamiliar with the broad outlines of Japanese history. Nor is it a military history of the samurai. Will O'Neil 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating historical analysis... By trollificus... of the origin and ongoing evolution of the Samurai class in Japan. I'd always thought that, despite congruences with warrior classes in other cultures, the Samurai were unique in a lot of ways. Certainly, no other warrior class ruled their society for 800 years. Ms. Ikegami's book now informs me that they were unique in different ways, at different times, and frequently subject to unique stressors and sociological conditions. The changes in the samurai, from reputation-and-power-seeking free agents to powerful rulers, lords and warlords, finally to confucianist administrators in the Tokugawa shogunate, demonstrate remarkable adaptivity. The author describes these changes against the background of Japanese state formation. People more qualified than myself seem to think her approach is revelatory. I had thought there would be more material documenting how the twin motors of bushido, honor-seeking and service-owing have been internalized in modern Japanese culture, but that final section was not in great depth. In any event, it was still an eye-opener, viewing the early stages of the class, and of bushido... anyone who has ever thought the Japanese culture inculcates only conformity, shame-aversion and discipline has gotten things badly wrong. (except for the discipline part) As to the difficulty factor, Ms. Ikegami's ideas can be followed, and her historical attributions, while not dense, certainly seem sound. That said, parts of the book sounded very much like they were aimed at a dissertation-review committee rather than 'people interested in the samurai'. If you've ever read any dissertations-turned-general-release-books, you'll know how to wade through. 0 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Great dissertation By Kojiro The title suggest a very interesting and worthy subject. However, the book seems to be a copy of Ikegami's dissertation. Factual information does not have to be communicated with words that cannot be understood by most readers. I spent most of my time in Google - researching definitions. It appears this book is a regeneration of the writer's dissertation.

Modern Japan offers us a view of a highly developed society with its own internal logic. Eiko Ikegami makes this logic accessible to us through a sweeping investigation into the roots of Japanese organizational structures. She accomplishes this by focusing on the diverse roles that the samurai have played in Japanese history. From their rise in ancient Japan, through their dominance as warrior lords in the medieval period, and their subsequent transformation to quasi-bureaucrats at the beginning of the Tokugawa era, the samurai held center stage in Japan until their abolishment after the opening up of Japan in the mid-nineteenth century. This book demonstrates how Japan's so-called harmonious collective culture is paradoxically connected with a history of conflict. Ikegami contends that contemporary Japanese culture is based upon two remarkably complementary ingredients, honorable competition and honorable collaboration. The historical roots of this situation can be found in the process of state formation, along very different lines from that seen in Europe at around the same time. The solution that emerged out of the turbulent beginnings of the Tokugawa state was a transformation of the samurai into a hereditary class of vassal-bureaucrats, a solution that would have many unexpected ramifications for subsequent centuries. Ikegami's approach, while sociological, draws on anthropological and historical methods to provide an answer to the question of how the Japanese managed to achieve modernity without traveling the route taken by Western countries. The result is a work of enormous depth and sensitivity that will facilitate a better understanding of, and appreciation for, Japanese society.

This book has already been widely praised by prominent American political scientists and historians for answering how the Japanese achieved modernity without traveling the route taken by Western countries. At once a remarkable historical study of the samurai warrior class from its ancient origins to its transformation under the Tokugawa regime and a comparative study that makes Japan available for analysis alongside other great instances of state formation... Beautifully written. It will undoubtedly become standard reading in universities around the world. (Foreign Affairs) Eiko Ikegami's study of the samurai during Japan's feudal period is a book of considerable intellectual sophistication. The analysis is rigorous and elegant, and in the course of time will no doubt be regarded as the definitive statement on this subject... This is a superb book. (T. L. Richardson Asian Affairs) Eiko Ikegami examines the nature and historical development of the samurai ethos, specifically concepts of honour, in the belief that the ideas

which evolved among samurai in that context in pre-modern Japan do much to explain the paradox that a society almost universally regarded as conformist has undergone changes in the past 100 years that have been radical, even revolutionary, and owed much of their character to individual initiative. It is a very large subject...Professor Ikegami has produced a book of major importance for the understanding of Japan. (Times Literary Supplement)Ikegami's mastery of the sources, not only for the Tokugawa Period but going all the way back to the beginning of Japanese history, is most impressive...One can learn a great deal about premodern Japanese society from this book. (Robert N. Bellah Contemporary Sociology)[Ikegami's] analysis...constitute[s] a very important contribution combining historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches to the analysis of Japanese society and history...Full of very important insights. (S. N. Eisenstadt American Journal of Sociology)The story of how the forty-seven loyal retainers took revenge for their lord's death in 1703 is the most retold tale in Japanese literature and history, but Ikegami brings to it a fresh perspective based on her historical analysis of what honor meant in samurai society...Packed with ideas, this book is certain to be debated long and hard in Japanese history circles. It is to be hoped that it will have a similar impact on scholars trying to understand the ingredients of state formation in societies around the world. (Anne Walthall Journal of Social History)Ikegami offers persuasive, well-documented answers in this remarkable book. Two interwoven and recurring themes are central to her thesis. The first is the samurai ethos of what she labels 'honorific individualism' marked by an obsession with personal dignity, self-esteem, and reputation...The second is the unresolvable and dramatic conflict between autonomy and heteronomy--between the violence-based honor of the samurai elite and the need to control them under a collective political order. Ikegami explores the historical sites and paths of these themes, painstakingly tracing their origins, development, transformation, and recurrence. The final product is a historical sociology of Japan on a grand scale...The book deserves the attention of anyone interested in historical and comparative sociology or ethnography, cultural psychology, and enduring issues of individual freedom versus social order...Non-academic readers will find an educational and entertaining story in this elegantly written book. (Takie Sugiyama Lebra Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies)Ikegami's multidimensional approach fuses historical and political processes with an examination of four aspects of samurai life: the system of vassalage; the emergence of the *ie*, or house, as a social unit among the landed military elite; the military role of the samurai and the nature of warfare; and the relationship of the samurai class to other social classes...In addition to explaining the cultural origins of contemporary forms of social organization in Japan, *The Taming of the Samurai* makes a major contribution to the cross-cultural study of individuality and identity. (Janet Goff Japan Quarterly)An important contribution to Japanese sociology and history. (Carl Steenstrup Journal of Japanese Studies)This book is a must for those who wish to know why Japan succeeded in its industrialization effort and how the otherwise paradoxical sense of collectivism versus individualism exists in Japan. General readers; upper-division undergraduates and above. (M.Y. Rynn Choice)Ikegami analyzes the Japanese state so sure-handedly that old prejudices fall away and the Japanese path of change, in all its distinctness, becomes available for comparison with other great experiences of state formation. Japanese traits that once seemed peculiarities of an inscrutable culture become, in her deft treatment, understandable consequences of a vast political transformation. (Charles Tilly, Center for Studies of Social Change, New School for Social Research)Ikegami analyzes the Japanese state so sure-handedly that old prejudices fall away and the Japanese path of change, in all its distinctness, becomes available for comparison with other great experiences of state formation. Japanese traits that once seemed peculiarities of an inscrutable culture become, in her deft treatment, understandable consequences of a vast political transformation. (Charles Tilly, Center for Studies of Social Change, New School for Social Research)About the AuthorEiko Ikegami is Associate Professor of Sociology, Yale University.