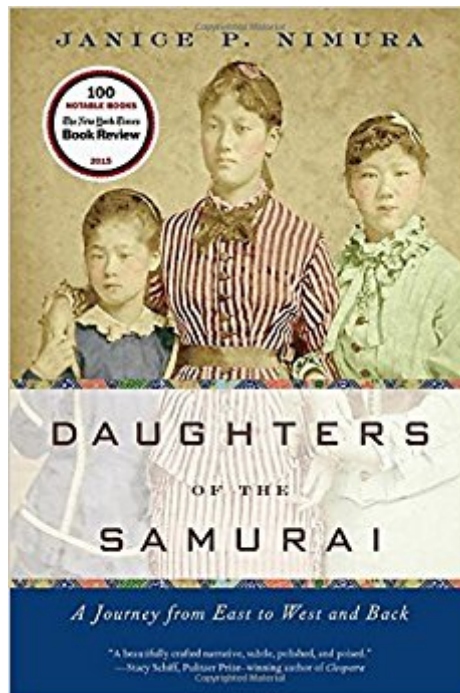


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# Daughters Of The Samurai: A Journey From East To West And Back



## Synopsis

"Nimura paints history in cinematic strokes and brings a forgotten story to vivid, unforgettable life." *—*Arthur Golden, author of *Memoirs of a Geisha* In 1871, five young girls were sent by the Japanese government to the United States. Their mission: learn Western ways and return to help nurture a new generation of enlightened men to lead Japan. Raised in traditional samurai households during the turmoil of civil war, three of these unusual ambassadors *—* Sutomatsu Yamakawa, Shige Nagai, and Ume Tsuda *—* grew up as typical American schoolgirls. Upon their arrival in San Francisco they became celebrities, their travels and traditional clothing exclaimed over by newspapers across the nation. As they learned English and Western customs, their American friends grew to love them for their high spirits and intellectual brilliance. The passionate relationships they formed reveal an intimate world of cross-cultural fascination and connection. Ten years later, they returned to Japan *—* a land grown foreign to them *—* determined to revolutionize women's education. Based on in-depth archival research in Japan and in the United States, including decades of letters from between the three women and their American host families, *Daughters of the Samurai* is beautifully, cinematically written, a fascinating lens through which to view an extraordinary historical moment. Map; 8 pages of illustrations

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (May 17, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393352781

ISBN-13: 978-0393352788

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.9 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 146 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #109,538 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in *Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Asia > Japan* #40 in *Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Japanese* #133 in *Books > History > Asia > Japan*

## Customer Reviews

"Beautifully written *—* In Nimura's deftly interwoven account, the three girls emerge as contrasting types, like Chekhov's 'Three Sisters.' *—* Christopher Benfey, *New York Times Book Review* "You'd be hard-pressed to find a novelist who is as

deft at portraying relationships and inner thoughts—[Nimura] skillfully bridges Japanese and American cultures, using the seemingly small story of three young people to tell a much larger tale of another time. —Becky Krystal, *Washington Post* —“Janice P. Nimura achieves the elusive dream of the historian, producing a work that will engage and satisfy academic and non-specialist audiences alike. The author offers both sets of readers a magnificently and meticulously detailed account of three women whose lives epitomize key features of the changing landscape of late 19th and early 20th century Japan. —Miriam Kingsberg, *Los Angeles Review of Books* —“This remarkable and beautifully written story—often as riveting as a page-turning novel—is both scholarly and accessible to non-specialists. —Wingate Packard, *Seattle Times* —“As immersive as any work of fiction, heartwrenching in its depiction of these cultural orphans turned pioneers. —Julia Pierpont, *Oprah.com* —“Reads like a novel about the meeting of East and West and how it transformed the lives of three extraordinary young women. —Elizabeth Bennett, *Dallas Morning News* —“You won’t welcome intrusions while reading this unprecedented, true story . . . memorably illuminating. —Terry Hong, *Christian Science Monitor* —“This is feminism for Japanese women in its infancy, and Janice P. Nimura enhances the reality of the entire experience with this superb historical nonfiction account. —Historical Novel Society —“At a reform-minded moment, Japan dispatched five young girls to be educated in America. Patiently, vividly, Janice P. Nimura reconstructs their Alice in Wonderland adventure. A beautifully crafted narrative, subtle, polished, and poised. —Stacy Schiff, *Pulitzer Prize* —a winning author of *Cleopatra* —“A riveting story of three remarkable girls, caught in the maelstrom of one of the strangest culture clashes in modern history, *Daughters of the Samurai* is history writing at its finest and required reading for anyone interested in Japan. —Ruth Ozeki, author of *A Tale for the Time Being* —“Nimura brings the girls and their late nineteenth-century exploits to life in a narrative that feels like an international variation on Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, so very appealing and delightful. —Booklist, Starred review

Janice P. Nimura is a book critic, independent scholar, and the American daughter-in-law of a Japanese family. She lives in New York City.

A hundred years before globalization and multiculturalism became the goals of every corporation and curriculum, three Japanese girls spanned the globe and became fluent in two worlds at

once. It's not other to everyone except each other. It's not Janice P. Nimura, Author's Notes. It's not location 61321 don't dare begin raving about this book for fear I won't be able to stop. I loved it. Interesting, engaging, and illuminating; it's now one of my all time favorite reads. Can I give it six stars? Let me begin by lifting a quote from the goodreads/publisher's synopsis that absolutely nails it for me:

"Daughters of the Samurai is beautifully, cinematically written, a fascinating lens through which to view an extraordinary historical moment. Born a samurai, raised an American teenager, she died a Japanese princess. Sutematsu Yamakawa was born in 1860, in feudal Japan, into a family of the samurai class who were soon to find themselves on the losing side in Japan's transformational, civil upheaval. [Emperor replaces Shogun, samurai class diminished/eliminated, liberalization/reform reigns (at least for a little while).] She would grow up to become the first ever Japanese female to attain a four-year college degree: A graduate of Vassar College, class of 1882. Less than thirty years after Perry's gunboat diplomacy had proffered our pacific overture for open trade to Japan. DAUGHTERS OF THE SAMURAI: A Journey from East to West and Back, by Janice P. Nimura, is largely Sutematsu's story; the story of two other girls of Japan, Shige Nagai and Ume Tsuda, who also spent the years 1872-1882 in America, learning the ways and whyfords of the hairy barbarians; and so much, and some many, more. A story of a society, of a world, in major transition; and of three leading, albeit softer, lights in that transition. And it is an indescribably amazing read. Recommendation: Read it now.

"Learn as if you will live forever; live as if you will die tomorrow."

Kindle edition, 336 pages/6,142 locations.

This is a wonderful book in many ways. It's a very human story about women's education in the later 19th century - both in Japan and in the early years of the Seven Sisters in America. It's about the end of feudalism in Japan and the birth of a new state which would Westernize and begin to change the status of women in meaningful ways. It's a story about Japan's early feminism - it's travails and successes in the late 19th century. The book provides this excerpt from an 1898 speech delivered in America by one of the first Japanese women sent to be educated in the United States: Thus from one nation to another will be passed on the work of education and elevation for women...thus, step by step will women arise, throughout all the world, from slave and drudge of savage days, from the plaything and doll of later periods, to take her place as helpmate and true equal of

man. Twenty-seven years earlier (in 1871) six year-old Ume Tsuda, the author of this statement, had been sent to America by the Japanese government. The author tells us that advice to women back then fell under guidelines delineated in the 18th century treatise Greater Learning for Women, which was based on the Confucian model: "The only qualities that befit a woman are gentle obedience, chastity, mercy, and quietness". In keeping with that sentiment was this statement by a Meiji minister: "When women are learned and clever in their speech it is a sign that civil disturbance is not far off". But to suggest this book is merely a feminist tract would be to do it a disservice. It's also a compelling travelogue, with descriptions both of period ship travel across the Pacific, and train travel across America on newly completed transcontinental track. And it's a story of Japanese-American relations at the personal rather than the state to state level. In the main however it's a story of three daughters of samurai under the old shogunate regime who were transplanted to America to be educated, and who then returned to Japan and made their lives extraordinary - each in a different way. Recommended for general interest readers, and more particularly for anyone desiring a deeper understanding of Japan's Meiji era than a textbook-style history can provide.

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