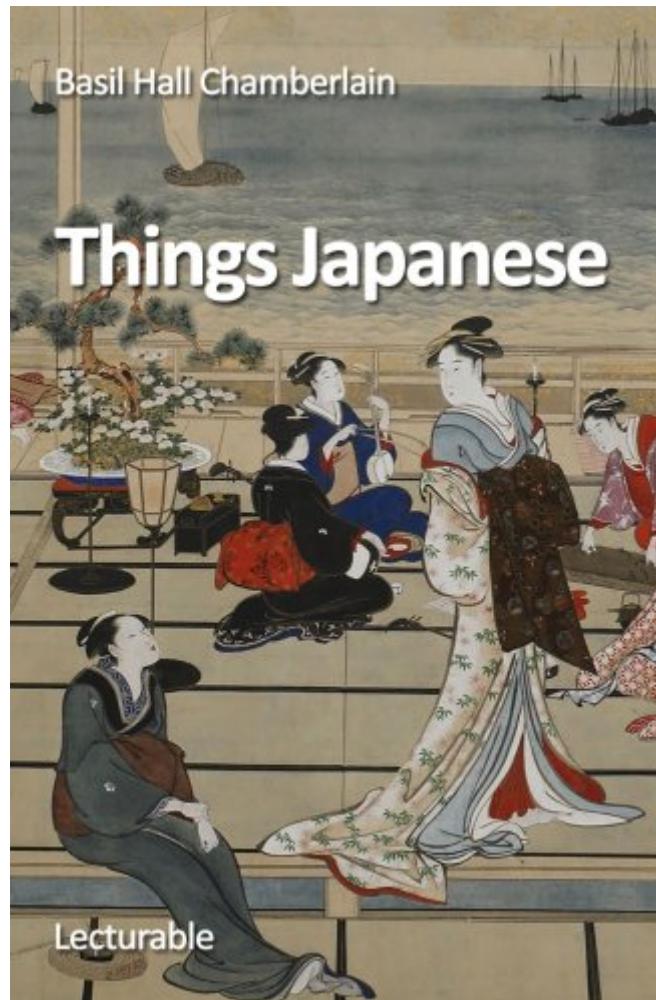


The book was found

Things Japanese



Synopsis

"To have lived through the transition stage of modern Japan makes a man feel preternaturally old; for here he is in modern times, with the air full of talk about bicycles and bacilli and spheres of influence, and yet he can himself distinctly remember the Middle Ages. The dear old Samurai who first initiated the present writer into the mysteries of the Japanese language, wore a queue and two swords. This relic of feudalism now sleeps in Nirvana. His modern successor, fairly fluent in English, might almost be a European, save for a certain obliqueness of the eyes and scantiness of beard. Old things pass away between a night and a morning. The Japanese boast that they have done in thirty or forty years what it took Europe half as many centuries to accomplish..." - Basil Hall

Chamberlain
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Vegetable Wax. Volcanoes. Weights and Measures. Woman (Status of). Wood Engraving.

Wrestling. Writing. Yezo. Yoshiwara. Zoology.

Book Information

File Size: 840 KB

Print Length: 568 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publisher: Lecturable (January 29, 2013)

Publication Date: January 29, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00B7TAJMW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #330,834 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #58

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Customer Reviews

Very thorough discussion of observations about long-ago Japan, written in the style of the times. If you're a student of oriental culture and history, this book is well-worth your time. If you're looking for contemporary prose about modern Japan, this is not the book you want. I've lived and worked in Japan, have a Japanese wife, and completed graduate work in Asian studies, and enjoyed this book.

Chamberlain was one of the great 19th century amateur sociologists. This book contains his personal observations and a trove of references to contemporary and ancient books about Japan. For someone who is more accustomed to reading history from the vantage point of current historians, this book offers a unique view of how Japan was regarded by westerners in the early 1900's. His wit and humor is still mostly fresh, rarely condescending, but not uncritical.

Basil Hall Chamberlain is writing in 1904, but both his writing and his treatment of his subject are fresh and engaging. Because he examines various 'things Japanese,' the reader is able to go directly to topics of interest. Although the Japan that he's looking at is the Japan of 100 years ago, his perspective helps the 21st century reader make sense of Japan as it is now. Not only did I enjoy the book, but I also learned that among students of 'things Japanese' it is considered number one source material. A bonus is Chamberlain's bibliography on topic at the end of each chapter. I picked this book at random simply because I'm interested in Japan. I'm glad that I did. Oh, and the Kindle version has the original illustrations.

This is an absolutely fascinating book. Being written in about 1904, and therefore carrying all the prejudices of its era and its white male western writer (for which one must make necessary allowances), it gives an insight into what we would now think of as 'old Japan', but which in Hall Chamberlain's day would have been thought of as 'modern' Japan. You can see the formation of what would be a 20th century superpower from a feudal state that had no trains, no transport infrastructure, no industry, no school system, no universities, no health service, no national army or navy and no newspapers. The 'old' Japan had 26 seasons and no winter, its hours were two hours long, its time was ranked in eras, not years. It was utterly different from the west, having existed for 200 years in self-imposed isolation, and yet by the diligence of its own people and its willingness to adopt new habits, it wrenches itself from medievalism to modernism in only a generation or two. A great deal has been lost as well as gained - the great flourishing of art, especially in silk and metalwork; the lack of envy among the populace because in a feudal society it is hard to better oneself - but the position of women has been utterly transformed and that, at least, has to be one good thing. I find it interesting that even in 1904, the position of women in Japan was seen as shockingly backward by the west, and particularly by Hall Chamberlain, who is more modern in many of his views than I would have suspected. A really interesting read that I don't doubt I'll dip into many more times.

For a good review of the nineteenth and twentieth century transition and a set piece explaining the foundation of customs, it's very useful. The bibliography, which is mostly Japanese authors in Japanese is much less useful, but very interesting, and left me with the desire to learn Japanese. Maybe someday. Meanwhile, I at least have a decent resource.

This book is a very interesting look at Japan at the turn of the century. If you are interested in Japanese history at all, I would recommend it. The author's observations are astute and based on my knowledge of Japan, pretty accurate for that period in Japanese history.

For those readers who are not full bottles on Japan or things Japanese, this well written and alphabetically structured book is a great help. I find it to be a fantastic reference tool and can therefore recommend it to fellow readers. Great publication.

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