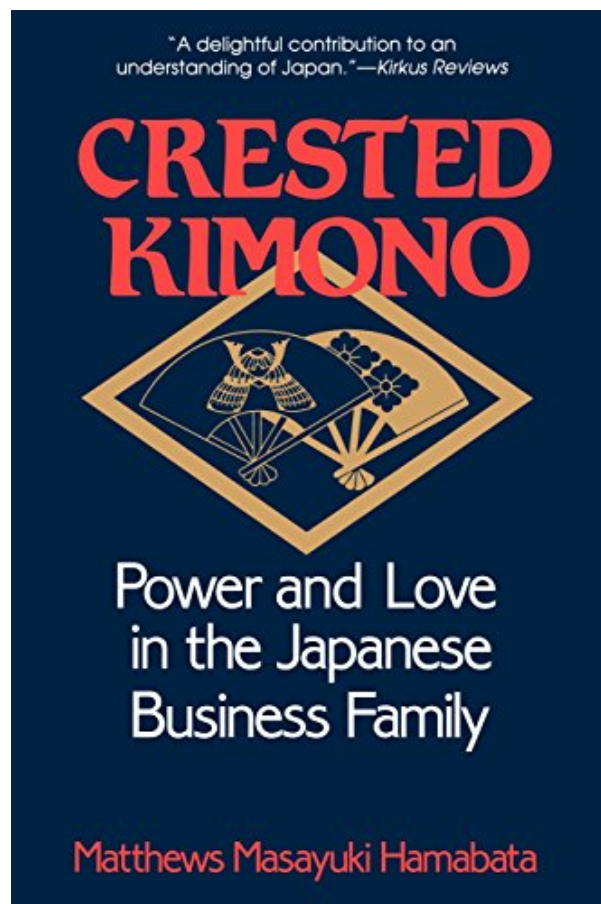


**CRESTED KIMONO: POWER AND LOVE IN
THE JAPANESE BUSINESS FAMILY BY
MATTHEWS MASAYUKI HAMABATA**



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"A delightful contribution to an understanding of Japan."—*Kirkus Reviews*

CRESTED KIMONO



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in the Japanese
Business Family

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From Publishers Weekly

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Review

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PDF

Examines influential Japanese business families, describing the social and emotional lives of all members of the Japanese household and the conflict of tradition with the need for power, love, wealth, and emotional expression.

- Sales Rank: #715287 in Books
- Published on: 1991-08-27
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- Dimensions: 9.04" h x .58" w x 6.06" l, 1.30 pounds
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Crested Kimono

By A Customer

The book, *Crested Kimono*, is an excellent example of the potential for the integration of real life experiences with sociological theories. It is also extremely well written and tends to read like a novel. Professor Hamabata, an American citizen of Japanese ancestry, divided his book into seven chapters: (1) Boundaries, (2) Perspectives, (3) Households, (4) Death, (5) Authority, (6) Marriage, and (7) Love. I shall briefly describe each of these chapters, making personal comments where it seems necessary. I shall conclude with a general critique. The first chapter, "Boundaries," explained how Professor Hamabata was able to establish relationships with some elite Japanese families-thus making his research possible. When he first arrived in Japan, Hamabata was planning to conduct ethnographic research among top business executives. However, the contacts that he made turned out to be quite superficial. Indeed, Hamabata "wondered why [he] had traveled all the way ! to Tokyo only to hear what could be read in documents available in almost any American University." Moreover, he suffered from two major problems of identity: (1) Was he a Japanese or an American. (2) Was he a sexually available male or a immature student? After deciding to play back-and-forth with the first question, he determined that it would be best (in terms of his study) to assume the identity of a "immature graduate student." Yet, in assuming such an identity, he was soon shut out of the "man's world," which he had hoped to gain access to. However, by spending a lot of time with the wives and children of elite businessmen, he was able to obtain a lot of information on love and marriage-but the importance was yet unclear. In chapter two, "Perspectives," Hamabata discovers that the lives of elite businessmen "cannot be understood apart from the women who act as their partners." This short chapter represents an attempt to demonstrate the legitimacy of basing hi! s study (almost entirely) on observations and interactions ! of elite women and their children. Hamabata wants the reader to believe that his study is somehow advancing beyond the traditional wisdom of sociologists. He wants to go beyond the "neat boundary that sociologists have usually drawn around the family." In short, he is arguing that his idea about Japanese wives has broken new ground. However, the argument that his study is ground-breaking in its initial idea is somewhat misleading. I would agree that his study has indeed added knowledge to the field, but its success was largely based on his unique circumstances (e.g., physical appearance, language ability, and personal connections). More to the point, it is misleading to suggest that scholars of Japan have failed to see the connection between the family and the economy. Many writers before Hamabata have noticed the connections that women have with and within the family enterprise. For instance, as Suzanne Vogal writes, "the interdependence of the husband's and wives! roles in the division of labor is merely a manifestation of the interdependence that characterizes Japanese society" (Vogal, 1978: 16). Likewise, Ann Imamura writes, "the housewife has the greater responsibility of managing the household, including the finances, by herself" (Imamura, 1987: 83). So the new insight about Japanese women that Hamabata claims to have is not as profound as he thinks it is. However, as with the first man to walk on the moon, the actual success of his study-as opposed to its original inspiration-is to be praised. In chapter three of his book, entitled "Households," Hamabata explains how households are formed and constituted among the upper crust of the Tokyo elite. He explained in detail the importance of succession and inheritance in the Japanese household. I was especially amazed by the cold and calculating nature of the Japanese mother he described. The mother actually went so far as to hire a private detective to research the background of! a prospective son-in-law. Similarly, because her own son ! had "entered a third ranked university," she was considering denying him the head ship of the family by bringing in a mukoo-yoshi. All that sort of behavior would be fascinating for the cultural game theorists, who model these behaviors mathematically. The "bringing in a mukoo-yoshi" is actually quite rare among most of the Japanese she knew. So, one criticism of Hamabata's third chapter is

that seems to claim this sort of behavior is wide spread in Japanese society. But maybe the mukoo-yoshi phenomena is more concentrated among the elites of Japanese society. However, Professor Hamabata rarely, if ever, considers the enormous class difference of his "informants." In chapter four, "Death," Hamabata describes the process whereby the Japanese deal with a death in the family. He goes into some detail about how the dead family member is "removed from the realm of the living and ultimately from the world of men." It was particularly interesting to note the lack of strong belief that Hamabata's informants had in the "afterlife." When pressed, none of them would unequivocally declare a belief in ancestral spirits. At least for the upper crust of Japanese society, the dead are treated in a very calculating and utilitarian-like fashion. In Hamabata's interpretation, all the rituals for the dead seemed to be more for the benefit of the living. And the dead often took center stage in familial power struggles. In contrast to many of the observations Hamabata made, I think his discussion of death applies widely across Japanese society. As an English teacher in Osaka, I spoke with hundreds of Japanese and only met one who expressed a sincere belief in the existence of dead ancestors. I believe that Japanese live somewhat of a dual life in this regard. For the most part, they accept the theory of evolution. Yet, at certain times of the year, they suspend their scientific belief in order to strengthen their family bonds. It all seems very rational. Apparently for Japanese, "God was made for man," whereas American Christians tend to assume that "man was made for God." In chapter five, "Authority," Hamabata largely describes the struggles for power that occurred after grandfather Moriuchi had passed away. Mr. Moriuchi did not specify which of his son's should assume the dominant position in the ie structure. He had left the instructions that his trusted assistant should temporarily hold the position until he (the trusted assistant) could make the judgment as to a successor. But this created quite a power struggle within the extended family. After several brothers had experienced financial failures, it eventually became clear who would succeed. With the resolution of the matter, the family enterprises were better able to move on towards economic success. I thought this chapter was especially insightful in its providing real life examples for Nakane's more theoretical insights. As Nakane writes, "No matter how strong the unity, no matter how happy the group, the sudden removal of the leader is a severe blow and automatically brings a household rebellion" (Nakane, 1970: 44).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

All in the Family

By Bob Newman

An interesting study of family patterns and strategies among Japanese business families, Hamabata's book alternates between two poles. On one hand you have extremely complex descriptions of family authority structures and how families develop combined with a lot of Japanese terminology. He takes the theories of a number of writers and tests them out in practice. On the other hand, there is a lot of very interesting descriptive material which not only elucidates the more complex material, but reveals a lot of the research process and the personal tribulations (and even mistakes) of the American author. It's a very honest book from which you can learn the difficulties of anthropological research as well as anything about Japanese society.

There are some contrasts in Japanese society which have been written about many times. Hamabata connects them very skillfully with high-level Japanese business families. One is the contrast between IE and UCHI, perhaps succinctly explained as between household and home. In the former, continuity and organization are paramount, obligations (GIRI) are more important than human feelings (NINJÔ). In the far more flexible UCHI, it's the reverse. My explanation is simplified, for the details, read the book. Hamabata himself writes, "...the IE looks less like a family and more like a corporate group with a variety of options available to it..." While admiring the author's work and not wishing to detract from it--I felt that few readers would be able to follow everything that he writes about the IE, the Japanese household or "family".

On the contrary, the descriptive material is extremely clearly-written. The author was lucky, thanks to certain

contacts, to be able to penetrate into the private worlds of several Japanese business families. He socialized more with the wives and talked with the young adult children, rather less with the men at the head of the families because he chose to be "an immature graduate student" rather than a serious scholar who should have been married. Love vs. duty, marriage arrangements, death, authority and a lot about rituals, expectations of life and family behavior are discussed in the various chapters. While CRESTED KIMONO may not be the last word on Japanese society, and the research was done over 30 years ago, it certainly reveals a lot that is generally closed to outsiders, especially non-Japanese. If you were compiling a short list of useful books for an introduction to Japanese society, I would still put this one on it, despite my comments above.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Sociological Analysis wrapped in the form of a Coming-of-Age Novel

By E. Ellis

Although Hamabata is definitely astute in his observation and analysis, the book felt a little too much like a coming-of-age novel rather than a relevant sociological analysis. Yet, at the same time it dealt with issues that seem to be not openly discussed especially towards Western audiences. It is filled with useful information despite the embarrassing moments of Hamabata's self realizations.

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