

# Ryoma: Life of a Renaissance Samurai

*By Romulus Hillsborough*

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## **Ryoma: Life of a Renaissance Samurai** By Romulus Hillsborough

The founder of Japan's first modern corporation was a swaggering swordsman who packed a Smith and Wesson, an outlaw who led a band of samurai to overthrow the shogun, and one of the most colorful figures in Japanese history. His name was Ryoma, which is the title of the only biographical novel of Japan's greatest samurai in English.

This is the authentic story of Ryoma's key role in Japan's bloody revolution, by which the country was transformed from a land ruled by feudal lords and samurai, under the hegemony of the shogun, into a modern industrialized nation under the unifying rule of the Emperor.

Mid-19th-century Japan was a caldron of political upheaval and intrigue and bloody inner-fighting among samurai. This most enthralling age in the annals of Japan brought forth some of the most fascinating men in that nation's history. Those men modernized Japan, and laid the foundation for the militarism of WWII and the economic powerhouse of today. This close look into the hearts and minds of those two-sworded men provides a deep insight into the political, cultural, and psychological roots of modern Japan.

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## **Ryoma: Life of a Renaissance Samurai** By Romulus Hillsborough Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

A magnificent book and painstaking achievement. -- *Former Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi*

Hillsborough has painted a clear and thorough picture of the times and overlaid it with a compelling story of ingenuity and bravery, supported by 16 years of historical research in Japan. This is definitely one not to be missed by anyone interested in Japanese history, the Meiji restoration or the spirit and determination of the warrior classes of feudal Japan. -- *Peter West, British Kendo Association Newsletter, Summer 1999*

Many historical biographies written in a literary format are entertaining. Very few are such that you are a different person after you have read them. I cannot recommend Ryoma more highly. -- *Adrian Ko, Sword Forum Magazine Online*

Ryoma is the first literary biography in English of Sakamoto Ryoma, one of the people principally responsible for the downfall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Ryoma was the founder of Japan's first modern corporation; a swaggering swordsman who packed a Smith & Wesson revolver; and one of the most colorful figures in 19th century Japanese history. Ryoma is a cultural icon in contemporary Japanese culture and a figure in numerous novels and popular movies. Now biographer Romulus Hillsborough brings to the English speaking audience the definitive and personal history of an amazing and memorable man. Ryoma will be of immense interest to those with an interest in Japanese history, culture, and anyone who enjoys an exceptionally well written biography that adheres to the highest standards of scholarship and literature. -- *The Bookwatch, April 1999*

With his easily readable and entertaining style, Hillsborough does a great job of elucidating the complex customs that ruled Edo Period life and politics. Since this is more a historical novel than a faithful biography, the author is free to put together lively dialogue and portray the characters from the point of view of an omniscient narrator. This goes a long way toward alleviating the typical dryness of a scholarly work of history. -- *John Moore, Japan Times, June 8, 1999*

### **From the Publisher**

Ridgeback Press is pleased to announce the publication of *Ryoma-Life of a Renaissance Samurai*, by Romulus Hillsborough. It is the first literary biography in English of Sakamoto Ryoma, one of the main people responsible for overthrowing the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Ryoma was the founder of Japan's first modern corporation. He was a swaggering swordsman who packed a Smith and Wesson, and one of the most colorful figures in Japanese history. Although basically unknown in the West, this samurai of the mid-19th-century has been idolized, if not deified, among Japan's young and old since the end of WWII.

Asahi Shimbun, one of Japan's leading daily newspapers, recently conducted a survey among executives at 200 Japanese corporations. In answer to the question of who from world history over the past millennium would be most useful in overcoming the economic crisis of today's Japan, Sakamoto Ryoma received the most votes, far ahead of such giants as Thomas Edison, Leonardo da Vinci and the founders of NEC and Honda.

Most major Japanese cities have "Ryoma Societies." Ryoma is depicted in numerous best-selling novels and

popular movies. His image appears regularly in media throughout Japan. "Ryoma fans" flock to his grave site in Kyoto, leaving flowers and purchasing Ryoma posters. And all this for a man who has been dead for nearly a century and a half.

Romulus Hillsborough is a native Californian who lived in Japan for over sixteen years, eight of which he spent writing this extensively researched book. It has been his objective to strictly adhere to historical and cultural fact, while maintaining high literary standards. He has felt that in this way he would be able to both edify and delight the minds of his readers. "To edify while delighting the mind is no easy task," the author contends. "It is one which requires significant motivation. My personal motivation came with the realization of the cultural loss on a grand scale that an historical figure of Ryoma's stature has failed to gain the full attention of the Western world for nearly a century and a half." **FIRST LITERARY BIOGRAPHY OF JAPAN'S MOST REMARKABLE SAMURAI**

The founder of Japan's first modern corporation was a swaggering swordsman who packed a Smith and Wesson, an outlaw who led a band of stalwart samurai to overthrow the shogun, and one of the most colorful figures in Japanese history. His name was Ryoma, which is the title of his first biography in story form to appear in the English language.

The historical importance of Ryoma upon modern Japan, and indeed the rest of Asia, cannot be overlooked. "Without this genius Japan would have lost its independence over a century ago, and been colonized by a European nation," says Tsutomu Ohshima, Chief Instructor of Shotokan Karate of America, the oldest karate organization in the U.S.

"It is a cultural loss that an historical figure of such magnificent stature could have failed to gain the full attention of the Western world for nearly a century and a half," says Romulus Hillsborough, author of *Ryoma-Life of a Renaissance Samurai*. "It is a tragedy that the general public's sources of information about the era of the samurai have, for the most part, been travesties of Japanese history and culture in the forms of popular fiction and movies." Through his new book, Hillsborough has rectified the situation.

"Of the many heroes who lived and died during the turbulent years leading up to and following the Meiji Restoration, Ryoma was the most deserving of the appellation 'a man for all nations,'" says Saichiro Miyaji, Japan's most distinguished biographer of Sakamoto Ryoma. "I am very pleased to see the ideas and magnificent human stature of Ryoma presented in English to the entire world on the eve of the 21st century."

Hillsborough spent 16 years in Japan, studying the language, history and culture. His extensive research includes forty books about his subject's life, historical period and prominent contemporaries, all of Ryoma's extant letters, of which there are over 120 in publication, numerous other letters written to him by his peers, and articles and other pieces from Japanese history journals. The author traveled to those areas in Japan where Ryoma was most active, including the historical cities of Kyoto, Nagasaki, Kagoshima, Hagi, Ryoma's native Kochi, and the picturesque fishing village of Tomo-no-Ura on the Inland Sea.

"In the present age of economical, political and social turmoil, Japan desperately needs a farsighted leader of Ryoma's caliber," says Tae Moriyama, principal of the prestigious Modern Japanese Language School in Tokyo, and author of several books on Japanese language, and local Japanese history and culture. "Hillsborough has woven the elaborate story of Ryoma with pinpoint accuracy and a profound insight into the most exciting period in Japanese history. The author's infatuation with the life of this leader of men is alive on each page of this truly captivating book."

From the Author

Romulus Hillsborough is a native Californian who lived in Japan for sixteen years. Fluent in spoken and written Japanese, his other books include "Shinsengumi: The Shogun's Last Samurai Corps," "Samurai

Tales," and the forthcoming "Samurai Revolution: The Dawn of Modern Japan Through the Eyes of the Shogun's Last Samurai." Hillsborough currently lives in San Francisco.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Megan Martelli:**

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