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## **JAPANESE, UKRAINIAN, AND EUROPEAN CULTURE**

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### **CHARACTERISTICS OF JAPANESE PEOPLE AND CULTURES INFLUENCED BY BUSHIDO**

In this paper we would like to discuss characteristics of Japanese people and society influenced by BUSHIDO.

BUSHIDO is the norm or doctrine of morality which was observed in Japanese society which Samurai controlled. It was explained in the book *BUSHIDO: the Soul of Japan* written by Inazou Nitobe (1862–1933). He was a Japanese educator and thinker. He claimed world peace and attained the position of the deputy secretary-general of the League of Nations. When he was studying in Belgium, he was asked, “how do Japanese people cultivate their moral sense although there’s no religious education in Japan?” He was confused. This is why he decided to write and publish *BUSHIDO*. He reached the conclusion that the Japanese national character was strongly influenced by the concept of BUSHIDO just like characteristics of people in Europe were influenced by the doctrine of Christianity. From what he said, we searched about BUSHIDO and characteristics of Japanese people and cultures influenced by BUSHIDO.

#### **About BUSHIDO**

BUSHIDO means “the path of Samurai”. Nitobe says it consists of seven basic elements. The first is *Gi* (義) which means justice. The second is *Yu* (勇) which means the

courage to go the way which you believe. The third is *Jin* (仁) which means mercy for the disadvantaged. The fourth is *Rei* (礼) which means the kindness and the feeling of respect for others. The fifth is *Sei* (精) which means truthfulness, like keeping promises. The sixth is *Meiyo* (名誉) which means having self-respect. Lastly, the seventh is *Chugi* (忠義) which means serving one's lord sincerely. In these seven elements, *Chugi* is the most important for Samurai. For example, Samurai put a greater priority on serving their lord than being good to their families because they had a strong feeling that they should maintain their *Meiyo* or self-respect. So they tried to maintain it by observing *Chugi*.

These elements of BUSHIDO have many characteristic and values which might be difficult to understand for foreign people. Now I introduce some of them. First one is *Seppuku* (*Hara-kiri*). It's a way of committing suicide. They stabbed their stomachs when they committed *Seppuku*. Samurai used to commit *Seppuku*-suicide when they made a fault against their lord. Why did they do such a terrible thing? This was because Japanese people thought that death is honorable. For example, when it comes to a battle, they thought dying to protect their lord was more important than killing the captain of their enemy. So, all the guilt was absolved when they committed suicide. As mentioned earlier, *Meiyo* was the most important for Samurai. So, they chose committing a suicide to protect their honor. They respected a custom of *Kokki* (克己) which means sympathizing with others even though their thoughts are different from others' thoughts because harmony with others is important for Japanese. It is said that this custom was created by the spirits of *Rei* which is one of the seven basic elements of BUSHIDO.

## **Japanese Characteristic**

First, Japanese people tend to respect hierarchical relationship. This tendency is based on Confucianism. It is said that Confucianism brought about a seniority system which is adopted in many Japanese companies even today.

Second, Japanese people are easily influenced by their surroundings. One of the reasons for this is that Japanese are traditionally regarded as being collectively minded. Japanese tend to think that democracy is something where you follow the majority, and many people behave like that. One should say this is connected to the traditional value of *Kokki* or self-denial.

## **Japanese society**

Let me introduce everyday life in Japan and describe influences of the Japanese national character in it.

First, Japanese often wait in line. For example, when we take a train when there are a lot of people, we line up separately for the train we want to ride. Also, now under the COVID-19 pandemic, we always wear a mask and line up while maintaining social distance. This behavior is reflected in the Japanese character to avoid shame and fit in with others.

Second, Japanese often express appreciation with the word “Arigatou” which is a typical Japanese word used to express thankfulness. Also, we say “Itadaki-masu” every time we eat. This word expresses appreciation for the animals who gave their lives to be eaten and the people who made food. Some Japanese put their palms together, when we use this expression.

Third, the services of Japanese restaurants are very polite. For example, wet hand towels and a glass of water are a free service in nearly all restaurants and cafes. Also, the attitude of waiters and waitresses are very polite. When they talk with customers, they don't use usual expressions

but special ones that show respect for their customers. They are expected to help customers spend their time as comfortably as possible. The traditional notion of *Kokki* or self-denial for others can be seen here.

One can say that the influence of Bushido is found even in contemporary Japanese life.

### **References**

Nitobe, I. (2004). *Bushido: Samurai Ethics and the Soul of Japan*, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.