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UKRAINIAN COSSACKS AND JAPANESE SAMURAI: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The Ukrainian Cossack has come to symbolize Ukraine's ethnic image, much like the medieval knight of Western Europe or the Samurai of Japan. In fact, only a minority of Ukrainians belonged to this famed social group – but their influence on history, culture, and the psychology of the country was deeply profound.

The Japanese Samurai has come to symbolize the image of Japan. A person who has deep connections with their inner self, a person who holds their word just like their sword, and one who upholds the law, no matter the cost.

The name *Cossack* (Ukrainian: *козак*; *kozak*) is derived from the Turkic *kazak* (free man), meaning anyone who could not find his appropriate place in society and went into the steppes, where he acknowledged no authority. A man who is free from the shackles of anyone. The ethnic origin of Cossacks is mixed. Their ancestors came from Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and Tatar territories. However, no matter their race, everyone was accepted as long as they obeyed the rules of the free people.

The most important branch of the Zaporozhye economy was cattle breeding. Cossacks bred horses, cattle, pigs, and sheep. Hunting was a significant industry. They were also engaged in poultry and beekeeping. Cossacks made drinks from honey and made candles from wax for the Sich church, as well as for monastic and parish churches.

The laws of the Zaporizhian Sich were rather strict. This was not particularly humane treatment, but it helped to maintain excellent discipline. If one Cossack was to kill another then, the murderer would be buried alive with the person that they have killed.

As any men, they liked drinking, however it was strictly forbidden during the time of war, and those who were caught doing so before a battle would be left at the encampment.

If a Cossack found an item without an owner it would be put on a special stick that was in the middle of the sich, and if the owner of the item didn't take it back after 3 days then anyone could take that item.

Cossacks elected a new leader every year, a man who could lead them forwards, he was called hetman.

Cossacks adhered to the following principles:

- Honor and a good name are more valuable than life;
- Cossacks have equal rights (“no kings, no slaves, but all are slaves to God”);
- Let your words be your promise;
- Uphold the Orthodox faith, and act by the traditions of your people;
- There is no greater bond than brotherhood;
- Save others before saving yourself.

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The full list of their principles could be found in an old official document, written by a hetman.

Samurais were the well-paid retainers of the daimyo (the great feudal landholders). They had high prestige and special privileges such as wearing two swords. They cultivated the bushido codes of martial virtues, indifference to pain, and unflinching loyalty, engaging in many local battles. Though they had predecessors in earlier military and administrative officers, the samurai truly emerged during the Kamakura shogunate, ruling from c.1185–1333.

Another, more general word for a warrior is “bushi,” from which bushido is derived; this word lacks the connotations of service to a master.

By the end of the 12th century, the Samurai became almost entirely synonymous with bushi, and the word was closely associated with the middle and upper echelons of the warrior class. The Samurai were usually associated with a clan and their lord, and were trained as officers in military tactics and grand strategy.

Bushido formalized earlier samurai moral values and ethical code, most commonly stressing a combination of sincerity, frugality, loyalty, martial arts mastery and honour until death. Born from Neo-Confucianism during times of peace in the Edo period (1603–1868) and following Confucian texts, while also being influenced by Shinto and Zen Buddhism, it allowed the violent existence of the samurai to be tempered by wisdom, patience and serenity.

Most samurai were bound by a code of honor and were expected to set an example for those below them. Samurais had the following principles:

- *Justice*: Justice is a core value of the Samurai. Incorporating the Bushido principle of justice into your life requires reflecting on what is fair and upholding the value of upstanding moral character.
- *Courage*: Courage, like justice, entails deciphering what is right and wrong.
- *Compassion*: Compassion is the ability to manifest love and sympathy through patience. This is an especially important trait for those in a leadership role.
- *Respect*: Respect means that you acknowledge your regard for the experiences and feelings of others.
- *Integrity*: In order to practice many of the other principles listed, one has to maintain integrity.
- *Honor*: Samurai were warriors who upheld a sense of self worth and lived by the highest code of conduct.
- *Loyalty*: First, stay true to yourself. When fealty is given to another, this must not be abandoned even under difficult circumstances.
- *Self-control*: Self-control in the Bushido code means adhering to this code under all circumstances.

Here you can see the actor who played the role of Taras Bulba, a famous colonel who was regarded in the tale as “A hero, a representative of a life of a whole nation, the political and social life.”

Set on the Ukrainian steppe, “Taras Bulba” is an epic tale of the lives of Cossack

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warriors by famous Ukrainian writer Mykola Gogol. The narrative follows the exploits of an aging Cossack, Taras Bulba, and his two sons. Gogol published a revised and expanded version of the story in 1842 year.

Taras Bulba was initially published in 1835 as part of a collection of stories, it was much more abridged and evinced some differences in the storyline compared with the better known 1842 edition, the latter having been described by Victor Erlich as a “paragon of civic virtue and a force of patriotic edification.”

In the year 1256, the Shogunal Deputy in Kyoto, Hōjō Shigetoki (1198-1261) wrote a letter to his son and house elders of his clan. The letter, now known as “The Message Of Master Gokurakuji”, emphasized the importance of loyalty to one’s master.

Written in kanamajiri style, “The Message Of Master Gokurakuji” is described as being “...basically concerned with man’s moral duties and the ideal behavior for leaders of the warrior class. The predominant tone of the work is a Buddhist sympathy for all living beings and an awareness of the functions of karma. Women, children, and those of lower social standing are to be treated kindly and with regard, and even the concept of loyalty to superiors is dealt with more in a religious sense than a Confucian one.”

Getting to know different cultures helps strengthen the bond between countries. This project was quite insightful for us.

Getting to know the disciplined Samurai, and the free spirited and independent Cossack was an interesting contrast to research. Both are loyal to their counties, traditions and religion, just in their own ways.