

# The distinctive national character of Japanese culture and the philosophy of Bushido

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**Abstract-** This article explores the philosophy of Bushido, which is part of Japanese culture. Thoughts on Bushido philosophy, the traditional culture of the Japanese, are analyzed. There are ideas about Zen Buddhist philosophy and its essence.

**Keyword:** bushi, samurai, hara-kiri, satori, musin, national character.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the XII-XIX centuries in Japan, an estate of warriors, called in Japanese **bushi**, or **samurai**, was in power. In the beginning, during the Heian period, they were simply self-defense groups to defend fiefdoms and maintain public order. In a feudal system, in which vassals received protection and land from the overlord as a reward for loyalty and service, the samurai clan acquired unprecedented power (Burns and Ralph, 1955, p. 408). In the Edo era, samurai were considered the highest of the four classes (the other three are peasants, artisans, and merchants). Despite the abolition of the estate hierarchy during the Meiji Restoration (Japanese bourgeois revolution of 1868) in the late 19th century, former samurai took an active part in the modernization of Japan. As a result, they retained a huge influence on Japanese society, and the spirit of the samurai (or **bushido**) remained the most important factor in the formation of Japanese national character.

Bushido reflects the ethical views that were formed among the samurai warriors. Although this term was not used until the Edo period, the very moral and ethical opinion about the norms of samurai behavior was formed during the Kamakura period and, evolving with the assimilation of neo-Confucian ideas in the Edo period, after the Meiji Restoration, formed the basis of the worldview, philosophy and life principles of the military class and in the whole of the Japanese people (Bushido, 1988, p. 2111). It is important to note that "bushido was related not only to the education of a warlike spirit and

the ability to wield weapons; the samurai code presupposed absolute loyalty to the overlord, a heightened sense of personal honor, strict adherence to official duty and a willingness, if necessary, to sacrifice life in battle or in accordance with ritual (**hara-kiri** is suicide by ripping open the belly.)" (Bushido, 1983, p. 221) ...

## The origins of bushido -DZen Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced to Japan from China in the 6th century and has had a tremendous impact on Japanese culture. At the end of the 12th century, the Zen Buddhist sect was founded in Japan. While other Buddhist sects were mainly concerned with the religious aspects of Japanese life, the DZen sect played a major role in shaping the Japanese national character, developing certain stereotypes of behavior and thinking.

Strongly influenced by DZen teachings, traditional arts such as tea ceremony (**sado**), flower arrangement (**kado**), **haiku** poetry, and calligraphy (**shodo**) arose. In addition, Zen ideology had a significant impact on bushido.

Since [DZen Buddhism] emphasized physical fitness, the art of self-control and the practice of meditation instead of conventional training, the sect appealed to the military class, whose representatives believed that the teachings of Zen gave them mystical powers that could reveal the secret of being and help in practical activity. and this was seen as the most important condition for maintaining their social status (Burns and Ralph, 1955, p. 503).

The main goal of DZen Buddhism is to achieve spiritual enlightenment (**satori**) by its adherents through the feeling of Buddha in oneself: "Nirvana is seen as liberation from human consciousness, from the burden of confused thoughts and sensations of reality." According to this teaching, "Buddha exists in all objects, but ... this reality cannot be grasped, since it is beyond the limits of dualism and the formation of a concrete idea" (Davies, 1998, p. 1). For this reason, Zen teachings emphasize the sensation of one's own body in order to know the truth. They say that "to reach the state of satori means to

know the truth outside the mind (**musin**, or the unconscious)", to go into the state of subconscious-associative thinking (Suzuki, 1988, p. 220). Status Mushin - ce Kret success in the martial arts. As Zen Master Takuan states :

[Unconscious] is a consciousness that is not aimed at a specific task ... In the state of musin , or muneng , thought glides from one object to another, flowing like a stream of water, feeling the slightest bends of the path. Therefore, the mind performs its functions subconsciously. But when the flow (stream of thought) stops at any one point, all other points receive nothing, and as a result, inhibition occurs (ibid., P. 111).

In other words, the state of unconsciousness connects the body to the soul. Many samurai trained diligently to achieve this state through DZen, and this reduced their fear of death. In a letter from Takuan to Iemitsu , a great swordsman and one of the teachers of the Tokugawa shogun , a Zen master gave the following advice.

When the opponent tries to hit you, your eyes follow the movements of his sword all the time, and you try to follow them. But as soon as your attention focuses on the sword, you will cease to control yourself and inevitably suffer defeat ... Therefore, do not even think about yourself (ibid., Pp. 95-96).

Thus, the spiritual components of bushido came from DZen Buddhism, and DZen meditation was used by samurai for physical and spiritual exercise. Through Zen training, they reached the pinnacle of mastery of their weapons, keeping their cool and calm under any circumstances.

In addition to the most important influence of DZen Buddhism, the modern concept of bushido has incorporated the fundamental principles of the Confucian teachings - Confucianism.

Confucianism is the first and main, rational and utilitarian philosophy of human nature, which considers worthy human relations to be the foundation of society ... [It] establishes a social order on the basis of strict ethical norms that determine the central role of the family and the state, ruled by educated people with high moral foundations and wisdom. [There are four principle]: 1) **zhen** - gu mannost, warm human relations between people; 2) **and** - loyalty, loyalty, or fairness; 3) **whether** - compliance with the norms of behavior and morality; 4) **sin** - wisdom ( Davies , 1998, p. 2).

The ideas of neo-Confucianism were developed in China by Zhu Xi (Zhu-tzu) (1130-1200). In Japanese, neo-Confucianism was usually called **shushigaku** (religious teaching). This teaching was comprehended by monks of the Zen sect in the **gozan** monasteries during the Muromachi period and was taken into account by the feudal barons when developing laws. During the Edo period , the Zhu Xi school received strong support from the Tokugawa shogunate (military rule of the Tokugawa clan). The shoguns believed that "the philosophy of [Zhu Xi] can be very useful for justifying and ideologically legitimizing the feudal structure of the state and society that developed in Japan in the 17th century." For the neo-Confucian school, the most important were the principles whether (decency, observance of moral norms) and zhen (humanity), in which respect for parents and devotion to the master were especially valued (Varley, 1986, p. 151). Samurai were considered the upper class during the Edo period . These were not only warriors, but also prominent political figures. Therefore, according to Beasley (Beasley, 1999, p. 158), "the education of the samurai was intended to shape the character and acquire the knowledge required for the official career ... It was believed that the samurai is necessary to inculcate the" right "moral values, if they were meant to work in government spheres. " Based on this, the Tokugawa shogunate and the feudal barons subject to it organized many schools that gave their servants the opportunity to study the ideas of Confucianism.

A number of Japanese thinkers rejected Zhu Xi 's neo-Confucian orthodox teachings as difficult to adapt in Japanese society. They are in the middle of the period Edo were based kogaku ( "school for the study of ancient times"). Kogaku students returned to the works of classical Chinese Confucianism in order to thoroughly understand what the ancient sages still taught ("Kogaku", 1993, pp. 808-809). Yamaga Soko was one of the first among those who studied ancient teachings. He argued that "a sincere or truthful life ... is about following the principles of good governance, which allows those who follow them to communicate with what was vital and dynamic in their souls" (ibid., P. 808). Yamaga Soko came from samurai and was well versed in the military grandfather. He is considered one of the main compilers of the bushido code . "A samurai," Soko argued , "must improve not only his physical condition as a warrior, but also his mind and willpower" (Varley, 1986, pp. 183-

184). In conclusion, we note that with the help of the samurai class, Confucianism flourished during the Edo period. Its fundamental principles - loyalty and humanity - not only infiltrated the ruling samurai class, but also universally rooted in the common people, with the result that it became possible existence of staunch followers of Confucianism, and in modern Japan.

The samurai followed a strict moral code, which required them to behave in a dignified manner, be fair, humble, etc. Moreover, as Nitobe explains (Nitobe, 1935, p. 86), "personal loyalty is a moral bond in the relations of people of all classes, but only in the code of knightly honor does loyalty take the most important place."

Devotion was thus a defining feature of relations in feudal Japan: the relationship between suzerain and vassal during the Kamakura characterized as "duties and ministry" (UNEG the hoko). The economic side of samurai life depended on the land allotment, the master guaranteed his servants a certain territory and gave them additional possessions (estates) in accordance with feats of arms.

There were also completely opposite principles, reflected in the ethical views of the samurai during the Kamakura period. So, Watsuji (cited in Sagara, 1964, pp. 162-164) argues that the relationship between servants and the owner was based on unquestioning obedience and self-sacrifice.

Ienaga (Ienaga), on the other hand, believes that the samurai served his master only for a fee (ibid). When the service did not satisfy the master, he resorted to sanctions; or the disgruntled samurai, in turn, openly demanded a greater reward. Yet the concept of "honor" has always affected the relationship between the overlord and the vassals. Samurai were often torn between the desire for independence and loyalty to their master in order to save that very honor. In fact, however, the nature of the relationship between feudal barons and their samurai was very different depending on the size of the holdings (Ikegami, 200, pp. 83-84).

The samurai valued honor above all else, which was expressed in the aphorism "Better to die than dishonor yourself" (Ozawa, 1994, p. 13). Samurai who accepted death in battle were honored with military honors and glory and wished that this glory would be passed on from generation to generation forever. In battle, they tried to be the first and led the soldiers into the attack, shouting out their names to demonstrate fearlessness and courage to the enemy (ibid., P. 65). Honor meant a lot to the samurai,

being the subject of their pride, and a worthy death of a samurai meant that his descendants would be provided with the care and respect of the overlord. One example: in 1582, Uesugi Kagekatsu's troops fought against the warriors of Oda Nobunaga. When Uesugi was in a critical situation and one of his fortresses was about to fall, the samurai who defended it made the following decision: Just before the fall of this fortress ... the vassals decided that it would be regrettable if they were captured alive and the enemy dishonored their names. They decided to resort to **seppuku** (another reading - hara-kiri) and leave their names unblemished to their descendants ... They not only died with dignity: before death, each wrote his name on a wooden board and attached it to his head through a hole made in his own ears. In short, they did it to show who is who. Indeed, their names were inherited and remained in history. All of their descendants were rewarded by Uesugi (Nomura, 1995, pp. 8-9).

As you can see from this example, seppuku, or voluntary liberation of the soul from the body, was the most honorable kind of death for a samurai. The belly was considered the place where the soul dwells and all human attachments are concentrated, and the samurai demonstrated their honesty and integrity of nature in this way of leaving life (Nitobe, 1935, pp. 118-120). The samurai also demonstrated their fearlessness and resilience and felt a sense of complete satisfaction by killing themselves with their swords - the most valuable and important thing they had left (Okuma, 1995, p. 28). Samurai as an estate ceased to exist after the collapse of the feudal system; nevertheless, certain moral values that they followed, including loyalty, justice, honesty and honor, were highly regarded in the Meiji era (Nomura, 1995, p. 232). However, the Japanese nation abused the notion of loyalty and spawned fanatical patriots when it waged wars against other countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. The military committed atrocities against innocent people on the territory of other countries, although the samurai of earlier times observed certain decencies and were respected by their enemies. However, in the period of modern history, Japanese soldiers fought too fanatically for their country and the emperor, which led to many tragedies.

However, as the country was modernized under the Meiji Emperor, society lost the spiritual foundations of the Japanese bushido code, and some even argued that the concept of bushido had exhausted itself with the end of the Meiji period (Nomura, 1995, p. 237).

As indicated above, it is believed that the Bushido spirit as a distinctive feature of the Japanese national character hardly exists today. However, some signs of bushido can still be found in martial and aesthetic arts, in which certain exercises ( **kata** ) are performed repeatedly until the performer masters them perfectly and reaches a state of "nonexistence." Manners, rules of conduct are also important; pupils of martial arts schools demonstrate loyalty to their teachers and treat them with great respect.

Unfortunately, loyalty, devotion of bushido had the effect is also characteristic of the Japanese " overwork ", which sometimes resulted in death ( **Karos** ) in cases where people worked, sparing no effort and demonstrating his effort to do everything possible for his company and its owners. Moreover, these days, some Japanese people even commit suicide when they want to restore a tarnished reputation or apologize for their mistakes or misdeeds towards family or company. The Japanese tend to justify and even praise such suicides and have sympathy for the victims. All this has a negative impact on people, especially young people who are starting to think that suicide is the simplest way to get rid of all troubles.

As a result, we note that bushido had a strong influence on the formation of the Japanese national character. As noted above, the spirit of bushido still dominates Japanese society in some areas, while in others it can be difficult to detect, for example among young people who do not differ in respect to their teachers and do not bother to observe the norms of decency in society. That is, in modern Japan, some are well aware of everything related to bushido , while others are no longer interested in it. Bushido as a characteristic of the Japanese nation seems to be going through a turning point now, and its role in the life of the Japanese largely depends on each of the

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