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“Japanese Ethic: Samurai and Soldiers”

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Changing Soldiers' Ethics

After World War II, Japan entered a peaceful period for more than 60 years. Through the support of the U.S. government, nationalism, regulations and guidance Japan developed rapidly and became a more modern nation. Will the Japanese continue to hold the irreplaceable aspect of harmony in their hands with the rapid change that has taken place in the past 60 years? The news has reported many cruel cases recently. Has Japanese morality, morals impacted the earth? What drastic changes have taken place in our Self-Defense Force and military personnel? These questions are asked not only of the military, but of the Japanese society as well. I think Japanese life has progressed in materials and riches, but on the other hand, traditional Japanese culture (thought and mental pillar) has suffered and lost. In this paper, I will try to check the origin of Japanese ethics, what has Japanese lost, and Soldier's ethics from history.

The Way of Samurai

There was once a group of warriors from the 10th century to the 19th century in Japanese history. We called them "Samurai". It is difficult to explain the concepts of the Samurai Warriors, because it has changed and is somewhat different today. The concept of Bushido is also changing. Both Samurai and the Bushido are warriors. In this paper, I will review the Bushido through the book "Bushido: The Soul of Japan" written by Inazo Nitobe.

The Bushido is influenced by Buddhism, Zen Shinto (the native religion of Japan, once its state religion) and Confucianism. Of the two, Confucianism was the most important source of Bushido.

During the Tokugawa period (1603 - 1867) Confucianism was encouraged as an official study. The study of Confucianism improved a person with the "GOJHO", and applied it to the "GORIN". The "GOJHO" means five virtues. They are: JIN (Benevolence) "having a heart of

consideration”, GI (Rectitude) “Do a right act”, REI (Respect) “having a tolerant heart”, CHI (Wisdom) “Make a right decision”, and SHIN (Trust) “be trusted by persons”.

GORIN means five cardinal relationships. They are: “father and son”, “ruler and subjects”, “husband and wife”, “elder and younger”, and “between friends”. This is the core of theme to the Confucian “Human relation”. Confucianism is the basis for the Samurai’s behavior which developed into the “Bushido”. Besides these, CHU (loyalty) was also taught as an important virtue.

INAZO NITOBÉ wrote the book “Bushido: The Soul of Japan” published in English in 1899. He expressed the Bushido in words for foreigners and prior to him, no one had ever done it before. He wrote his opinions and experiences in this book, because there is no written code to the Bushido. He wrote this book to introduce Japanese ethics to Americans, but he also introduced this book to the Japanese. Japanese widely received his teaching and it had a large impact on modern Japan.

He analyzed that the Bushido was formed on seven virtues. They are GI (Rectitude), YU (Courage), JIN (Benevolence), REI (Respect), SHIN (Honesty), MEIYO (Honor), and CHU (Loyalty). He explained how the Samurai were raised as warriors, rulers of society. I think the essences of the Bushido are two things: self control and serving the public. In 1868, the Samurai became extinct, but the spirit of the Samurai – the Bushido was inherited.

Imperial Re-script for Military Personnel

The Meiji Emperor issued the Imperial Re-script for Military Personnel as the official code of ethics for military personnel in January 1882. This re-script consists of 2,940 words that explained in detail the history of Japan, the spirit of the Japanese, foresight of the nation, history of the military, what the military should be, and the essence of military spirit. The most

important points, which military personnel should obey, were: Loyalty, Courtesy, Courage, Faith, and Humility. The Imperial Army and Navy had to memorize the document by heart and read it aloud in the morning and the evening. This re-script became the creed for Imperial military personnel. A famous precept in the Imperial Re-script to Imperial Soldiers and Sailors states that “duty is heavier than a mountain; death is lighter than a feather” (Nirasawa, 2002).

Imperial Re-script on Education

The Imperial Re-script on Education was issued in October 1890 as the government policy on the guiding principals of Japanese education. The Re-script requested people to follow the 12 virtues that included filial piety, unity in marriage, law-abiding mind, self-development, and courageous service in national emergency (Nirasawa, 2002).

Field Service Code

The War Minister Tojo issued The Field Service Code (Senjinkun) just before the outbreak of war in December 1941. These regulations and manuals showed the ethics that Imperial Army Soldiers should have. The Field Service Code stated that Soldiers should conduct the GUNJIN-CHOKUYU (Imperial Re-script for Military Personnel) on the battlefield in details (Senjinkun, 1941).

After the WW II

The Japanese Imperial Army and Navy ethics were based on Japanese tradition, like the Bushido, until the end of WW II. It formed the backbone and spirit of the warrior. After WW II, the Japanese threw the code away and many other traditions were forbidden because of the intention of the GHQ which enforced the Japanese occupation policy. Education was based on a new sense of values. Many Japanese, especially the younger generation, have lost the opportunity to learn the traditional teachings of Confucianism or the Bushido. Confucianism or

the Bushido values of strict self control and achieving responsibility were just some of those that were lost as well.

Japanese society and its sense of values have changed. Presently, the Japanese are satisfied with greed and self indulgence. Traditional values are lost and Japanese traditions, (old and good) along with Japanese ethics are gone. As mentioned in the beginning, this has taken place over the past 60 years.

Coming back the “BUSHI-DO”

In 2004 the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force deployed to Iraq for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance. Colonel Banjo, the Commander of 1st Iraq Restore Support Group demanded the following from his soldiers:

- As a Japanese representative, “As Japanese be faithfully and heartily, as soldiers from country of the “BUSHI-DO”, be in disciplined and be stately.”
- Motto GNN: G(Giri = Obligation), N(Ninjou = Humanity heart), N(Naniwabusi =Behavior based on Obligation and Humanity heart)

Commander ordered to practice the “BUSHI-DO” to conduct thorough training and to keep tight military discipline. Col Banjo gave solders improving their combating ability with thorough training, conducted security for the camp and movement with vehicles with ridgley attitude to never show unguarded or careless action.

This “BUSHI-DO” concept made solders imaging of pride as Japanese soldier and ridged discipline. Sprits of the “BUSHI-DO” which value strictly control one’s behavior, honor and achieving responsibility, became a help of success of mission in severe condition.

Conclusion

I have explained Japanese ethics as it relates to the Japanese Samurai and Soldiers. We can see similarities between our Soldiers' values by comparing the Bushido seven virtues with the U.S. Army's values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The values of our warriors and Soldiers have not changed through out our nation. Our ancestors have left a splendid legacy for our Soldier's to follow. The Bushido should be inherited by Japanese Soldiers who are successors of the Samurai. Hopefully the Bushido way may strengthen our Soldiers mental strength, values, and ethics.

References

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