

Bushido: the way of the warrior



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Bushido is known as the code of the samurai, but it is much more than that. Bushido is a way of life. Bushido is an ancient code of conduct for the samurai of feudal Japan. Bushido is one of the few things that has not changed through the years. Bushido first appears in 712AD in one of the oldest books of Japan. Bushido has been compared by many to the English Knights' Chivalry. Even though they have some of the same principles, they have little in common. Bushido was only truly formed in the twelfth century. It developed under the Tokugawa's rule of Japan.

As I have said Bushido is the Samurai's code so before I can describe Bushido I must explain the Samurai. The teachings of Bushido set down strict rules that revolve over seven virtues which I will explain the most importance of all the teachings and virtues of Bushido. I will also examine the affect of Bushido on the Japanese social system from its first development to modern times. During the thirteenth through seventeenth centuries Bushido changed slowly, and almost un-noticeably, so I will explain Bushido in the 1700s to the present day. The final part of Bushido I will examine is its effect on popular culture.

The Samurai were some of the most honorable warriors of all time. " Do not forget preparedness for battle" (French 206). As the warriors of Japan the Samurai were each adapt at fighting, and warfare. Some of the weapons the Samurai employed included: the katana, bow and arrows, spears, bo staffs, kamas. In Japanese Samurai literally means to serve, and as such the Samurai served their lords. The Samurai also were very loyal, if they believed they disobeyed or dishonored their lords they would ask for the

chance to commit seppuku (seppuku is a ritual suicide). The Samurai's were divided into family based clans.

As clans gathered manpower and resources and struck alliances with each other. When the clans would come together they would pick a leader to rule them. The leaders were each in some way related to a high noble family, or the emperor. At this earlier point in history there were three noble families, the Fujimaru, the Minamori, and the Tairi. Because of their rising military and economic power, the clans ultimately became a new force in the politics. The Shogunate ruled over all Japan, including the clans. So in this time with samurais ruling Japan, Bushido was now wide-spread, across the country.

Bushido was a mixture of many other teaching in Japan. “ The code of these new samurai knights melded the values of Shinto, Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism. ” (French 205). Bushido expanded code of the samurai, and stressed frugality, loyalty, mastery of martial arts, and honor to the death. Bushido had seven main virtues and they were: Courage, Benevolence, Respect, Honesty, Honor, Loyalty, and Righteousness. Bushido also taught that you should not fear death, and should strive for a form of enlightenment. It also has similar vows of Buddhism. The first vow of Bushido is to never to be outdone in your way of life.

To practice Bushido you must be good to your master. In the same respect you must be honorable to your children, as if they are your master. The final vow of Bushido is to show great compassion to all people. They believed that by reciting these vows they could gain strength, and prosperity. Judgment is the power of deciding upon a certain course of conduct in accordance with reason, without wavering. “ You can not judge whether one is good or evil by

there prosperity” (Tanaka 29) Judgment is the bone that gives firmness and stature. As without bones the head cannot rest on the top of the spine, nor hands move nor do feet stand.

Without good Judgment a Samurai could not discern the best path. Next in the line of virtues was Courage. Courage is doing what is right. Going through all kinds of hazards, to jeopardize one's self was part of Courage. This is what courage was taught to be in Bushido. Many thought that this kind of courage was only rashness. Pure courage was to live a good life, and to die an honorable death. Tranquility is courage when, you must have a calm mind to access the battle field and your opponents. Benevolence was deemed a princely virtue. It was broken down into two different parts.

The first part of Benevolence is to keep a good spirit at all times. “ He presents gifts and donations” (Tanaka 28) the second part of this virtue is to show charity to all people. As Judgment must be hard or stern, Benevolence must be gentle. Benevolence can be compared to other religious teaching that all teach mercy. “ The warrior who strikes his wife is a coward” (French 207). The sense of honor, knows your personal dignity and worth. This to the Samurai's was very important. Honor being so important was at the same time all expected. Some believed that a good Honor was eternal.

In this teaching the Samurai came to fear disgrace. Honor however could become a vain self-centered person. On the other hand when some one disgraced a samurai or spoke against a samurai, the code of Honor gave the samurai the right to kill them in a fight. Bushido and the Samurai were central to revolutionizing the Japanese society. Bushido permeated all social classes to have a chance at glory and fame. Not one of the social

classes could resist the power of Bushido's influence. The Samurai were initially the fighting class of Japan, though through the years it became almost a religion for its practitioners.

Originally these warriors were merely mercenaries in the employ of the emperor and noble clans. Over time the Samurai slowly gained more power than the nobles, and began to create a Samurai based government. Because of their rising military and economic power, the clans ultimately became a new force in the politics of the court. Over time, powerful samurai clans became a type of warrior nobles. The Samurai began taking on some of the Noble's pastimes such as calligraphy and poetry. The Nobles also began to absorb some of the Samurai's customs. After a certain amount of time the Samurai's power began to wane.

At this point all of Japan broke down into States. In this turbulent period, bushido ethics became important factors in controlling and maintaining public order. During this time many warriors began calling themselves Samurai, and with little order there were many de facto Samurai's. The biggest change in Bushido happened. Now the Samurai moved from warrior nobles to nobles. They became the aristocrats of their time. They lost all of their military notability during this time, as several true Samurai gained a good amount of political power. The rulers of the time ordered the generals of the time to cut the military's size.

The now unemployed Samurai became known as Ronin. Ronin literally means wave person, they were called this because they had no lord and they moved from place to place like the waves. One Samurai thought that it was unrespectable to oneself to be a Ronin so he took his own life. Japan during

1700s to 1800s would be the end of the Samurai. This was the first point in time when Japan allowed outside countries to enter. The Samurais were being traded in for new modern technology, and industry. The tradition Samurai was now out dated with gun powder being utilized. Claim that the last samurai conflict was in 1877, during the Satsuma Rebellion.

The Satsuma Rebellion occurred when many Samurai was upset over how the government abandoned them. “ The samurai of Satsuma had grown dissatisfied with the direction the government was taking” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satsuma_Rebellion 1). The Rebellion was lead by Saigo Takamori. The unit was attacked by Saigo and his men. Saigo's samurai forces fought with some modern firearms as well as traditional weapons, but his military tactics were traditional and antiquated. In February, Saigo and his army of 25, 000-40, 000 men besieged the government garrison in the city of Kumamoto.

The siege of Kumamoto is considered by historians a major tactical blunder on Saigo's part as it allowed time for the government to attack with 300, 000 soldiers, under the command of Sumiyoshi Kawamura. The rebel samurai managed a kill ratio of two to one, but were heavily outnumbered. The battle lasted six weeks, and lowered the number of Saigo's men to 300-400. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satsuma_Rebellion 2). The Samurai lost this battle and the whole Samurai class was abolished. However Bushido survived having its practioners gone. Bushido survived though the Japanese martial arts.

Kendo is the practice of training with a false sword. Kendo teaches Bushido just as it has always been taught. Now many of the Tenets are taught, even

though they are impossible to follow. They are impossible because many of the teaching were to be trained on the battle field. The tenets are still the same but now it is much harder to prove each of the virtues in Bushido. Bushido and Samurai are very prevalent in popular culture. There are many movies that show case Samurai. One such movie is The Seven Samurai, in which a farming village hires a collection of wandering samurai to defend them from bandits.

The Seven Samurai was remade in America as The Magnificent Seven; it kept many of the same attributes. The only difference is that the setting is in the west, and instead of Samurai the hero's are Gunslingers. Another movie is Yojimbo, where a former samurai involves himself in a town's gang war by working for both sides. A recent movie, The Last Samurai, containing a mixture of fact and fiction, was released in 2003. It takes most of its story from the Satsuma Rebellion. The samurai have also appeared frequently in Japanese comics and animation.

Most common are historical works where the protagonist is either a samurai or former samurai who possesses considerable martial skill. One of the famous comics is Rouroni Kenshin. It covers the life of a former Samurai that has given up on killing people. American comic books have adopted the character type for stories of their own. Frank Miller (The creator of Sin City) wrote a comic with the main protagonist being a Ronin. Samurais are also prevalent in video games. Bushido is a strange thing that is not completely understood. To me Bushido and the Samurai are great things. Some may see these things as part of the past.

I do see them as part of the past but they are also part of the present that we live in, and the future that we will live in. Bushido is much more than a set of codes for a warrior it is a force that changes Japan for the better. It taught generations of people to have Honor, Valor, Honest, and many other great qualities. The people that learned this way of life slowly began to take power. The Samurai once a group of warriors took the nobles place in the government, becoming diplomats. In my opinion Bushido is an enlightening way of life for those with the determination to follow its teachings.