

Example of honor in japanese culture essay

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



The people of Japan hold the virtue of honor in very high regard. Honor often has close ties with culture and self-perception. The Japanese often look upon honor as essential to one's character as integrity. Masculine and feminine roles are also often defined under the idea of honor (Guerra).

How Honor is taught

Traditionally honor is taught to the new generation often within different families and clans. For a normal student, a teacher might have simply gone over the most basic aspects of the style without diving deeper into the subject or the student's life. For a disciple, the teacher would develop a much more in depth training plan and instruction. With a disciple, the teacher also often becomes an integral part of the person's life and the pair usually develops a close bond and understanding of honor. As master, this person is dedicating themselves to the role of mentor and instructor and the responsibilities that result. In this culture the person who gives information is typically a higher rank than the one that receives the information (Guerra). There are no clear cut guidelines for what must take place between master and student. Both should possess a desire for mutual respect and wellbeing. A teacher would give any information that was needed for the student to progress and learn, nothing would be held back. Clan strength used to be essential for survival so it would be unwise to hold back, the strength of a student insures that the clan will succeed and continue on and that honor remains an important virtue (Guerra). While it is correct that a master does hold more power than their student, it is also their responsibility to perform their duties with a sense of moral responsibility and honor. But relationships should not be entirely one sided, mutual benefit is key. However by today's

estimation, often these relationships no longer exist. The idea of a “ perfect” master student relationship is now thought of as a romanticized version (Guerra) . While there are of course instructors that care deeply about their students, more often than not the instructor’s wellbeing comes first. It is understandable that the instructor has bills to pay and a responsibility to keep the school profitable, however one should not override the other. A “ path of balance” is greatly needed.

Ways of Showing Honor

Tradition etiquette such as bowing, saluting, or honorifics have long been an important part of Japanese culture. . While they are not required, they are valuable in teaching respect and courtesy, morals that I feel are important to understanding honor. The bow or salute is a sign of mutual admiration and a symbol of virtue.

The traditional bow consists of the right palm placed over the left fist. The elbows come to chest height to form a circle. This signifies humility and that all martial artists are a single family. The right hand as a fist and the left as a palm are considered Yang or masculine. The left hand fist and the right palm are considered Yin or feminine. Bowing to a shrine is also required in some schools, often this act is misunderstood. Bowing to a shrine doesn’t have religious significance, instead it is meant to honor past masters and to show appreciation for the knowledge one is about to receive. To bow to or address a teacher by the correct title simply shows that one has an understanding and appreciation for the work they put forth to get to that position.

The use of honorifics is also prevalent in Japan. Different styles are influenced by different cultures. Some schools insist upon learning proper

honorifics for instructors and leaders. They may also insist upon using the culturally correct terms for techniques. Although the idea of honorifics is diminishing as Japan moves towards a more westernized form of communication.

Honor and Media

In the 1985 film “Ran” directed by Akira Kurosawa, honor is one of the predominant themes. The movie chronicles what may happen if honor is lost. In the film, three sons are asked to divide the kingdom of their father, traditionally the eldest receiving the most valuable estate. The younger sons rebel against the tradition of honoring their father’s wishes and as a result start a bitter feud between the brothers (Kurosawa). The film ends with the death of the entire family. The moral of the film suggests that if they had honored their father’s wish and kept the family honor intact, then things might have ended in a happier way.

William Shakespeare’s play “King Lear” also plays upon this theme. Like the family in “Ran”, the king also has sons that are asked to divide the kingdom. In both pieces, two sons rebel against the father and one stands by them. However the reader is often much more sympathetic to King Lear than they would be to Hidetora. King Lear appears to have been a good leader caught up within the greed of his sons (Shakespeare). In contrast Hidetora, was a blood thirsty warrior in his youth. Much of his gains were ill-gotten. The viewer typically does not lament his death at the end of the film. In both pieces there were also instances where innocents were injured or killed as a result of these feuds.

“Ran” and “King Lear” both illustrate the idea that honor is imperative to a

sound family structure, without it everything seems to fall apart. Had the sons honored their father and accepted their fate, both works would have probably ended differently.

Conclusion

Overall the idea of honor is determined by many different factors such as: culture, sex, age, and social standing. Family is one of the most important factors in the Japanese's' idea of honor. Elders are to be respected and celebrates. The younger generations are taught to revere and learn from their elders. Gender roles are also often prevalent in the idea of honor. Men and woman are expected to preform different roles in their quest to become honorable. In some ways they are equal in the honors they receive yet shown in different ways.

Honor for an individual is often shown through the use of honorifics. Terms such as sensei, san, sama, chan, and kun given after a name indicate the social standing or level of respect associated with that person. Using these honorifics is the polite way to let someone know that you respect their position and accomplishments. Small acts such as bowing also convey this message.

When taking on the role of a master, one is expected to develop a much deeper relationship with their disciple than a westernized instructor and student relationship would be. The bond between master and disciple can be a very powerful thing and honor is part of this instruction. Family is a very important concept within this virtue. While some traditions of Japan might be slightly outdated, the core values are still needed in today's society.

Traditions such as bowing, honorifics, and titles all exists to show respect

and honor for those who have achieved positive things. By keeping these ideas alive within the Japanese culture, they hope to continue the teachings designed to honor their richly cultured past.

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