

# Evolution of japanese values after 1945



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Nationalism can be defined as “ the complex network of ideas and philosophies that defines what constitutes a nation and what it means to be a citizen”. In other words, it can be described as the sense of identity as well as pride that not only distinguish the country from the rest of the world but also bind its people together. Thus, Japanese nationalism involves different elements that make up the country’s unique characteristics which allow it to have a distinctive identity among other nations.

However, it is also a notion that can be subject to changes over time, either due to political, economic or social changes. Therefore, what constitutes Japanese nationalism and how did it evolved from 1945 to the present day? Japanese nationalism is the result of numerous components, of which the most important elements are the nation’s traditions and values. These fundamentals can be considered to be part of the foundations of the country and thus, play an important role in Japanese nationalism. After World War II, Japan was in ruin and had succumbed to an economic as well as a social setback.

However, traditions as well as societal values that prevailed from Confucian teachings were a significant factor in bringing the country together as well as giving the population an identity and pride to hold on during these times of troubles. In fact, these values and traditions were channelled to the population by two main institutions: family and education. More specifically, family played a big part in forming the foundations for Japanese individuals’ moral and values, such as honour, loyalty and importance of family relationships.

This in turn allows them to forge an identity, a sense of who they are, in contrast of the foreign countries. Moreover, the Japanese family also allowed the support as well as the bonding of family members, which is critical since every individual had a sense of belonging and no one is left out. The other main factor that helped the country to go through the post-war period is education. In fact, the education system also provided Japanese youth, who were the future generations of the country, a sense of identity by also setting the fundamentals for proper moral attitudes as well as personal habits.

In fact, the school teaches individuals self-discipline, the self-development as well as sense of belonging to their community. The Japanese school system is also a place where individuals learned about the importance of the group, and thus it is also a place where individuals support and bond with each other. However, these traditions and values seemed to erode as time goes on. In fact, these societal morals were challenged by a specific group of the population, namely the youth. The country's population saw its first signs of uprising against the norms during the 1960s, with the protests as well as the rise of individualism.

This first wave of "rebels" was different than other countries with the fact that it was accompanied by deviant actions, such as vandalism and violence. Then, during the 1980s, traditional norms and values were once again challenged with the appearance of a new youth culture, called "shinjinrui" - literally "a new human species" - with its new sense of consumerism as well as individualism. Finally, from the 1990s until the present day, the rise of

subcultures such as boso-zoku and otaku raise the bar in terms of defiance against traditions and societal values.

Traditions and societal values from Confucian teachings are one of the foundations of Japanese society. After World War II, Japan was left in ruins and was falling apart economically with its international trades on suspension as well as its supply of raw materials on mainland Asia cut off. Despite these times of troubles, the general population still managed to keep the society together with the nation's traditional values and beliefs. These societal morals not only bind the population together, but also gave them a strong sense of identity and nationalism that set them apart from the rest of the world.

In fact, they are educated to Japanese individuals through two fundamental institutions of the Japanese society: family and education. Family plays a big role in socializing and transferring traditional values to Japanese individuals. In fact, it contributes to Japanese nationalism by forging identity as well as providing support which binds the population together through educating these societal morals and beliefs. In fact, during the post-war period, the most prominent family model in Japanese was the "ie" family.

The ie is the most traditional form of family in Japan that stems from the aristocratic and warrior classes thousands years ago, similarly to the Chinese "jia" type of family. This type of family usually consists of three or four generations (grand-parents, parents and children) all living under the same roof and it is purely patrilineal, in other words only the son will be head of the family. Moreover, it is based on primogeniture, meaning that only the

eldest sons of every generation get to live in the main “ branch” of the family after marriage.

The other sons, when married, will separate and form another branch and will form themselves another ie family. This traditional family is a major factor in binding the population together after the war because all generations are living together in the same house and thus allows support for each other since no one is left out. Furthermore, with all the “ sub-branches” families, every family is connected with each other and therefore it allows the community to bond and support each other.

In addition, the ie family is also a place where individuals forge their identity by educating them about traditional that has its roots from Confucian teachings. One of the most important values that are taught in the Japanese family is honor and loyalty. In fact, individuals are taught to never bring shame to the family, or the “ clan”, and should always be loyal to where he/she belongs, similarly to a Samurai to his master.

An example of this is during World War II with the Kamikazes: for them, the country comes before anything else and their loyalty towards the nation is so strong that they were willing to sacrifice themselves for it. Another example of these values putting into practice is the life-time employment concept unique to Japanese, where an individual will remain in one company for the rest of his life and consider it as his family with complete devotion and loyalty. Another value that is taught by the family is the sense of obedience. In fact, Japanese are taught to know their places in society and to respect their seniors and elderly.

This value thus reinforces the concept of hierarchy and is the root of the bureaucratic aspect of the Japanese society that can be seen through different institutions: children have to obey their parents, underclassmen have to obey their upperclassmen in school, an employee has to respect a senior employee and a citizen has to obey their emperor. The second institution that transmits traditional values to Japanese individuals is the education system. School in Japan is not only a place to learn academically, but also a place where individuals learn the values and morals needed to integrate into adult society later on.

While the former is done during class hours, the latter is done through extracurricular clubs, or bukatsudo. There are many types of bukatsudo, such as sports (baseball, soccer ... ), martial arts (judo, karate, kendo ... ), and arts (tea ceremony, calligraphy ... ) to name a few. These clubs play a significant role in forming Japanese individuals' character and identity as well as teaching them about the importance of community. Two of the values that bukatsudo promote that go together is discipline and determination.

Members of those clubs are required to be committed to the club and to train, sometimes very rigorously, in order for the club to succeed. This is called "seishin kyoiku", or the "education of the spirit", which essentially highlights perseverance and hardship as a path to maturity. This in turn allows students to form selfhood and a sense of identity through the activities. School is also a place where Japanese are taught the importance of the group, where the community's goals rise above individual's interests. For example, students in every class are divided into smaller groups that take turns to clean up the classroom every day.

This demonstrates the idea of self-sacrificing (ie instead of going home and play) and doing what is right for the greater good of the group (ie the class). Bukatsudo also have the same role in giving importance to the group, with intense training and high level of commitment (as much as six or seven days, three hours training sessions a week) as a form of self-sacrifice to the club. Furthermore, extracurricular clubs also is also a place that brings Japanese individuals together through camaraderie, respect for each other and mutual support. Finally, Japanese school also teaches individuals about the “harmony of the group”, or “wa”.

This concept is essentially based on the idea that in order for a community to function without conflict, certain principles, etiquette and moral standards are required. It is a very important concept because it basically structures the Japanese society. For example, in Japanese school, hierarchy among students is very important. Juniors, or “kohai”, must have great respect for their seniors, “senpai”, and do whatever they are told to do by their upperclassmen. Similar to the family, the school educates individuals with the notion of order and that it is only with order that harmony can be achieved.

This concept of “wa” is an element of Japan’s nationalism because it is part of the population’s identity since it plays a big role in organizing the society. As a conclusion, conventional values and moral standards such as loyalty, discipline and harmony of the group are passed on to the Japanese population through family and education. These principalities are among what constitutes Japan’s population today as they set the foundations for the

individual's attitude as well as individuality that are unique to the Japanese society.

Thus, it reflects the Japanese nationalism by giving its society a distinguished identity. Furthermore, family traditions, such as the "ie" family, and bukatsudo from the education system play a great role in bringing the country together by allowing maintaining kinship as well as mutual support. Although traditions and societal values are the backbone of the Japanese society and form the country's identity, as Japan enters the economic prosperity, driven by the "economic miracle", these values are put into question and challenged with the rise of new Japanese youth cultures from the 1960s until today.

The first generation that begin to defy the set of traditional norms and values of the Japanese society is the "prosperity and global" generation. This generation rose during the 1960s and is mainly characterized by two elements: students political protest movements as well as a deviant culture that reflects its disapproval against social conformism. More specifically, this generation can be portrayed with the main themes of escape, tentativeness, anarchy as well as rebellion against social rigidity and other conformity values such as hierarchy and loyalty.

These characteristics are mainly the results of the increasing westernization of the younger population (influences from Western cultures and ideology) as well as the awareness of global issues (war in Vietnam and peace treaty between Japan and South Korea). As a result, this first wave of youth culture



is the beginning of an increasing defiance as well as detachments between the younger population and traditional norms and moral standards.

The second generation that marks another significant sign of opposition against societal values, although for very different reasons, is the generation of the 1980s, other known as “shinjinrui” – literally “a new human species”. This new youth culture is mainly illustrated by three characteristics. First of all, it is portrayed by a high sense of individualism: for them, individual priorities are more important than the overall group consciousness.

This characteristic is further accompanied by a strong consumerism and urbanism. However, their style of consumerism differs from previous generations, they don't consume to be like others, but rather to differentiate and distinguish themselves from the mass (ie high-class brands etc.). This is called the “bunshu” phenomenon. This generation can be compared to the “yuppies” class in North America during the same period: young workers that live in cities that are savvy and stylish.

Furthermore, during the 1980s, the “shinjinrui” generation received a great amount of attention from the media and was labelled by the general population, more specifically older generations, as being “unacceptably egoist” due to their sense of individualism and aspiration to discern themselves from the mass. Finally, the last generation of youth culture that defied conventional social values and standards is the one from the 1990s until today. In fact, this generation defies societal norms in a completely different way with the rise of the well-known Japanese subcultures.

One of the subcultures that are worth mentioning is the “street fashion”. In fact, in Japan, especially in the big cities, fashion has a huge influence on the younger population and it is both ever changing and extremely diversified. Some famous examples are “cosplay”, where people are dressed as their characters from animes and mangas; “boso-zoku”, who are motorcycle gangs that sport retro-hairdos as well as ride flashy vehicles; “ganguro”, who are girls that have very artificial dark tan and wear heavy make ups; or even the more modern “Lolita”, who dressed in Victorian-era clothing.

These different subcultures adopted by Japanese youth challenge societal norms and standards by being shockingly different visually and thus disrupt the “harmony of the group” that Japanese put such importance on. Another subculture that can be considered “shunned” by the Japanese society is “otaku”. “Otakus” are basically fanatics that are obsessed about something, usually about Japanese pop culture (mangas, animes, video games etc. ).

Although they are gradually accepted, they were once considered abnormal and troubling because of their withdrawal from society to focus on an obsession. Traditional values and social norms are put into question and challenged by different generations of youth culture in completely different ways as time goes on. However, it is also these youth cultures that gave Japan its distinguished characteristic contributing to its identity, which in turn contributes to its nationalism.

For example, fashion subcultures such as “cosplay” and “otaku” are well-known traits of Japan youth population that allows Japanese cultural exportation to other countries, more specifically its popular culture such as

mangas and animes . To conclude, traditions and conventional values such as loyalty, honour, discipline and the harmony of the group form the backbone of the Japanese society. They are educated to Japanese individuals through the family as well as the school.

Being a citizen in Japan means that you have to comply with these traditional values and integrate them into your identity. Therefore they are important to the country's population because it defines who they are, and thus play a significant role in its nationalism. These values and norms are questioned and rebelled against by different youth generations as Japan enters a modernized era characterized by economic growth, consumerism and westernization. Student movements in the 1960s, the consumer-oriented "shinjinrui" generation in the 1980s and fashion subcultures in the 1990s all played part in defying against conventional norms.

However, it is also important to note that even with all this, traditional values and norms still play an important role in Japanese society: Japan is still a very ordered nation that values group consciousness, honour and loyalty (6).

Therefore, there is a "dual value system" that exists in the Japanese society: on one side the rigid and group oriented society and on the other side a population that aspires to break this rigidity by expressing themselves.

#### Bibliography

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914501,00.html>

<http://www.thejapanfaq.com/FAQ-Primer.html>

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-confucian/#ConModJap>

<https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-japanese-values-after-1945/>

<http://www.cjas.org/~leng/hikiko.htm#time>

<http://listverse.com/2009/04/20/10-unusual-japanese-fashions-and-subcultures>

[http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at\\_japan\\_soc/](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at_japan_soc/)

<https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-japanese-values-after-1945/>