

Samurai william



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In Giles Milton's novel, *Samurai William*, the reader is taken to the other side of the globe to experience the history of old world Japan. Throughout the book, Milton provides reason for complex historical events and actions, while still communicating the subtleties and mysterious customs of the Japanese. The novel also closely examines the wide range of relationships between different groups of Europeans and Asians, predominantly revolving around the protagonist, William Adams.

The book documents the successes and failures that occur between the two civilizations, then links them back to either the positive or negative relationship they have. As the book goes on, the correlation is obvious. Milton shows us the extreme role that religion, etiquette and trade played in establishing positive relations between visiting Europeans and the Asian civilizations. Religion and traditions played a chief role in the Europeans' relationships in Asia all throughout the novel. Milton puts an incredible weight on the shoulders of religion on both sides of the civilisations.

The book dives right into explaining the fascination and disgust felt by European priests and Jesuits towards the Japanese monks. They carried rosaries like the Catholics and "in old age, many retired to Buddhist monasteries to live the rest of their days in prayer and contemplation". The Buddhist All-Souls Day consisted of the ceremonial sprinkling of graves with flower petals. All of this appealed to the Catholic Jesuits, no doubt, as it was reflective of many forms of Christianity. It was also appealing because many were "convinced that Japan would prove fertile territory" for converting because of the similarities.

However, it was the negative aspects such as of sodomy, crucifixion, and complete lack of charity and care for the sick that seemed to fuel the mission of the Jesuits. (The relationship between the Catholics and Protestants must also be noted here. The battling religions came to a head in Japan when the Liefde appeared baring William and other Dutch Protestants. Japan was slowing becoming baptised to Catholicism and the arrival of the ' heretics' terrified the Jesuit priests. They lobbied non-stop to the feudal lord to have them executed before they could harm Japan, as they had the rest of the world, they said.

The ruler, Lord Terasawa, refused for " he wanted to know more about their voyage and the purpose of their mission". Had the monks had a positive and influential relationship with Terasawa, he probably would have listened to them, and done as requested.) The book presents such complex Japanese religious traditions as ritual suicide and goes on to say how an individual would commit such an act in great detail. But it also fills in all the blanks with subtleties of the religion and traditions that denied European monks the pork and beef they so longed for.

It was the Japanese, however, that realized the power of converting to Christianity. Otomo Yoshishige of Bungo grasped the idea that by converting to Christianity, he would please the Europeans and create more positive relations with them. Becoming parallel with the beliefs of the Jesuits would in turn bring travel and trade to Bungo. When the Europeans landed in Nagasaki, the feudal lord immediately saw the benefits of conversation and " went one step further and declared intention of making his fiefdom a purely Christian one. Religion and tradition had become more than just beliefs; they

were now a way for the civilizations to connect with one another. The level of etiquette that had been established by the Japanese was perhaps the largest barrier that stood in the way of positive relations with the Europeans. The beginning of the novel explains the Japanese's first impressions of the newly landed visitors as amazed and repulsed. They were reported as being "well dressed and that they spoke with considerable delicacy".

But it was soon learned that they did not bathe everyday; they ate unfit meats like pork and beef; they did not clean their dishes or kitchens; they did not squat on their heels to sit down with company; and they were brash, easily angered and immoderate. All of these things were found by the Japanese to be incredibly rude and insulting and they took the Europeans for barbarians. On the other hand, it was the Europeans who looked upon the Japanese as backwards in their thinking. There were incredibly complex aspects of the country.

Samurais were known to test their swords on criminals by chopping their bodies to bits; casual violence was no need for alarm here. There were subtle things like how they wore long strips of silk draped around their bodies held only in place by a knotted rope; they tweezed the hairs from their faces and wore their hair in oily buns on the tops of their heads. All of these differences could have very well been the negative road block that would have stopped all progress in the relations between the two civilisations. Alessandro Valignano was quick to recognise this potential disaster.

He ordered that his Jesuits live like natives to create harmony and understanding. He wrote a manual for them to follow with all the behaviours

this foreign country was built upon. He also encouraged them to “ think and behave as though they were Japanese, to act with dignity and stoic decorum”. In turn, the Jesuits became accustomed to the way of life of the Japanese, and found themselves to be much more successful in their relationships with them. When William Adams came to the Land of the Rising sun, he was at first incredibly homesick and longed to return to his home more than anything.

But the shogun had come to depend on William as interpreter and was forced him to stay. Soon, William found himself the owner of estate and slaves from the shogun. William shed his English dress clothes for traditional kimonos and silks, and soon found the more he assimilated the more successful he became. He married a Japanese girl, spoke the language perfectly, and had secured a place as a samurai. He is a perfect example of adopting Japanese etiquette to create the positive relations the Europeans needed. The opposite was demonstrated by John Saris, another English adventurer.

Saris intended to reach Ieyasu with a letter from the King for trade. William led him to Ieyasu's Castle, all the while instructing him on the proper etiquette in which to approach the mighty ruler. Saris turned up his nose at this, not wanting appear so low beneath Ieyasu. He did not give the letter to the secretary, as he was required. He did not fall to the floor before Ieyasu and attempted to hand the letter to him. All of these things were explicit insults and all led to the angering of Ieyasu and hindering positive relations and trade. Trade was the main reason for the explorations to Japan.

Every adventure that went through the trouble of acquiring a ship, a crew, and investors was dreaming of exotic spices and silks. Rumours of the far away island had tempted men for ages, most who never made it at all or never returned to tell the tale. They loaded their ships with crystal, wool, pewter, and ivory; all in hopes of reaching the fabled lands and finding their fortune. When the lucky few who reached the country landed, they were faced by the numerous barriers already named; language, culture, etiquette and religion were all roadblocks to the specific goals the sailors had created.

Once they were over come though, trade with the Japanese came down to a matter of personal relations with the influential. While the Portuguese had arrived and had no problems setting up trade and monasteries, the Dutch had a hard time establishing trade because of the influence the Jesuits had on the shogun. The Jesuits were opposed to the shogun granting the Dutch their lives after they had explicitly warned him that the Dutch were heretics and a threat to Japan and to the Catholic doctrine.

Fortunately for the Dutch, they had the personable William Adams, who almost single handily was able to humor the shogun with his skills in shipbuilding. Ieyasu was pleased for he had hoped to improve on his own country's shipbuilding skills. Soon Adams would be able to push aside the influence the Jesuits had on the shogun, and Milton has successfully shown that while the Portuguese were the first to establish themselves with no competition, Adams was able to establish himself despite and monopolize trade.

Such a profitable relationship is the perfect example of trade being influenced incredibly by positive personal relations between the two civilizations. Milton's interesting and scholarly novel depicts the opening and closing of Japan in a very readable way. He successfully portrays the complexities of violence and hierarchy within the country, but also touches the subtleties of bathing, pleasure gardens and diet. The book thoroughly examines the outcomes of all relations between the Europeans and the Asians.

Milton divulges the positive outcomes for the Japanese when they strengthen the relationship by converting to Christianity. The success of William Adams and the failure of John Saris are both seen within paying respect to the customs and etiquette of the Japanese. Lastly, the English and Dutch owe their success in trade to the positive relations that William Adams creates with multiple rulers and public figures. The novel gives insight into the old world of Japan while successfully relaying the relationships established by the Europeans.

Milton sends out a very clear message to readers; personal connects and positive relationships are necessary for success, whether you are William Adams, or not. Relationships in Samurai William Dana Bjorkman 102848159 02-43-114-01 Professor Lazure March 30, 2009 Brainstorm!! * Thesis: Milton shows us the extreme role that religion, etiquette and trade played key roles in establishing positive relations between visiting Europeans and the Asian civilizations. * POINTS: RELIGION/TRADITION * Jesuit-Protestant conflict Disagreeing with each others practices * Eventually assimilating * Success of trade for natives * ETIQUETTE * Initially very insulting to each other *

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Examples: food, cleanliness * Eventually assimilating * Success of adams *
Failure of salis * TRADE * Once over coming the above hurdles: * Success
was closely related to personal relationships * Ex. Adam dressing, speaking,
acting Japanese and his personal success * Was also successful in convincing
ruler to oust portugese * Monopolized trade for English and dutch