

Similarities of sophocles' plays characters and japanese samurai code

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**ASSIGN
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War, what is it good for? While Edwin Starr may say that it is good for “absolutely nothin,” war can allow us to better understand past civilizations. This stems from the importance many civilizations placed on certain codes for their warriors to follow. Warrior codes allow us to understand the culture of a certain civilization better. Of course, when you place the values of one civilization in the context of the actions of another civilization, there will be some similarities, but there will also be instances where they mismatch. This is seen in using Bushido to evaluate characters in the Greek texts by Sophocles, Ajax and Philoctetes. Ajax is vastly concerned with his honor, which is in line with Bushido, but also tells everyone how bad of a person he is, which is contrary to Bushido. Odysseus keeps to his plan for warfare, which is supported by Bushido but also shows disrespect, which Bushido does not advocate. Finally, Philoctetes keeps his fighting skills sharp, which is recommended by Bushido but when he is called by his master to fight, he is reluctant to answer the call.

One important aspect of Japanese culture is the preservation of one's honor. The expectation is for one to uphold an honorable life until the person dies, with an honorable death as well. This is seen in Bushido when Torii Mototada is preparing his final statement to his children stating, “preserve your righteousness and strive in bravery, and be of a mind never to stain the reputation of a clan that has not remained from the world” (p. 3) When Ajax realizes that he slaughtered farm animals instead of enemy soldier, which would damage his pride, he exclaims, “Oh! What a mockery I have come to! What indignity!” (Sophocles, p. 21). Another important code within Bushido is the idea of placing warrior duties ahead of anything else. This is

showcased in Bushido when Mototada tells his son, “ after I am slain, you must lovingly care for all your younger brothers” (p. 3). This reflects Mototada’s anticipation of death and the fact that he realizes that his duty as a warrior comes ahead of his duty as a family man. Ajax reflects the importance of honor to him when he says, “ let a man nobly live or nobly die” (Sophocles, p. 25). Since Ajax believes can no longer nobly live as he embarrassed himself in battle, he follows a noble death, stabbing himself with Hector’s sword.

Even though Ajax kept with Bushido code regarding the importance of honor, Bushido would believe he vastly overreacted and went overboard when projecting to others upon his loss of honor. After Ajax realizes the error he made, he states “ For God’s sake, help me die” (Sophocles, p. 21). However, Bushido would not approve of this reaction toward a mistake stating, “ One should not torture himself over a single mistake” (Nobushige, p. 5). Ajax projects his anguish to others when he tells his wife Tecmessa that he is, “ no longer worthy nor yet to mankind” (Sophocles, p. 22). Regarding venting to others about a certain action that makes you feel bad, Bushido says, “ One should not utter a word about his own inadequacies” (Nobushige, p. 2). With this, Bushido would look negatively upon Ajax talking negatively about himself to his wife and would say that the reaction to his loss of honor is not a reaction one should have.

While Ajax kept with Bushido code with the importance he placed on honor, Bushido would also believe he vastly overreacted. Since Ajax acknowledges the importance of honor as one of the most important traits he can hold,

Ajax follows Bushido code in this aspect. At the same time, Bushido would frown upon Ajax's openness of his emotions once he loses his honor. Bushido would say that Ajax is justified in feeling negative due to losing his honor, but would also say that Ajax had a vast overreaction to a mistake he made, that he should keep his insecurity to himself and that he should recover from the mistake instead of letting it ruin him. In practice, Ajax follows Bushido code, but his reactions lead him away from fully connecting with Bushido code.

Another important aspect of Japanese culture is using resources in an efficient manner. As stated in Bushido, "[a master] should use men according to their talents" (Sadayo, p. 3). This is exactly what Odysseus does. After leaving Philoctetes on an island for years, he comes back for him, telling him "you must come with the bow" (Sophocles, p. 234) as he says Philoctetes "is destined to take Troy" (Sophocles, p. 235). While these quotes create questions whether Odysseus needs Philoctetes or just his bow, Odysseus is still set on acquiring what he needs, despite the awkwardness of the situation of visiting Philoctetes after abandoning him years ago. With the concreteness in his mission to get the specific resources he needs for warfare, Odysseus shows traits reflected in the Bushido reflecting the idea that a specific set of resources needs to be used in a specific manner to achieve a set objective.

However, since Odysseus was deceitful and disrespectful toward Philoctetes, Odysseus does not fully follow Bushido. When Neoptolemus asks Odysseus if lying is immoral, Odysseus justifies lying by saying, "not if the lying brings

our rescue with it" (Sophocles, p. 199). This goes completely against Bushido as it states, "one should not tell a lie in any situation" (Nobushige, p. 1). Odysseus also shows disrespect toward Philoctetes as he, "marooned him [on the island] long ago," never to return to him until he needed him (Sophocles, p. 195). This also goes completely against Bushido as it states, "the master should give [a retainer] assistance for a while" (Nobushige, p. 3). Lastly, Bushido would look down upon Odysseus with the statement, "it is truly regrettable that a person will treat a man who is valuable to him well, and a man who is worthless to him poorly" (Shigetoki, p. 3). This is evident within Odysseus's actions when he threatens to leave Philoctetes again by saying, "let him stay here. We have these arms of yours and do not need you" (Sophocles, p. 237), creating the idea that he did not come to make amends with Philoctetes, but simply to get what he needed for battle. Since Bushido asks for one to be straightforward and respectful toward those at a lower rank, Odysseus fails to follow Bushido in this aspect.

Out of the three characters, Odysseus follows Bushido the least. The only facet of Bushido which he follows is knowing which specific resources he needs to use. However, his disrespect while trying to acquire these resources is against Bushido code. In fact, the actions of Odysseus directly go against the principles within Bushido as he lies and only treats Philoctetes with respect when he is useful to Odysseus. Because Odysseus only performs one action that follows with Bushido code, while performing many actions that go against Bushido, Odysseus is the character that follows Bushido the least between him, Ajax and Philoctetes.

Another important aspect of Japanese culture is to keep one's fighting skills sharp. By continually practicing his fighting skills, Philoctetes follows Bushido. Bushido reflects the consequences if a warrior does not keep his fighting skills intact, stating, "if the way of the warrior is neglected, ordinary military tactics will not be established... consultation would be unprepared for, and the establishment of strategy would be difficult" (Nagamasa, p. 2). In seclusion on the island, Philoctetes states that, "[I used] this bow of mine to shoot the birds that filled my belly" (Sophocles, p. 206), keeping his archery skills intact. Another code within Bushido states, "one should not be lazy in attending to his everyday duties" (Nobushige p. 3). On the island, Philoctetes had to do "everything for [himself]" on the island, such as "break up firewood" and "rub stone on stone [to] produce the spark that kept me still in life" (Sophocles, p. 206). This reflects that Philoctetes was active in his everyday duties. Even though Philoctetes is forced to keep his archery skills sharp, among other things in order to survive, the fact that he is not letting his warrior skills diminish and is not lazy in his everyday duties follows with the code of Bushido.

On the other hand, Philoctetes does not follow Bushido as he does not immediately answer to the call of his master when the master needs him. According to Bushido, "when summoned by the master, one should not be the least bit tardy" (Nobushige, p. 5). However, when Odysseus tells him that he is destined to take Troy, Philoctetes replies with, "I would rather suffer anything than this" (Sophocles, p. 235) since he does not want to fight for Odysseus. Before Philoctetes is aware of the fact that Odysseus wants him to fight for him, Philoctetes does not listen to a superior when he asks

Neoptolemus to "leave me" due to "the terrible burden of [his] sickness" (Sophocles, p. 225) after Neoptolemus offered to take him off the island. Since Philoctetes does not immediately follow the orders from a superior as Bushido would suggest, Philoctetes' actions differ from the codes in the Bushido in this manner.

Out of the three characters, Philoctetes follows Bushido the most. When Philoctetes is on the island by himself, he follows Bushido code. Even though Philoctetes is forced to keep his fighting skills up to par and ensure that he isn't lazy in order to stay alive, the fact that he does these actions, regardless of the reason behind it, is in line with Bushido code. However, once Odysseus comes back to the island for Philoctetes, he stops following Bushido. This is because he does not immediately answer the call of duty when his master, Odysseus, asks him to fight for him. When Philoctetes is alone, his actions are fully in line with Bushido, but once others come into his life, his actions do not fall in line with Bushido any longer. Even so, as the only facet of Bushido that Philoctetes does not follow is not immediately answering the call of his master, while continually following Bushido when he is on the island, Philoctetes follows Bushido the most between him, Ajax and Odysseus.

When comparing the actions of the characters in Sophocles' plays to Japanese samurai code, there are some similarities. The actions that appear in Sophocles' plays that fall in line with Bushido include the importance of pride and having a specific plan. These actions are seen with Ajax greatly valuing his sense of pride, Odysseus knowing that he needed Philoctetes and

his bow to overtake Troy and Philoctetes keeping to his plan for survival. At the same time, as the Greek culture and Japanese culture are very different, there are also see some distinct differences. This includes Ajax's overreaction to his error in battle, Odysseus' lack of respect toward Philoctetes and Philoctetes' reluctance to listen to Odysseus. Overall, Philoctetes' actions fall in line with Bushido the most and Odysseus' actions fall in line with Bushido the least with Ajax falling between the two.