

SAMURAI



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Samurai is a word for a Japanese warrior class and for a member of this class.

The Japanese Way of the Warrior, has played a major role shaping the behaviour of modern Japanese government, corporation, society, and individuals, as well as in shaping the modern martial arts within Japan and internationally. Samurai have been **glorified** in numerous films, books, comic series, TV shows and theatre plays. They are a source **fascination** for adults and children all over the world.

No figure is more **emblematic** of Japan and the Japanese than the samurai, the heroic warriors who lived by the code of **bushido** - the way of the samurai - founded upon loyalty, justice and honour. The warrior tradition in Japan is as ancient as the country itself, but the true samurai **emerged** during the late Heian period (mid 12th century) (when two powerful Japanese clans fought bitter wars against each other - the Taira and the Minamoto) and thereafter ruled Japan for some 800 years.

During this time, the classic Japanese martial arts evolved, and with them the bushido code. At that time the Japanese **shogunate**, a system of a military ruler, called the **shogun** was formed. Under the **shogun** the next hierarchy were the **daimyo**, local rulers comparable to dukes in Europe. The samurai were the military retainers of a **daimyo**. And finally you may have heard of **ronin**. **Ronin** are samurai without a master.

According to historians the **fierce** fights between **hostile** clans and warlords was mainly a battle for land.

Samurai Attributes and Privileges

Samurai had several far-reaching **privileges**. They were allowed to wear two swords - a long one and a short one. **Commoners** were not allowed to wear any weapons at all. At a certain period samurai were even allowed to **behead** a commoner who had offended them.

The samurai **caste** itself had different ranks with different privileges. A basic ranking system from the 12th century **distinguished** three major samurai ranks:

- Kenin - meaning "housemen". They were the **administrators** or **vassals**.
- Mounted samurai - Only high-ranking samurai were allowed to fight on horseback.
- Foot soldiers

Some of a samurai's most important **principles** were loyalty to his master, self-discipline and respectful, ethical behaviour.



Mounted Samurai

As I have mentioned before, the samurai class had an ethic code of behaviour called **bushido**, meaning "way of the warrior". The central point of the **bushido** was complete loyalty towards the lord, the **daimyo**.

The most important influence on the code of the samurai was the introduction of Zen Buddhism, which became the philosophical **basis** of bushido. Bushido demands, above all else, the willingness to face death - and facing death willingly means conquering fear. According to Zen principles, fear can only be truly conquered by **eliminating** the notion of self.

Belonging to the samurai class was a **hereditary** membership. The sons of a samurai became samurai by birth.

Seppuku - a Samurai Tradition

Seppuku is a ritual suicide and considered as a honourable death. Seppuku was part of **bushido**. **Hara-kiri** means literally "stomach-cutting" and was a practised form of *seppuku*. It was performed in a formal ceremony. **Spectators** attended the event. The act was extremely painful. The person doing hara-kiri had to slice up his **abdomen**. When he finished, he stretched out his neck. An assistant was waiting behind him and had to **behead** the suicide with one stroke of his sword. Reasons for committing seppuku were connected to honour and disgrace. One occasion for committing *seppuku* was the death of the lord. It was an expression of grief at one's master's death and was the **utmost** form of loyalty to the lord. Other reasons were punishment. *Seppuku* could also be a way of showing a disagreement with one's master. A frequent reason for committing hara-kiri was in a lost battle to avoid the disgrace of falling into the hands of an enemy.

All high-ranking Japanese did actually not support the ritual suicide. In 1603 and again in 1663 the practise was largely forbidden. But it continued nevertheless.

The idea that a honourable death is better than a life of disgrace continues in modern Japan. Japan has the highest rate of suicides in the world. Japanese kill themselves for failing in business or for not passing an exam.

Where in history can we also find the example of honourable death, a suicide? (Kamikaze, World War Two)

CLOTHES

As may be expected, the basic clothing item in a samurai's 'everyday' wardrobe was the kimono. Heavier kimonos were worn in the winter, while lighter examples (those made of finer silk, for instance) were worn in the summer.

(A samurai's kimono would normally be made of silk, a material considered superior to cotton and **hemp** not only for its feel and appearance but for its relative coolness in the hot Japanese summer.)

Samurai had the option of wearing socks, called **tabi**, which included a space to separate the big toe from the other toes (to **facilitate** the wearing of sandals).

Footwear generally consisted of sandals (**waraji**) and wooden **clogs (geta)**. Sandals were made from various sorts of material, including straw, **hemp**, and cotton **thread**. Clogs were generally associated with the lower classes (geisha, kabuki actors) though samurai wore them from time to time. As with the standard kimono, the samurai's swords were normally thrust through a belt (**obi**) worn wrapped around the waist and tied in front.

The samurai's hair was an important part of his appearance. The traditional hairstyle (for the better part of a thousand years) was the **topknot**, a fashion by no means exclusive to the samurai. The topknot would then either be worn back or forward, hanging over the centre of the head.

FOOD

They ate rice, potatoes, **radishes**, cucumbers, beans, chestnuts, **persimmons** (another road side treat), various nuts, tofu, **yams**, sour plums, **apricots**, peaches, apples, oranges, etc...

The sea provided seven types of seaweed, **abalone**, **carp**, **bonito**, **trout**, tuna, octopus, jellyfish, clams and whale meat.

A mention should be made of the meal traditionally served to a samurai before setting out for war. This included dried chestnuts, **kelp, and **abalone**, served on small **lacquered** plates - as well as sake. The sake was served in three cups - as the number three was considered good luck.**

Sake

The most popular drink among the samurai - aside from perhaps **tea** - was *sake*.

Sake was made from rice and was normally produced during the winter months. Drinking was fairly common, at least among the samurai class, and found its way into many occasions - from social gatherings to the **aftermath** of battle. Drunkenness was generally not considered **odious** (nor is it still), and it could in fact be considered impolite NOT to get drunk at a drinking party.

Decline and End of the Samurai Class



During the Tokugawa shogunate from 1603 to 1867 (the Edo period) the country lived in peace. The samurai warrior class had basically nothing to do. So samurai took other tasks, in the **bureaucracy** for instance. Many samurai did not know how to make a living and survive.

In 1867 the last shogun resigned, and the samurai class lost its privileges in 1871 when the whole feudal system was **abolished**. In 1878, the names *daimyo* and *samurai* were changed to *kazoku*, or nobility, and *shizoku*, or **gentry**, respectively.

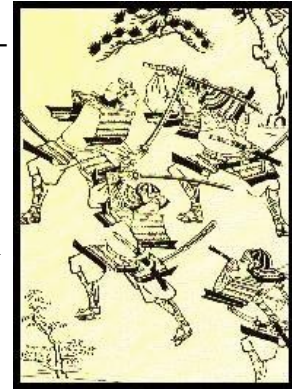
Samurai in Modern Japan

Today the samurai spirit and the code of bushido live on, notably in the practice of **the martial art of kendo**. Kendo means literally 'the way of the sword'. Based upon traditional samurai swordsmanship, it transmits the ancient traditions and has attracted many followers. The essence of this classical martial art is that, in the pursuit of the desired aim, mental training is even more important than physical training - a fact that is now recognized in Western sports psychology. Kendo, the practice of which is always **preceded** and followed by a Zen kendo meditation, is an ideal way of personal development, as it is designed to perfect of kind of discipline necessary to **cultivate** alertness, speed of action and direct **cognition** - qualities that are as important today as in the days of the samurai.

Although samurai do not have any official status in today's modern Japan, **descendants** of samurai families still enjoy a high **esteem** among the Japanese population.

Ten Samurai Sayings

- **Duel.** 'One finds life through conquering the fear of death within one's mind. Empty the mind of all forms of attachment, make a go-for-broke charge and conquer the opponent with one decisive slash.' - *Togo Shigekata*.
- **Stance.** 'An effective stance is to be attached neither to the opponent's sword nor to one's own sword.' - *Yagyu Toshiyoshi*.
- **Mental Calm.** 'The undisturbed mind is like the calm body water reflecting the brilliance of the moon. Empty the mind and you will realize the undisturbed mind.' - *Yagyu Jubei*.
- **Mental Evenness.** 'To be *swayed* neither by the opponent nor by sword is the essence of swordsmanship.' - *Miyamoto Musashi*.
- **Self.** 'Conquer the Self and you will conquer the opponent.' - *Takuan Soho*.
- **The Immoveable Mind.** 'The mind unmoved by external distraction produces physical *mobility*.' - *Yagyu Renyasai*.
- **Tricks, Feints and Schemes.** 'The hands manipulate the sword, the mind manipulates the hands. *Cultivate* the mind and do not be deceived by tricks, *feints* and schemes. They are the properties of a magician, not of the samurai..' - *Saito Yakuro*.
- **Maturity.** 'Mental bearing (calmness), not skill, is the sign of a matured samurai. A samurai therefore should neither be pompous nor arrogant.' - *Tsukahara Bokuden*.
- **Peace.** 'Conquering evil, not the opponent, is the essence of swordsmanship.' - *Yagyu Munenori*.
- **Samurai Character.** 'An unpolished crystal does not shine; an undisciplined samurai does not have brilliance. A samurai therefore should cultivate his mind.' - *Anonymous*.



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bakufu Japanese military rule; rule of the shogun

budo *The Way of combat*; a name adopted in the 20th century for martial arts in general with an emphasis on their peaceful aspects

bushi Warrior; name given to all the warriors who made up families with a warrior tradition

bushido *Way of the warrior*; a code of honour and social behaviour; succeeded the unwritten code of *the Way of the bow and the horse*

daimyo A feudal lord; maintained a great number of samurai in their service, who all swore an oath of allegiance to them according to the rules of Bushido

ken-jutsu *The warrior art of the sword*; art of using the sword as soon as it is drawn from the scabbard, in order to attack the enemy; transformed into the art of *kendo*

kendo *Way of the sword*; a martial art (*budo*) of using the sword (*ken*). This art was developed from the earliest times by the warriors (*bushi*) of Japan, and from the 14th century on by the samurai. Ken-jutsu was prohibited in 1876 when the samurai were forbidden to carry swords, but was transformed into a martial sport (*kendo*) for physical and mental training of the young.

naginata Weapon used by foot soldiers against horsemen or to cut the tendons of horses or to disembowel them; also favourite weapon of the wives of samurai and of warrior monks

ninja A group of men and women specially trained for espionage and assassination; generally drawn from the lower classes and used by the daimyo to assassinate enemies and penetrate enemy fortresses

ronin During the Tokugawa period, name given to all bushi and samurai who did not serve a particular master, either because the master had died or because his lands had been confiscated. A number of these ronin became martial arts teachers or began some other job, which was compatible with their samurai status (e.g., bodyguards).

samurai A class of bushi (warriors). The original samurai were there for the protection of their lord and were especially trained in martial arts. Later the name was given to all bushi of a certain rank belonging to warrior families

seppuku the act of ritual suicide performed by the samurai (The expression *hara-kiri*, to cut the abdomen, more widely used in the West, is considered more vulgar.)

shogun (ate) Title given by the emperor to the daimyo who showed himself to be the richest and the most powerful of all the lords

so-jutsu Techniques of using the lance, and performed wearing the ancient armour of the samurai

SAMURAI THOUGHTS :

The flower of flowers is the cherry blossom - the samurai is the man among men.' - Japanese proverb

One should have insight into this world of dreams that passes in the twinkling of an eye.

Many men feel that they should act according to the time or the moment they are facing, and thus are in confusion when something goes beyond this and some difficulty arises.

The man whose profession are arms should calm his mind and look into the depths of others. Doing so is likely the best of the martial arts.

Without knowledge of Learning, one will ultimately have no military victories.

One should not be envious of someone who has prospered by unjust deeds. Nor should he disdain someone who has fallen while adhering to the path of righteousness.

A man with deep far-sightedness will survey both the beginning and the end of a situation and continually consider its every facet as important.

Intelligence is the flower of discrimination. There are many examples of the flower blooming but not bearing fruit.

No matter whether a person belongs to the upper or lower ranks, if he has not put his life on the line at least once he has cause for shame.

In strategy your spiritual bearing must not be any different from normal. Both in fighting and in everyday life you should be determined though calm. Meet the situation without tenseness yet not recklessly, your spirit settled yet unbiased.

If the enemy thinks of the mountains, attack like the sea; and if he thinks of the sea, attack like the mountains.

If we watch men of other schools discussing theory, and concentrating on techniques with the hands, even though they seem skilful to watch, they have not the slightest true spirit.

A person who is said to be proficient at the arts is like a fool. Because of his foolishness in concerning himself with just one thing, he thinks of nothing else and thus becomes proficient. He is a worthless person.



- **EMBLEMATIC:** that represents or is a symbol of sth; that is considered typical of a situation, an area or work (znak)

- **ODIOUS:** extremely unpleasant (gnusen)
- **FACET:** a particular part or aspect of sth; one of the flat sides of a cut stone or jewel (izbrušena ploskev dragulja, faseta)
- **FEINT:** a movement that is intended to make you opponent think you are going to do one thing when you are really going to do sth else (pretveza, zvijača, hlimba, videz; pretvarjati se, hliniti, simulirati)
- **UNBIASED:** fair and not influenced by your own or sb else's opinions, desires; SYN: impartial (brez predsodkov, nepristranski)
- **TO ADHERE:** to stick firmly to sth; behave according to a particular law, rule, set of instructions (trdno se držati, prilepiti se, biti vdan, ostati zvest)
- **TO PRECEDE:** to happen before sth or come before sth/sb in order; to go in front of sb (iti pred kom, imeti prednost, biti spredaj)
- **TO PROSPER:** to develop in a successful way; to be successful; SYN: thrive (uspevati, prosperirati, pomagati k uspehu)
- **UTMOST:** the greatest amount possible, most extreme (skrajnost, maximum; skrajni, zadnji, najbolj oddaljeni)
- **GLORIFIED:** making sb/sth seem more important than they are (sijajen)
- **DISDAIN-noun:** the feeling that sb/sth is not good enough to deserve your respect or attention; SYN: contempt (prezir, zaničevanje; zavračati, zaničevati, prezirati, omaloževati)
- **PROFICIENT:** able to do sth well, because of the training and practice (spreten, sposoben)
- **COGNITION:** the process by which knowledge and understanding is developed in the mind (poznavanje, znanje)
- **DISTINGUISHED:** to recognize the difference between two people or things (razločiti)
- **ABDOMEN:** (trebuh)
- **AFTERMATH:** the situation that exists as a result of an important (and usually unpleasant) event, especially a war, an accident (paberkovanje, otava; posledica, učinek)
- **HEMP:** a plant which is used for making rope and fabric, and also to make the drug cannabis (konoplja)
- **TO CARP:** to keep complaining about sth/sth in an annoying way (zbadati, zasmehovati, pričkati se)
- **FASCINATION:** a very strong attraction, that makes sth very interesting (očaranost)
- **EMERGED:** to become known; to start to exist; to come out of the dark, enclosed or hidden place (pojaviti)
- **FIERCE:** angry and aggressive in a way that is frightening (divji)
- **HOSTILE:** (sovražen)
- **PRIVILEGES:** (privilegij)
- **COMMONERS:** (navadni, običajni ljudje)
- **BEHEAD:** (obglaviti)
- **CASTE:** (kasta)
- **ADMINISTRATORS:** (upravniki)
- **VASSALS:** (vazal, podložnik, suženj)
- **PRINCIPLES:** (načela)
- **HEREDITARY:** (deden)
- **ELIMINATING:** (izločiti)
- **CLOGS:** (cokla; klada; breme)
- **THREAD:** (nit)
- **TOPKNOT:** (vrh glave v vozeli zvezani lasje)
- **RADISHES:** (redkev) >>> horse-radish (hren)
- **PERSIMMONS:** (kaki)
- **CARP:** (krap)
- **TROUT:** (postrv)
- **KELP:** (vrsta velike rjave morske alge)
- **LACQUERED:** (lakirano)
- **BUREAUCRACY:** (birokracija)
- **ABOLISHED:** (odpravljen)
- **CULTIVATE:** (vzgajati)
- **DESCENDANTS:** (potomci)
- **ESTEEM:** (spoštovanje)
- **TO SWAY:** (zibati se)