

Bushidō and the Legacy of “Samurai Values” in Contemporary Japan

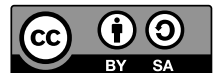
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Abstract

Though difficult to define as a clear set of moral precepts, aspects of so-called “samurai values”, the combination of orally-transmitted Confucian and Buddhist lore to which Nitobe Inazō refers in his *Bushido*, can clearly be discerned in Japanese society today. As evidence for the influence of “samurai values”, I have provided examples from two fields with which I am personally familiar: journalism and education.¹ Although in recent years several academic works have exposed historical anomalies in widely-held beliefs about actual samurai behaviour, I argue that the effectiveness of ideologies does not depend on historical accuracy. For example, justification for the right of newspapers to criticise governments in Japan does not stem from inalienable rights originating with European Enlightenment philosophers. Instead, it is linked to the view that the former samurai who in the 1870s became Japan’s first news reporters could be trusted intermediaries between the government and the people, because as samurai they possessed higher standards of morality. That expectations of superior moral conduct continue to justify in the eyes of the general public the right of newspapers to speak truth to power can be seen by mass cancellations of subscriptions of newspapers whose staff betray these expectations through involvement in scandal. Likewise, the emphasis on “character building” (*jinkaku keisei*) in Japanese higher education is another link to perceived “samurai values.” Some of Japan’s leading private universities were founded in the late nineteenth century by former samurai. As in the case of journalism, the maintenance of superior moral conduct helps strengthen the claim to legitimacy of educational institutions in Japan. Finally, I will present a picture of Nitobe as an example of a former samurai who long after his passing continues to be revered for having adhered to the “samurai values” he both defined and embraced.

Keywords: *bushidō*, ethics, Nitobe, journalism, education

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***Bushidō* in zapuščina »samurajskih vrednot« v sodobni Japonski**

Izvleček

Četudi bi jih težko opredelili kot jasno določeno zbirko moralnih predpisov, lahko vidike tako imenovanih »samurajskih vrednot«, skupka konfucijanskih in budističnih ustnih izročil, na katere se sklicuje Nitobe Inazō v svoji knjigi *Bushido*, kljub vsemu zaznamo tudi v današnji japonski družbi. Vpliv teh vrednot v prispevku dokazujem s primeri s področij, ki ju dobro poznam: novinarstvo in izobraževanje. V zadnjem času več znanstvenih del razkriva zgodovinske zmote glede dejanskega vedenja samurajev, vendar v prispevku zagovarjam tezo, da učinkovitost ideologij ni odvisna od njihove zgodovinske resničnosti. Tako na primer utemeljitev pravice časopisov, da kritizirajo vlado na Japonskem, ne izvira iz neodtujljivih pravic, ki so jih utemeljevali evropski razsvetljenski filozofi, temveč je povezana s stališčem, da je nekdanjim samurajem, ki so v sedemdesetih letih 19. stoletja postali prvi novinarji na Japonskem, mogoče zaupati vlogo posrednika med vlado in ljudstvom, saj so kot samuraji imeli višje moralne standarde. V očeh javnosti pričakovanje moralno superiornega vedenja še vedno upravičuje pravico časopisov, da opravljajo vlogo nadzornika oblasti, kar se kaže v primerih, ko bralci na primer množično odpovedujejo naročnino na časopis, če se njegovi ustvarjalci zapletejo v kakšen škandal. Podobno je z domnevnimi »samurajskimi vrednotami« povezano japonsko visoko šolstvo, v katerem se poudarja »krepitev značaja« (*jinkaku keisei*). Več vodilnih zasebnih univerz na Japonskem so na primer v poznem devetnajstem stoletju ustanovili nekdanji samuraji. Tako kot pri novinarstvu je ohranjanje superiornega moralnega vedenja osnova za legitimnost izobraževalnih ustanov na Japonskem. Na koncu predstavim še portret Nitobeja kot primer nekdanjega samuraja, ki še dolgo po svoji smrti uživa spoštovanje, saj se je ravnal po »samurajskih vrednotah«, ki jih je opredelil in sprejel.

Ključne besede: *bushidō*, etika, Nitobe, novinarstvo, izobraževanje

Introduction

It is the position of this paper that vestiges of so-called "samurai values", namely the combination of orally transmitted Confucian and Buddhist lore which Nitobe Inazō refers to as *bushidō* in his book of the same name,² can be found in various aspects of Japanese social behaviour today. As evidence for the lasting legacy of the system of ethical behaviour ascribed since the Edo period (1600–1868) to samurai, I have provided examples from journalism and education, fields with which I am personally familiar. In both cases I combine references to academic literature with my own experiences to make the point that these traditional values—whether historically accurate or constructed—continue to function as social norms, the benchmarks by which correct behaviour is judged.

In searching for traces of *bushidō* thought in contemporary Japan one is faced with a number of questions. What kind of behaviour is consistent with samurai

2 In this paper, Nitobe's book is referred to as *Bushido* while "samurai values" are *bushidō*.

values? Is Nitobe's *Bushido* an accurate representation of *bushidō* as practiced in premodern times, prior to the abolition of feudalism? What allows us to link the humourless moralism of Japan's mass circulation national dailies to Tokugawa samurai culture? Likewise, what aspects of samurai education can be found in practices at Japanese universities today? What about Nitobe as an interpreter of "samurai values"? What are we to make of recent scholarship that calls into question the key concept of "samurai loyalty"?

Not all the above questions have precise answers. But some do. Although there is no single definition of samurai values, there is a remarkable convergence in popular thinking on the image, though not necessarily the reality, of the noble samurai. We know that Japan's early news reporters were former samurai, and it does not take much effort to discover that the founders of some of Japan's most prestigious private universities were ex-samurai, some of whom had converted to Christianity. Although Nitobe never established an institute of higher learning, he became the president of two universities, professor at three of Japan's most prestigious schools, and in that last capacity, came to be regarded highly for having nurtured a generation of leading public intellectuals.³

Bushidō—Does It Give Us an Accurate Picture of Samurai Values?

Lauded abroad as the most authentic guide to the Japanese character when first published in 1900, Nitobe's *Bushido* has been criticised for having far more references to Christianity and classical European tradition than to Japanese or Chinese sources.⁴ Nitobe himself is vague about just what constitutes *bushidō* thought. He writes, "It is not a written code; at best it consists of a few maxims handed down from mouth to mouth [...]" (Nitobe 1936, 5). However, as the descendant of a samurai family with a record of distinguished service to the Nambu fiefdom (an area in northeast Honshū, straddling present day Iwate and Aomori prefectures), Nitobe can be said to speak with some authority on samurai values, at least in the manner that they were explained to him in his youth. Nitobe's wife, Mary Elinton Nitobe, was convinced that her husband's samurai origins held the key to the "make-up of his [...] character" (Howes 1995, 27).

3 Nitobe taught political economy at Kyoto University, colonial administration at Tokyo University and became president of Tokyo Woman's Christian University and principal of the Dai-Ichi Higher School, which though not called a university corresponds almost exactly to three-year undergraduate studies under the Bologna system in Europe today.

4 Kanno Kakumyō writes: "In the index of the Iwanami edition of Nitobe's *Bushido*, of 157 personal names listed, a mere 20 are Japanese. Of these just 17 are samurai or former samurai such as Saigō Takamori" (*Bushidō no gyakushū* 2004, 17).

Writing in 1934, a year after Nitobe's passing, she recalled, "My husband sometimes pained me by saying, 'I have not been loyal to my ancestors in suffering more'" (ibid.).

In a collection of personal reminiscences of his childhood collected and published in 1934, Nitobe reveals just how seriously his family took its samurai origins and how his mother expected him to show through his life and works that he was worthy of the status into which he was born. Nitobe summarises the content of a letter his mother sent together with two yen, young Inazō's share of a gift of money to the Nitobe family from the Meiji Emperor in recognition of the contribution made to agriculture by Nitobe's father and grandfather, both of whom had directed reclamation projects that had increased rice production by bringing new land under cultivation. Nitobe's name Inazō, literally "producer of rice plants", is a reference to this achievement for which the family had been honoured. Nitobe quotes his mother as having written him, "Your grandfather had been a famous man and so was your father. If you do not attain to greatness, people will laugh at you and say that you were only your mother's child and not your father's. If you disgrace yourself, you will drag me down, too. Strive for renown" (ibid., 33). In the preface to *Bushido*, Nitobe insists that he wrote his book in order to explain to foreigners that Japanese people can act with moral rectitude even if their children are not given religious instruction in schools. But, judging from Nitobe's reminiscences, one cannot help but think that the author may have been motivated by personal reasons as well, perhaps a desire to put down on paper some of the moral values that he saw as being the driving force in his own life. The above passage would seem to correspond neatly to the concept of honour which Nitobe deals with in his book. In other words, *Bushidō* may be historically inaccurate and it may have been written as propaganda, but neither of these points are sufficient to argue that the author did not sincerely believe that what he wrote about samurai morality was true.

Bushidō as Invented Tradition

In searching for authenticity in *Bushido* (not just the *Bushido* of Nitobe, but *bushidō*, the way of the samurai in general) one needs to deal with a new scepticism in scholarship about national traditions in general, initiated in the 1980s by the historians Eric Hobsbawm, Hugh Trevor-Roper and others who demonstrated in their writings that what citizens of modern nation states believe today to be the age-old traditions that define their national identity are often of relatively recent origin, and were in many cases consciously invented in order to inspire patriotic feelings. Trevor-Roper's essay proving that the Scottish kilt was invented by an

English merchant, that tartans did not originate with clans but with the easy availability of commercially woven cloth, and that the highland epic poet Ossian and his works were an elaborate hoax perpetrated by two patriotic clergymen is a case in point (Trevor-Roper 1983, 15–41). The periodic reinvention of samurai values, first during the Edo period and then in the middle of Meiji (1868–1912), would seem to fit into the above pattern.

Even a cursory reading of recently published books and papers indicates a sizeable gap between the conclusions of scholars and popular perceptions regarding samurai behaviour, real and invented. For example, research by Henry Smith and Bitō Masahide strongly suggests that the conspiracy in 1702 by 46 of Lord Asano's 47 loyal retainers to avenge the death of their master, the subject of one of Japan's most popular Kabuki plays, *Chūshingura*, represented anachronistic behaviour even by the standards of its day. Loyalty came to be stressed as a samurai virtue as part of an attempt to create a peacetime role of absolute submission to authority for the samurai, and had nothing to do with dying for one's lord in battle.⁵ In fact, during the war-torn sixteenth century real life samurai were known to switch sides in the most opportunistic manner.⁶ But for the purposes of this paper, what matters is not what was historically accurate but how people at the time thought samurai should behave. There have been many interpretations for the motivation of the 46 "loyal retainers" and whether pure unalloyed loyalty was one of them has been called into question.⁷ However, that the actions of the 46 came to be interpreted later as "pure loyalty" can be assumed from the virtually uninterrupted popularity of stage and film performances with the name *Chūshingura*, literally, "a treasure house of loyalty". While historical research points to the fact that the behaviour of the 46 was anachronistic, it should be clear that what matters is not whether the act to avenge the death of their lord was historically accurate but the fact that Japanese audiences for generations have come to take for granted that samurai should show loyalty to their lord even beyond the grave. I would like to argue that the existence of anachronism in *bushidō* thought should in no way call into question the attachment large numbers—perhaps the majority—of Japanese

5 Bitō points out that the virtue of samurai loyalty was invented in the Edo period in order to turn unruly warriors into submissive bureaucrats in keeping with the needs of the Tokugawa shogunate (see Bitō 2003).

6 For a very thorough treatment of the subject of samurai disloyalty, see (Archer 2018).

7 Bitō makes the point that the initial interpretation both by the shogunate and the general public was that the assassination of Lord Kira, the man who had caused Asano to draw his sword in the Tokugawa Palace, was an act of protest against the shogunate for having punished only the Asano side. Henry Smith, in a separate paper, states that the first dramatization of the Akō Incident took place in 1748, nearly half a century after the event. It was only then that the incident came to be spoken of as an act of loyalty (see Smith 2003).

people continue to show to what they regard as moral principles exemplifying the best in Japanese culture.

Bushidō, not only Nitobe's but the many books that used the word in their titles published in Japan at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries, do fit into the category of “invented tradition”. Nitobe's claim that *bushidō* “was an organic growth of decades and centuries of military career” (Nitobe 1936, 5) has been called into question most recently by Oleg Benesch who places the emergence of *bushidō* thought firmly in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Benesch 2014).

The moral philosopher Kanno Kakumyō states that during the revival of *bushidō* in mid-Meiji ordinary Japanese did not rely on the works of scholars to define exemplary samurai behaviour for themselves: “Their source material consisted of historical novels” (Kanno 2004, 11) and so it is today. For example, the film director Kurosawa Akira, descendant of a samurai family, did much to project an idealised vision of the noble, self-effacing, superior *rōnin* (masterless samurai) in his period films, especially in *Seven Samurai*.⁸ As the film is set during the century of war immediately prior to the Edo period, Kurosawa's image of samurai willing to lay down their lives to protect farmers against bandits has to be seen as pure fantasy. However, Kurosawa is not alone in creating popular culture samurai heroes with overwhelmingly positive traits. The list of period films and television programs with samurai superheroes whose only purpose in life is to protect the poor and exploited from greedy merchants and venal officials is virtually endless. However, it is not entirely correct to say that directors such as Kurosawa somehow invented these samurai heroes. On the contrary, they responded to pre-existing popularly held images.

The transformation of sixteenth century ruffian samurai (portrayed realistically in director Mizoguchi Kenji's film *Ugetsu Monogatari*) into protectors of the people took place in the Edo era, when Confucian scholars in the service of the Tokugawa shogunate, (Yamaga Sokō, Ogyū Sorai and others) sought to harness Chinese political philosophy to transform the warrior retainers of a century earlier into scholar administrators who—it was hoped—could win the trust of the lower classes and legitimately claim the right to occupy the highest position in the Tokugawa social hierarchy through displays of moral rectitude. In this regard the samurai had little choice; they had to acquire positive traits in order for the Tokugawa to achieve their goal of a peaceful, stable society after a century of bloodshed. Thus, even though, as Benesch and others have pointed out, samurai

8 Other Kurosawa films with samurai heroes are *The Hidden Fortress*, *Yōjimbō*, and *Tsubaki Sanjūrō*.

values were not referred to as *bushidō* during the Edo period, and even though what constituted such values remains the subject of debate, this does not mean that such values did not exist or that they were the complete invention of a later era. For example teaching of Confucian morality in fief schools to young samurai was almost exclusively conducted by samurai of middle or lower rank, indicating that samurai values were passed on from older to younger generations of samurai. While Nitobe was incorrect to describe *bushidō* as an exclusively oral tradition (since samurai teachers were known to have conducted classes using texts), Nitobe was not just making things up. Also, while it was historically inaccurate on Nitobe's part to use the word *bushidō* to refer to samurai values, as Martin Collcutt mentions in his essay "The Confucian Legacy in Japan", Nitobe was right to see strands of Confucian, Buddhist, Shinto and folk elements in Japanese thinking about morality (Cullcutt 1991).

All the same, samurai pop culture heroes are useful: they not only gauge popularly held views of the samurai, but they also provide examples of the virtues which the general public considers to be typical of the noblest traits of the former warrior class. In this regard, Nitobe's *Bushidō* does offer a useful list of positive attributes. For the purpose of this paper, perhaps the following traits might offer a sampling of what ordinary individuals would demand of an elite class: Benevolence (to the weak), Loyalty (not to the death but in service), Rectitude, and Sincerity.

Journalism

Journalism offers an excellent sampling of samurai-linked ethical standards—both observed and broken—since the founding of Japan's major dailies in the first decades of Meiji. I am indebted to two reporters-turned-scholars, Albert Altman and James Huffman, whose work linking the early Meiji press to the samurai class has sadly received insufficient attention. In contrast, to this day both academic and popular works on the Japanese press published in the West heap criticism on the Japanese news media and its practitioners for their alleged failure to fulfil the role of a Fourth Estate in a democracy.

For example, veteran Tōkyō reporter Richard Halloran wrote in 1969, "... [A]n English or American newsman today often has a hard time recognizing the connection between Japanese journalism and his own craft"⁹ (Halloran 1969, 160). Halloran, who would later become Tōkyō bureau chief of the *New York Times*, argued that Japan's news media was "regulated" and that it was "not a mirror but

9 Halloran wrote, "[The Japanese press] dispenses the decisions of the Establishment and assists in persuading the public to follow."

a molder of public opinion on behalf of the Establishment”. Halloran’s strongly critical ideas of the Japanese press were echoed in more strident tones in 1989 by Dutch journalist Karel van Wolferen in his best-selling *Enigma of Japanese Power*, in which he called the Japanese news media a “house-broken press” (Van Wolferen 1989, 123) and accused its practitioners of “help[ing] to keep secret the details of how the administrators actually run Japan” (ibid., 126). A similarly critical approach was adopted by Laurie Anne Freeman in *Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan’s Mass Media*, in which she blamed “institutional constraints” for preventing the Japanese news media from providing the public “all the news that’s fit to print”¹⁰ (Freeman 2003, 178).

What the above critics failed to see, but Altman and Huffman did, was that Japanese journalism was never intended to fully function as a Fourth Estate. It was founded by the samurai who won the Boshin Civil War that brought Meiji leaders to power, and it was written (at least initially) by samurai who had been on the losing side. It is its origins during an era of rapid nation-building and the indebtedness of its practitioners to a tradition of Confucian morality that sets the Japanese media apart from counterparts in countries where the press earned its right to speak freely through a struggle against entrenched authority. In the Japanese case, the news media was in part a creation of the new state; the first journalists shared the same samurai class origins—if not always the same political views—as the founders of the modern Japanese nation. They did not ask for unfettered freedoms to which they themselves did not feel entitled; rather, as members of the elite who lost out in the struggle for power, the early journalists vied to share in it. To do that, they simultaneously collaborated with their former adversaries in helping to convince the public of the need for radical reforms, and at the same time competed against those in power through demonstrations of high moral principles and passionate patriotism. In other words, the Japanese press did not enter the modern era as a permanent adversary of political power. Unlike in the West, in Japan the expression “the Fourth Estate” is rarely if ever used to describe the press.¹¹

One of very few foreign news correspondents to have shown a nuanced understanding of the work of his Japanese counterparts was the late Frank Gibney. As Tōkyō correspondent of *Time*, he wrote the following in an article in 1949 about the *Asahi Shimbun*: “To an American it is a bewildering combination of

10 On the same page Freeman concludes that the Japanese media provides an “informationally inferior product”.

11 Readers interested in a more detailed treatment of the contemporary Japanese news media’s collaborative role with government may wish to access the author’s essay, “Japan’s News Media—How and Why Reporters and News Organizations Influence Public Policy” (Kotler 2016, 95–133).

sense-making progressiveness and technical efficiency with stuffy unwieldy Japanese orthodoxy, but unquestionably it should take rank as one of the world's great newspapers" (Gibney 2001, 274). Gibney should be given credit for being among very few foreign observers to notice the "stuffy unwieldy orthodoxy" aspect of Japanese newspapers, since it is the key to the basis of their legitimacy.

For example, in Japan no newspaper has a humour column. It is rare to see a pun in any headline. None publish any letters from readers that contradict or complain about any article or editorial appearing on their pages. None accept or commission op-ed pieces that take positions different from the political orientation of the newspaper: left in the case of the *Asahi*, *Mainichi* and *Tokyo Shimbun*, and right in the case of the *Yomiuri* and *Sankei*. It is a rare day that a Japanese newspaper prints a correction. In Japan the line between reporting and opinion, so clearly drawn by the American news media, is hardly perceptible. Papers do not allow themselves to be contradicted because they do not merely report facts which can be challenged, they take positions which carry moral weight and therefore ought to be unassailable. In other words, they are not a marketplace of competing ideas; they offer a package of policy positions and they defend them much the way that a political party might stand behind its platform, or in the case of the idealised samurai, the honour of his lord.

All one has to do to see the difference between the self-perception of Japanese versus Western journalists is to compare the statements of core values of the *New York Times* with those of the *Asahi* or *Yomiuri*, Japan's two national dailies with the largest circulations:

"The Company's core purpose is to enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news, information and entertainment." Core values statement on *The New York Times* company website.

"From a consistent and unbiased standpoint, making full use of the right of free speech, contribute to the development of a democratic state and to the establishment of world peace...." From *Asahi Shimbun's* basic principles (1952).

"Contribute to the peace and prosperity of Japan and the world..." From *Yomiuri Shimbun's* basic principles (2000).

These quotes from the core value statements of Japan's two leading papers are the "stuffy unwieldy Japanese orthodoxy" that Gibney described and which represent the strong moralistic streak of the Japanese media. It is not the "public's right to know" that justifies the newspaper's privilege to publish information, but rather the

news media's claim to high moral standards, which reporters are expected to uphold, that confers upon them the privilege of offering advice to government. It is because of the existence of this norm that another national daily, the *Mainichi*, lost some 400,000 subscribers in a few months in 1972 when in the course of a trial it came to be known that a *Mainichi* political reporter had slept with one of his sources, a married female employee of the Foreign Ministry (Kawachi 2007, 22). The *Asahi* faced a similar drop in subscriptions in the fall of 2014, when its management made a tactical mistake by admitting that there were errors in a series of stories, the last of which the paper had published some 22 years earlier (Horvat 2016, 100).

In the case of the *Mainichi*, the public prosecutor reading out the list of charges, used a particular phrase that was clearly designed to characterise the reporter, Nishiyama Takichi, as lacking in character, or what the Japanese call *jinkaku*. He described the reporter as taking advantage of a woman, an act unbecoming of a gentleman. The words he used were, *jō wo tsūjite*, literally “through emotions”, effectively accusing the reporter of being both “insincere” and taking advantage of the weak. At the time I was a cub reporter working for the English-language *Mainichi*, and I recall my Japanese colleagues freezing on hearing the prosecutor's phrase. The fact that the evidence Nishiyama had obtained clearly proved that the Foreign Minister, Fukuda Takeo, had lied in Parliament—which should have destroyed his political career—was quickly forgotten and all attention was focused on the “morally unbecoming behaviour” of the reporter. The outrage felt by the general public toward Nishiyama extended to his employer. In other words, Nishiyama's insincerity and his caddish behaviour—in the eyes of the public—removed the claims to superior ethical standards that the *Mainichi* needed in order to justify its work as a newspaper. To understand the reasoning for the public's negative reaction, one needs to keep in mind that newspapers began in Japan as vehicles by which to disseminate official information during the period of rapid modernisation, so-called *bunmei kaika* or civilization and enlightenment. Part of their mission was to enlighten, i.e. to explain and by extension educate the general public on policies that they needed to understand in order to keep up with an era of rapid changes, such as the introduction of railroads, the telegraph, military conscription and so on. Far from challenging the government, the early newspapers acted as interpreters of official policy. In other words, the newspapers shared certain qualities with the new Japan's educational system—they served the state by informing and educating, and through their editorials encouraging correct moral conduct.

As mentioned above, the conflation of samurai values and journalistic ethics in Japan is no accident: the founding of the modern Japanese press was accomplished almost entirely by former samurai. The best-known example of a samurai turned

reporter is that of Fukuchi Gen'ichirō, first editor of the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* (the present day *Mainichi Shimbun*). An incident involving Fukuchi, often referred to as the “father of modern Japanese journalism”, serves to illustrate that Japanese news reporters at the time when the first papers were established were fully aware that they had no “inalienable rights” to publish anything. In 1869 Fukuchi became the first Japanese journalist to be jailed for breaking the Newspaper Regulations promulgated that year. But instead of fighting the government, he submitted an abject apology for his misbehaviour. Albert Altman wrote:

None of the editors of the civil-war newsbooks [early newspapers], during the ten months between July 1868 and the promulgation of the [Newspaper] Regulations, appears even to have suggested that he had the “right” to publish his views in print. Neither has any evidence been offered that these same intellectuals were censorious of the Regulations on the ground that the government attempted to control the contents of the newspapers it was allowing to come into legal existence. [They] were all Tokugawa intellectuals committed to the accepted ethic which emphasized responsibility and obligations rather than rights.¹² (Altman 1976, 56)

Most other journalists active during the Meiji era, both on the pro-government and the popular rights movement, traced their family origins, and education, to the samurai class. State-media relations in Meiji were definitely marked by samurai ethics. Reporters served the state (loyalty) and educated the public (with feelings of benevolence). Although less overtly today, the Japanese media continues to spend much time explaining government policies to readers and viewers, and in spite of a dent in their earnings, Japanese media conglomerates engage in educational, cultural, and charity activities that are part good publicity, but also “noblesse oblige”.

The “stuffy unwieldy orthodoxy” noted by Gibney extends to demonstrations of activities for the public good. Suffice to say that one newspaper, the *Yomiuri*, maintains its own symphony orchestra, a cultural activity which in the United States would be undertaken by a tax-exempt foundation. The *Asahi* runs cultural centres which offer a wide range of self-improvement courses, much the same as a university extension department in North America. The *Asahi*, *Mainichi* and *Yomiuri* all bestow annual prizes for literary and artistic achievements. Both the *Asahi* and the *Mainichi* promote month-long nation-wide high school baseball

12 Altman discusses the *kawaraban*, the pre-Meiji single page woodblock printed news sheets which provided a combination of advertising and entertainment, but which were prohibited from reporting or commenting on political events.

tournaments, which have achieved the status of national institutions. Not to be outdone, the *Sankei* maintains a charitable foundation which awards scholarships to needy students throughout Japan.

Such cultural and educational activities of Japanese news organisations need to be seen not as additional activities, but as work integral to their *raison d'être*. Unlike their British and American counterparts, which were able to draw on ideas originating with the Enlightenment and which were later interpreted by American revolutionaries as giving individual citizens “inalienable rights” including participation in politics and government, Japanese news organisations had to earn the privilege to criticise their leaders through demonstrations of exemplary moral behaviour. It should be remembered that until the Meiji revolution publications in Japan were prohibited from reporting on real political events.

The elite status of news reporters is also linked to the “stuffy unwieldy orthodoxy” Gibney so astutely observed. The idea that one needs to demonstrate a high level of education by graduating from one of half-dozen elite universities, and to be working for a news organisation with a proven track record of contributing to the moral improvement of society—concepts that can be traced to the Confucian values modern Japan has inherited from the Tokugawa shogunate—continues to function as the non-stated norm of Japanese journalism. And it is this same “stuffy unwieldy Japanese orthodoxy” that on the one hand fails to grant the Japanese news practitioner an “inalienable right” to criticise government, while on the other allows him or her to move freely between the ranks of the governors and the governed, having earned that right through a demonstration of moral worth. This may explain the absence of a strict line of demarcation between reporters for Japan's elite news organisations and the elites whom they cover, and the existence of such an invisible barrier between reporters of the elite national dailies and the largely non-elite freelancers who write for the salacious weeklies, equivalents of Britain's tabloids.

To sum up, in Japan a news reporter working for one of the two national news agencies, five major dailies, 40 odd regional newspapers, as well as their affiliated television stations, derives the right to ask questions and make the answers publicly known from proven moral worth, consisting of a combination of high educational attainment and the daily demonstration of morally correct behaviour. Incidentally, the Japanese news media displays a far greater commitment to public service in its reporting than does its Western counterpart. We see this in the awarding of prizes for long, team-reported special projects, such as a six-month series by a local paper in Tochigi Prefecture on child poverty, or another lengthy series by a regional newspaper in Kyūshū on the deterioration of grazing lands on the slopes of Mt Aso as a result of population aging among dairy farmers.

Education

For the influence of “samurai values” on Japanese higher education one need not look very far. As in the case of the Japanese mass media, there is a tendency to emphasise morally exemplary behaviour. In the case of many private universities, the legitimacy of the university is linked to the accomplishments of a historically prominent founder. Among ex-samurai founders of private universities are Fukuzawa Yukichi of Keio, Okuma Shigenobu of Waseda, and Niiijima Jō of Dōshisha. The founder’s life as well as his or her sayings are studied and sometimes included in the curriculum. Some epithet of the founder may become the school motto, which is invoked at school ceremonies (of which there are many at Japanese private universities) or when exhorting students to do their best. The professor is a “sensei” (master) who acts both autocratically and with “benevolence”. The professor’s job is not just to teach academic subjects but to impart a sense of moral rectitude in his or her students. Moreover, in a pattern that harkens back to Edo days, the teacher’s responsibility for the welfare of a student extends beyond graduation. Much has been made of the job-placement role of Japan’s private universities, but there is plenty of evidence that this too is part of the Edo legacy of higher education in Japan.¹³ Incidentally, Edo era terms such as *monkasei*, literally students from the same gate, a reference to the wooden gates of the Confucian academies, continue to be used to denote any group of alumni who studied with the same professor. Referring to Tokyo University as the “red gate” also harkens back to Edo times.

The link between higher education and morality in Japan was the result of a practical need for “men of character” during Edo. As mentioned earlier, the shogunate saw it in its interests to turn warrior samurai into scholar officials as a means to achieve long-term stability. In later years, as the feudal system came under stress, shogunate and local fief leaders came to see a need to nurture talent. As educational historian Kobayashi Tetsuya has written, in Edo

[G]overnment was still simple enough so that the wisdom of the sages taught in the Confucian classics had practical meaning. When leadership

13 A well-documented case of an Edo period job placement by a *sensei* of his *deshi* (pupil) is that of the Kyōto Confucian scholar Kinoshita Jun’an recommending Amenomori Hōshū to serve as adviser to the Sō fiefdom on the island of Tsushima in 1692. The Sō acted as intermediaries in diplomatic relations between the Tokugawa shogunate and Korea. In his capacity as adviser to the Tsushima fiefdom, Amenomori played a leading role in Japan-Korea relations for the best part of the following six decades. Incidentally, Kinoshita was the mentor of Arai Hakuseki, who went on to act as policy adviser to the shogunate. Although Arai was of samurai stock, neither Kinoshita nor Amenomori appear to have been. However, all three functioned as educators and advisers of samurai.

depended primarily upon the moral quality of individuals, the study of Confucianism was through its moral instruction, a practical preparation of administrators. (Kobayashi 1965, 292)

Unlike in the West, where morals were closely linked to religion and where religious instruction came to be separated from secular education, often after bitter struggle between church and state, in Japan morality was not clearly identified with any one established religion, so its presence in education was not seen as objectionable. On the contrary, a claim to morally superior behaviour tended to reinforce the legitimacy of educational institutions. Perhaps one can see in the excessive emphasis at some schools on ceremony as a latter-day outcropping of "rectitude", a virtue inherited from Confucian rites as yet another way to confer legitimacy on universities which fail to provide much by the way of real academic content. These school ceremonies are highly choreographed and invariably involve the shouting of orders for students to "rise", "bow heads", and "be seated". Depending on the university's zeal for ritual, there can be as many as four commencement exercises per year plus several unveilings of plaques, anniversary events and so on, all of which must be attended by all faculty.¹⁴ In his classic study of Japanese high schools, Thomas Rohlen argues that the tendency to stress school ceremonies is rooted in Japan's Confucian influenced past. Rohlen writes,

School events and ceremonies [in the United States] are readily changed and abandoned if student support lags. Japanese school events, on the other hand, appear uniform and constant [...]. The Confucian appreciation of formality in ritual as expressive of the moral order lingers in Japan [...]. (Rohlen 1983, 167)

One might argue that these Confucian legacies may not necessarily indicate a samurai connection, but as has been mentioned before, Confucian morality constituted a large part of samurai education so it is very difficult to separate the two. Since emulating one's betters is a behaviour pattern common to all societies, it should come as no surprise that public schools have adopted the moral values of a long defunct elite class.

Another example of the high value attached to moral exhortations at Japanese universities is the prominence given to school mottos. Unlike at most universities in the West, where little attention is paid to the university motto, except perhaps when

14 For criticism of the tendency at many Japanese private universities to emphasize ritual, see McVeigh 2015. The chapter titled "Japanese Higher Education as Simulated Schooling" (123–47), specifically deals with the heavy emphasis on ceremonies at many Japanese private universities.

it is part of a design printed on franchised sportswear, in Japan virtually all tertiary institutions provide detailed explanations of the origins and meaning of their mottos in pamphlets, and lately on websites under the heading of *kengaku no seishin* or, the “spiritual foundations of our school”. Although some schools have modernised their slogans to take into account the new role of universities as producers of global human resources, in a recently accessed list of leading private institutions about one in three professed to adhere to the moral exhortations of their founders compressed into a few syllables. Dokkyo University’s is: *gakumon wo tsūjite ningen keisei* (character building through learning).¹⁵ Jōsai University’s is almost identical, and means the same thing: *gakumon ni yoru ningen keisei*. A women’s university in Kamakura promises to “mould individuals who devote their lives to service and gratitude”. Japan Women’s University’s motto, which is in English, carries a similar message: “Bloom as a leader”. What all of these “bon mots” (and many, many others) convey is a promise that the university will seek to improve the student’s personal character, or *jinkaku*.

We can also see vestiges of samurai ethical influence in the contrast between the image of the ideal Japanese university professor and his or her counterpart in the West. In the West it is sufficient for a university instructor to excel in an academic field, or at least to have a reasonable command of it. In Japan, other than being a professional the *sensei* must also be a person of integrity and high moral character. We know this because the news media reports on the slightest infringements by teachers and instructors. Causing a traffic accident is enough to result in a forced resignation.

Incidentally, the Japanese Ministry of Education encourages universities to offer courses on the life, times and accomplishments of their founders, so that students can learn from their exemplary behaviour.

Although one might argue that the continued emphasis on “character building” at Japanese universities is intended as little more than a veneer designed to impart legitimacy by linking the school to age-old educational traditions, it is not entirely a case of all show and no go. When Matsushita Kōnosuke, founder of the Panasonic business empire, decided to establish a graduate school to train future political leaders, he chose to call it *juku* as a homage to the private Confucian academies of Edo times. The Matsushita Seikei Juku (Matsushita School of Government and Management) has so far sent more than 50 of its graduates to the Japanese Parliament as members of both ruling and opposition parties. Former Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko is an alumnus, as is the present Minister of Defence, Onodera Itsunori, and the former head of the Democratic Party of Japan, Maehara Seishi.

15 For a list of the mottos of Japanese private universities and explanations of the school’s “founding philosophies” see Dokkyo Daigaku 2018.

Not surprisingly, a significant part of the school curriculum consists of studying the thoughts, sayings and moral principles of the founder, Matsushita.¹⁶

Nitobe Inazō as a Latter-day Educator Samurai

But perhaps no example of *jinkaku* as a samurai value is clearer than in the case of Nitobe himself. It should be clear from the extraordinary accomplishments of Nitobe that he sincerely believed in the key role to be played in modern Japan of the “superior” man whose position of leadership is based on the high moral standards which he enunciated in *Bushido*. We also know that he personally struggled to achieve the high standards that he set for himself.

The very name Inazō—producer of rice crops—mentioned above, links him to a tradition of service. It is no accident that Nitobe himself would become an agricultural economist and colonial policy advisor, credited with having laid the foundations of the Taiwanese sugar industry, the reorganisation of which, thanks to Nitobe’s advice, made Japanese colonial rule of the island a paying proposition. To describe Nitobe as multi-talented would be to understate matters. Nitobe, by most accounts, was someone we might call today a manic depressive, except for the fact that he worked furiously even during his periods of deep self-doubt. Advised by his German doctor to rest at a hot spring as a cure for depression, Nitobe withdrew in 1898 to Ikaho in Gunma, where he wrote *Nōgyō Honron* (*Basic Principles of Japanese Agriculture*), a 461-page treatise for which he received a doctorate in agriculture, the first to be awarded in Japan. In 1890, while studying in Germany, he wrote a thesis on the Japanese system of land tenure in German. It was while still recovering from depression that Nitobe (again on the advice of his doctor) moved to a hotel in Monterey, California, where instead of resting he wrote *Bushido* in English. Cured of depression, he started his consulting work on the Taiwanese sugar industry in 1901.

Author, educator, agricultural economist, colonial policy advisor, in 1901 Nitobe was not yet 40. He would go on to hold a chair at Kyoto University, serve as president of Tokyo Woman’s Christian University, principal of the elite Dai-Ichi Higher School and then start a separate career as the first deputy secretary general of the League of Nations, where he founded a committee which after World War II would become known as UNESCO. Retiring from the League in 1926, he became head of the Japanese national committee of the Institute of Pacific Relations, a track two organisation where he became known as a defender of Japanese

16 As a former outside adjudicator of student graduate presentations, the author is personally familiar with the teaching style and content of the Matsushita school.

interests in China, a position that he would come to regret after the Japanese military's expansionist policies in Manchuria (Howes 1995; Nitobe 1936).

It should be clear by now that Nitobe was probably far more successful as a latter-day samurai than he was as a historically accurate interpreter of samurai values. The point here, however, is that both in his multifaceted career and as an educator he adhered to the values that he set forth in *Bushido*. In this regard, he has had a lasting impact on education, linking “character building” and “education” by personal example in the minds of leading Japanese educators and public servants. It is not by accident that his likeness graced the ¥5,000 banknote for 23 years.

Allow me here to describe the “participant observer” role I had the opportunity to play in the middle of the last decade as a member of an informal organisation called the Nitobe-kai. At the time I was the Japan representative of the San Francisco based Asia Foundation, where my mission included reaching out to Japanese civil society, educational institutions and a wide range of Japanese activists and individuals, with the aim of promoting some of the loftier goals of U.S. foreign policy at the time, such as human rights, empowerment of women, and historical reconciliation in East Asia. The Nitobe-kai, though informal in nature had half dozen members, including Japan's then chief public prosecutor, the presidents of two Tokyo area private universities, and a senior executive of Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, who would leave the group when he was named bank president.

Why Nitobe Now? This was the question posed on the poster of an event our Nitobe-kai held at the main hall of the United Nations University in Shibuya, in 2005. The conference took place in the UNU's largest hall and was filled to capacity. Each of the Nitobe-kai's illustrious members spoke on one particular aspect of Nitobe that they felt had influenced their lives. Among the many events we convened—in Sapporo, where Nitobe had attended university, in Ikaho, Gunma, where he had written his first monumental work, and at Morioka, Nitobe's birthplace—the one subject that never directly came up for discussion was *Bushido*, the book. Though “samurai values” by name were never mentioned, all speakers discussed at length some positive aspect of Nitobe's “superior character”. Japan's chief public prosecutor focused on Nitobe as a *kokusaijin*, the kind of cosmopolitan—citizen of the world—that he felt Japan lacked. For the president of Takushoku University, an institution founded to promote the economic exploitation of Japan's growing number of colonies, Nitobe's legacy as an early advocate of economic development of Asia had meant the most. For the president of Tokyo Woman's Christian University, Nitobe's conversion to Christianity and his concern for women's education figured greatly. The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi

executive enjoyed Nitobe the author. As for me, attempting to implement public policy programming, I was struck by Nitobe's influence as moulder of men, the master, the *onshi* (respected teacher) of an elite corps of dedicated servants of society and the nation.

Nitobe was a teacher before the days of mass higher education. He must have been a deeply inspirational individual, because the names of his students read like a twentieth century Japanese intellectual *Who Is Who*. Among this illustrious group was Yanaihara Tadao, who would later be forced to resign as professor of colonial policy at Tokyo Imperial University because of his pacifist views. Yanaihara had been a student at Dai-Ichi Higher School (equivalent to present day undergraduate studies) when Nitobe was its principal. That it is a mistake to look for militaristic instruction in Nitobe's *Bushido* is in some ways obvious, given the fact that Yanaihara was one of its translators into Japanese and that both the author and Yanaihara were Christian pacifists.

Who were the other Nitobe disciples of note? Let me just mention two: Maeda Tamon, who became Japan's first post-war Minister of Education, and Matsumoto Shigeharu, correspondent of *Dōmei News* in Shanghai at the time of the Nanjing Massacre. What distinguishes these people is that they were leaders in both pre- and post-war Japan. But Matsumoto was clearly Nitobe's star pupil. He re-emerges after WWII working with the Institute of Pacific Relations, but then when that organisation becomes the target of an anti-communist witch hunt in the United States, his friendship with John D. Rockefeller III paves the way for his appointment as the first director of International House in Roppongi, which becomes the centre of post-war intellectual exchanges and U.S.-Japan reconciliation. It should come as no surprise therefore that the International House of Japan has a series of Nitobe lectures and offers scholarships in his name.

Conclusion

The few examples of contemporary Japanese expectations of moral behaviour presented above should demonstrate the lasting influence of so-called "samurai values", referred to as *bushidō*, which Nitobe Inazō attempted to introduce to Western readers in 1900, in part with a view to obtaining a favourable understanding of Japan in the West. The part of *bushidō* that forms the topic of this paper is the moral ethical teachings emphasizing *jinkaku* or superior character, which Edo era educators hoped to inculcate into generations of peacetime "warriors-turned-bureaucrats". It should be evident from the examples of expected exemplary behaviour among modern day Japanese journalists working for Japan's "serious press",

the stress on the development of *jinkaku* in contemporary Japanese education, and the respect which leading members of Japan's ruling establishment continue to show to Nitobe himself, that these values, passed down both orally, as Nitobe has written, and through formal Confucian-influenced educational institutions catering to samurai during the Edo period, remain very much alive today.

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