

SOCIETY OF WARRIORS

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Upon entering a form of Japanese martial arts, a good student will gain the benefits of agility, self confidence, and discipline. What the student does not realize is that he is becoming part of an age old process that has formed a nation. The martial arts of Japan since its beginning have shaped and molded the basis of Japanese cultural lifestyles, as well as found its own origin in them. This is reflected in the three different areas of discipline, hierarchy, and will power which are characteristics of both the Japanese martial arts and cultural lifestyles.

One of the major aspects of martial arts that one can see reflected in the Japanese culture is discipline. Discipline is found in every culture, although it's extent is different for each. In Japan however it takes a strong stand, for those who do not heed it will face social rejection. The Japanese form of discipline can be broken down into three separate but distinct groups to aid in observation. These groups are "shuyo", mind over matter, and expertness, all of which create discipline as a whole.

The first grouping of discipline is shuyo, which in Japanese means self discipline. The culture of Japan demands that discipline is shown in every aspect of life. The Japanese believe "Only through self discipline can a man or a woman gain the power to live fully and to get the taste of life" (Benedict, 223). Thus those who do not work to gain discipline of themselves will be robbed of a good life. They also believe that a " person needs self training quite apart from learning the specific things that will be required of him on a test" (Benedict, 229). Even though discipline is stressed, the Japanese culture also realizes that it takes time to form and is not always easy, "A boy learns judo, a young woman adjusts to the demands of her mother-in-law. It is quite understood that in the first stages of training, the man or woman unused to the new requirements may wish to be free of shuyo" (Benedict, 233). It should also be noted that

"Not all Japanese submit to intense training, of course, but even those who do not the phraseology and the practice of self discipline have recognized its place in life" (Benedict, 229). For those who do take up forms of martial arts, discipline is formed in the same way. As the student starts, he may find it hard to meet the requirements of his instructor, but as he progresses it becomes easier. In Kyudo, an art centered around archery, discipline is of the utmost, perhaps greater than that of any other martial art. At first one must memorize the many movements that are required to approach the shooting area and the firing of the arrow, but as time progresses he finds these actions automatic. As in culture, discipline in martial arts is hard to acquire, pushed to the extreme, but is essential for the person to grow and gain fulfillment in his chosen art.

A second grouping of discipline is the concept of mind over matter. The Japanese believe that the spirit is the soul of our existence and the body is just a shell to cloak it. Thus no matter what the body endures through mind over matter, tortures will only strengthen the spirits. "The heavier our bodies the higher our spirit will rise above them" (Singer, 30). When need be, the individual should be able to ignore the demands of the body to achieve desired results, "When it is a matter of the really serious affairs of life, the demands of the body, no matter how essential to health, no matter how approved and cultivated as things apart, should be drastically subordinated" (Benedict, 230). Mind over matter in Japanese martial arts also works to override the body and build one's spirit. In many forms of the Japanese martial arts there are requirements of meditation for long periods of time or breaking of objects such as concrete bricks. This is achieved by the individual ignoring the doubts and demands of the body and drawing upon his own spirit to complete his task. In doing this people have been able to meditate in the same position for hours on end or endure pain of great measures without showing the faintest signs of fatigue or

falter. Mind over matter has also allowed the physically weak to crush 10 or so 3 inch cement blocks with one punch without damage to the hand. Mind over matter in both the common lifestyle and martial art have allowed individuals to endure great hardships and benefit from the experience.

The third grouping of discipline is striving for expertness, a predominant trait in Japan that has its beginnings in schooling and is carried on throughout life. In the cultural lifestyles of Japan, the struggle for expertness begins in schooling where a student is not only taught to know a subject matter but is required to master it. "Beyond and above competent self discipline, there is also the plane of expertness" (Benedict 235). The Japanese themselves have their own definition of expertness. "The description of this state of expertness is that it denotes those experiences, whether secular or religious when there is no break, not even the thickness of a hair between a man's will and his act" (Benedict 235). Expertness is then traveled past schooling where the individual fights to make his country the top economic power in the world. Whether to aid his corporation where he works to rise above all others or to make his own company succeed, the Japanese work more than any other country to get to the top. The martial artist of Japan also strives to gain expertness by mastering his art. This of course begins in the start of his training where he is required to perform certain pattern, kicks, throws, etc., in accordance with his art, to achieve the next rank. Each belt or rank is a show of mastery of his former, as he works up to master as much as he can until stopped by choice or natural causes such as death. The cultural display of expertness is very similar to that of the martial arts, for in both the individual seeks to gain mastery, and although this may be achieved in some things it cannot be done in all.

Discipline exists both in the martial arts and in the cultural lifestyles of the Japanese. Its co-existence in both is not only apparent but very similar in many ways. In both, discipline is used to gain shuyo, mind over matter, and expertness, which in turn will better the life of the individual. To gain better control of one's mind, body, and spirit, in order to achieve the mastery of one's actions, is seen by the Japanese as a winning combination. It cannot be obtained easily and is readily apparent in only a few. It can be argued that this combination is not only seen in the political and business leaders of Japan, but is also what makes up the few masters and grand masters of the martial art of the past and present.

A second major aspect of Japanese martial arts that can be reflected upon the society of Japan is hierarchy. It has existed since the feudal times of Japan and carries on into present day. Hierarchy can be broken into three separate groups in which it can be viewed. These groups are, respect, bowing, and the women's role, which both in separation and in whole are direct reflections of hierarchy in Japan.

Respect is one of the aspects of hierarchy and it plays a greater role in Japan than perhaps in any other country. To show respect the people of Japan take certain ranks, in their society, "Filial piety means in Japan taking one's proper station according to generation, sex and age" (Benedict, 52). Those who are of lower rank of course show considerable respect to those of higher rank and will receive this respect back. Even in feudal times Japanese classes were divided into ranks, all of which were below the Imperial Family. "There were four Japanese classes ranked in hierarchal order: The warriors (samurai), the farmers, the artisans, and the merchants" (Benedict, 61). Age also plays an important part in ranking "Proper station, not only means differences of generation but differences of age" (Benedict, 52). The older a person in Japan, the more respect he will gain from society. Japanese martial arts also work in a similar

fashion, using ranks to signify the hierarchy. "The atmosphere within a dojo (workout area), is usually extremely formal and the discipline very strict. The deference with which senior instructors are treated reflects the Japanese hierarchal attitude" (Williams, 13). In the beginning of class students will line up from left to right in accordance to rank or experience, "In this kind of class a hierarchy exist with the teacher at the top and student ranked by grade and length of experience" (Williams, 32). To reach that of an instructor's status it generally takes about four years, but to reach a master's status it will take around 19 to 20 years. Usually the most respected instructors are those who have devoted a life time in the martial arts, and due to time requirements these people are the elders.

Another aspect of hierarchy is bowing, which seems to be almost a compulsive action of the Japanese. Bowing is not just considered a show of respect, but also a part of the Japanese language, "The Japanese have a respect language..and they accompany it with bows and kneeling" (Benedict, 47/48). Most westerners see only one form of bowing which is the slight arching of the head and shoulders, however, this is only one of many forms. "Bows range all the way from kneeling with forehead lowered to the hands placed flat upon the floor, to the mere inclination of the head and shoulders" (Benedict, 48). In accordance to a particular situation, the individual will pick the proper bow to perform in order to show respect. In the Japanese martial arts bows serve the same function as in society, including their variety. There are several instances where the student is required to show respect to other students, to his instructor's, a weapon, or to his dojo (workout area). Usually before engaging in an exercise with another student or a lower ranked instructor, the slight inclination of the head and shoulders are sufficient. When facing a master instructor the students must complete a formal bow, which is the same bow as previously

stated but emphasized for a longer duration. Upon entering a dojo or at the beginning of a weapons kata (form), the student is required to kneel down and touch his forehead to his hands that are laying flat on the floor. This is done to show respect to the area where he learns and to a weapon and its potential for death. It is apparent that in both the society and martial arts bowing is used in the same manner to aid in the expression of the Japanese respect language.

The third grouping of hierarchy is the women's role in both the martial arts and society. Although this is a shorter subject, it is essential to understand the full structure of the Japanese hierarchy. To be stated in general terms the Japanese woman is near the bottom of the ranking system, "Whatever one's age, position in the hierarchy depends whether one is male or female" (Benedict, 153). A woman will make many of the important decisions at the home but receives little respect from her son who engages in tantrums and gives demands, without punishment. Women in Japan also find it difficult in the business world, "Japanese women find it hard to get jobs, and get paid far less than males" (Christopher, 104). In the Japanese martial arts the woman plays a lesser role as well. Aikido in fact is the only style of martial arts that is considered for the woman. The rest are considered to be for the male. Even in aikido the majority of teaching is done by the male and there are not women master instructors to speak of. When the top instructors gather to discuss their different styles, if a woman is brought along she is under strict rules. She cannot speak unless spoken to, she must stand behind the male who brought her at all times when standing, and she must wait for all males to be seated in the room before she can take her own seat. This is probably due to the fact that traditionally the warrior's role was to protect his family and home and the woman was to raise the children and adhere to the needs of her husband. Nevertheless, this down-grading of women has always been present

in the martial arts, and is a very real part of the Japanese society.

The hierarchy of Japan has existed since its beginning, and will probably continue until its end. It plays an important part in both the martial arts and the cultural lifestyles, by creating means by which an order of importance can be formed. Being a group centered society, Japan finds it necessary to keep things in order and avoid unpleasantness of disrespect. Showing respect for those who have worked hard all their lives is not only a noble action but a way to keep youth in its place. Bowing brings action rather than words to show respect in a society where silence is sacred. Furthermore, the degradation of women however unjust it may seem, also reflects the male superiority complex that exists in both the society and martial arts of Japan.

The third major aspect of martial arts that can be reflected upon the culture is the stress upon the will power of an individual. Will power is the ability to resist certain human desires and the pure determination within an individual. In the fast paced society of Japan, will power is essential to survive let alone prosper. It is primarily what holds a person back from certain actions while prompting others to obtain a certain goal. Will power of the Japanese can be separated into three sub-divisions. These sub-divisions are: self control, controlled violence and the code of never surrender.

The first division of will power is self control. Self control is being in control of one's emotions and desires. To the Japanese it serves as an important tool for judging others. "Japanese of all groups judge themselves and others in terms of a whole set of concepts which depends upon their notion of generalized technical self control and self governance" (Benedict, 61). The Japanese tea ceremony is used to gain better self control and discipline. "The ceremony thus helps the individual to attain a control, a self discipline, a purification which prepared the spirit to

receive communication from and object of beauty or vista of nature" (Buck, 172). The Japanese also believe self control should be wanton opposition to be honored" (Kauz, 62). In the martial arts of Japan the avoidance of a conflict is the first teaching. In any situation where a fight may start, the student should walk away unless it is a situation of life and death. Even when a conflict arises the student should always try to avoid injuring his opponent, "Our intention should always be to avoid injuring our attacker if a less extreme method of defense will safely turn away an attack" (Kauz, 94). In both the martial arts and the culture of Japan there is a mutual avoidance of violence and conflict, but this however is not always the case.

The second division of will power is controlled violence. Although the stress in Japan is non-violence, there are times during which certain forms of controlled violence is necessary. The Japanese realize that violence is a natural part of humanity, "Japanese themselves see certain violent swings of behavior as integral parts of a system consistent within itself" (Benedict, 18). These violent swings of behavior are necessary in the tense over-worked society of Japan where emotions are so concealed. The Japanese seemingly take so much in that when they finally reach their limit it will sometimes cause a violent outburst of emotion that can lead to violent actions. In martial arts there will also be time when enough is too much and violence will be the result. The attack will be that of controlled violence, either to maim or kill an opponent in a swift complete motion. Even in anger the martial artist's training allows his attack to be well focused and his motions exact to make his first attack his last. Although this is seemingly violent, it is essential that the training of a martial artist's is sufficient in the instances of real life. In both society and martial arts, certain events will occur where violence is called for, but in both, the Japanese will call upon as much controlled

violence as possible to aid him in his situation.

The third division of will power is the code of never surrender. This code, although better hidden at some times than others, is the strong determination the Japanese society. This code was perhaps first apparent to the world in World War II, when Japanese soldiers were trained by the code. "Honor was bound to fighting to the death in a hopeless situation, a Japanese soldier should kill himself with a last grenade or charge weaponless against the enemy in a mass suicide attack" (Benedict 38). This can also be seen on a national level in Japan's determination to be the top. In present times the code of never surrender can be seen in almost every aspect of the Japanese lifestyle. It ranges anywhere from the workaholic who will drive himself to exhaustion, never quitting, to the quiet but never relinquishing women's movement that faces enormous opposition in Japan. This group concept of never surrender has allowed a devastated nation in a short span of time after World War II to become one of the foremost economic powers in the world. For those who do give up will become the outcasts of the Japanese society. In every style of Japanese martial arts, the code of never surrender exists. When a martial artist comes in conflict, his reason for battle should be one of which he should be willing to fight to the death for. In his training a martial artist is taught to protect those older, younger and weaker than himself. He is also taught to defend his homeland and household. In all of these situations, should the martial artist fail to act, or surrender in battle, the loss could very well be his life. More importantly to the Japanese, if one surrenders, a loss of life would be favored to living and taking the loss upon his soul. For both the society and martial arts of Japan, to surrender would be the greatest dishonor of all. This is one of the main reasons why suicide is not a frequent occurrence in Japan. Suicide signifies the ultimate surrender, by ending one's life in order to escape the

pressures of life. This is a very self centered act in a very group centered, group conscious society.

Will power in Japan has an inescapable role in both the martial arts and cultural lifestyles of the nation. Self control is used a basis for others to judge and to aid an individual to avoid conflict. Violence will occur in any society, but whether being a businessman or a martial artist it should be controlled to obtain one's desired results. To achieve one's goals one must never surrender, either in physical fight or a fight to reach the top of the business world. Without strong will power the Japanese economy could never have reached its current position, and the martial arts of Japan would be reduced to mere street fighting.

Japanese culture and martial arts have existed together since the days before recorded history. In this time span evolution has caused an intermingling of both, which together created a whole. Due to this, Japanese martial arts have become the basis of the Japanese cultural lifestyle, while gaining its origin in it as well. This can be derived from the Japanese views of discipline hierarchy and will power which are the major parts of both the martial arts and cultural lifestyles. Discipline brings shuyo, mind over matter, and a striving for expertness together to create a calm basis to each. While hierarchy is formed by the concepts of ranks, bowing, and a women's role, which together form the order for which things will stand. Lastly, will power carries forth self control, controlled violence and the code of never surrender to give both the determination and ability to achieve one's goals. When one thinks of the martial arts of Japan, he believes them to be created in Japan. On the other hand, could the nation of Japan really be a creation of the martial arts? It is feasible to assume that certain forms of martial arts were created first by different tribes, and as these tribes came together the individual styles of martial arts were combined to become the basis for their culture. As

this culture formed this original basis would change to meet society's specific demands, while still keeping its own original values. As the culture grew new martial art styles would be formed and old ones modified to meet the new standards set by this society. Soon however the culture would shift from feudal into industrial times and the emphasis on the techniques for the warrior would fade in an overwhelming struggle for new technologies. The Japanese in past and present, have proven themselves to be a race of intelligent people who in their everyday life reflect the teaching of their martial arts.

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