

A HARCOS RÉTEG IDEOLÓGIAI HÁTTERE JAPÁNBAN IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF WARRIORS IN JAPAN

A cikk bemutatja, hogy a Japán történelem során hogyan született meg a társadalom egy kiemelt szerepet betöltő rétege, a harcos (*bushi*) osztály.

Az írás részletezi a harcosok életfelfogását, és annak a harcművészeti kultúrának a kibontakozását, amelyet ma a világ úgy ismer, mint *budō*-kultúra.

Az írás kiemeli, hogy a buddhista világszemlélet és életfelfogás, amely a konfucianizmus és a *shintō* mellett a japán néplélek kialakításában a legnagyobb szerepet játszotta, intuitív vallásbölcseletként hatott, és hat mind a mai napig.

The paper describes how the *bushi* or warrior class, the prominent stratum of the Japanese society has been developed in the history of Japan.

The paper details the warriors' attitude to life and the development of the culture of martial arts that is known worldwide nowadays as the culture of *budō*.

The article highlighted the Buddhist perception of the world, which, besides Confucianism and *Shintō*, played the most significant role in the development of the Japanese soul, has had the intuitive religious wisdom up to our days.

Based on historical events we will examine the ideological background that through centuries nourished the belief of Japanese people in their emperor, in their victory and in being invincible.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Japan the social role of the *bushi*¹ started to form in the 8th century, but their influence, both in cultural and religious terms, had consolidated by the 10th century. The value of their role in history is unquestionable even in modern times. The word itself needs to be found in the verb "*saburau*", which means „to serve a master”. The order of *bushi* is still politically respected in Japan.

Their special role in history is underlined by the fact that they demanded ultimate respect from common people. If they met a *bushi*, they had to bow, with their eyes looking down. Basically the *bushi* had total control over common people, their lives and death, they had the right to execute anybody on the spot if they decided that the person's behaviour was not respectful enough. To throw life away and die is easy, however, to make no difference between life and death is difficult – this idea characterised their thinking. The ritual Japanese way of suicide, called *harakiri* by them, had been practised for a long time. It was even used as a method of pedagogy, like for example, the master of *Oda Nobugana*², who performed *harakiri* to convince his mentored student to give up his aggressive behaviour.

A soldier should not be afraid of getting wounded, in other words, it is more honourable to lose by being honest than by cheating. Losing honestly is not shameful. This kind of behaviour and thinking originates from the ideological base of *bushi* or samurai moral.

In the times of *Kamakura*, the time from 1192 to 1333, which was the first political reign of the samurai, warriors considered *budō*, as *tsuwamono-no-michi*³ to be upright, to keep belief was as important for them as to avoid disgrace.

¹ *bushi* – the leading group of the Japanese society in the Middle Ages, military elite, the meaning of the word is „warrior”

² *Oda Nobugana* (1534–1582) – a noble man from the Japanese war-time historical period, called *Sengoku Jidai*

³ *tsuwamono-no-michi* – path of the warrior knight

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These highly respected principles, such as – Act a lot and do not speak much –, as well as being honest. In later times the previous warrior role of *bushi* diminished, however, their role as the reigning layer strengthened, where the path of the warrior knight, the so-called *shidō*, which is based on the moral of Confucius, the so-called *jin rin no michi*, was to be followed as the human responsibility in the world.

This ideological path shows principles of actions, practical ethical principles that showed how a *bushi* should live and die honourably. In reality, it is nothing else but the spirituality of *budō*, which opened for the followers of the path. This was the courageous, determined behaviour, the proud and self-respecting way of life and facing death.

During an era of peace between 1603 and 1868, the real warrior value of *budō* diminished. Actually, the creation of the technique was emphasized, and the *bushi* represented such spiritual values as preparation for death, the inheritance of their name and honour, and evidence of shame. In other words, the life path of *bushi* was required, sought and expressed in the light of the quality of the *budō* technique.⁴

The *Meiji* restoration in 1868 fully modernised the country – where The Middle Ages had lasted for a long time – and brought back emperorship, which was suppressed for nearly a thousand years.

It seemed that for a while Japan became untrue to all the heritage that the era of *Edo* meant and returned to an earlier tradition where God, the love of the motherland and religion reigned and they all represented the same notion and the idea that Japanese people were God's chosen ones. At the same time, the European way of life influenced everyday life more and more.

In 1876 an order issued by the emperor prohibited wearing swords (*Haitōrei*) for everybody, except for those serving in the military. By this a period in history was ended, because by this step – after the cessation of society classes in 1871 – the most important symbol of *bushi* as a class separation disappeared.

The sword of the *bushi* was not only a thing, it was mostly the symbol of its master's spirituality. It was not only the representation of defence and attack, but the possibility of finishing life honourably.

It was a general perception that the sword-smith included a piece of his own personality into the sword, and the smiths prayed long before they started their work. *Go rin no sho*⁵ itself, in the famous book by *Miyamoto Musashi* (1584-1645), a famous fencer, he mentioned not only the physical but the mental aspect of fighting with the sword. In his opinion, training of the mind is as important as training the body, and while practising, a kind of intuition developed. Fighting with a sword is a form of art of meeting life and death.

Bushi, as the warrior layer of the class society of the era, made up approximately 6 percent of the population. It had a kind of sense of belonging, which they later they tried to provide for further society layers to teach discipline.

THE TRADITION

It is easier to understand how Japanese people perceived the world if we get to know the specific system of ideals that appeared in the Middle Ages in Japan. These ideals led Japanese people in their obedience to any ruling power, to the glory of *tennō*, the accepted death, as well as the thought that they are superior compared to other people. This specific ideology was comprised of many factors, which characterised the common way of thinking of that period of time, how people lived, their sense of responsibility, and what regulated the order and the functioning of the state.

The Confucian philosophy, morality formed the political and social system in Eastern Asia and it became the state philosophy in Japan. Confucius⁶ saw the path leading to both individual and sociological stability in moral teachings comprised by him. His teaching was based on the principle that in the present political system that the relationship

⁴ KIYOKAZU Maebayashi: Technika lélek és test a budó kultúrában. In. Budo Kulturális Fórum konferencia kiadvány, 2002. pp. 6-7.

⁵ *Go rin no sho* – the book of the five elements, a book by *Miyamoto Musashi* (1645)

⁶ Confucius (551–479 B.C.) – Chinese philosopher, was the first to establish a system of ideologies that combined the basic elements of Chinese thinking. Quite often he is considered to be a religion establisher, but it is a misconception. Basically he was a secular thinker, he was interested in individual and moral behaviour. His philosophy was present in the Chinese life and culture for more than 2 thousand years

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between individuals and those in power is that of the superior and their subordinates. The relationship between the superior and those under him was exactly the same as the relationship in a family where the decisions of the head of the family were unquestionable. This was the reason that with modernisation the emperorship could enjoy a much more important function than its legally codified role. The emperor institutionalised the notion of the family state, and by this decision each individual of the society performed their duties mainly for the emperor. The most important rule in the relationship between people was that of the superior and his subordinate, being truthful, as well as declining the desire for personal benefits. In Japan this desire was considered a serious moral crime. The most important element of the Japanese variety of the Confucian world perception was that the members of society were separated into castes according to their professions, so the position of each person was judged according to his contribution to the maintenance and well-being of the society. According to the modern Confucian system of values, on the top of the hierarchy was the warrior.⁷

But let's have a look at the two main elements of the scale of values. The first one is *Shintō*⁸, which is considered to be that of state religion in Japan and it is a sophisticated form of respect of the ancestors. The other one is the education of *bushidō*, a system of moral, physical and cultural tasks of *bushi*, from their middle and *Edo*-period.

In 1935 in his book about the story of *Shintō*, *Kiyohara Sadao* wrote the following:

*"The emperor must be admired not only by the Japanese, he is not only the emperor of Japanese people. The emperor rules not only in Japan, he is the emperor of the entire mankind. Consequently, Japan exists not only for Japan, but for the whole world, and as the embodiment of heaven, he must rule the entire mankind."*⁹

According to the basic principles of *Shintō* religion, the Japanese emperor originates from *Amaterasu*, the goddess of the Sun, his power comes from God. These tenets were the basic ideology behind education, whose main aim was that loyalty and unconditional respect of *tennō* would characterise people's thinking. By considering *tennō* and its power coming from God it was natural that Japanese people as a nation are God's chosen ones and they have the task of leading other nations and that they would spread the emperor's power, as the only imaginable governmental ruling, to the people of Asia.

For a Japanese person, the two main social responsibilities are the family and the state, and they themselves and their loyalty to those is exemplifying. The undoubted idea that each Japanese person, from birth to death, belongs to these two unities, and only as their member can expect respect, however, as an individual, he or she is useless. This idea is the reason why people are ready for sacrifices and it inspires them to provide happiness of their families and their homeland, and if it is necessary they are ready to die for the honour of these two. All those self sacrificing and fanatic deeds that were observed by the world with fascination is nothing else but results of the sense of unity of the Japanese people, and the strength based on this unity. The love of the motherland in Japanese people is so strong because they view the state as a big family, and the emperor as the head of this family. Only the child who respected his parents and was obedient in his childhood can become a loyal citizen of the state and the emperor.¹⁰

Since in the era of *Edo* the real battle events were not of much importance, consequently the intellectual ingredients of the social role of certain warriors with outstanding abilities were emphasized.

In 1716 *Yamamoto Tsunetomo*¹¹ appeared the *Hagakure*.¹² This is the first detailed description of the ideological system of *bushidō*.

⁷ FERBER Katalin: A japán gazdasági és társadalmi modernizáció kérdéséhez. Bp.: Japanológiai körkép, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2007. pp.356-370.

⁸ *Shintō* – or *kami no michi* (Way of the Gods) is the indigenous spirituality of Japan and the Japanese people.

⁹ KIRCHMANN, Hans: Hirohito, a Tennō „Japán utolsó császára”. Bp.: Gondolat, 1990. p.57.

¹⁰ MEZEY István: Az igazi Japán. Bp.: Magyar Nippon Társaság, 1939. p.51.

¹¹ *Yamamoto Tsunetomo* (1659-1719) – a *samurai*, the author of *Hagakure* (1716)

¹² *Hagakure* – meaning; hiding under trees

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The *Hagakure* considers death and the ways of its importance as the most important thing, as well as people's mental attitude of its acceptance.

As it is emphasized in the book, if one has to choose between life and death, one must choose death without any hesitation. The aim, of course, is not senseless death but to reach that state of mind where a person loses the fear of death completely. In this extraordinary mental condition the impossibility to act, self-pity and all kinds of devotion ceases completely, those factors that are the main hindrances of the true inner freedom. Consequently, as a paradox, with the acceptance of death, the opportunity of respectful life opens up.

As it was stated earlier, in Japan for a real *samurai*, it is natural to die. Consequently, in *Hagakure* we often meet the explanation of the philosophy of death. To achieve the goal it is necessary to become clean and simple because this makes it possible to sacrifice our hearts and souls for the cause in the given second of time. The everyday sense of death helps as well because it stops self-admiration, and as a result, it gives space for true and altruistic desire to act.

The Buddhist perception of the world, which, besides Confucianism and *Shintō*, played the most significant role in the development of the Japanese soul, has had the intuitive religious wisdom up to our days.

The clear, stoic and self-assured Zen philosophy puts significant emphasis on the strength of the soul and discipline, and on the values of the warriors who need to pay all their attention only to the bitterness of the fights in battles. *Hagakure* implies that in the claws of death we need to get rid of all petty deliberations, self-admiration and doubts. Getting rid of all worldly thoughts leads to perfect calmness of the mind – teaches Zen.

Hagakure describes the ideal *bushi* as a respectful, serious, honest man, who is self-disciplined and strong minded. There are several stories about how somebody committed *seppuku* courageously. In peacetime, however, *Hagakure* seeks those brave *bushi* who are happy to face the biggest challenges and they possess strength that can influence others.

The perception of the book changed from time to time, due to the social expectations of the era and other factors. But there is no doubt that ideas concerning death, self-assurance, brave deeds, strong personality, greatly influenced the reader even after the first reading of the book.

Hagakure still lives for many and radiates fearless strength of life.¹³

*Kyūba no Michi*¹⁴ as well as the general cultural foundations from which the notion of *bushidō* was formed, identified not only the way of thinking of *bushi* in Japan, but that of common people. In the moral teachings of *bushidō* there is a mixture of the cleanness cult of *Shintō*, the simplicity of Buddhism and the pragmatic ethics of Confucianism. The idea became independently formed in the era of *Kamakura* and by the time of *Edo bakufu*¹⁵ it had become the governing ideology. The moral laws of *bushidō* as the leading military layer practically applied only for the soldiers, however, some elements, such as the Confucian moral teaching, reached other layers of the society through schools. It seems that due to this that while the European society, rocked in the Greek-Roman cradle seemed to be a society of law, on the other hand, the Japanese society was considered a moral one.¹⁶

*Nitobe Inazō*¹⁷ was the one who put into words the actual teachings which were known as *Bushidō*. The book appeared in 1900 in the English language, and it is an interesting fact that it was published in Japan in 1938, as a tool for ideological education.

Bushidō (the path of the warrior) is the compilation of regulations that need to be observed by the class of warriors while they lead their everyday lives or while they execute their responsibilities. These regulations were the basis for

¹³ TSUNETOMO Yamamoto: *Hagakure*, A samurájok kódexe. Bp.: Szentár Kiadó, 2000. pp.11-30.

¹⁴ *Kyūba no Michi* – the road of the arrow and the horse, a battle skill

¹⁵ *bakufu* – *shōgun* government

¹⁶ KIGLICS István: Japán, múlt a holnapban. Bp.: Pszichoteam, 1989. pp.23-24.

¹⁷ *Nitobe Inazō* (1862-1933) – agronomist, educator, writer, politician in the *Meiji*- and *Taisho*-period

education, following them was compulsory. They were not formulated perfectly in earlier times, the warring centuries of history shaped them more and they lived in the society as real deeds and real laws.

As a source of *bushidō* it is essential to mention Buddhism, *Shintō* and Confucian ideas.

Buddhism nourishes the feeling of calm belief in fate, the silent acceptance of the unavoidable, the stoic self discipline in cases of danger of misfortune, and the ability to ignore life and the friendly attitude regarding death.

When the master of sword saw that his student absorbed all knowledge, he told him the following: "After this point my leadership is secondary to the teachings of Zen." And it is the truth, Zen means help, it is a human effort that aims to overcome the limitations of verbal expression with the meditative means of thinking.

Loyalty to the emperor and the religious respect, respect of the memory of ancestors gets to people through *Shintō*. It does not convey morals, it mainly emphasises the national conscience of individuals as well as the two main pillars of the Japanese people's emotional lives, such as love of the motherland and loyalty.

As far as formulation is concerned, the freely formulated moral teachings of Confucius were the source for *Bushidō*. The five areas of moral relationship, which were worked out very carefully are those of the master and the slave, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger siblings and that of friends.

Besides Confucius, it was Mencius¹⁸ who greatly influenced *Bushidō*. His strong, in many cases absolutely democratic theories showed great empathy. His works were often considered dangerous, even revolutionary regarding the existing society. However, his words lived deep in the hearts of *bushi*.

Works of Confucius and Mencius were basic literature for the young. However, these writings warned against the danger of too much theoretical work. They strongly argued that knowledge becomes real knowledge only in case when it builds into a person's thinking and reflects itself in the person's character. This is the real value of *bushidō*, as it was summarised by a Chinese philosopher "To know and to act is the same thing."¹⁹

Knowing the sources of *bushidō* we can briefly summarise its values, such as straight personality (*gishi*) and fairness (*giri*), braveness, stamina, courage, fearlessness and moral strength, good will and empathy, politeness, truthfulness and openness, honour, loyalty, self-discipline.

Japan is acknowledged in today's world mainly due to *bushi*. Though they closed themselves off from the masses, they established a moral standard for them and influenced them with personal examples, they emphasized practising morality itself as a value. Japanese intellect and morals directly or indirectly is the product of *bushidō* and as an irresistible force moves the nation and its individuals.²⁰

It is no surprise that Eastern mentality quite often turns to *bushi* and their code of honesty when looking for an ideal warrior. In many cases it is based on the romantic interpretation of that era of Japanese history. However, if we start from the words that formulate *bushidō*, it is a path leading to conflicts where victory and defeat await those who choose to step on it.

For *bushi* defeat was an unknown phenomenon. Their war skills were characterised by brutal determination. The leading idea, the most resourceful exploitation of possibilities was the destruction of the enemy. It did not matter if you got hurt in the process or if you experienced loss, the main aim was to achieve the set goal.

Bushi as the system of laws regulating the exceptional lifestyle and behaviour of the military and the noble, together with religious education are the strong basis of the modern emperor-led military, which founded discipline and determination. Consequently, the emperor's soldier, as well as the *bushi* of the Middle age had to be blindly obedient, fearlessly brave and responsible until his death.

¹⁸ Mencius (371-289 B.C.) - He was one of the most important figures of Confucian school. His philosophy was the continuation of Confucian thoughts. He believed in goodness of mankind.

¹⁹ NITOBÉ Inazō: *Bushidō*. Bp.: Budo Kiskönyvtár, 1998. pp.33-44.

²⁰ NITOBÉ Inazō: *Bushidō*. Bp.: Budo Kiskönyvtár, 1998. pp.162-171.

According to *bushidō* theories those who were taken prisoner, shamed their name and their family. He has no more right to life, it is his duty to escape and wash off the shame with his blood. Having been taken prisoner was considered cowardly, and characterised as the greatest shame.

To summarise, this fanaticism based on religious, nationalistic and militaristic approaches moved deep into the mind of the Japanese society through many generations. This was the reason of their exceptionally vicious, treacherous methods of warfare. Burning with fanaticism they blindly followed all orders, they were able to withstand any hardship and suffering and to fight endlessly even in the most hopeless situations. "Fight till your last breath, maybe your last strike will kill the enemy". They acted so even when it was perfectly clear for them that the war was lost.

Kulcsszavak: budō, bushi, Hagakure, Bushidō, erkölcs, értékrend

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