

### SECTION THREE: JAPAN; FEUDALISM AND IMPERIALISM

## 10 *Fundamentals of Japan's Religious Ideology*

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the Age of Gods (*Kami-Yo*), that is, during the prehistoric era of Japan lasting until approximately 660 B.C., the divine forebearers of the emperors fulfilled their mission by giving birth to Izanagi and Izanami, the parents of the sun-goddess Amaterasu-Omikami. Five generations after the sun-goddess appeared in the world of man, one of the offsprings of this family of gods became the first Emperor of Japan, Jimmu. He is a legendary figure but not entirely fictitious. His existence is supposedly documented; however, taking the year 660 B.C. as the beginning of his reign is an assumption which cannot be proved definitely. The Chinese calendar was introduced into Japan almost one hundred years after Jimmu ascended the throne.

The history of early Japan is clouded in mystery. Not even the origin of the Japanese race can be determined with precision, although it is assumed that Malays must have entered the islands from the south. Chinese and Korean elements played a considerable part in the racial composition; they brought culture and script characters to Japan. The earliest Japanese chronicles, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*, date from 720 A.D. They are not reliable and must be checked with Chinese chronicles and archaeological discoveries.

All we know of the centuries between the ascension of the Emperor Jimmu and the reign of the regent, Prince Shokotu, c. 600 A.D., is that the frontiers of Japan were defined and that the introduction of Chinese and Korean culture elevated the country from barbaric primitivism to a higher type of civilization. In 552 A.D. Buddhism was introduced. Prince Shokotu, who assumed the regency almost half a century later, became an ardent Buddhist. He was the first great ruler of Japan and he did more for his country's

culture than any other sovereign had done previously. To him, Japan owes much and the imperial house even more. Already in his time, the feudal lords had become strong; he curbed their power, at least for the time being, and issued his famous "Seventeen Article Constitution." This document not only shows a decided Buddhist influence but also makes it clear that his Korean teachers instructed him in Confucianism. Confucius' teachings are not alien to some of the basic Shinto ideals, particularly to the way of family life which is so vitally important in Japan. It is worth quoting a few of Shokoku's principles:

In everything let there be good faith, for without it everything ends in failure;  
Let the court officials attend early and retire late for the whole day is hardly enough for accomplishing the business of the state;  
Let no official sacrifice the public interest to his private feelings;  
Flatterers and deceivers lead to the overthrow of the state and the destruction of the people;  
When you receive imperial commands, fail not to obey them carefully;  
Let all important matters be discussed by many persons.<sup>1</sup>

During the following centuries, Japan remained completely under the cultural influence of China and of China's glorious Tang dynasty which made that country the greatest and most powerful of the Eastern world. As in China, the power and the glory of the court rose in Japan. Eventually, the growing influence of the court led to the creation of the ancient city of Nara whose splendor must have been unique in the history of austere Japan. In the eleventh century, the power of the imperial court diminished rapidly because the provincial *daimyo* (feudal lords) had strengthened their position and independence. They controlled the country's wealth and commanded armies of considerable size and military prowess. Not unlike the medieval barons in their relation to their king, the knights who served their *daimyo* received positions and livelihood from him and, in return, watched over his life, his honor, and his riches. These knights were the *samurai* (literally, attendants) who developed into a warrior caste with a strict moral code. They

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by M. M. Dils, *The Pageant of Japanese History*, Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1938, pp. 23-24.

were also called *bushi* (fighting gentlemen) whence the expression *Bushido* which is both a state of mind and a code of behavior fitting for noble warriors. The importance of this spirit of *Bushido* upon the formation of Japanese mentality cannot be overestimated.<sup>1</sup>

Until some time after the eleventh century, the growing strength of the landholding class could have been checked by the court. The court, however, was too deeply preoccupied with esthetics, Chinese art and philosophy, and all the elaborate ceremonials which came with the introduction of Chinese culture into Japan. It did not care to play one lord against the other in order to weaken their individual positions. Furthermore, the court faced the danger of a rising priestly caste. Alone, it was not strong enough to subdue this menace; it had to call for the help of the *daimyo* and their *samurai*. These very soon crushed the imminent revolt but they did not return to their estates after victory was achieved. Once in the capital, they wanted to exercise power themselves. They did not intend to destroy the court as an institution because, after all, the existence of the emperor was part of the national religion. However, they began to crowd the court out of active political life and eventually succeeded in reducing it to a shadow government without actual importance.

The real governing power was taken over by the *Shogun* (*generalissimo*). The first *Shogunate* originated as the result of the struggle between the two mightiest clans, the Minamoto and the Taira. The Taira lost, were annihilated to the last family member, and thus left the Minamoto clan the uncontested rulers of the country. Being ruled by both emperor and *Shogun*, Japan had thus become a "duarchy" which was to last for seven centuries, until 1867. The first of the *Shoguns* was Yorimoto who established himself in 1186 at Kamakura. The place of residence of the *Shogun* changed according to the location of his home estate; only the emperors steadily lived their shadow existence at Kyoto. They were revered by everyone but had no political influence whatsoever. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *Shogun* moved to Yedo, which is the ancient name for Tokyo.

During the last period of the *Shogunate*, from 1600 to 1867, the

<sup>1</sup> See Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*, G. Putnam & Sons, London and New York, 1905.

amazing Tokugawa family ruled the country while keeping it in complete isolation. It was Iyeyasu, the first Shogun of the Tokugawa clan to assume the reins of government, who ordered, on penalty of death, that Japan should not permit any foreigner to land on the island empire and that every spiritual and cultural influence which might have reached Japan from the outside should be eradicated with fire and sword.

Japan had not lived in such isolation before 1600. Her relations with China and Korea had flourished, at their beginning, through peaceful commercial and cultural ties. Later they were, every now and then, disturbed by Japanese attacks. Korea particularly has always been a goal of Japanese aggression; Japan's greatest warrior, Hideyoshi, undertook two expeditions in grandiose style (1592-54 and 1597-98) to subjugate Korea. He began as successfully as Napoleon in Russia and envisaged an attack upon China after the consolidation of his gains. But the campaign ended in disaster, like Napoleon's Russian campaign, and for similar reasons, namely, the interruption of communications with the homeland. However, since that time, Japan has never renounced her "rights" on Korea. When Hideyoshi died in Japan in 1598, the rest of his expeditionary force left Korea and sailed home.

Europe did not learn anything about Japan until Marco Polo described it in his *Travels*. Almost two and a half centuries later, the Portuguese Mendez Pinto rediscovered Japan in 1542 and taught the Japanese the use of firearms. Also, Christian missionaries came to Japan (Francis Xavier was the first) and had a limited amount of success. Unfortunately, this development was interrupted by the extremely bad behavior of subsequent European seamen who compromised Western Christianity by their unrestrained greed for wealth. The medieval Japanese could not understand the contradiction between the Christian principles preached by the missionaries and the conduct of the men who pretended to be Christians. This was one of the reasons which had determined the Shogun Iyeyasu to close Japan against foreign intrusion and to establish domestic peace after almost two centuries of strife among the feudal lords. It was the wish of the great Hideyoshi that Iyeyasu should continue the social system, economically based upon agriculture with rice as currency, which Hideyoshi had begun to estab-

lish. Iyeyasu obeyed his master faithfully. For the first time, a "new order" based on extreme isolationism and the return to ancient tradition and its conservation was introduced in Japan. "A new order is instituted in which the elements from the past are rearranged. The regime of the Tokugawa established a new order of this kind, destroying nothing, but reweighing and redividing and thus creating the new."<sup>1</sup>

Desirous of perpetuating their power on the basis of the *status quo*, the Tokugawa made sure that no political power should remain in the hands of the emperors, whose role was to be confined to the spiritual domain. Emperors being divine, worldly affairs could not touch them. In order to be quite secure, the Shogun kept close supervision of the court's expenditures and restricted the imperial families to the essential means of subsistence only.

The way in which the Tokugawa handled the great *daimyo* shows the high degree of their political craftsmanship. They defeated the attempts of the *daimyo* to unite and, during holiday seasons, forbade them to come to town together. Having organized an efficient spy system, the Shogunate was informed of every move of the *daimyo* and their servants. The geographical nature of Japan made such supervision easier than it would have been in China where the feudal system was equally entrenched, but where the degree of centralization achieved by the Shoguns was impossible to accomplish. In order to maintain such a rigid system, force and even violence had to be used. The Tokugawa did not hesitate to resort to them. The principles of government outlined by Iyeyasu were simple: the court had to be supervised; the *daimyo* had to be made economically dependent upon the Shogun and to be set one against the other; the social groups had to be strictly separated through ritual regulations with no possibility of ever intermingling; the political energies of the higher classes had to be directed into harmless channels, preferably of a cultural and artistic nature.

The Tokugawa family held at least one third of the land of central Japan. The three hundred larger fiefs of influential *daimyo* were so organized that every one of their estates was surrounded by estates of the Shogun's spies. In other words, the *daimyo* rarely had common frontiers with each other and thus were unable to

<sup>1</sup> E. Lederer, *Japan in Transition*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1938, p. 48.

organize seditious movements. Furthermore, the *daimyo* were required to live a part of the year in Yedo (Tokyo) where Iyeyasu had established his residence. If they could not come, their wives had to represent them. These journeys were extremely expensive; the *daimyo* came with a following befitting their social rank, which meant that they had to pay for hundreds or even thousands of friends and followers. Thus the Shoguns ruined the economic resources of the *daimyo* and always had them or their families as convenient hostages should a rebellion occur.

The Tokugawa controlled all commerce and, most important, the agricultural production. Rice remained the official currency until the nineteenth century. The rate of exchange for rice to be accepted as land rent depended entirely upon the Shoguns' will. The *daimyo* were not permitted to determine the value of their rice production themselves or even to make their rice function as a means of exchange unless they had received the Shoguns' permission.

The complete isolation of the country and the peculiar type of the absolutism of its government during more than two and a half centuries under the Tokugawa dynasty, had a powerful influence on the formation of the Japanese character. This period constitutes the immediate background of modern Japan; an understanding of it is a prerequisite to an understanding of the Japan of today. During this period, the "duarchy" instilled its double-faced political ideology into the people; stifled liberal thinking by strengthening the power of the ruling class and by keeping all classes strictly within their own limits; did not permit any but one single interpretation of Confucian ethics as the approved system of learning. "Any doctrine other than this was tabooed as heretical. . . . Innovation in any respect, but most of all ideas, was strictly forbidden."<sup>1</sup>

The American Commodore Perry, by putting an end to Japan's isolation in 1853, also ended the Tokugawa era. The Shogunate had developed weaknesses which now became apparent. Only sixteen more years passed before the last Shogun opened the doors of Tokyo to the army of the emperor. Under Emperor Meiji, the court of Japan again became the center of the nation's power. After his death in 1912, imperial influence began to wane once more

<sup>1</sup> Inazo Nitobe, *Japan*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1931, p. 94.

although not nearly to the same extent as in the Tokugawa period. Instead of the Shogun, the generals and admirals tried to seize political power. The introduction of Western ideas hampered them but they quietly prepared for their opportunity. The successes of Japanese expansionist policies and the military and diplomatic victories from 1894 to 1932 strengthened the position of the military and their allies, the few big capitalists who, between them, controlled the bulk of Japanese economy. A new "duarchy" was about to be created, this time with the military leaders as rivals of the civil government. Since the generals claimed to represent the will of the "divine" sovereign, the civilian representatives of the government were not able to maintain their position.

It was the influence of Shinto which brought about this peculiar situation. Shinto is the national religion of Japan, which not only provides for spiritual needs but also regulates social relations and, in addition, rationalizes Japan's aspirations in the world and the peculiarities of her administration. It is therefore necessary to analyze Shinto as a historical phenomenon which has shaped the Japanese mind for fifteen hundred years and is responsible for the religious and political aspects of Japanese ideology.

#### *SHINTO, ITS HISTORY AND MEANING*

Shinto is not a religion in the ordinary sense. It does not offer doctrines or dogmas developed on the basis of a definite philosophy. Shinto is a cult which originally had no defined ethics. Only in the course of the centuries, with the help of Confucianism, did ceremonial laws evolve into strict moral precepts. These precepts were at first limited to ethical matters and laws of physical purity. Even today, cleanliness of the body and utter abhorrence of all pollution play a major role in the regulation of Japanese social behavior.

The interpretation of Shinto has varied through the ages. But these variations, affecting ceremonial, were of a superficial nature. Scholars who have attempted to analyze Shinto in its purest form, have come to fundamentally similar conclusions. They have stated that Shinto is the way to worship the gods and goddesses of heaven and earth; but it may also be the way of government or the rule of right and justice, in fact, the way in which the emperor governs the country. Or, as other scholars have claimed, Shinto is the way

which was indicated by the divine ancestress Amaterasu-Omikami, the sun-goddess; but it may also be the everyday way or the right path of duty that should be followed by man. It is the way existing between lord and subject, man and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and among friends. Shinto is the national religion which has been transmitted from the "Age of Gods." It maintains the national constitution and is the moral essence of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

These interpretations, taken together, make Shinto a religion stressing four basic worships: nature worship, hero worship, ancestor worship, and emperor worship. Nature worship was originally the most important part of the ritual. The early Japanese distinguished between innumerable gods, "800 myriad" of them, reminding one of the animism of primitive tribes.<sup>2</sup> In recent times, this part of Shinto, while still existing, has lost much of its importance to the worship of heroes, ancestors, and the imperial family. Ancestor worship, in fact, has become the greatest force of Shinto and is today, in conjunction with emperor worship, the basic element of the Japanese national religion.

The belief in the divine character of the family and the divinity of ancestral spirits plays in Japan a role comparable to that of the *lares* and *penates* (home deities) in the ancient Roman family. The Japanese family is just as patriarchally organized as the Roman; profound respect is paid to the family's own ancestors and to the ancestors of other families as well. The higher the standing of the families, the higher the respect paid to their ancestors. The greatest respect is paid to the ancestors and members of the imperial family. As family units have their *pater familias* (head of the family), so the population of Japan is considered to be one big family with the emperor as its head. This not only gives the mikado a loftier stature but also brings him emotionally close to the hearts of his loyal subjects who feel that they are to be envied in having a family head who is a direct descendant of the sun-goddess.

Shinto has two aspects: one ideological and one religious. The

<sup>1</sup> For further details, see A. Akiyama, *Shinto and Its Architecture*, Japan Welcome Society, Kyoto, 1936, pp. 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> Animism is the belief of primitive tribes that every natural object possesses an inherent spirit.



National Faith Shinto is a very broad ideological conception, also known as *Jinsha Shinto*, which is mainly concerned with ancestor and emperor worship. It may well be called a "nonsectarian movement." In a much narrower sense, Shinto is a religious ritual, *Shukyo Shinto*, which embraces thirteen different sects. While the National Faith Shinto is supervised by the Ministry of the Interior, the sectarian Shinto is controlled by the Department of Education.

Shinto derives its origin from the ancient imperial courts. At the beginning, Shinto and the court were one and the same, the emperor being the high priest. The very word "government" meant literally the "administration of affairs pertaining to religion" (*mat-suri-goto*). The word "shrine" (*miya*) was also used for the location of the imperial palace. Not until the reign of the tenth emperor, Sujin (564-631), did a separation between religious and worldly rule—or as we might say, between church and state—take place.

Of extreme importance were the influences of Confucianism and Buddhism upon Shinto and Japanese mentality. The moral philosophy of Confucius was imported from China about 286 A.D. when a member of the Chinese Han dynasty visited the Japanese court and brought with him the great classical books of Confucius and Mencius. From the beginning, there was no friction between Shinto and Confucian thought. Both revered the family as the divine basis of social life, thus blending their moral precepts into one ethical system which has been recognized ever since.

Buddhism was introduced later, in 552 A.D., when the court of Korea sent the image of the founder of Buddhism as a gift to the court of Japan. However, a reconciliation between Shinto and Buddhism was not easy. It took a long time and much struggling between Buddhists and non-Buddhists before a common ground was found upon which an intellectual agreement could be based. Japanese priests traveled to China and Korea to study Buddhism there; Chinese and Korean Buddhists came to Japan to teach the saintly way of Amida Buddha. The greatest difficulty was not so much spiritual as political. Buddhism preached equality; Shinto was inseparable from the feudalistic organization of a stratified Japanese society. At this time, the *uji*, the family patriarchs, began to become dangerous for the court whose power they contested.

But the court was satisfied when the Buddhists rationalized a combination of Shinto and Buddhism by dividing the competence of the gods. The two faiths established the doctrine of duality (*Ryobu*) which states that the gods in heaven have earthly manifestations, and that the earthly spirits are Shinto deities while the original deities in heaven are Buddhist in nature. So far did the Buddhist theologians go that they claimed the eight hundred myriad Shinto spirits were the exact replicas of Buddhist deities. On the other hand, the Shinto priests pronounced the Buddhist deities replicas of Shinto spirits.

The great Shokotu, himself a devout Buddhist, did his utmost to indoctrinate the Japanese people with Buddhism. But the very fact that Shinto in the broader sense had always remained identical with the nation and its ruler made a complete conquest of Japan by Buddhism impossible.

#### EMPEROR WORSHIP, NOW AND THEN

The genealogy of the Japanese emperors begins in the Japanese Olympus where, during the "Age of Gods," many generations of gods and goddesses ruled in heaven, preparing for the day on which Izanagi and Izanami would beget Amaterasu-Omikami, the sun-goddess, the divine ancestress of the mikados. Generations later, the first Emperor of Japan, Jimmu, began a hard and protracted family struggle against his divine relatives who apparently did not approve of his coming down to earth and ascending the throne of the Yamato race. According to the myth, Jimmu Tenno—Tenno meaning "son of heaven"—needed not less than 1,792,476 years before he won the contest with his family and proceeded to formulate Japan's basic policies. Jimmu is a legendary figure, but his life and deeds are said to be provable. He is quite seriously referred to as an authoritative source by modern Japanese statesmen. The year of his accession to the Japanese throne is supposedly 660 B.C. However, as has been stated, before the introduction of the Chinese calendar centuries later, the chronology of Japanese historiography is unreliable.

Jimmu, so the chronicles state, proclaimed the principle of *Hakko Ichiu*, a mystical conception meaning that the peoples of the world should be brought under one "roof." The roof was a

symbol of the imperial rule. Jimmu's world was certainly far from any "new world order" or even a "new order in Asia"; all this emperor tried to do was to pacify and make homogenous the different tribes living on the Japanese islands so that they could be molded into one nation.

Under Jimmu's successors the principle was temporarily forgotten. Even the great Hideyoshi did not justify his expedition to Korea and China with the ideal of *Hakko Ichiu*. It was only in modern times, after the Meiji restoration and the end of Japan's isolation, that *Hakko Ichiu* was revived and appropriately reinterpreted. Emperor Hirohito, the one hundred and twenty-fourth ruler of his line, stated in an imperial rescript of 1940:

It has been the great instruction bequeathed by our imperial foundress and other imperial ancestors that our grand moral obligation should be extended to all directions and the world be unified under one roof. This is the point of view we are trying to obey day in and day out<sup>1</sup>

Some Japanese under Christian influence have interpreted *Hakko Ichiu* as "world brotherhood"; but the most far-reaching interpretation of *Hakko Ichiu* is in terms of world-wide expansion and conquest of the globe so that all men may live under the "roof" of the Japanese emperors. Former Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka made the following elucidating statement which should be kept in mind for its implications:

I firmly believe that the great mission which Heaven has imposed on Japan is to save humanity. In conformity with the great spirit in which Emperor Jimmu founded the empire, Japan should take over management of the continent on a large scale, propagate *Hakko Ichiu* (meaning that all the world is one household) and the way of the Emperor and then extend it all over the world.<sup>2</sup>

The frankness of this statement makes clear how inseparable emperor worship is from Japan's national faith and policies. In fact, her national aspirations are identical with her religious ideology. Emperor worship has remained an essential part of the National Faith Shinto since the distant days of Emperor Jimmu; it is still the creed of every loyal patriot. It is highly emotional in nature and,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Otto Tolischus, "God, Emperor, High Priest," *New York Times Magazine*, November 23, 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by H. J. Timperley, *Japan: A World Problem*, The John Day Company, New York, 1942, pp. 101-102.

significantly, derives its appeal more from the national than from the spiritual aspect of Shinto. It is, indeed, a manifestation of the soul of Japan, pervading Japanese life in its totality.

As a Japanese scholar writes: "The National Shinto Faith culminates in the form of emperor worship and patriotic loyalty to the Emperor—a sense of utmost devotion to the *Jinno* or Divine Ruler, which is suffused with religious zeal and enthusiasm. Just herein lies the life and kernel of Shinto. . . . It is, in fact, a Japanese patriotism, suffused with religious emotion; or, in other words, a peculiar enthusiastic patriotic sentiment, often soaring into the plane of adoration or religious worship toward the Emperor or Mikado, a manifest deity in the sense of the anthropic religion. I should, indeed, call it . . . a manifestation, coupled with religious zeal, of *Yamato-damashii*, or, the "Soul of Japan."<sup>1</sup>

Emperor worship did not deteriorate in the least during the time when the court had no political power, particularly after the twelfth century when the Shogunate deprived the emperors of any practical influence. Even then the emperors remained the spiritual symbols of the Japanese nation. Nor was it abandoned when Emperor Meiji restored political power to the court in 1868, breaking down some of the worst features of feudalism and attempting to modernize Japan's political and economic structure. On the contrary, a further strengthening of the National Faith Shinto served to keep emperor worship firmly entrenched.

The Department of Divine Rites received a place above all administrative and legislative offices, and Shinto was separated again from Buddhism. Fundamental Shinto with its thousands of shrines, some 114,000 throughout the country, was reinstated and their maintenance assisted by the government.<sup>2</sup> The court did everything to foster this movement, but there was no religious persecution of other sects. Buddhism, Confucianism, and related sects (but not the Christian) are free to worship as they see fit. However, Shinto is a *conditio sine qua non*. Its importance to the throne caused Emperor Meiji to appoint more than seven thousand government preachers who in the years from 1875 to 1877

<sup>1</sup> Genchi Kato, *What Is Shintoism?* Tokyo, 1935, pp. 14, 29, 59, 63–65, quoted by James A. B. Scherer, *Japan Defies the World*, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1938, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Nitobe, *op. cit.*, pp. 314–315.

traveled all over the country and taught their flocks "to practice the principle of love of country and reverence for the gods; to make clear the reason of heaven and the way of man; to accept gratefully the rule of His Majesty and to obey his will."<sup>1</sup> This propaganda campaign was unsuccessful but is certainly among the world's most peculiar undertakings. Emperor Meiji's fears that the restoration might revolutionize the Japanese mind proved unfounded; he underestimated the tenacity with which the Japanese cling to their tradition.

Viewed in the light of its historical background, the Mikado's position is infinitely higher and loftier than the position of any Western monarch has ever been. It is also different in that the Tenno may have little political power and yet remain the exalted leader of a "chosen people." Even at the height of the medieval papacy, there was always in the West a separation and a struggle between the political and the religious power. For a comparison, one must turn to the Arab, and later the Turkish, caliphate, where the ruler of the state was at the same time head of the religious organization. But, unlike the Japanese, the Moslem State—a state of Asiatic origin for that matter—was not rooted in nationality.

The Japanese emperor symbolizes the entirety of the nation's worldly and spiritual aspirations. Thus religion amounts to patriotism, and patriotism is the exercise of the national religion. More than seventy million Japanese bow at least once every day in the direction of the imperial palace, and this bow is both a prayer and an expression of patriotic devotion. And as ancient Christian martyrs died willingly for the greater glory of God, so the Japanese die readily for their emperor who represents their gods and their country.

Alien as such a mental attitude is to Western thinking, its practical results are not very different from those of European totalitarianism. Emperor Meiji voluntarily gave his people a "constitution" and instituted a parliamentary machinery of government. But the limitations of the powers of the throne, an essential feature of constitutional government, were not in fact applied to curb imperial absolutism. It was expressly stated that the parliamentary bodies did not possess ultimate power and should merely assist the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

emperor in matters of government. As a result, more than half a century after Emperor Meiji proclaimed his constitution, the Japanese Diet was nothing but a ceremonial sounding board which the real leaders used to state their policies. A shortlived democratic trend previous to the Manchurian campaign was quickly forgotten, and the Diet became an assembly not unlike Hitler's Reichstag in Germany.

The introduction of Western technique and civilization makes it difficult for the rest of the world to understand how a nation can adopt the forms of modern life and yet cling to an ideology fundamentally alien to the West. Some observers have thought that too much was made of emperor worship, and that the emperors, after having been shadow figures for many centuries, could not possibly command so much respect and reverence from the people. But this view is incorrect, for the homage everybody pays to the Tenno is basically reverence toward the country. In this sense, Japan is very definitely a totalitarian country, and the emperor is the personification of a thoroughly authoritarian state.

It may be that Japanese leaders used emperor worship for demagogic and chauvinistic purposes; it may be that some of the more highly educated persons had their doubts about the divine origin of the emperor. But for the Japanese nation, the emperor remained the living symbol of the divine destiny of the Japanese Empire. For the millions, he remained the *pater familias* of the national family and the overlord of a society which had lost its feudalistic form but not the content of class distinction and ancestor veneration. Obedience to the emperor was obedience to the nation. Obedience to the nation was obedience to the eight hundred myriad gods in the Shinto heaven. Only a revolution of unimaginable extent, brought about through a complete collapse of Japan's military, political, and economic organization, may induce a change of mind. Even then, the Japanese being Asiatics, one may doubt that they would turn to occidental schools of thought.

#### THE SPIRIT OF BUSHIDO

There is yet another ideological phenomenon to be discussed which is closely related to the development of the Japanese mind through the millennium and a half of its historic existence: the spirit

of *Bushido*, or the "way of knights." (The *bushi* or *samurai*, as will be remembered, were the fighting gentlemen of the feudal lords; they became a national institution when the rule of the court was usurped by the Shoguns.)

The *samurai*, living symbols of this "way of the warriors," became a class pledged to unflinching loyalty to their lords, to an ascetic and frugal life, to filial piety, and to worship of their elders and ancestors. Their exalted ideal of an austere life was an Asiatic version of the ancient Spartan discipline. In fact, *Bushido*, Spartan character and, perhaps, Prussian militarism at its purest, are spiritually related.

The *samurai*, however, were in addition fanatical Shintoists, which fact intensified their asceticism even above that of the Spartans whose religion was rather perfunctory and, of course, beyond that of many Prussian officers for whom king and country were the main objects of loyalty, religious service being regarded as part of their professional duties. Japanese writers quote Iyeyasu, the first Shogun of the Tokugawa family, as a shining example of the spirit of *Bushido*. This Shogun's prescription for the way of life of a *samurai* sounds as pessimistic as the teachings of the early Christian Church and is virtually identical with the *via regia crucis*, the royal way of the cross. Life is a heavy burden, Iyeyasu said, so proceed carefully and be ever aware of your own imperfections. This is your lot, but do not be dissatisfied or desperate about it. If you feel desires overwhelming you, think of the days of extreme danger through which you have passed. Control yourself and find fault with yourself rather than with others. Temper is your greatest enemy.

Iyeyasu did not enumerate all the virtues of the *samurai*; he must have taken for granted that they were known. But he stressed the sense of shame as one of the most important character traits of a *samurai*. "This feeling of a breach of decorum or decency is shame, and we become conscious of it when we have a standard by which to judge our thoughts or actions—a law existing either within us or without, and binding us to obedience."<sup>2</sup> Shame, in this particu-

<sup>2</sup> Nitobe, *op cit.*, p. 354. See also this author's *Bushido: Soul of Japan*. Nitobe was one of Japan's finest propagandists. He idealized Japanese life and thought and had the gift of presenting his ideas in English with a good understanding of Anglo-Saxon psychology. Valuable as his books are as sources of material, his statements on Japan should be read with caution.

lar interpretation, becomes thus an instrument for testing one's attitudes and deeds with respect to the prevailing social standards. It regulates, in a way, the two other important characteristics of the *samurai*, loyalty and filial piety.

So strong was the impression which the spirit of *Bushido* made upon the people as a whole that it became a national ideal partaking of a religious character. In the spiritual history of the world, men have always deeply impressed their fellow men by foregoing the pleasures of life for the attainment of nonmaterial goals. The *samurai* were regarded as saints and their words were revered as true because they had not been touched by the petty diversions of everyday life. They were expected to live up to their exalted spiritual position morally and physically. They were expected to abandon the pleasures of an epicurean life; they were not permitted to dance or to participate in large-scale feasts. If a *samurai* were married, the life of his family had to correspond to his high ideals; his wife, like himself, would have to throw her life away without hesitation if circumstances should demand such a sacrifice.

*Hara-kiri*, or *seppuku*, the particular type of *samurai* suicide, is part of the honor code of the *samurai*. If the sense of shame compels him to admit failure, *Bushido* demands the supreme consequence. He will open his abdomen with his sword, the symbol of his knighthood. This act is no escape as suicides generally are. It is a protest, a token of grief, or a way of executing himself when an average citizen would have been executed. Capture by an enemy always was regarded as dishonorable. Thus a *samurai*, if captured, would be expected to commit *hara-kiri*.

Such violent self-justice must entail a violent attitude toward others. And so, in the name of honor, Japanese history shows a long record of assassinations. In olden times, the assassins gave themselves up, handed to the authorities a written explanation of their act, and then committed suicide. Nowadays, the modern descendants of the ancient *samurai* do not bother to explain their motives for assassination. They also do not bother to apply the principles of *Bushido* to their foreign enemies. It is true that *Bushido* has no written code of honor, and its concept has always remained a loose assemblage of moral precepts and customs for the warrior. Many *samurai* lived up to these ideals in previous centuries, and there



may still be soldiers in modern Japan who do not agree with the methods applied by their superiors toward foreign armies against whom they struggle for the empire's expansion. But *Bushido*, in its finest sense, died when Japan opened her ports to the world because, apparently, the Japanese thought that it was not necessary to keep their code of honor toward foreign "barbarians" and so they limited *Bushido* to domestic use.

*Bushido* has become an abstract ideal for the people of Japan who like to call themselves a "nation of *samurai*." In fact, as some modern Western scholars claim, the concept of *Bushido* had almost been forgotten for a long time; it became popular again after the close of the nineteenth century when the Japanese militarists foresaw a century of crucial struggles and were vitally interested in militarizing the population both physically and ideologically. Consequently, *Bushido* has degenerated into death-defying ruthlessness, motivated by religious and nationalistic fanaticism. *Bushido* has become for Japan what Prussian militarism was for Germany. It proved very useful for educational purposes: to harden the physique and morale of children and to teach them self-control is of capital importance for a generation of future soldiers.

To reach an objective, *Bushido* allows any trickery. The ancient *samurai* had this privilege just as the ancient Spartans sanctioned any crime to achieve a goal which was in the interest of the state. Realization of the goal was always considered more important than the technique used toward its attainment. Japan has followed these precepts faithfully. The most recent examples are the unexpected attack upon the Russian fleet in Port Arthur in 1904, and the treacherous raid on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Despicable from the Western point of view, this system of sudden unexpected warfare still remains within the spirit of *Bushido*.

One can, then, speak of a Japanese ideology based upon the National Shinto Faith and the spirit of *Bushido*. It is an age-old ideology which was successfully used for many centuries and which is being used now. The Japanese did not have to develop or invent a new ideology as a spiritual basis for their political aspirations as did the Germans and the Italians. Their tradition, religion, social organization, and state of mind had remained ever adaptable to any purpose desired by their government. Shinto and *Bushido* are

rooted even more deeply in the national character of the Japanese people than National Socialism in Germany, let alone Fascism in Italy. They are so much a part of the thought of every individual that even the most skeptical intellectuals are afraid to violate the Shinto taboos, and even the most humble workman may feel the responsibility of *Bushido* when he is called to the colors.