

# Japanese Mind

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# Introduction

Ruth Benedict an anthropologist noted in her book '*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*' about the Japanese at the end of the Second World War:

During the past seventy five years since Japan's closed doors were opened, the Japanese have been described in the most fantastic series of 'but also's 'ever used for any nation of the world.... Japanese are to the highest degree both aggressive and

unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. They are terribly concerned about what people think of their behavior, and they are also overcome by guilt when other people know nothing of their misstep



Some of the Keywords that explains the Japanese  
aesthetic sense and social norms

- 幽玄 *Yugen* The subtle and profound
- わび・さび *Wabi . Sabi* Subtle taste,  
subdued refinement
- 無常 *mujou* Transiency
- 間 *ma* Interval in time or space

- 恩 *on* debt of gratitude
- 義理 *giri* moral obligation
- 人情 *ninjo* human feelings
- 恥 *haji* shame

- Today we'll discuss on some of the key terms that explains the social behavior of the Japanese people
- Non-Japanese may have difficulties in understanding Japanese mind due to such concepts like Aimai,
- *'kojin yori soshiki yusen*
- *Uchi/soto*
- *Shudan ishiki*



# *Aimai* 曖昧 Ambiguity

- *Aimaina* is a term with a wide range of meaning i.e. vague, obscure, doubtful, non-committal, indefinite and so on
- Japanese are tolerant of ambiguity and its use is regarded as a virtue. For them 'wa' the harmony is more important than self-assertion or confrontation

## *Shudan Ishiki* 集團意識

### Japanese Group Consciousness

- People are group-oriented
- Priority to group harmony than to individuals
- The loyalty to the group produces solidarity
- Development of non-verbal communication, the distinction between *uchi* and *soto*-emphasis on harmony



# *Chinmoku* 沈黙

## Silence is Gold

- Different societies view silence in different ways.
- In Japanese culture, silence is similar to truthfulness. A man of few words is trusted more than a man of many words.
- The words *haragei* and *ishin denshin* symbolize Japanese attitudes toward human interactions.

## *Honne to Tatemae* 本音と建前

- *Honne* is one's deep motive or intention and *Tatemae* refers to motives and intentions that are socially-tuned, those are shaped or suppressed by different norms
- Japanese don't like to express themselves in a straightforward manner
- *Honne* is used in one's personal space and *Tatemae* is used in more public forms and business meetings

## *Kata* Culture

- Origins of these primary attributes for which the Japanese are known-their strengths as well as their weaknesses is their cultural molds known as saho作法 or kata 'form/way, or Shikata仕方 (she-kah-tah), 'way of doing things
- To understand Japanese it is essential to understand the 'Japanese way'



- Numerous *kata* or *saho* have been well established for centuries
- Over the generations they became not only institutionalized but also became ritualized
- Doing things the right way was often more important than doing the right things
- *Kata* was equated with morality
- One is 'in' *kata* (*kata in hamaru*) or 'out' (*kata ni hamaranai*)
- Being out of *kata* was a sin against society

## Origins of the *Kata* or *Saho* culture

- Wet-rice farming demanded a highly organized group system of co-operation and co-ordination
- Any deviation angered not only one's family, friends and neighbors, but the gods as well
- Group behavior, self-sacrifice, and harmony

- Over the generations, Japan's ruling samurai warrior developed their own 'class' *kata* comprising a collective code of thought and conduct known as '*Bushido*' or 'the way of the warrior', applied to all the members of their families
- Loyalty to the clan, ritualized etiquette, supreme dedication
- Influence of Zen Buddhism
- Zen-inspired *kata* training system
- Noh and Kabuki- forms the ultimate in method acting
- Noh even more stylized and *kata* bound than kabuki
- The essence of Noh is for the actor to merge his whole personality into the wooden mask



# Continuing the *Kata* Culture

- The introduction of industrialism into Japan and disappearance of the samurai class after 1868 did not mean the end of the *kata* or *saho* culture that has been nurtured for many centuries
- *Kata*-based practices and skills in noh, kabuki, tea ceremony, Ikebana, kendo, judo and sumo

# Characteristics

- A compulsion to work together in clearly defined, exclusive groups
- A fierce loyalty to their groups
- An intuitive feel of precision and accuracy and correctness
- Single-minded dedication to the task at hand
- Overwhelming desire to excel in anything, they did

- Inability to think and act independently
- Stereotyping everyone in terms of family, education, company and position
- A tendency not to voice own opinion
- No reciprocity
- An undeveloped sense of rights of others
- Inability to identify themselves with other nationalities and races



# Reference Books

1. The Chrysanthemum and the Sword  
by *Ruth Benedict*
2. The Japanese Mind edited by *Roger J.  
Davis and Osamu Ikeno*