Bushido ethics

Bushido expanded and formalized the earlier code of the samurai, and stressed frugality, loyalty, mastery of martial arts, and honor to the death. Under the Bushido ideal, if a samurai failed to uphold his honor he could regain it by performing seppuku (ritual suicide). In an excerpt from the chapter "AN ACCOUNT OF THE HARA-KIRI" in Mitford's "Tales of Old Japan", the author describes a friend witnessing an act of Seppuku:

"There are many stories on record of extraordinary heroism being displayed in the hara-kiri. The case of a young fellow, only twenty years old, of the Choshiu clan, which was told to me the other day by an eye-witness, deserves mention as a marvellous instance of determination. Not content with giving himself the one necessary cut, he slashed himself thrice horizontally and twice vertically. Then he stabbed himself in the throat until the dirk protruded on the other side, with its sharp edge to the front; setting his teeth in one supreme effort, he drove the knife forward with both hands through his throat, and fell dead."

According to Inazo Nitobe, Author of "Bushido: The Soul of Japan", "As to strictly ethical doctrines, the teachings of Confucius were the most prolific source of Bushido.....Next to Confucius, Mencius exercised an immense authority over Bushido. His forcible and often quite democratic theories were exceedingly taking to sympathetic natures, and they were even thought dangerous to, and subversive of, the existing social order, hence his works were for a long time under censure. Still, the words of this master mind found permanent lodgment in the heart of the samurai."

Bushido ethics were also influenced by Shintoism, the Chinese Classics, and the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, which promoted austerity, detachment and "no-mind" concentration as an ultimate approach to combat situations as well as daily life, and considered martial arts as a way to self-realization and to the expression of one's Buddha-nature.

Bushido was widely practiced and it is surprising how uniform the samurai code remained over time, crossing over all geographic and socio-economic backgrounds of the samurai. The samurai represented a wide populace numbering between 7 to 10% of the Japanese population, and the first Meiji era census at the end of the 19th century counted 1,282,000 members of the "high samurais", allowed to ride a horse, and 492,000 members of the "low samurai", allowed to wear two swords but not to ride a horse, in a country of about 25 million. ("Japan. A historical survey" Mikiso Hane). Although Japan enjoyed a period of peace during the Sakoku ("Closed country") period from the 17th to the mid-19th century, the samurai class remained and continued to play a center role in the policing of the country. The status of the samurai was abolished after the Meiji Restoration, but the former samurai continued to play a key role in the industrialization of Japan and its traditions remain alive today, seen in cultural features as mundane as the outfit worn by Japanese firefighters.

Bushido ethics enjoyed a revival during World War II as a way to build up Japanese fighting spirit. It was particularly reinforced among the fighting forces as a means of portraying the value of self-sacrifice and loyalty, and reached its apotheosis with the self-sacrifice of the kamikaze pilots.
Seven virtues associated with bushido

- **義** – **Gi** – *Rectitude* (Right Decisions) (Should be Justice and Morality)
- **勇** – **Yu** – *Courage*
- **仁** – **Jin** – *Benevolence*
- **礼** – **Rei** – *Respect*
- **誠** – Makoto or **信** – Shin – *Honesty*
- **名誉** – Meiyō – *Honor, Glory*
- **忠義** – Chūgi – *Loyalty*