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**Paradoxes in Japanese
Behaviour**

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Notes

To begin this study of modern Japanese history we will start by briefly exploring some of the differences between the traditional Japanese character compared to our distinctive Australian character.

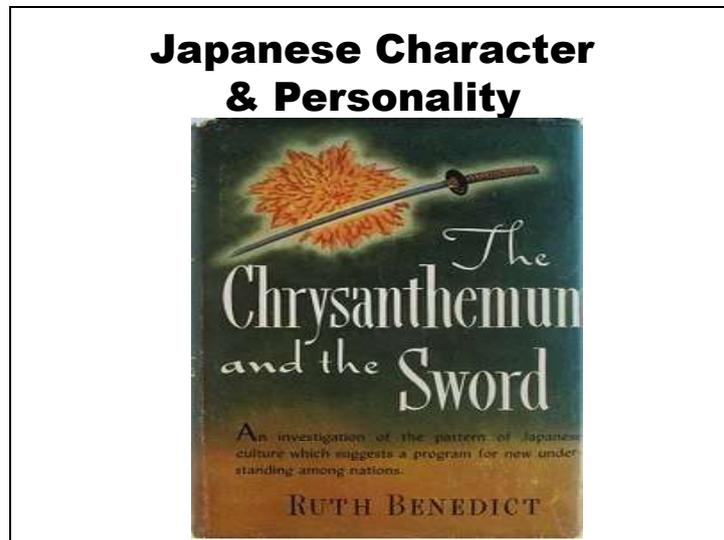
This brief sketch of Japanese 'character and personality' that follows relates more closely to those qualities *as they applied in Japan prior to the end of World War 11*.

Post war, Japanese society (like our own) has become more Westernized and Americanized, though many aspects of the traditional Japanese culture still remain evident, but no-where near the same extent as before.

In my experience I have found that many of the perceptions that Australian's have about the characteristics and qualities of the Japanese people have often been formed through the prism of events that occurred during the Second World War.

While not challenging the accuracy of those (often negative) perceptions, I would however suggest that the Japanese character is in fact deeper and more complex.

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Notes

Given how different Japanese value systems are to our Western ideas, it should not be surprising that at the conclusion to the World War Two that those Allied forces, including Australians, that occupied Japan in the post war era, often found themselves bewildered by many aspects of Japanese culture.

It was in response to this dilemma that the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) was invited by the US Office of War Information in 1946 to write a book that would help Allied Occupation troops in post war Japan to better understand the complexities and apparent contradictions of Japanese character, personality and culture.

Benedict's book provided a valuable guide to Japan for many years after the war and it still continues to be influential.

As a young teacher of Asian History in the early 1970's I read and studied Ruth Benedict's book prior to my first (and thus far only) visit to Japan in 1973/4. I found her explanations of Japanese culture and personality interesting and informative and they provided me with the basic understanding I have about the Japanese culture.

Today, 'Chrysanthemum' receives harsh criticism from some modern day anthropologists with more time better access to resources.

Anybody with a burning interest to learn more about modern Japanese culture will find there are many contemporary sources available to provide more informed and contemporary versions of Japanese culture and personality.

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In *Chrysanthemum & the Sword* Benedict wrote that the Japanese are both:

- * Aggressive but Peace loving;
- * Militaristic but Aesthetic;
- * Loyal but Treacherous;
- * Brave but Timid;
- * Insolent but Polite;
- * Submissive but Resentful of being pushed around;
- * Conservative to change but Hospitable to new ways;
- * Rigid but Adaptable.

Notes:

A key take out is that in terms of character and personality, the Japanese have always been (and still are) very different and often contrary to our Western ways of thinking and behaving.

We will now briefly explore some practical examples of cultural differences.

Case Study One: Surrender & Captivity



Notes

To begin our consideration of how the Japanese character differs from our Western customs we will briefly compare the aspects of 'surrender' and 'captivity' as displayed by Allied soldiers in the Pacific theatre of World War II compared to the behaviour of Japanese soldiers.

In our Western military culture, if one's army reaches a stage in a battle where it facing such heavy losses that there is the prospect of probable annihilation, then under the Geneva Conventions it is quite acceptable for a commander to make an honourable surrender to the enemy.

The photo above depicts what was probably the most humiliating surrender ever suffered by British military forces. On 15th February 1942 General Arthur Percival, commander of British forces, surrendered the British fortress of Singapore to the Japanese. Subsequently some 130,000 men, including 22,000 Australians, mostly from the 2nd AIF 8th Division, became prisoners of war of the Japanese Imperial Army.

In such situations, the Geneva Conventions stipulated that the captured soldiers were to be treated humanely.

Also, under our Western culture it was considered quite natural and normal that surviving 'prisoners of war' would want their families to know that they were alive.

This communication function was often effectively performed by the International Red Cross. However in the case of many Allied prisoners of the Japanese, the Red Cross had restricted access to our POWs.

There was another in-built Western cultural expectation for POWs - that is, that our captured soldiers would not (willingly) disclose any significant military information to their captors.

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Notes

Pre-war Japanese military culture however was very different.

Because of their sense of KO obligations and CHU duties to the emperor, Japanese soldiers had been trained to expect only two possibilities in war: either win victory or die in the attempt.

The extension of this concept meant that the notions of 'surrender' and 'captivity' were never conceived or discussed in Imperial Japanese Army training manuals. As a consequence individual Japanese POWs were given no guidance as to how to behave in those situations. This meant that the relatively small percentage of Japanese soldiers who were captured or did surrender and were taken into captivity, were confronted by an experience for which they were unprepared and for which they had no protocols as to how they should conduct themselves.

However, individual Japanese POWs were acutely aware of the fact that they were dishonoured and that therefore their life as Japanese was ended. They believed that their odious surrender automatically made them 'dead' to both their families and to Japanese society.

It was in this context that many Japanese mothers exhorted their departing sons with the sentiment "*Commit suicide rather than shame me by returning home as an ex-prisoner...*".

It also explains why captured Japanese prisoners were reluctant to use organisations such as the Red Cross to try and contact their families to let them know they were alive, because they were mindful of the deep and lasting shame this information would inflict on their loved ones within their local communities at home.

Unlike Allied POWs who were trained to expect to provide their captors with limited information restricted to 'Name, Rank and Service Number', Japanese POWs without that expectation were often willing to provide their Allied captors with relevant military information, and later to assist with the drafting and refining of propaganda pamphlets for distribution to Japanese troops encouraging them to surrender.

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Case Study Two
An Incredible 'About Face'

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Suicide Cliff - Saipan



Notes

Because the people of pre-war Japan viewed their emperor as a God, with their ON (obligations) and CHU (duty) citizens and members of the Japanese military were prepared to fight for their emperor to the death.

The above photograph of **Laderan Banadero** near the northern tip of Saipan in the Mariana Islands is the location where thousands of Japanese civilian men women and children and some soldiers committed suicide by jumping to their deaths in 1944 in order to avoid capture by the United States.

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On April 8, 1945, Japan launched Operation Ketsu-go.

This was to be the final defence strategy to be employed with the anticipated and imminent American invasion of Kyushu.

The plan was for the total Japanese population to inflict such heavy casualties on the invading US forces that it would undermine the American objective to fight for Japan's unconditional surrender.

Defence preparations included mobilizing civilians, as the plan ordered all males 15 – 60 years old and all females 17 – 40 years old to be trained to employ hand grenades, swords, sickles, knives, fire hooks, and bamboo spears in preparation of joining the regular Japanese forces in combatting the invaders.

In addition to these preparations, Japanese military propaganda also warned the civilian population that if they were captured, the Americans would torture, rape, and murder them.

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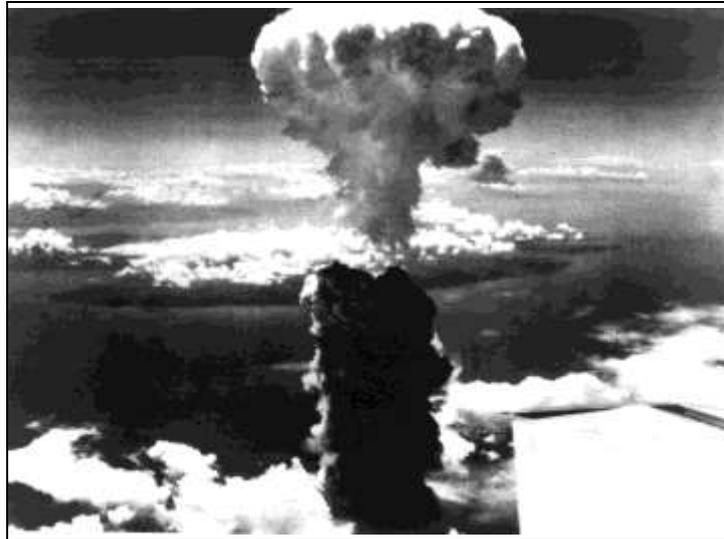
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On 26th July 1945, the Allied nations of the USA, USSR and Great Britain issued the Potsdam declaration demanding Japan's 'unconditional' surrender.

It was during this conference that the American's tested the world's first nuclear bomb at Los Alamos in the Nevada Desert.

After considering the option of 'unconditional' surrender' the Japanese government and Emperor Hirohito made a decision that the nation would not comply with that demand.

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Notes

As World War II moved closer to Japan by mid 1945, the willingness of the Japanese people to die for their Emperor, as displayed on the island of Saipan, illustrated to the Allies the possibility that 100 million Japanese civilians on the main islands would be prepared to fight to the death against foreign invaders rather than surrender unconditionally.

American military leadership was affected by the “ferocity of Japan’s no-surrender policy”. A Joint Chiefs of Staff planning document, dated August 30, 1944, coined the term “Saipan ratio” wherein it stated that “approximately one American would be killed and several wounded to exterminate seven Japanese soldiers.”

According to the Saipan ratio, an invasion of the main island of Kyushu was expected to be extremely costly in terms of American casualties.

Clearly, this probability played a significant part in the US military’s decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan.

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Notes

The position of the Japanese government changed immediately after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima (August 6th) and Nagasaki (August 8th), followed by the opportunistic declaration of war by the Soviet Union against Japan on August 9th.

On August 10, the Japanese cabinet drafted an "Imperial Rescript ending the War".

On 15th August 1945 a pre-recorded speech by Emperor Hirohito was broadcast over the radio to the Japanese people - the first time such a communication had ever occurred.

In this historic speech the Emperor announced Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration to end the War.

The "Jewel Voice Broadcast"



During this "Jewel Voice Broadcast" the Emperor stated:

In his speech Emperor Hirohito stated that: ***"the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage"***

Finally Hirohito directed the Japanese people to ***"endure the unendurable"*** – that is, accept and endure a period of American occupation.



However, in August 1945 Japan, the Emperor of Japan **was** the state, in a deep and divine sense.

It was not like in a democracy where the head of state is a secular citizen, who if they were perceived to make a wrong call, might be challenged and even rebelled against.

When the Emperor of Japan announced to the Japanese people that the war was over, that instruction was accepted by the Japanese people immediately and without question.

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Notes

As a consequence, a potential costly blood bath for both sides was instantly averted, and instead what would turn out to be a peaceful and benevolent Allied occupation of the country took place up until 1952.

On the other hand, at the conclusion to the War, both citizens and military obeyed the emperor without question when he ordered them to surrender, suffer the insufferable, and to build a new Japan.

After years of propaganda which had told them about Japan's military might and the inevitability of victory, the suddenness of the revelation of Emperor Hirohito's surrender broadcast was a total shock.

Despite the openly aggressive stance displayed by the Japanese people in late July 1945, in the space of just a few weeks, and in accordance with their Emperor's directive, these same people docilely accepted the large-scale occupation of their sacred nation by tens of thousands of Allied 'barbarian' soldiers.

An incredible 'about' face'!

The remarkable stories of the Allied Occupation of Japan and the nation's subsequent 'Economic Miracle' will be covered off later in the course.

