

Slide 1

**Aspects of Japanese Culture
& Personality**

'ON' / CHU / Gimu / Giri

Slide 2

The Japanese Obligations of 'ON' & Repayments by 'GIMU' & 'GIRI'

An 'On' is an 'obligation of duty' that requires repayment. (+ / -)

Some 'ON' are very important and some 'ON' are less important, but ALL are important.

Slide 3



Notes

'Ko on' is the 'obligation of duty' an individual Japanese has to the Emperor of Japan. This 'ON' is repaid by **Chu** - honour and obedience to the Emperor, to the law, to one's superiors and to Japan.

'Oya on' is the 'obligation of duty' an individual received from one's parents, which is repaid by **Ko** - honour and obedience to parents and to ancestors.

Gimu in Japanese culture is the most important debt for an individual Japanese that refers to the repayment of these two obligations.

Gimu refers to one's lifelong duty / obligation to the broader Japanese society and is of such a magnitude that, no matter how much one does, one can only ever repay a fraction of the debt.

Because the pre-war population of Japan viewed their Emperor as a God, and strongly believed in their 'ko on' duties and obligations, the debt repayment notion of 'chu' required them to be prepared to fight for their emperor until their last breath, which was exemplified by the thousands of civilians who died on the island of Saipan.

In contrast, when Emperor Hirohito issued his historic 'Jewel Voice Broadcast' to end the war, it was the concept of Gimu that ensured the 'hostile' Japanese nation was immediately obedient to his command and became docile as soon as he instructed them to surrender, to 'bear the unbearable' and to build a new Japan.

Slide 4

'Gimu' – (Obligation) – The Case Study of Hirō Onoda



Notes

Hiro Onoda, 19 March 1922 – 16 January 2014

Upon reaching the age of 18 years Hiro Onoda enlisted in the Imperial Japanese Army where he was trained as an intelligence officer.

In late December 1944, less than eight months before the end of the War, he was posted to Lubang Island in the Philippines, where he was ordered by his superiors to do all he could to 'hamper enemy forces' on the island.

Onoda's orders also stated that under no circumstances was he to surrender or take his own life.

Two months later on February 28, 1945, Allied forces landed on the island and soon overwhelmed the defending Japanese troops.

In the face of defeat, lieutenant Onoda and three other soldiers took to the hills to avoid capture, and in compliance with his orders Onoda and his companions carried out guerrilla activities from the mountains wherein they on some occasions over the years they engaged in shootouts with the local Philippines police.

Slide 5



Notes

The guerrilla band found a leaflet in October 1945 which announced that Japan had surrendered in August 1945, that the war had ended and imploring them to come down from the mountains.

However, because the group had been fired upon, they disbelieved the leaflet, concluding it was Allied propaganda, and continued their clandestine activities.

A year after the war was over leaflets were dropped in their locality by air with a surrender order printed from General Yamashita of the Japanese Fourteenth Area Army. Again, Onoda's group analysed the leaflet very closely to determine whether it was genuine, and decided it was not.

In September 1949, now four years after the war officially ended, one of Onoda's underlings left the group and surrendered to Philippines forces.

To the remainders this was seen to pose a security problem and they became more cautious.

In 1952 letters and family pictures were dropped from aircraft urging the group to surrender, but the three soldiers again concluded that this was a trick.

In a clash with Philippines police in May 1954, Shimada was shot and killed by a search party looking for the men, and Onoda's remaining accomplice was killed in an offensive action against local farmers in October 1972, leaving him as the sole Japanese 'holdout' survivor.

Slide 6



Notes

In early 1974 a Japanese adventurer, Norio Suzuki, journeyed to Lubang in search of Onoda, whom he found after four days.

Onoda described this moment in a 2010 interview: "This hippie boy Suzuki came to the island to listen to the feelings of a Japanese soldier. Suzuki asked me why I would not come out ...".

Onoda and Suzuki became friends, but Onoda still refused to surrender, saying that he was waiting for orders from a superior officer.

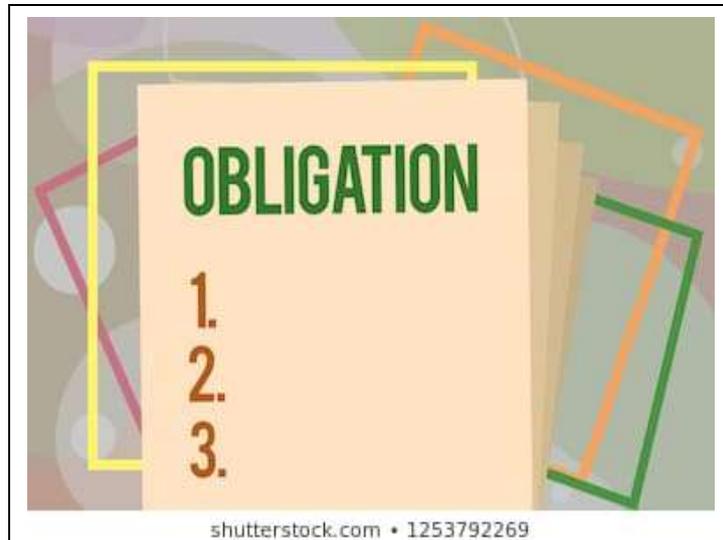
Suzuki returned to Japan with photographs of himself and Onoda as proof of their encounter, and the Japanese government located Onoda's commanding officer, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi, who had since become a bookseller.

Taniguchi flew to Lubang where on March 9, 1974, he finally met with Onoda and issued him with an order to cease his military activities and place himself under the command of legal authorities.

At this point Onoda was thus properly relieved of duty, and he surrendered.

He turned over his sword, his functioning Arisaka Type 99 rifle, 500 rounds of ammunition and several hand grenades. He also handed over the dagger his mother had given him in 1944 to kill himself with if he was captured.

Slide 7



Notes

Traditionally, whenever a Japanese person does 'something' **for** or **to** another Japanese, an '**ON**' obligation is created.

An '**ON**' may be good (a gift) or bad (an insult).

That good 'something' may be a favour, a kindness, a gift – it may be something minor (shouting a coffee) or something major (giving a friend's child a job).

In Japanese culture the recipient of an 'ON' then carries a 'debt of obligation' to repay the giver.

In acknowledging that debt of obligation, a traditional response is '**Domo arigato gaziamusu**' which literally means:

'thank you for your kindness –I am now obligated to repay you, but because I might never be able to repay you I am sorry for the burden of the debt you have created for me'.

Giri debts need to be repaid with mathematical exactness for the favour, and there are time limits.

Slide 8



Notes

Between 1576 and 1582 a significant portion of Japan was under the military rule of one of Japan's greatest war lords - **Nobunaga**.

In his rise to power however Nobunaga had had to make difficult decisions that lead to him having enemies — even from within his own ranks.

One of his top generals, Akechi Mitsuhide held a grudge against Nobunaga for years because of his master's role in the death of Akechi's mother many years before.

In 1582, while Nobunaga was attending a Kyoto Buddhist temple for a tea ceremony, Akechi's samurai surrounded the temple, and to exact revenge against his master, Akichi set the temple on fire, as depicted in the above slide, which killed Nobunaga along with his son.

That was Akechi's repayment of an ON obligation.

Slide 9

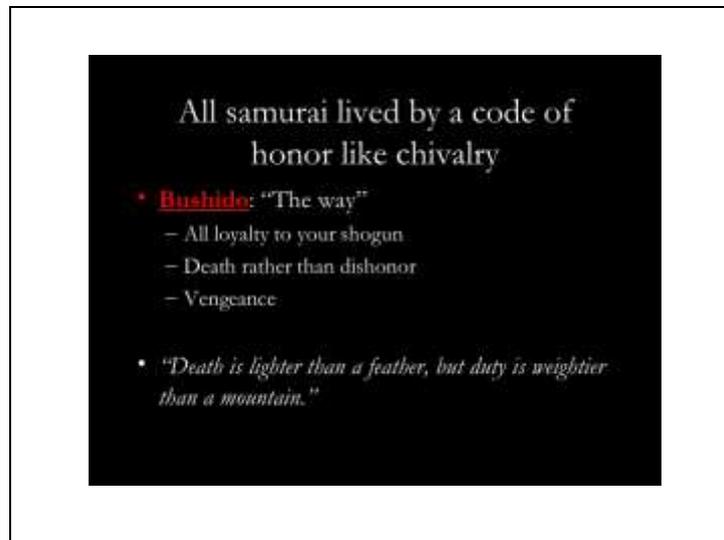


Notes

Giri is a key concept that is very helpful in understanding Japanese behaviour and personality. Unfortunately however it has no English equivalent, which therefore makes it somewhat difficult to explain.

Giri might best be considered the other side of the 'ON' coin – it translates as the sense of duty, sense of honour, obligation, debt of gratitude that arises from an 'ON'.

Slide 10

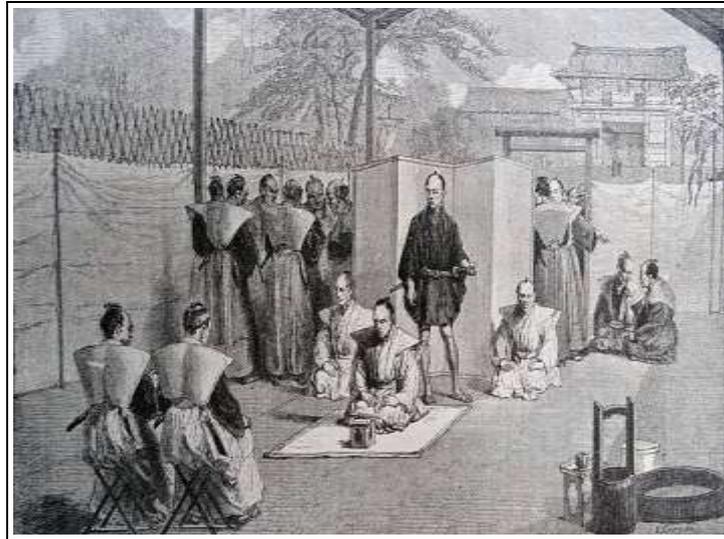


Notes

GIRI is that unwritten sense of duty that a Japanese person conforms to in conducting him/hers self in carrying out the thousands of social contracts that ensure social harmony. In pre-war Japan there was a saying that *"Death is lighter than a feather, but Giri is heavier than a mountain"* and a second saying that *'the debt of Giri is hardest to bear.'*

It is impossible to have a little Giri – to be honourable a person has to fully embrace it. In our Australian society Giri might be something approaching notions such as 'character' and 'honesty'.

Slide 11



Notes

A traditional (and extreme) example of *giri* was the duty or obligation that Samurai had to their masters. A Shogun could ask anything of a Samurai — even that a Samurai take his own life. Samurai were bound by *giri* to obey by committing *seppuku* (ritual suicide).

In today's Japan the modern notion of *giri* continues to apply to situations involving work, family and interpersonal relationships.

For example, a Japanese worker at a coffee shop has a duty to provide good service to customers. If a customer happens to be particularly 'unpleasant' — the duty remains. Japanese society finds it distasteful when staff assert themselves with customers.

On a sliding scale it would be fair to say that in pre-war Japan the notion of *GIRI* during that period would have been more in the direction of the traditional example given above, particularly within the Japanese military.

Slide 12



Concluding Notes

This brief glimpse of Japanese Culture and personality aimed to illustrate that the unique 'culture and personality' of the Japanese people is indeed very different to those of any other nation. Clearly, the task for those Westerners who dealt with the Japanese in the distant past or post World war II would have been challenging.

As we proceed through the various eras of Japanese history in coming weeks, we will observe that these underlying national behavioural characteristics played significant roles in many of the events that unfolded.

Also, as we view various Japanese films related to the course, it is hoped that this brief overview of the Japanese character will enable a better understanding of the various story lines.