

# Japanese Civilization

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# Introduction:

While reading *The Enemy* by Pearl S. Buck we encountered some interesting facts about the Japanese culture and what values they live by. We noticed that their culture is very pastoral and colorful. Therefore, we wanted to understand more thoroughly what their civilization consists of; celebrations, clothing and many other traditions we read about in *The Enemy*. Lastly, we are very curious to find out what Pearl Buck thought and had to say about the Japanese civilization and their path in life.

We would like to answer every question we asked above, and try to learn and expand what we know of the Japanese civilization. We hope to learn what the main differences are between the Japanese and the Western society and culture. We want to understand what part of their history World War II played, and see whether it changed anything at all in their society. All this we hope to learn by studying further into the Japanese culture and values.

Throughout the project, we will use *The Knowledge Book* by National Geographic, *Encyclopedia Britannica* online, and *Wikipedia* as our sources of information. We will also use *The Enemy* as a source of quotations and a biography of Pearl Buck in order to learn about her life experiences and how they are presented in the story.

Finally, we chose this topic because we were intrigued by the setting Pearl Buck chose for her short story, *The Enemy*, and we hope to learn and attain as much as we can about this fascinating topic.

# Japanese Traditional Clothing

In the story 'The Enemy' we can find some examples of Japanese traditional clothing. In recent years, the Japanese have become more accustomed to wearing western clothing. This is likely due to the convenience of western clothes and the global acceptance of western styles and fashions. However, the Japanese have a rich history and their own unique cultural fashion.

Traditional Japanese clothing includes many different types of clothing .These clothes are made to suit the seasons in which they are worn. Clothing with rustic hues and patterns, such as those that feature russet leaves, are preferred for autumn wear. However, floral designs, such as those that feature cherry blossoms and more vibrant colors are more common during the spring time. For winter, people who are dressed in kimonos like to wear darker fabric and more layers. Sometimes, people may wear ten layers of clothing.

One of the most popular garments of traditional Japanese clothing is the kimono, which is worn by both men and women. In the story we see that both Sadao and Hana wear their kimono only at home. Pearl Buck uses Hana and Sadao in order to express how important Japanese civilization and culture is to her. However, when Sadao went to the general, he did not feel comfortable to be with it, maybe because of the strange look of the kimono. Unlike the kimono that is worn by women, men's kimonos are much simpler and usually include only five pieces. A few inches of the sleeves are left



unattached at the bottom of the sleeves. The sleeves are also not nearly as deep as the sleeves of the women's kimonos. This is to make room for the sash called “obi” that goes around the man's waist directly underneath the sleeves. On the woman's kimono, sleeves are able to hang on top of the obi and therefore don't interfere.

More recently, the main difference between men and women's kimonos is the material used. Typically, men's kimonos are dark, subdued colors, like dark blue, black, brown, or green. Usually, these are also matte fabrics with some having slight patterns. Casual-styled ones are commonly textured and a little more brightly-colored, like light blue, green, or purple. The formal kimono is colored plain black and it is made of silk and features shoulders, a chest, and a back with five emblems called “kamons”- a kimono with three kamons is more formal. These kimonos are worn with white accessories and undergarments.



Popular traditional Japanese clothing that does not appear to be used in the story is called happi (happy coat). Happi is a coat with straight sleeves that is normally made of brown cotton and feathers. These were first family crests, owing to the fact that happis were the clothing of the house servants. Eventually, happis started to use the crests for organizations and shops. Happis were also popular for firemen. These happis had symbols on the back that told people the groups to which the firemen belonged.

During Japan's Edo period, firemen were paid for being prompt and present. This is why the happis were so important for them.

Traditional Japanese clothing are still in use by many people and worn most often on special occasions such as weddings, celebrations and other special ceremonies.

# Japanese Traditions

The Japanese people have many traditions that go back so much back in time, and still most of them fully exist.

In the story we can see a number of Japanese traditions. For example; the Japanese House and clothing.



The Japanese traditional house is built up from wood. The floor is called "Tatami" and on the floor there are mats.



In the front of the house they take off their shoes because of the difference between home and the outside world. In addition, when they go to the toilet they take special shoes.

sleeping.

Moreover, in the house you sit on a pillow, which is placed on the Tatami. They sleep on the Poton, which is a thin mattress only for

The Japanese traditional gifts exchange is of their nature. Their tradition says that you need to give to your family, neighborhoods and friends but at the same time it is common to give back



gifts with the same value. Furthermore, in almost every occasion they exchange gifts.

The Japanese signature is a personal stamp unlike the western signature made by hand writing. The Japanese stamp is a red sponge with the name of the person- it is sometimes also created from wood, ivory and stone. Moreover, only signatures from the stamp are accepted.



In The Enemy Pearl Buck makes it clear how important is to Sadao the Japanese civilization. When he meets Hana in America, they only decide on marrying in Japan, since his father brought him up to respect and live by what the Japanese civilization teaches and commands.

All in all, Japanese traditions are very pastoral and almost completely static-going from one generation to another with almost no difference.

# Japanese and Western Civilization

Japan is different from the western countries in a variety of values and social habits. Those differences affect the Japanese personal life, beliefs, education and the system of judgment. In addition, some of these differences find expression in "The Enemy".

Success and money are considered a satisfactory thing. For parents general schooling is not enough, as a result, children are sent to academic learning during their adolescence. It seems teenagers should focus their childhood on their future, in spite of spending their childhood with friends

like in the western culture. In addition, westerns measure pleasure by love, freedom, rights and money. For the Japanese happiness is measured by success and material property. It can be seen in "The Enemy" in Sadao's growing up: his father had not been



joking or playing with him when he was a child. In addition, Sadao spent his twenties on learning in the United States of America. Despite the reason for Sadao's success, patriotism is one more of the reasons.

In the Japanese society there are clear rules and behaviors. Firstly respect other people and yourself, particularly parents and teachers. Sadao respects his father's wishes to his son's future; Sadao will be a success and help his nation, Sadao will marry a pure Japanese woman in a traditional marriage and many other examples can be found by the keen reader. Unfortunately, in the western culture to be honorable is not quiet so obvious.



Secondly, for Japanese their social life is very important. It starts at a young age when they build groups of friends in order to spend time or achieve higher social classes, so they cannot be different from others.



For instance; it is very common to spend money with a friend in Japan. If a child has no money to spend, he will suffer from a mental problem. Hana asks her husband: "Why is it we cannot see clearly what we ought to do?" as a result of the servants' reaction. In the western culture social life is very

important too.

During World War II Japan was characterized by unusual patriotism. Sadao's father is revealed in the beginning of the story as a patriot. He says to his son that the most important value is helping Japan to develop. But in our ages, Japanese have been less patriotic, some say that the reason is the American culture, which has influenced the Japanese. The western culture does not seem to be very patriotic.

In conclusion, some of the Japanese veteran values that take place in society are social values, except for patriotism. In the western culture the individualism is highly emphasized in everyday practices, which explain why Sadao's humanitarian values won all else.

**Pearl Buck's Views about the Japanese Civilization:**

Pearl S. Buck had a very clear view about human rights, no matter what race, skin color, or nationality- a human is a human. Throughout *The Enemy Sadao*- a doctor- has an internal conflict whether to fulfill the Hippocratic Oath to which he swore upon becoming a doctor, or to be a good citizen and not help the enemy. A few times throughout the story he even wants to kill him, indirectly of course, but kill him all the same. Pearl Buck makes it clear that he automatically acts by his code of ethics as a doctor: *"...his trained hands seemed of their own will to be doing what they could to stanch the fearful bleeding"*.

Pearl Buck used Sadao as a character to show the conflict a nation at war faces, and yet he makes the right decision according to her opinion- he saves the man's lives. Another quote that shows that all humans are equal is when Hana – Sadao's wife- says the following about the white man when Yumi- her servant- resists washing him: *"Is this anything but a man? And a wounded helpless man!"*.

## **Conclusion:**

All through the research we have done for this project, we learned many new things about Japanese culture, society and values. We saw how each was represented in the story almost wherever we looked- Sadao's Father, symbolism in the setting, Yumi's reactions, and Hana's decisions.

After we read through Pearl S. Buck's biography, we gained a good perspective about what she thought and what her view about the world was. We have found some proof in *The Enemy*, as we showed throughout the project.

A few things we found stunning were how different their values were from ours. The way they understood happiness is completely different than how we do. Another thing is that they barely live according to their emotions, they live by noetic values such as patriotism, and still they are very respectful and full of honor towards each other.

To conclude, this project enriched us with plenty of new ideas and sharpened our understanding of *The Enemy*. We enjoyed the project thoroughly and think that we attained more than we expected, and surely more than we knew before.

## Reflection

From this project I learned new things about the Japanese civilization. I also discovered many interesting details about Pearl Buck.

The part of the project I found most interesting is the part in which we saw the differences between eastern and western values. I am fascinated by traditions and other civilizations, so that comparison was very interesting.

The most difficult part was also the most interesting one- the part on Japanese tradition and values. I found it hard to do because we had to use many different sources to answer our questions.

This project has contributed to my knowledge of the English language with many different things. I learned how to sum up long articles in English, always looking for the main Ideas.

If I did this project again, I would expand the part on the Eastern values because I really enjoyed it.

The main advantage of working together was being able to split up the tasks that had to be done among us, thus reducing the pressure on one person in our group. It also helped us get the project finished on time.

The main disadvantage

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National Geographic - The Knowledge Book (1<sup>st</sup> Edition)

The Enemy - Pearl S. Buck - <http://www.nelliemuller.com/The-Enemy-Pearl.S.Buck.htm>

We used many blogs as a primary source for the Japanese traditions and values.