SAMURAI CULTURE TWISTED:

BUSHIDO, SHINTO AND WAR CRIMES

TONG SHUK YING

M. Phil. Thesis

HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

2006
Samurai Culture Twisted: *Bushido, Shinto* and War Crimes

TONG Shuk Ying

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Dr. James A. Stewart Jr.

Hong Kong Baptist University

April 2006
Abstract

This thesis deals with the changes of Bushido and Shinto, and how the “corrupted” Bushido and extremist State Shinto influenced war crimes in WWII. This topic has long been given insufficient attention in the field’s literature. Moreover, most of the studies which deal with Bushido and Shinto focus on their traditional role or their role in WWII, thus, they seldom talk about the changes of Bushido and Shinto from their proper, traditional period to their extremist forms in WWII and their relation to war crimes. This thesis will employ the famous book of Dr. Inazo Nitobe on Bushido and other primary sources, such as The Tokyo Trials and Hagakure to explore these important issues.

These two fundamental elements of traditional Japanese culture — Bushido and Shinto — continue to have great influence today. Historically, all Japanese have been seriously influenced by them. Japanese feel a great pride in their culture and they feel pride in Bushido and Shinto because they were indigenous to their culture. However, this presentation argues that both Bushido and Shinto were significantly altered in the period between the Meiji Restoration and the Second World War. This was done, in part, to consolidate the position of the emperor. Under the influence of the militarists and extreme Shintoists, the traditional concepts of both of these foundation elements of traditional Japanese culture were changed into far more extremist forms. In the period after the Meiji Restoration, both of them became important factors in the origins of the Second World War and helped lead to many crimes during the entire war.
# Table of Contents

Declaration..................................................................................................................... i  
Abstract......................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements...................................................................................................... iii  
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... iv  

Chapter One: Introduction .............................................................................................1  
  War and War Culture...................................................................................................1  
  War and War Crimes ....................................................................................................4  
  Related Aspects of Japanese Cultural History ...........................................................5  

Chapter Two: Traditional *Bushido* .............................................................................12  
  *Bushido*: Origins ......................................................................................................12  
  Historical Background: Rise of the *Samurai* and  
  the Feudal System in Japan .......................................................................................19  
  The Code of the *Samurai*: *Bushido* .....................................................................23  

Chapter Three: Traditional *Shinto* ............................................................................41  
  The Origins: *Shinto*, a Traditional (Animist) Religion ............................................41  
  *Shinto* under Foreign Influence .............................................................................47  

Chapter Four: Corrupted *Bushido* & War Crimes .....................................................51  
  What is a War Crime? .................................................................................................51  
  Corrupted *Bushido* and War Crimes .....................................................................55
Chapter Five: Extremist State Shinto & War Crimes..................................................72

Shinto’s Rebirth: An Extremist National Religion,

“State Shinto”........................................................................................................72

Shinto Changed and War Crimes ..........................................................................91

Chapter Six: Conclusion .........................................................................................109

Appendix I: Japan Chronological Time-table.........................................................114
Appendix II: Imperial Rescript on Education.........................................................119
Appendix III: Extract from a Textbook on Ethics from the 1930s.........................121
Appendix IV: Prince Ito Hirobumi ........................................................................123
Bibliography .............................................................................................................125
Curriculum Vitae......................................................................................................136