

CHAPTER 7

Two Bridges in Nitobe's *Bushido* (1900) and Their Symbolism Today

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The Bridge across the Pacific

Later in his life, Inazo Nitobe (1862-1933) recounted that “I wished to be a bridge across the Pacific” was his response to a professor at the University of Tokyo while seeking entrance to the university. Previously, Nitobe had completed a bachelor’s degree in agricultural science at Sapporo Agricultural College, along with his life-long friend Kanzo Uchimura (1861-1930). In addition, he worked for the Hokkaido government for several years. Still in his early 20s, seeking entry to the University of Tokyo was a career readjustment for young Inazo. He wanted to study economics along with English literature, since the university did not offer a formal program in “agricultural policies.” “Why English literature?” asked the professor. To that, Inazo reportedly answered “I would like to be a medium to introduce foreign thoughts to Japan and Japanese thoughts to the foreign countries.” (my trans., *Zenshū*, vol. 6, 20).

It is very well known how the rest of his life turned out. Nitobe held a series of prestigious professorial positions in Japan from 1891 to 1919, followed by six years in Geneva as one of the founding Under-Secretaries General of the League of Nations. During his tenure as professor, Nitobe taught agricultural economics, law, and colonial studies in Sapporo, Kyoto and Tokyo. He also served as the headmaster of the First Higher School and preparatory division for the University of Tokyo (1906-1911). In addition, he was the founding president of Tokyo Women’s Christian University (1918-1923). While in Geneva, he established the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (a forerunner of UNESCO) under the auspices of the League of Nations. He also took a leadership role in settling the territorial dispute between Sweden and Finland over the Swedish-speaking Åland Islands. This was the first case of a territorial dispute peacefully settled by a multilateral international body by the means of demilitarization and minority self-governance (Hein, 2009, 42-43; Nauclér, 2007). In his final years, Nitobe served in the House of Peers (upper house) in the Japanese Imperial Parliament, and in 1933 died in Victoria, British Columbia, after attending an international conference in Banff, Alberta.

Today, Nitobe's life is celebrated and commemorated on both sides of the Pacific. Museums in his birthplace, Morioka, and ancestral hometown, Towada, in Japan have permanent displays dedicated to his legacy. His portrait was printed on the Japanese 5,000 yen bill in the 1980s and 1990s. The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, has a renowned Japanese garden named after him. Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital, where he spent the last days of his life, also built a courtyard named after him. The cities of Morioka and Victoria celebrated their 30th anniversary of their twin city relationship in 2015. As Nitobe had longed for, his life indeed was regarded as a "bridge across the Pacific."

Midlife Crisis and Writing of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*

Looking over Nitobe's life with 20/20 hindsight, it is hard to imagine that his scholarly and international diplomatic achievements were results of a twisted path of failed "career change," nervous breakdowns and subsequent interruptions during his early career due to an extended period of recuperation. The writing of his most famous English book *Bushido: the Soul of Japan* (1900) played a pivotal role of "breakthrough" during those difficult years.

After a brief academic stint at the University of Tokyo, young Inazo soon headed to the United States in 1884, and enrolled at John Hopkins, a recently established graduate university endowed by the named Quaker entrepreneurs. Having been baptized by a Methodist Episcopalian missionary in Sapporo, Inazo soon became a Quaker in Baltimore. He also found a new research topic at Johns Hopkins: U.S.-Japan relations. It is obvious that Inazo at this time was clearly seeking a career change. He was no longer interested in agricultural studies, but switched to international relations, possibly in pursuance of his "bridge" building dream through diplomacy or law. Ironically, Inazo was poverty-stricken at the time, and his time living in Baltimore was cut short. As a result, he was forced back to agricultural studies. His alma mater, Sapporo Agricultural College, appointed him as an assistant professor in absentia and gave him a full scholarship for completing a PhD in agricultural economics in Germany. He had no choice, and withdrew from Johns Hopkins. His aspiration in international relations was put on hold for the time being.

With a newly-minted PhD from Germany in hand, Inazo revisited the United States in 1890 on the way home to Japan. Inazo married an American Quaker, Mary Patterson Elkinton, in Philadelphia. Now married to a fellow Quaker, Inazo settled in Sapporo and started his academic career. However, life in Sapporo was difficult for the young couple. They lost their child a few days after birth. Overworked, Inazo eventually had a nervous breakdown after six years of

teaching. Inazo took a leave of absence from the College; the couple left Sapporo in 1897. I suspect that a career in agricultural science, rather than in his primary passion of international relations, may have contributed indirectly to his nervous breakdown. Inazo needed to sort out and reexamine his life's direction. In today's terms, he was having a midlife crisis.

It was ironic, albeit timely, that during the prolonged period of recuperation in Japan and later in California, Nitobe wrote his most famous English book, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1900). Writing *Bushido* gave Inazo an opportunity to reexamine the moral values he learned as a child growing up in a *samurai* family. It also gave him an opportunity to contextualize the traditional values in post-*samurai* Japan with its increasing international role as an emerging power in competition with Western colonial interests in East Asia.

Written in eloquent English, *Bushido* sold well despite the first edition being published by a small press in Philadelphia. A revised and enlarged edition was published in 1905 by a much larger and well known, G.P. Putnam's Sons of New York. The timing could not have been better. The Russo-Japanese war ended in 1905 on terms favorable for Japan. As interests in this new Asian powerhouse, Japan, skyrocketed around the world, so did worldwide sales for *Bushido* (Ôshiro, 1992, 95-96). Inazo's career also took off. He was offered a position as an agricultural development advisor for the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan. With his success in developing the commercial sugar industry in Taiwan, Nitobe was subsequently invited back to academia as an agricultural economist. As they say, the rest is history.

Two "Bridges" in Nitobe's *Bushido*

The writing of *Bushido* took place at a pivotal moment in Nitobe's life and career. *Bushido* literally "bridged" Nitobe's past life as a lost-status samurai, struggling to realize his ideals as a professor in the remote backcountry of Sapporo with his future as a scholar of international stature. With the English version of *Bushido* being widely read, Nitobe's name became increasingly known throughout the world as one of the most eloquent spokespersons of Japanese matters. The content of *Bushido* reflects the "bridge" in two ways: a bridge between cultures of East and West, and a bridge between class values of the samurai past and the more egalitarian future. In other words, Nitobe's *Bushido* provides two bridges: 1) a *synchronic* bridge between the East and West and 2) a *diachronic* bridge between the past and the future.

The word *bushido* literally means "samurai's way," or the codes of ethics for the *samurai* class. In the preface, Nitobe sets out to answer frequently

posed questions by his American wife as to why certain ideas and customs prevail in Japan. In addition, a question posed by a Belgian legal scholar M. de Laveleye as to how moral education was delivered in Japan without religious instructions in school (Nitobe, 1906, ix-x). As a response to these questions, Nitobe, in his *Bushido*, laid out “[w]hat I was taught and told in my youthful days, when feudalism was still in force” (x). In the course of exploration on the topic, he tried to “illustrate whatever points [he had] made with parallel examples from European history and literature, believing that these will aid in bringing the subject nearer to the comprehension of foreign readers” (xi).

Bridge between East and West

Thus, chapter by chapter Nitobe explains traditional values (such as justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity, honour, loyalty, self-control, etc.) with references from Japanese or other Eastern sources along with his own anecdotal accounts, in parallel with Western sources and traditions. His point is clear: Japanese people are not special or so different from Westerners, but rather, they are just like anyone else. Nitobe explains his intention in his own words:

As you see, what I wrote in *Bushido* were all elementary things which every Japanese knows. So, I did not intend it for a Japanese audience but for foreigners who seem to think that the Japanese are really a very strange people. I wanted to show in it that the Japanese are not really so different, that you can find similar ideas to those of the Japanese even in the West, thought under a slightly different guise, and that there is no East or West as far as human beings are concerned. (Cited in Ota, 1995, 250)

How successful Nitobe was in presenting things about the East and West on an equal plane is debatable. There is plenty of criticism about Nitobe’s *Bushido* in this regard. Especially about how samurai virtues, so lyrically and poetically presented in *Bushido*, created illusions of how “special” the Japanese people and culture were in the reader’s mind (Ota, 1995; Powles, 1995). However, considering the historical context, Nitobe’s original intention was valid. Nitobe had been resentful over unequal treaties between Japan and the United States ever since he was a student in Baltimore. To him, the principle of equality in international relations must be upheld on the mutual understanding among the nations.

Bridge between the Past and the Future

Writing *Bushido* also gave Nitobe an opportunity to reexamine the virtues from his *samurai* heritage of the past, alongside his future direction as a Christian (Quaker) in new Japan equipped with a constitutional monarchy and a budding democratic government. The notion of *bushidō* (warrior's way) clearly belongs to old Japan. Nitobe asserts, now is the time to "prepare for an honourable burial" for *bushidō* because, he states, "[t]he history of the world confirms the prophecy that 'the meek shall inherit the earth.' A nation that sells its birthright of peace, and backslides....makes a poor bargain indeed!" (Nitobe, 1906, 187) Therefore, he continues, "the moral system of Feudal Japan, like its castles and its armories, will crumble into dust and new ethics rise phoenix-like to lead New Japan in her path of progress" (189).

In other words, the military aspects of the warrior class of the past would die out. However, the best elements of Japanese culture (justice, courage, honor, etc.) must be inherited and incorporated into a new ethical system for new Japan, which Nitobe identified in his later publications as *heimindō*. *Heimindō* literally means "commoner's way" or "peaceful people's way" as opposed to *bushidō* ("warrior's way" or "military person's way") (Nitobe, *Zenshū*, vol. 4, 538-539). In Nitobe's (Quaker) pacifist ideal, the world is seen moving from the warring past to the peaceful future. This view is most explicit in the final chapter of *Bushido*, where he argues, *bushidō*'s "schools of martial prowess or civic honour may be demolished, but its light and its glory will long survive their ruins. Like its symbolic flower, after it is blown to the four winds, it will still bless mankind with the perfume with which it will enrich life" (192).

Two Bridges as Symbolism Today

The two bridges, between cultures and time, seem to be useful tools of analysis in our own lives today. Each one of us, in a way, is a symbolic bridge of our circumstances and historical contexts, bridging space and time. That we are symbolic bridges in our own lives is perhaps more evident and pronounced among those of us who live and work using multiple languages or are of mixed family heritages, consciously negotiating the contrasting traditions in daily life. Chances are, Canadians with Japanese origins are most likely to embody mixed heritages, considering the high percentage of interracial marriages among Japanese-Canadians during the postwar era. The Japanese in Canada are identified as "the visible minority group most likely to marry or live common-law with a partner who does not share their ethnic heritage" (Makabe, 2005, 122).

Typical, then, is the case of my son, whose mother is of English-Scottish descent and father (myself), a new immigrant from Japan that landed in Canada in the early 1990s after several years of studying on a student visa. My son's experience on Remembrance Day a few years back illustrates his role as a "bridge" in time and space.

A WWII veteran visited my son's grade 9 class and talked about his combat experience in Europe. After the veteran's talk, my son apparently spoke up and shared his Japanese grandmother's wartime experience in Japan. That is, his grandmother was a schoolgirl coming home after school in rural Shizuoka. When she saw a U.S. fighter plane descending towards her, she let go of her bicycle on the dirt road in the midst of rice paddies, and hid herself in the roadside ditch. The low-flying fighter flew passed while machine-gunning her abandoned bike.

"It was interesting," my son told me, "I was the only kid in the class who had *both sides* of the war in the family." I said, "That's really brave of you for sticking out in class like that, telling the Japanese side of the story." Then I asked, "Didn't it put you in an awkward position, being Japanese and all?" "No, not at all," replied my son, "Everyone loves Japan."

Born in Victoria during the turn of the millennium, my son is obviously a product of his time. To him and to his peers, Japan represents soft power, not monstrous military power. Thus, anything associated with Japan (e.g., video games, anime and Harajuku fashion) nowadays has a "cool" factor. Representing "both sides" to his peers with his stories is my son's way of being a *synchronic* bridge. To him, Japanese-Canadian's wartime hardship in the internment camps is something he learned indirectly from his history class, even if he directly enjoys the equality hard-won by Japanese-Canadians and other visible minorities in postwar Canada. My son also enjoys frequent visits to Japan, prosperous under its postwar "pacifist" Constitution, an indirect legacy of Nitobe's, which until recent years had never been seriously threatened (Suzuki, 2015). "Both sides" to him are experiences of his Japanese father's families and that of his "mainstream" Canadian mother's families, which include a long line of church ministers, some of whom served as missionaries to First Nations in northern British Columbia, being involved in Native residential schools. These are the heritages he shall bridge, I expect, *diachronically* through his life.

Each of us bridge time and space in our own unique circumstances. One's own bridge may or may not neatly fit into the predominant national narratives or the ethnic community narratives. It is perhaps our own responsibility to consciously and conscientiously negotiate the terrain of human relationships, and

to curve out footings for our own bridges to build upon, as we travel through our lives' journeys. Nitobe closes his *Bushido* by quoting a Quaker poet, as follows:

*The traveller owns the grateful sense
Of sweetness near, he knows not whence,
And, pausing, takes with forehead bare
The benediction of the air.*

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), "Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl"

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