



# Paging Dr. Nitobe! Social Fevers, Moral Levers, and Doctored Traditions in Bushido: The Soul of Japan. (Thesis + Soundtrack Album)

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Paging Dr. Nitobe!

Social Fevers, Moral Levers, and Doctored Traditions in

*Bushido: The Soul of Japan.*

(Thesis + Soundtrack Album)

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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## Abstract

Nitobe Inazo's popular book, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, was an important effort to enshrine a long-standing national identity in Japan with the development of *bushido*, or the "way of the warrior." This identity was crafted at the time when the samurai—a status formally defined by warrior consciousness—were themselves being forced to retreat from the national stage. Their cultural charisma shored up a newly crafted cultural institution (*bushido*) which was posited as the heart and soul of Japanese identity—an invented tradition meant to unify the Japanese domestically and to set Japan apart on the global stage.

This research sought to understand, from a literary standpoint, how Nitobe crafted a unifying Japanese identity through the invention of tradition. I identified and researched an array of scholars who provided insight into invented traditions as an analytical framework, as well as pre-modern and modern Japanese history. Nitobe's professed Christianity, mastery of the English language, and prolific use of Western allusions likely helped his presentation of *bushido* as the soul of Japan to be more compelling, engaging, and relatable to Western audiences.

The academic, artistic, and religious profiles of a select few in Nitobe's Western audience appear to have influenced their responses in terms of their literary tones, emphases on Japanese/Western cultural parallels and affinities, as well as levels of skepticism and opportunism. Yet, even the most skeptical of these Westerners indirectly acknowledged how Nitobe's *Bushido*, through the cultural charisma of the samurai,

addressed a national desire to weave a distinctively Japanese cultural tapestry of virtue-ethics, inspirational symbols, and patriotic traditions.

For each chapter of the thesis, I created an original song that artistically expresses the themes and core concepts. A lyric excerpt is presented as an epigraph at the opening of each chapter, and the lyrics of the full song are presented at each chapter's closing. A related footnote for each song is linked to an audio-visual presentation of the song, all playable on my website: <https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

Frontispiece

Paging Dr. Nitobe (Prelude)<sup>1</sup>



Fellow Johns Hopkins Alumnus Nitobe Inazo

Source: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022

<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>

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<sup>1</sup>“Paging Dr. Nitobe” Thesis Soundtrack Preludes by Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father Bola Adamolekun, mother Wura Adamolekun, brothers Damola and Wale Adamolekun, and sisters Debra and Dara Adamolekun. I am appreciative of your lifelong support in my academic and artistic endeavors.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis director, Professor Ian Miller, and my thesis advisor, Professor Doug Bond. Your guidance, support, graciousness, and utmost patience have been blessings beyond measure.

In addition, thank you to Ms. Cherie Potts for your expert assistance and support with copy editing and formatting under a very tight deadline.



## Table of Contents

Frontispiece	v
Dedication	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Figures	x
List of Songs	xi
Key Words Defined	xii
Chapter I. Heart and Soul (Pre-Modern Social Fevers)	1
Samurai Loyalists	2
Modernism versus Traditionalism	3
A Western Perspective	4
Heart and Soul	8
Chapter II. Moments Ago (Post-Modern Identity Disorder)	9
Moments Ago	14
Chapter III. Sweet Elixir for the Masses (Doctored Traditions)	15
Inventing a Social Construct	16
Chapter IV. Imperial Rescript (Loyalty)	23
Innately Distinct (Moral Lever)	24
Imperial Rescript	27
Chapter V. A Different <i>Wa(y)</i> (Interclass Solidarity)	31
Buddhism and <i>Bushido</i> (Moral Lever)	33
Samurai and Commoners	35
Women and Socialists	37
The Eta Caste	38
Middle Class Erasure	39
Chapter VI. Bridge Across the Pacific (A Space Odyssey and Postlude)	43
Maurice Browne: A Space Odyssey	44
Déjà vu: Basil Hall Chamberlain	45
James Scherer	47

Nathaniel Schmidt.....	48
Conclusion .....	50
References .....	50

## List of Figures

Figure 1.	Three Samurai in Armor .....	7
Figure 2.	Moments Ago.....	13
Figure 3.	Sweet Elixir for the Masses .....	21
Figure 4.	Emperor Meiji.....	27
Figure 5.	A Different <i>Wa(y)</i> .....	38
Figure 6.	1891: A Space Odyssey (Monolith Column).....	48

List of Songs<sup>2</sup>

Paging Dr. Nitobe (Preludes).....v  
Heart and Soul (Pre-Modern Social Fevers).....8  
Moments Ago (Post-Modern Identity Disorder).....14  
Sweet Elixir for the Masses (Doctored Traditions) .....22  
Imperial Rescript (to Soldiers and Sailors).....28  
A Different *Wa(y)*.....39  
Bridge Across the Pacific (A Space Odyssey) and (Postludes).....49

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<sup>2</sup>“Paging Dr. Nitobe!” Thesis Soundtrack Album/Listing by Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

## Key Words Defined

<i>bakufu</i>	tent government
<i>bunmei</i>	civilization
<i>bushido</i>	way of the warrior
<i>daimyo</i>	Lord
<i>dhyâna</i>	a Buddhist principle
<i>goshi</i>	Country samurai (郷士), for example, <i>Tosa Goshi</i> ( <i>goshi</i> of the <i>Tosa</i> clan)
<i>kokuminteki no kannen</i>	a sense of nation
Meiji	bright governance
<i>Mibunsei</i>	status system
<i>nengu</i>	a land tax or annual tribute
<i>Shishi</i>	Loyalist samurai, or men of high purpose
<i>wa</i>	a signifier of Japanese collectivism

## Chapter I

### Heart and Soul (Pre-Modern Social Fevers)

*We used to play that song “Heart and Soul.”  
We’re losing our heart and soul.<sup>3</sup>*

An overwhelming consensus exists among historians that a major factor leading to the Meiji revolutionaries’ overthrow of the Tokugawa Bakufu was the political alignment of key “outer” domains (*tozama daimyo*) against the Tokugawa Shogun, and his failure to rally enough support from the rest.<sup>4</sup> By 1867, anti-Bakufu activists had begun to assert themselves in domains such as Satsuma and Choshu, often blocking their respective *daimyo* (lord) from providing meaningful support to the Tokugawa regime, even those who may have wanted to find a path to collaboration.<sup>5</sup> According to historian Andrew Gordon, crystallizing among shogunal officials “in daimyō castles, and in the private academies where politically concerned samurai debated history and policy, was a new conception of Japan as a single nation, to be defended and governed as such.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from “[Heart and Soul](https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/heart-and-soul-pre-modern-social-fevers)” by Demo Adamolekun:  
<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/heart-and-soul-pre-modern-social-fevers>

<sup>4</sup> W. G. Beasley, “Politics and the Samurai Class Structure in Satsuma, 1858-1868,” *Modern Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1967): 47–57.

<sup>5</sup> Beasley, “Politics,” 47–57.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan from Tokugawa to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 51.

W. G. Beasley's micro-level research into Tokugawa-era politics and the samurai class structure supports Gordon's macro-level view of Japan's budding national consciousness. Beasley's study of the Tosa and Satsuma *goshi* (country samurai) determined that poverty alone was not enough to inspire samurai rebellions. But "a sense of worthiness, unrecognized, was." Class consciousness and national consciousness were in flux as Japan itself entered a period of crisis.<sup>7</sup>

### Samurai Loyalists

This unrecognized sense of worthiness was echoed by Gordon's characterization of these samurai as loyalist samurai, or "men of high purpose" (*shishi*) and one part of a complicated three-sided political dance of interest alignment with Bakufu diehards (especially councilors from smaller feudal domains, who wanted to bolster traditional Tokugawa authority by carrying out foreign policy and military and financial reforms on their own terms) and their powerful daimyo challengers (from the outer and collateral domains officials with backing from the imperial court) who utilized anti-foreign, pro-emperor rhetoric to gain relative political power.<sup>8</sup> The samurai loyalists were proud of their culture and traditions, with their birthright and training entitling them not only to serve their lords but, beyond that fueling a broader notion of the Japanese realm of embodied by the emperor. With idealist values of social reform many loyalists unequivocally backed violent action against the Tokugawa Bakufu in the name of an exalted emperor, and in defense of a national dignity they saw as besmirched by

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<sup>7</sup> Beasley, "Politics," 56.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon, *Modern History of Japan*, 53.

encroaching foreigners. It was these strong loyalist sentiments in Satsuma and Choshu that led to a revolutionary military alliance between the domain, ringing the Tokugawa's death knell—as the Bakufu military crackdown on the rebelling domains went even more poorly than its divide-and-conquer strategy of turning the daimyos against the revolutionary samurai factions. Soon after, the Tokugawa regime gave way to a restorationist coup in 1868. Eventually, the new government, arrayed under a figurehead emperor, would come to be known as Meiji, (“bright governance”), the reign name assigned to its young imperial leader.

### Modernism versus Traditionalism

The seminal conflict facing the new Meiji government (like its Russian rival and other latecomers to industrialization) was how to strike a balance between the necessities of Western-style modernization and a surging sense of “traditional” authenticity developed as a counterbalance to the disorienting pace of modernizing change. Defining this traditional authenticity, advocated by the samurai loyalists and others, was an ethos of a national consciousness that the Meiji government sought to affirm and nurture through its policies of political unification and a centralized bureaucracy, all while advancing a pragmatic foreign policy agenda of Westernization. To preserve the nation in the face of Euro-American imperialism, the leaders of the newly centralizing state—many of them radical mid- and lower-level samurai from rebellious Western domains such as Satsuma and Choshu—advocated for radical political-economic change. Consequently, the Meiji government abolished a 260-year-old tradition of *daimyo* (lord) domains and shifted to an integrated national polity in 1869, with the domains replaced



by prefectures that were led by Meiji government-appointed governors who had largely been bought off by the government.<sup>9</sup> Thus, feudalism eventually gave way to a modern state organized under the sign of civilization (*bunmei*). The Meiji government's key concern then became crafting an identity that would suit the demands of Westernization without sacrificing the emerging sense of unitary national authenticity, an accusation leveled against the Meiji government by now-former samurai who perceived the rapid Meiji-era modernization (particularly the abolition of samurai privileges and status) as a betrayal of Japan's national identity and traditional authenticity. Such sentiments led to domestic strife through the course of the 1870s, often turning into violent rebellions led by former samurai against other former samurai in power.

As Mark Ravina<sup>10</sup> and Charles Yates<sup>11</sup> have argued, the failure of the Satsuma Rebellion marked the dying gasp of an alternative politics that continued to elevate samurai status. It also marked a crisis of consciousness for some, who perceived a country that risked coming loose from traditional moorings like the status system (*mibunsei*).

#### A Western Perspective

With his flair for the caustic, British Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain remarked on the Meiji regime's political conundrum:

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon, Andrew, 2002 p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Mark J. Ravina, "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, 'Seppuku', and the Politics of Legend," *Journal of Asian Studies*. 69, no. 3 (2010): 691–721.

<sup>11</sup> Charles L. Yates, "Saigō Takamori in the Emergence of Meiji Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994): 449–474.

On the one hand, it [needed to] make good to the outer world the new claim that Japan differs in no essential way from the nations of the West, unless, indeed, it be by way of superiority. On the other hand, it [had to] manage restive steeds at home, where ancestral ideas and habits [clashed] with new dangers arising from an alien material civilisation hastily absorbed.<sup>12</sup>

Chamberlain then provided a contemporary observation of engineered nationalism as political solution in the late Meiji period:

Everything foreign [in Japan] was then hailed as perfect-- everything old and national was contemned. Sentiment grew democratic, as American democratic ideals were understood. Love of country seemed likely to yield to a humble bowing down before foreign models. Officialdom not unnaturally took fright at this abdication of national individualism. Evidently something must be done to turn the tide. Accordingly, patriotic sentiment was appealed to through the throne, whose hoary antiquity had ever been a source of pride to Japanese literati, who loved to dwell on the contrast between Japan's unique line of absolute monarchs and the short-lived dynasties of China.<sup>13</sup>

Chamberlain's attribution of Meiji "national individualism" to Western encroachment is borne out in the historical record—perhaps most notably in Carol Gluck's book, *Japan's Modern Myths*. She contends that morality and a "sense of nation" became major ideological drivers of the Japanese government in the late Meiji period, culminating in, among other records, the 1890 Rescript on Education, which elevated native values and social ethics to civil morality and an index of what it meant to be Japanese.<sup>14</sup> Shielded by the goodwill toward an emperor in name, the Meiji oligarchs wielded power, as ideology and tradition were now one: a new religion, which

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<sup>12</sup> Basil Hall Chamberlain, *The Invention of a New Religion* (Champaign, IL: Book Jungle, 2010). Available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2510/2510-h/2510-h.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 116-126.

Chamberlain noted, “still [lacked] one important item—a sacred book.”<sup>15</sup> All that was left was for an intellectual voice, amongst a burgeoning educated Japanese elite, to rally solidarity by seizing on perhaps the only undeniable and unifying force in Japanese politics at the time: “a sense of nation” (*kokuminteki no kannen*).<sup>16</sup>

This thesis argues that Nitobe’s popular book, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, was an important effort to enshrine a durable national identity for Japan with the fabrication of *bushido* (“way of the warrior”). This notion of identity was crafted when samurai themselves were being forced to retreat from the national stage. Their cultural charisma shored up a newly crafted cultural institution, *bushido*, which was posited as the heart and soul of Japanese identity, an invented tradition meant to unify the Japanese domestically and to set Japan apart on the global stage.

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<sup>15</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.

<sup>16</sup> Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 113.



Figure 1. Three Samurai in Armor.

Source: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022.

<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>

Heart and Soul  
(Pre-Modern Social Fevers)<sup>18</sup>

*Heart and Soul, we used to play that song heart and soul  
 On that old wooden piano, we're losing our heart and soul*

*One Kublai Khan is starting to harass the innocent  
 He persecutes he finds excuses obstacles he's sent  
 How long will it take as the lovers try to stand their ground  
 They're doing the best they know how under the circumstance*

*Believers will not back down we'll always have our eyes set on the prize*

*Mind flees to the sea, she's waiting for me  
 Bound shackled and seized, fixating on me  
 I don't want to be seen; y'all mean mugging me  
 Eyes looking so keen; you won't like what you see*

*Sometimes it takes being a victim for all the good to die in you so soon*

*Heart and Soul, we used to play that song heart and soul  
 On that old wooden piano, we're losing our heart and soul  
 And letting go*

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<sup>18</sup> By Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

## Chapter II.

### Moments Ago (Post-Modern Identity Disorder)

*Take me back to when my heart still could feel  
Take me back to when this part of me could heal  
Take me back to when my heart became part of  
Moments Ago<sup>19</sup>*

Nitobe Inazo's invention of *bushido* at the turn of the nineteenth century was meant to address the problem of reconciling domestic unity while also establishing a national identity geopolitically in a time of rapid change and political uncertainty. Nitobe's book presented national loyalty and inter-class solidarity as traditional and virtuous elements of a samurai archetype that historically infused and would ultimately come to define Japanese ethics, character, and identity. Originally written in English and tailored to a Western audience, Nitobe's invented tradition simultaneously evoked intrigue, skepticism, and inspiration among Westerners. Historian Eiko Ikegami dismissed the myth of "Japanese exceptionalism" (an innate sense of social solidarity and national loyalty) by positing that Meiji Japan's development of a national identity required "working out a relationship between conflicting identities."

The archetypal conflict between traditionalism and modernism is characteristic of nation-states that were late to the Industrial Age, such as Japan and Russia, because

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<sup>19</sup> Excerpt from "[Moments Ago](https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/moments-ago-post-modern-identity-disorder)" by Demo Adamolekun:  
<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/moments-ago-post-modern-identity-disorder>

sustaining popular loyalty after the collapse of an old social order can be challenging without a powerful symbol or compelling (even if invented) tradition. Nitobe's *Bushido* provided a loosely factual but nonetheless compelling and unifying narrative that, along with the symbol of the emperor, gave the Meiji government political cover to adopt otherwise divisive Western reforms. The reforms were crucial for the Japanese state to compete against the expansionist Western powers without alienating the Meiji oligarchs' political base of support, particularly the nostalgic traditionalists, who were well represented amongst the samurai and whose rallying cries called on their compatriots to defiantly and uncompromisingly embrace their Japanese cultural heritage in the face of Western encroachment.

This early Meiji-era identity crisis of competing traditionalist and modernist visions was resolved in the latter's favor politically because of two institutional failures under the Meiji government's Tokugawa predecessor, which brought modern reforms: (1) Western imperialist encroachment revealed glaring flaws in Japan's political institutions and sparked inter-class solidarity in calls for modern institution-building, and (2) social tensions evolved into peasant rebellions and popular movements that demanded modern reforms.

However, when a series of reforms in the 1870s stripped the samurai of their economic and traditional privileges, large groups of alienated and discontented samurai took part in rebellions that fractured the political coalition and brought the Meiji government to power. Moreover, as the new Meiji leadership slowly evolved into a smaller and unaccountable oligarchy of former samurai from Satsuma and Chōshū,

popular rights activists accused the Meiji government of tyranny, leading to further societal fractures that threatened the Meiji government.<sup>20</sup>

A lack of institutional accountability led to the Meiji government's headlong drive toward Westernization, which resulted in a conservative Confucian revivalism that inspired the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education<sup>21</sup> amid fears Japan was sacrificing its cultural identity and unleashing social anarchy. In addition to the Meiji elites' use of the Rescript on Education (particularly its Confucian emphasis on loyalty and filial piety) to preserve their power by fusing ideology with morality and patriotism for social control, Gluck's historical research also provided socio-political context related to Nitobe's recollection that Westerners were unable to grasp how Japan imparted a moral education to citizens without some form of religious instruction,<sup>22</sup> which had been in decline since the fall of the Tokugawa.<sup>23</sup>

But then the political alignment of moralists and traditionalists grew stronger, and their voices grew louder. Such was the case with the Governor of Kagawa, who declared the following: "In the days of the domains, a samurai learned as a child the will to die for his lord, but we cannot hope for that today. Still, we should communicate this point to the Governor and request an imperial decision"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon, *Modern History of Japan*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Oleg Benesch, "The Samurai Next Door: Chinese Examinations of the Japanese Martial Spirit," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 38 (2014): 132.

<sup>22</sup> Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 116.

<sup>23</sup> Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 116.



Nitobe's book repurposed a diverse and disparate tradition of samurai ethics into a unified cultural institution that was national in scope and Japanese in identity.<sup>25</sup> This thesis argues that through presenting loyalty and inter-class solidarity as traditional and virtuous elements of samurai character, Nitobe framed *bushido* as the core of a Japanese identity and ethic, free from foreign influences. It was embodied in a set of virtues that were sanctioned by his invented tradition, and suitable to distinguishing Japan globally and contributing to unity at home.

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28 Benesch, "The Samurai Next Door," 132.



Figure 2. "Moments Ago"

Source: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022.

<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>

Moments Ago  
(Post-Modern Identity Disorder)<sup>27</sup>

*Take me back to when my heart still could feel*

*Moments ago how were you supposed to know  
 Daddy and Mommy were showing the door  
 Those hips so defined like they're curved in some stone  
 Those lips so inclined to remind you that oh she's gone*

*Moments ago before you washed ashore  
 The most dangerous game just showed up at your door  
 You're dead to him now everything's so passé  
 He's feeling blasé, sips rosé as he toys with his prey*

*Take me back to when my heart still could feel  
 Take me back to when this part of me could heal  
 Take me back to when my heart became part of you  
 Moments Ago*

*Moments ago how were you supposed to know  
 Sometimes you get more than you bargained for  
 Those lips so defiant they won't throw you a bone  
 Those hips so reclined at least you won't be leaving alone*

*Moments ago before you washed ashore  
 The most dangerous game just showed up at your door  
 You're dead to him now everything's so passé  
 He's feeling blasé, sips rosé as he toys with his prey*

*Take me back to when my heart still could feel  
 Take me back to when this part of me could heal  
 Take me back to when my heart became part of you  
 Moments Ago*

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<sup>27</sup> By Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

### Chapter III.

#### Sweet Elixir for the Masses (Doctored Traditions)

*Voltaire and other eighteenth-century philosophers, who held religions to be the invention of priests, have been scorned as superficial by later investigators. But was there not something in their view, after all?*<sup>28</sup>

*Religion is the opiate of the masses.*<sup>29</sup>

*Puff of smoke take me there, where ugly folks will disappear  
With shallow friends my insides weep, for the hollow man about to leap  
Sweet Elixir, come here I hear you soothe  
I can't bear to taste the truth.*<sup>30</sup>

One cannot fully appreciate *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* as an invention of tradition without an understanding of the extent to which the engineering of nationalism was a political imperative for the fledgling Meiji government from 1868 onward. It is the nation's leaders cautiously nurtured, growing nationalist (and later imperialist) ambitions that were vociferously supported by both a new national press and opposition politicians. At the same time, the Meiji leadership also faced threats in the form of political protests and even violent attacks from its opposition—first from former samurai, then laborers

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<sup>28</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.

<sup>29</sup> Famously attributed to Karl Marx.

<sup>30</sup> Excerpt from “[Sweet Elixir for the Masses](https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/sweet-elixir-for-the-masses-doctored-traditions)” by Demo Adamolekun:  
<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/sweet-elixir-for-the-masses-doctored-traditions>

and farmers, eventually political leftists such as socialists, and even the perceived threat of feminism.<sup>31</sup> Invented tradition can serve as a cultural counterbalance in favor of conservative change (often quite ambitious, even revolutionary, in actual impact) rather than radical revolution that might invert the social order.

### Inventing a Social Construct

As I make these arguments, I draw on historian Eric Hobsbawm's model of "invented tradition," using an approach crafted in European historiography, to understand the political pressures and social tensions of the Meiji era (1868–1912). That was a time of tremendous change; its social and political hierarchies were in deep flux requiring new methods of "establishing bonds of loyalty and the subsequent invention of social traditions in institutions with political purposes in mind."<sup>32</sup>

To support their contention, Hobsbawm and his colleagues analyzed case studies in Europe, Africa, India, and Japan, which revealed how change and uncertainty regarding interpersonal relationships, politics, and national identity led to an effort to craft unique "traditions," many of them later (or even immediately) taken as authentic reflections of history rather than cultural invention. In the case of Japan, Ikegami showed how samurai "warriors" were, by the close of the Tokugawa era, often better understood as bureaucrats and functionaries.<sup>33</sup> The warrior origins of the samurai status had been

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<sup>31</sup> Gordon, *Modern History of Japan*, 139.

<sup>32</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 263.

<sup>33</sup> Eiko Ikegami, "Citizenship and National Identity in Early Meiji Japan, 1868–1889: A Comparative Assessment," *International Review of Social History* 40 (1995): 185–221.

born more than two centuries before the fall of the Tokugawa *bakufu* (“tent government”), which was itself created in a period of violent conflict.

Stephen Vlastos’ “Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan”<sup>34</sup> (a later study inspired by Hobsbawm) made a broadly similar case. He argued that cultural traditions are typically chosen, not inherited, given that many “age-old” Japanese cultural practices and values are largely modern creations.

The most relevant to this thesis is *wa*, which signifies Japanese collectivism. In chapter 3 of *Mirror of Modernity*, Ito Kimio reinterprets the invention of *wa* as

a process through which members of the ruling class revised and reorganized part of Japan’s ancient history into new symbols at a time when they faced the challenge of integrating the nation and inculcating a national consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

Kimio argues that *wa* is an invention of tradition à la Hobsbawm through a modern repurposing and fusion of Prince Shotoku’s nationalism with the collective spirit of *wa* apparent in the Seventeen-Article Constitution, a document authored by Prince Shōtoku in 604.

### Engineering Nationalism as Invented Tradition

Drawing on work from Gordon and others, I contend that Hobsbawm, Vlastos, and Kimio’s arguments are apparent in the way the Meiji government’s tenuous grip on power led to its leadership tasking three cabinet offices with inspiring a nationalist ethos

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<sup>34</sup> Stephen Vlastos, *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Ito Kimio, “The Invention of *Wa* and the Transformation of Prince Shotoku in Modern Japan.” In *Mirror of Modernity*, by Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 37.

and promoting stronger loyalty to Meiji Japan. These agencies were the Home Ministry, the Army, and the Ministry of Education. However, their goals (respectively) were at work across the government administration.<sup>36</sup> They sought to

streamline the system of local government by forcing the nation's many tiny hamlets to merge into larger administrative units, raise military preparedness among men who might be called to active duty in an emergency, and promote nationalism and respect for authority by adding two years to compulsory education in 1907 (among other missions).<sup>37</sup>

Amid this rising tide of engineered Japanese nationalism and a surging of educated Japanese elites into public intellectuals, Nitobe Inazo emerged as a powerful voice, eager to unify the fracturing nation by inventing and framing the tradition of *bushido* as core to the Japanese identity. For Nitobe, *bushido* was a set of positive virtues, sanctioned by (invented or reformulated) tradition, with the goal of ensuring Japanese national solidarity and global distinction in the context of global imperial competition. Japan needed a distinguishing ethos to hold its own in a context where assertions of “barbarism” could lead to the depredations of colonization. China, traditional hegemon in the region, was already under attack when Nitobe wrote *Bushido*.

Importantly, however, as historian G. Cameron Hurst highlighted in his critique of *bushido* as an invented tradition, it is not to

argue that the moral values Nitobe discusses in *Bushido* were not present in the Japanese people in Meiji or pre-Meiji times or is not today for that matter. Rather [the invention of tradition] is simply that there was a normative system of ethical thought, a “code” of behavior that was first

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<sup>36</sup> Gordon, *Modern History of Japan*, 139.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon, *Modern History of Japan*, 139.

universal among the samurai and then in fact became the “soul” of all Japanese citizens.<sup>38</sup>

Here, Hurst echoed the same argument made by Basil Chamberlain, one of the earliest critics of *bushido*—and a British Japanologist and Nitobe’s contemporary. Chamberlain argued that while chivalrous individuals existed in Japan (and in all countries, at all periods), *bushido* as an institution or code never existed in Japan, nor did the word *bushido* appear in a native or foreign dictionary before 1900.<sup>39</sup>

Hurst attributed the historical distortions of *bushido* primarily to Nitobe being “the least qualified Japanese of his age to have been informing anyone of Japan’s history or culture,” especially given that Nitobe was educated mostly in special Meiji-era English schools and grew up isolated “spatially, culturally, religiously, and even linguistically from the currents of Meiji Japan.”<sup>40</sup> Chamberlain aligned more with Hobsbawm’s model of invented traditions, which served as tool of engineering nationalism:

Thus, within the space of a short lifetime, the new Japanese religion of loyalty and patriotism [had] emerged into the light of day. The feats accomplished with Russia show that the simple ideal which it offers is capable of inspiring great deeds.<sup>41</sup>

Chamberlain’s argument linking an invented *bushido* tradition to engineering Japanese loyalty and patriotism with the Meiji government’s quest for domestic hegemony, addresses the international portion of the Meiji rulers’ political imperative.

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<sup>38</sup> G. Cameron Hurst, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal.” *Philosophy East and West* 40, no. 4 (1990): 513.

<sup>39</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Hurst, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty,” 511–512

<sup>41</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*, 1.



Relative to another Meiji political aim of national unity, Oleg Benesch's research provides more insight. He showed that as *bushido* became popular during and after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 (Japan shocked much of the world by emerging as the first non-European power to defeat a European power in modern state-driven warfare), it was adopted by a wide array of Meiji institutions to promote nationalism. For example, Meiji-era martial arts discourse was infused with an artificial sense of *bushido* values, legacy, and clout, despite the fact that many forms of these martial arts had been codified and accepted in their modern forms during the Meiji era, sparking a growth in martial arts participation as nationalist sentiments grew during the Sino-Japanese war.<sup>42</sup> One of the natural consequences of this engendered nationalism was the demeaning of the foreign as "not real" or "not Japanese." A samurai Quaker diplomat like Nitobe, with both a foreign and domestic audience, relied heavily on the invocation of *bushido* as a largely unassailable patriotic credential.

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<sup>42</sup>Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).



Figure 3. Sweet Elixir for the Masses.

Source: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022.

<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>

Sweet Elixir for the Masses  
(Doctored Traditions)<sup>44</sup>

*Puff of Smoke take me there; where I'll be coaxed till I don't care; that the shallow end is  
 getting deep and the jello bends are getting steep  
 Sweet Elixir, come here and stay with me, there's nowhere I'd rather be, Sweet Elixir*

*Deceiver, sweet prince of lies, my sweet elixir, whet my appetite  
 Forever and a day takes me to finding you (so kick back forever and a day)  
 Your sorry eyes won't say: shaky truce binding you (we'll be here forever and a day)  
 Somebody's being lied to yea; Somebody's playing the fool yeah (because)*

*I know they showed you no emotion; and in return you showed a lack of devotion  
 Look at what they've done; got you on the run  
 Know that my being here for you is no coincidence  
 Know that my being here for you means it's time to dance*

*Puff of smoke, take me there, where ugly folks will disappear  
 With shallow friends, my insides weep for the hollow man about to leap  
 Sweet Elixir, come here I hear you soothe; I can't bear to taste the truth*

*Made me feel richer than God, my lovely liar, worthless alibi  
 Forever and a day takes me to finding you (so kick back forever and a day)  
 Your sorry eyes won't say: shaky truce binding you (we'll be here forever and a day)  
 Somebody's being lied to yeah; Somebody's playing the fool yeah (because)*

*I know they showed you no emotion; and in return you showed a lack of devotion  
 Look at what they've done; got you on the run  
 Know that my being here for you is for no coincidence  
 Know that my being here for you means it's time to dance*

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<sup>44</sup> By Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

## Chapter IV.

### Imperial Rescript (Loyalty)

*You ain't got no follow through  
Staring in the mirror at all the nothing you do  
You ain't made no nothing new  
You only have your love to prove;  
Your life to lose; Your love too!*<sup>45</sup>

Nitobe presented the pre-modern Japanese samurai as bound to a historic and institutional ethical system within a feudal construct, arguing that *bushido* “was an organic growth of decades and centuries of military career” that became an unwritten “code of moral principles which the knights were required or instructed to observe.”<sup>46</sup> In reality, however, there were some house laws, house precepts, and other documents written during the medieval period in Japan which upheld samurai moral values. These were widely disseminated in the Tokugawa era, when samurai literacy grew to be almost universal.<sup>47</sup> Although few works during this period explicitly used the term *bushido*, analyses of their ethical philosophies showed them to be at odds with Confucian precepts followed by the samurai at the time, with Confucian moralists dismissing the “way of the

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<sup>45</sup> Excerpt from “Imperial Rescript (to Soldiers and Sailors)” by Demo Adamolekun: <https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/imperioa-rescript-to-soldiers-and-sailors>

<sup>46</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Hurst, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty,” 515.

warrior” as outmoded feudal ideology.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps even more ironically, historians such as Hurst have found noteworthy discrepancies in several house laws and codes that call on samurai to practice loyalty, as well as myriad examples of disloyalty that disrupted medieval Japanese warrior life. Hurst concluded: “It would not be an exaggeration to say that most crucial battles in medieval Japan were decided by the defection—that is, the disloyalty—of one or more of the major vassals of the losing general.”<sup>49</sup>

#### Innately Distinct (Moral Lever)

Next, I argue that Nitobe’s presentations of *bushido* loyalty as distinct, and at times more virtuous than other national ethics, were literary cultural advertisements that framed *bushido* as the core of Japanese identity, an invented tradition meant to unify the Japanese with a cultural sovereignty basis for relatively illiberal governance. For example, Nitobe presented the virtue of loyalty as innate in the Japanese by claiming that his *bushido*-infused compatriots were “thoroughly imbued with loyalty to the sovereign and love of country;”<sup>50</sup> which were patriotic virtues he interpreted “more as impulses than as doctrine.”<sup>51</sup> Nitobe also argued that this Japanese loyalty was more virtuous than the Western conception because the “individualism of the West, which recognizes separate interests for father and son, husband and wife, necessarily brings into strong relief the duties owed by one to the other; but *bushido* held that the interest of the family

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<sup>48</sup> Hurst, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty,” 515.

<sup>49</sup> Hurst, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty,” 517.

<sup>50</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

and of the members thereof is intact—one and inseparable.”<sup>52</sup> It was on this basis of inseparable gendered interests and the expectation that men also yielded to their feudal superiors--- even at the expense of one’s individualism, that Nitobe used to rationalize inequality between the sexes; reasoning that there should not be different interests in a household and that sacrificial servility was extremely virtuous in both the *bushido* and Christian ethical traditions because it was not based on duty but a choice of loyalty.<sup>53</sup> Japan’s Shinto-based moral responsibility to the personal, familial and social were nonetheless duty based in their presentation,<sup>54</sup> which is not surprising given that a meaningful sense of national loyalty or institutional tradition is unlikely without a genuine sense of solidarity. Therefore, even though voluntary-based service was seen as more virtuous than a duty-based one, the practical organization of a society would require more commitment for all participants.

Yet, Nitobe later declared that *bushido* did not require one’s conscience to be enslaved by any lord or king---<sup>55</sup>which, at a cursory glance, seems to contradict his endorsement of sacrificial servility as an ethical precept. Crucially, however, Nitobe clarified that his conception of the freedom of conscience was limited by the following corollary: “Whatever Conscience approves is Rectitude, and whatever enables us to obtain the latter in conformity with the former is Courage.” All the same, Nitobe’s claim that *bushido* did not require one’s conscience to be enslaved by any lord or king

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<sup>52</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Nitobe, 2021

<sup>54</sup> Alfred Stead, *Japan by The Japanese* (repr., London: W. Heinemann, 1904), 269.

<sup>55</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

was not borne out in the historical record because (1) violations of shogunal laws were punished by death without regard to the gravity of the crime<sup>56</sup> (much less whether intended as an act of civil disobedience); (2) instead of protesting by ignoring offenses against the widely unpopular Laws of Compassion,<sup>57</sup> lower officialdom enforced them with the utmost severity (even punishing the innocent at times),<sup>58</sup> and (3) the “freedom of conscience” clause of the Meiji constitution proved meaningless when refusing to bow to the imperial signature led to moral outrage and public shaming.<sup>59</sup>

The Meiji rulers’ ability to limit constitutional checks on their rule was a direct political benefit from unifying the country--- particularly the moralists and traditionalists-- through an invention of tradition that turned the emperor from an abstract Japanese political symbol into a humanized religious father-figure, as an attack on Emperor Meiji would now be perceived by the Japanese as an attack on their national identity.

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<sup>56</sup> Beatrice Bodart Bailey, “The Laws of Compassion,” *Monumenta Nipponica*. 40, no. 2 (1985): 163–189.

<sup>57</sup> The Laws of Compassion made the mistreatment of animals a capital offense

<sup>58</sup> Bailey, Beatrice, 1985, 187-188

<sup>59</sup> Gordon, Andrew, 2002 p. 114

## Imperial Rescript

Nitobe presented the Meiji Emperor as “the bodily representative of Heaven on earth, blending in his person its power and its mercy,”<sup>60</sup> framing the emperor as a demigod—another modern invention, because for centuries the emperor had been nothing more than a figurehead:

The sober fact is that no nation probably has ever treated its sovereigns more cavalierly than the Japanese have done, from the beginning of authentic history down to within the memory of living men. Emperors have been deposed, emperors have been assassinated; for centuries every succession to the throne was the signal for intrigues and sanguinary broils. Emperors have been exiled; some have been murdered in exile. From the remote island to which he had been relegated one managed to escape, hidden under a load of dried fish.<sup>61</sup>

Japanologists and historians such as Gluck, Chamberlain, Hurst, and Gordon have done much to peel back the many layers of Meiji modern myths, particularly the idealistic portrayal of imperial authority and loyalty in Japan’s feudal era. Although the Meiji emperor still wielded highly limited power, the Meiji oligarchy—the real power behind the throne—went to great legal and propagandic lengths to create an imperial system in which the Meiji Emperor was the father of the nation and the focus of patriotic loyalty.<sup>62</sup> Accomplishing this feat was very important to the Meiji oligarchs because the link between the oligarchy and the emperor had not been established historically before

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<sup>60</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1-3.



the Meiji restoration,<sup>63</sup> so the oligarchs relied on the emperor's symbolic value for their own legitimacy.

This was an ancient pattern in Japanese history, of course, with shoguns and others claiming to represent the emperor while exercising their own political control. But the modern iteration was especially robust, with the emperor elevated through the work of the burgeoning mass media as well as the imperial rescripts' emphases on loyalty and social control (as observed by Basil Chamberlain):

But the schools are the great strongholds of the new propaganda. History is so taught to the young as to focus everything upon Imperialism, and to diminish as far as possible the contrast between ancient and modern conditions. The same is true of the instruction given to army and navy recruits.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ikegami, "Citizenship and National Identity," 191.

<sup>64</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.



Figure 4. Meiji

Source: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022.

<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>

Imperial Rescript (to Soldiers and Sailors)<sup>66</sup>

*You ain't got no follow through  
Staring in the mirror at all the nothing you do  
You ain't made no nothing new  
You only have your love to prove, your life to lose, your love too!*

*You ain't got no follow through  
Crying in a mirror that's laughing at you  
You ain't made no nothing new  
Same ship different day with you*

*So I sail the world trying to fill my void  
But no one's ever loved me quite like you*

*You ain't got no follow through  
Staring in a mirror at all the nothing you do  
You ain't made no nothing new  
You only have your life to prove, your love to lose, your life too!*

*You ain't got no follow through  
Crying in a mirror that's laughing at you  
You ain't made no nothing new  
Same ship different day with you*

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<sup>66</sup> By Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

## Chapter V.

A Different *Wa(y)* (Interclass Solidarity)

*I'm picking up where you left off, just in a different way.  
I'm telling them what you told them, just in a different way.  
You and me are alike, in our different ways.  
But there's this point where we fade, to our different shades.  
Don't lose hope . . . I won't let you down.  
Don't look down . . . I just let you go.<sup>67</sup>*

Nitobe's claim that "in manifold ways Bushido filtered down from the social class where it originated, and acted as leaven among the masses, furnishing a moral standard for the whole people"<sup>68</sup> exhibits the author's effort to help the nation unite domestically and distinguish itself on the global stage with an invented tradition of *bushido*. In the preface of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, Nitobe acknowledged that when he discussed the subject of religion with distinguished Belgian jurist Monsieur de Laveleye, the Westerner was stunned that Japan had no religious instruction in its schools, and he wondered aloud how a moral education was imparted. According to Nitobe, Monsieur de Laveleye's question

stunned [him] at the time. [He] could give no ready answer, for the moral precepts [he] learned in [his] childhood days, were not given in schools; and not until [he] began to analyze the different elements that formed [his]

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<sup>67</sup> Excerpt from "A Different *Wa(y)*" by Demo Adamolekun:  
<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/track/a-different-wa-y>

<sup>68</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

notions of right and wrong, did [he] find that it was Bushido that breathed them into [his] nostrils.<sup>69</sup>

When one considers Nitobe's claim of *bushido* infusing the Japanese with a unifying moral standard alongside his belief that "originality of character . . . as well [as] individuality is the sign of superior races and of civilizations already developed," it becomes evident that Nitobe's objectives in presenting *bushido* as the soul of Japan were for national unity and distinction internationally. Yet, Nitobe conceded that the samurai often abused their privileges and sometimes showed little regard for the rights of commoners to the point of others' merciful intervention--- a benevolence that Nitobe co-opted and attributed to *bushido* nonetheless:

How the spirit of Bushido permeated all social classes is also shown in the development of a certain order of men, known as *otoko-daté*, the natural leaders of democracy. Staunch fellows were they, every inch of them strong with the strength of massive manhood. At once the spokesmen and the guardians of popular rights, they had each a following of hundreds and thousands of souls who proffered in the same fashion that samurai did to daimio, the willing service of "limb and life, of body, chattels and earthly honor." Backed by a vast multitude of rash and impetuous working-men, those born "bosses" formed a formidable check to the rampancy of the two-sworded order.

I also point to four inherent problems with this framing of *bushido* vis-à-vis samurai leadership: (1) historical and textual evidence of the persecution of Japanese Buddhists and the minimization of Buddhism's philosophical influence on *bushido*, respectively; (2) historical evidence from the civil administration of early modern Japan reveals that the limited number of those employed in this capacity did not live in the towns they ruled (constraining samurai inspections of villages and interactions with commoners, which in turn led to the involvement of a relatively large number of village officials in civil administration);<sup>70</sup> (3) the plight of women, socialists, and the erasure of

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<sup>69</sup> Nitobe, 2021

<sup>70</sup> Kenichiro Aratake, "Samurai and Peasants in the Civil Administration of Early Modern Japan." *Public Goods Provision in the Early Modern Economy: Comparative Perspectives from Japan, China, and*

the Eta caste undermined Nitobe's framing of a *bushido*-inspired inter-class solidarity; and (4) Nitobe's erasure of other sources of virtuous leadership in his time, such as the new Meiji-era set of urbanized white-collar workers, who sought with increasing success to shape the ethics and politics of modern Japan.<sup>71</sup>

### Buddhism and *Bushido* (Moral Lever)

Nitobe acknowledged that Buddhism, which originated in India, influenced *bushido*, infusing a sense of calm trust in fate, a quiet submission to the inevitable. It gave the samurai a stoic composure in the face of danger or calamity and little fear of death. Nitobe cited Zen as the Japanese counterpart for the Buddhist principle of *dhyāna*, which “represents human effort to reach through meditation zones of thought beyond the range of verbal expression.”<sup>72</sup>

Supplementing this meditative element of Nitobe's *bushido* was Japanese Shintoism, which according to Nitobe, provided

what Buddhism failed to give . . . such loyalty to the sovereign, such reverence for ancestral memory, and such filial piety as are not taught by any other creed, were inculcated by the Shinto doctrines, imparting passivity to the otherwise arrogant character of the samurai.<sup>73</sup>

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*Europe*, edited by Masayuki Tanimoto and R. Bin Wong (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 53.

<sup>71</sup> David R. Ambaras, “Social Knowledge, Cultural Capital, and the New Middle Class in Japan, 1895-1912,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998): 1.

<sup>72</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

In reality, the historical interplay between Buddhism and Shintoism was more complex, however, as the establishment of state Shinto as a historical marker of the ethnic Japanese identity was invented in Meiji times and presented serious challenges to foreign religions such as Buddhism. Buddhist institutions went from being the official registries of all Japanese households during the Tokugawa period to being persecuted under a Meiji government weary of foreign threats and encroachment.<sup>74</sup> However, the government's policies against Buddhism were met with widespread protest, and the military was sent to quell uprisings in parts of Japan. The protests and military reaction to them led the state to realize that its harshest policies against Buddhism were not politically viable, and measures of reconciliation and incorporation of Buddhism into the state Shinto structure prevented further major outbreaks of violence, which could explain Nitobe's framing of *bushido*'s limited Buddhist influence (Buddhism still officially remained second in status to Shintoism throughout the Meiji period and beyond).<sup>75</sup> Finally, with regard to other major influences on *bushido*, Nitobe rationalized that "the teachings of Confucius were the most prolific source of Bushido . . . but [were] a confirmation of what the race instinct had recognized before his writings were introduced from China."<sup>76</sup> Nitobe also sought to bolster his position by arguing that even though *bushido* mainly borrowed its forms of expression from Chinese texts and sages, the sages

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<sup>74</sup> Benesch, *Inventing*.

<sup>75</sup> Oleg Benesch, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

were only being exploited to enrich the Japanese ethical vocabulary and in no way provided moral wisdom to the Japanese.<sup>77</sup>

Nitobe concluded his discussion of foreign influences on *bushido* by noting that “whatever the sources, the essential principles which Bushido imbibed from them and assimilated to itself, were few and simple.” Therefore, echoing Chamberlain’s perceptive (if not charitable) critique, one can reasonably conclude that Nitobe downplayed China’s major influence on *bushido* because they undermined his efforts to frame *bushido* as uniquely Japanese in order to distinguish Japan on the world stage:

The speeches put into the mouths of ancient Mikados are centos culled from the Chinese classics; that their names are in some cases derived from Chinese sources; and that the earliest Japanese historical narratives, the earliest known social usages, and even the centralised Imperial form of Government itself, are all stained through and through with a Chinese dye, so much so that it is no longer possible to determine what percentage of old native thought may still linger on in fragments here and there. In the face of all this, moral ideals, which were of common knowledge derived from the teaching of the Chinese sages, are now arbitrarily referred to the ‘Imperial Ancestors.’ Such, in particular, are loyalty and filial piety—the two virtues on which, in the Far-Eastern world, all the others rest.<sup>78</sup>

### Samurai and Commoners

The next major point to consider is how Japan’s historical administrative structure, which limited interactions between the samurai and the village commoners, undermined Nitobe’s claim that *bushido* filtered down from samurai class to the

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<sup>77</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.



commoners to set a unifying moral standard. In early modern Japan, the shogun and *daimyos* collected a land tax called *nengu*, or annual tribute, from commoners.

These monies funded samurai salaries in an administrative structure that shaped two notable obligations in the societal relationship between feudal lords, retainers/samurai, and village commoners.<sup>79</sup> The obligations were: (1) to pay retainers' salaries, feudal lords levied taxes on commoners but in return were ethically required to show mercy toward them;<sup>80</sup> and (2) the collection of these taxes (and governance of the domains in general) was based on a cooperative effort between the samurai and peasants who were delegated to represent their villages. Historian Kenichiro Aratake found that although the samurai and peasants who made up the group of village officials who were responsible for tax collection and public order maintenance, "the role of the samurai was even smaller than previously thought, which leads to the conclusion that their duties were proactively handled by the village headmen and other peasants."<sup>81</sup> Aratake's finding discredits Nitobe's historical framing of *bushido* as "filtering down" from the samurai to the masses of commoners because of their limited interaction, given the historical evidence showing that the Tokugawa-era samurai were essentially bureaucrats responsible for villages that were, in reality, administered by peasants who reported to the samurai living in castle domains.

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<sup>79</sup> Aratake, "Samurai and Peasants," 38.

<sup>80</sup> Aratake, "Samurai and Peasants," 38.

<sup>81</sup> Aratake, "Samurai and Peasants," 44–45.

## Women and Socialists

Inequality of women and the plight of socialists, coupled with the existence of an isolated and shunned group of Japanese known as the Eta caste, further undermined Nitobe's framing of a *bushido*-inspired inter-class solidarity. Nitobe conceded that under the guidance of *bushido*, a woman's life was one of perpetual self-sacrifice. In fact, since the rise of feudalism in Japan, women had been perceived as legal incompetents and mere appendages to a male patriarchy.<sup>82</sup> Nitobe rationalized that "when we think in how few respects men are equal among themselves, before law courts or voting polls, it seems idle to trouble ourselves with a discussion on the equality of sexes."<sup>83</sup> Advocating for incremental reforms that did not threaten the political and social order, Nitobe continued:

The whole teaching of Bushido was so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice, that it was required not only of woman but of man. Hence, until the influence of its Precepts is entirely done away with, our society will not realize the view rashly expressed by an American exponent of woman's rights, who exclaimed, 'May all the daughters of Japan rise in revolt against ancient customs!' Can such a revolt succeed? Will it improve the female status? Will the rights they gain by such a summary process repay the loss of that sweetness of disposition, that gentleness of manner, which are their present heritage? Was not the loss of domesticity on the part of Roman matrons followed by moral corruption too gross to mention? Can the American reformer assure us that a revolt of our daughters is the true course for their historical development to take? These are grave questions. Changes must and will come without revolts! In the meantime, let us see whether the status of the fair sex under the Bushido regimen was really so bad as to justify a revolt.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hsia, "Rethinking the Roles of Japanese Women," 310-311.

<sup>83</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

Nitobe's hesitancy to admit the plight of women in Japan was like the Meiji government's unwillingness to acknowledge the socialist movements that arose at the turn of the century but were ultimately drowned out by the nationalism of the Russo-Japanese war. The founders of Japanese socialism were disturbed by the stark inequalities and effects that characterized Japan's adoption of Western capitalism, particularly the extensive use of women and children, unusually long working hours, inhumane work conditions, the expansion of slums, the decrease of morality, and general human degradation.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the citizens experiencing these hardships often had no avenue to seek political change because of a lack of universal suffrage, as Nitobe acknowledged.<sup>86</sup>

#### The Eta Caste

The shunned Eta caste greatly undermined Nitobe's framing of a *bushido*-inspired inter-class solidarity. Although they have been part of Japanese society for centuries, the Eta remain little known in the world. Historians posit two theories regarding the development of the Eta caste in Japan: one based on the group's racial origins, and the other based on occupational association.<sup>87</sup> According to the racial origins theory, in ancient Japan the Yamato people, whom modern Japanese consider their ancestral prototype, subjugated and enslaved all other groups that were collectively referred to as

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<sup>85</sup> Hyman Kublin, "The Origins of Japanese Socialist Tradition," *Journal of Politics* 14, no. 2 (1952): 263.

<sup>86</sup> Nitobe, 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Hugh Smythe, and Yoshimasa Naitoh, "The Eta Caste in Japan," *Phylon (1940-1956)* no. 1 (1953): 19–27.

the Semmin. Later, Korean and Chinese immigrants to Japan introduced crafts such as leatherworking and animal rendering that were looked upon with disdain by the indigenous Japanese and embraced as trades by the Semmin; the latter's association with these trades led to them being shunned by the former. This occupation aversion merged with an easily associated racial disdain toward non-Japanese who engaged in isolated professions and ultimately led to the outsiders being known as the Eta caste—a shunned and underprivileged caste that became legally solidified by the time of the Tokugawa regime.<sup>88</sup> The fact that the Eta became viewed as dirty untouchables within a highly stratified Japanese society undercuts Nitobe's framing of *bushido* interclass solidarity.

#### Middle Class Erasure

The emergence of new middle-class reformers in the last decades of the Meiji era highlights Nitobe's erasure of other classes' moral leadership in his narrative of *bushido* interclass solidarity. This new middle-class that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century featured civil servants, professionals, educators, journalists, managers, and office workers. The key to their influence was their knowledge because, according to Ambaras, “it was produced and deployed under specific social and institutional conditions and because it functioned not simply to support a given social order, but in fact to constitute that order.”<sup>89</sup>

In late Meiji Japan, as Nitobe would have been aware, the increase in state and private capital that was taking place valued technologies that solved the problems of

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<sup>88</sup> Smythe and Naitoh, “Eta Caste,” 19-20.

<sup>89</sup> Ambaras, “Social Knowledge,” 3.

socializing workers and citizens, which in turn alleviated the tensions related to socioeconomic dislocations that threatened Meiji rule. Ambaras argued:

Through their production and dissemination of relevant social knowledge, new-middle-class professionals established their authority in a wide range of fields and increasingly defined “the patterns of public demand response” to their work—[as] such professionals not only presumed to tell the rest of society what was good and right for it; they also set the very terms of thinking about problems which fell in their domains.<sup>90</sup>

Ambaras’ work is important because it elucidates how other members of Japanese society contributed to setting cultural norms and moral standards, and it reveals the limited context provided by Nitobe’s narrative, which claimed:

The Precepts of Knighthood, begun at first as the glory of the elite, became in time an aspiration and inspiration to the nation at large; and though the populace could not attain the moral height of those loftier souls, *Yamato Damashii*, the Soul of Japan, ultimately came to express the *Volksggeist* of the Island Realm.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ambaras, “Social Knowledge,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> Nitobe, 2021.



Figure 5. A Different *Wa(y)*

Source: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022.

<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>

[A Different Wa\(y\)](#)<sup>93</sup>

*I'm picking up where you left off; just in a different way  
I'm telling them what you told them; just in a different way  
You and me are alike; in our different ways  
But there's this point where we fade to our different shades*

*There for the taking was the world and all that's in it and I didn't hold back  
I almost couldn't help myself until I already had; to the world and all that's in it  
It took the world in my hands to feel how the world ain't enough*

*There for the taking was the world and all that's in it and you didn't hold back  
You almost couldn't help yourself until you already had; to the world and all that's in it  
It took the world in your hands to feel how the world ain't enough*

*Don't lose hope; I won't let you down  
Don't look down; I just let you go*

*There for the taking was the world and all that's in it and we didn't hold back  
We almost couldn't help ourselves until we already had - to the world and all that's in it  
It took the world in our hands to feel how the world ain't enough*

*There for the taking was the world and all that's in it and I didn't hold back  
I almost couldn't help myself until I already had- to the world and all that's in it  
It took the world in my hands to feel how the world ain't enough*

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<sup>93</sup> By Demo Adamolekun:

<https://demoadamolekunharvardalmthesis.bandcamp.com/releases>

## Chapter VI.

## Bridge Across the Pacific (A Space Odyssey and Final Postlude)

*“I wanted to be a Bridge Across the Pacific”<sup>94</sup>*

This study concludes by examining Western responses to Nitobe and his invented tradition of *bushido*. After the 1868 Meiji Restoration, in a bid to compete with the West while preserving their national identity, Japanese elites became preoccupied with a modernization based on Western science that nonetheless preserved Eastern morals. According to H. Matsuzawa, “the Meiji government conveniently introduced Western technologies such as warships, cannons, machines, laws, and ‘Real Politik’ while maintaining Japanese traditional culture and value systems.”<sup>95</sup> Nitobe’s book, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, came to symbolize a re-assertion of Japanese values, with its core argument being that Japan’s Meiji-era rise was attributable to the spirit of *bushido* and not Western technology.<sup>96</sup> In addition to its role in reframing the narrative of Japan’s modernizing influences, the “gospel” of *bushido* was also used by the Japanese political

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<sup>94</sup> An understatement popularly attributed to Nitobe Inazo.

<sup>95</sup> Holmes and Ion, “Bushidō and the Samurai,” 311.

<sup>96</sup> Holmes and Ion, “Bushidō and the Samurai,” 311.



elite to justify the nation's growing international ambitions and served as a rallying flag when social discontent grew domestically.<sup>97</sup>

Additionally, *bushido* disciples were in high demand in Britain in this age, as Britain was in decline as the primary global power after 1870, and America was rising to take her place. These unsettling changes led Britain's intellectual and political classes to engage in national discourse and soul-searching to resolve an imperial malaise they referred to as deficiencies "at the heart of the empire." This malaise led some Westerners to adopt the gospel of *bushido*, advocating that Eastern values were in no way inferior and in many ways superior to the West, which was particularly magnified after Japan's surprising victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905.<sup>98</sup>

#### Maurice Browne: A Space Odyssey

An odyssey of derivative inspiration led from Friedrich Nietzsche's literary masterpiece "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" to Richard Strauss' classical work of the same name, and finally to their thematic and musical influences on Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey." In the same way, Maurice Browne, a British poet and educator engaged in theater and poetry groups, started an organization called Samurai Order and the Avante-Garde Samurai Press. Although the group did not last long, Browne used this network to promote his essay collection entitled "Proposals for Voluntary Nobility," which were derivatively inspired by Nitobe's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* and its

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<sup>97</sup> Holmes and Ion, "Bushidō and the Samurai," 312.

<sup>98</sup> Holmes and Ion, "Bushidō and the Samurai," 312-313.

influence on H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*.<sup>99</sup> Browne's essay collection is no longer in print but still serves as evidence that some Westerners were inspired by *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* as an ethical model, while Browne—a practitioner of the same trade as Nitobe—went one step further by publishing a Western adaptation of Nitobe's *bushido* precepts.

#### Déjà vu: Basil Hall Chamberlain

Leading British intellectuals began taking inspiration from rising industrial powers such as Germany and Japan. Japan's advancements, after its centuries of mysterious self-isolation, particularly fascinated the British, especially when the Japanese became major players on the global stage by signing the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 and defeating the Russian Empire in the Russo-Japanese war. The British press characterized Japan's meteoric rise as “a vindication of organization, dedicated patriotism, and scientific methods.”<sup>100</sup>

However, as a British Japanologist witnessing first-hand Meiji Japan's social and cultural shifts, the nuance and astuteness of Basil Hall Chamberlain's social critiques and historical analyses apropos of the *bushido* phenomenon have stood the test of time. In “The Invention of a New Religion,” published in the *Rationalist Press Association* in 1912, Chamberlain—an atheist and leading British Japanologist active in Japan during the late nineteenth century—attacked *bushido* as a propagandizing form of revisionist history cloaked

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<sup>99</sup> Michael Sherborne, *H.G. Wells: Another Kind of Life* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2010). Kindle Edition.

<sup>100</sup> Holmes and Ion, “Bushidō and the Samurai,” 315.

in traditional affectations “which the official class [was] busy building up by every means in its power, including the punishment of those who [presumed] to stickle for historic truth.”<sup>101</sup> Chamberlain sarcastically continued that *bushido* was “so modern a thing . . . that neither Kaempfer, Siebold, Satow, nor Rein—all [revered European Japanologists] knowing their Japan by heart—never once alluded to it in their voluminous writings,<sup>102</sup>—a deafening silence that could be explained by the fact that *bushido* was unknown until the late nineteenth century.

However, in characterizing *bushido* as a twentieth-century Japanese cultural public-relations campaign that falsely repackaged disparate, pre-existing social norms as a moral code, Chamberlain departed notably from his tone and views in his earlier 1905 book *Things Japanese*, which is a textbook on Japanese history and culture released soon after *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. Chamberlain first implied the samurai *bushido* code’s authenticity in *Things Japanese*, then went even further to characterize it as a historical institutional peer with the chivalric code of medieval European knights. He expressly stated that Japan’s “social evolution” developed along the same lines as Britain and the West but at different rates.<sup>103</sup>

Chamberlain also notably concluded with an endorsement of Nitobe as an authority on *bushido*, only criticizing Nitobe for not distinguishing between the United States and Europe in his parallel narratives:

Books recommended: Nitobe Bushido for a theoretical discussion of Japanese chivalry and its moral code. The value of this book, which is written by a Japanese in excellent English, is considerably impaired by the fact that the author has taken, not medieval

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<sup>101</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.

<sup>102</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*.

<sup>103</sup> Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese* (Cambridge: Forgotten Books, 2019), 327–328.

Europe, but modern America as his standard of comparison with feudal Japan. The contrast between Eastern and Western social evolution, which in reality is chiefly one of time (Japan having developed along the same lines as Europe, but more slowly), is thus made to figure as one of place and race.<sup>104</sup>

Hence, the question arises: what caused this change in Chamberlain's tone? It is apparent that his view on *bushido*'s authenticity markedly shifted, from that of a fascinated educator in 1905 to a caustic detractor smarting over an invention of tradition. Although this answer may ultimately be lost to history, Chamberlain's about-face could possibly be attributed to an initially misguided reliance on Nitobe's portrayal of *bushido*, given that the book was new at the time, and Nitobe made a convincing appeal to authority in his writings. Nonetheless, Chamberlain's professional background as an academic made him well-suited to caustically raise the alarm on *bushido*'s modern invention, sooner or later.

#### James Scherer

Next, I contrast Chamberlain's critical response with James Scherer's practical observations in his book *What is Japanese Morality?* Scherer, an American Lutheran who served as a missionary in Japan, saw Biblical parallels to *bushido* ethics. In the same way Nitobe sought to distinguish between *bushido* and Western loyalty, Scherer sought to distinguish between Japan's chivalrous loyalty and the altruism of Jesus Christ, which he valued more:

Instilled into the plastic minds of generations of Japanese children, such stories—venerated as we reverence our Bible— have begotten unquestioning courage, and a loyalty that hesitates at nothing; but courage does not spell the whole of character, nor is such loyalty synonymous with chivalry. There is one incident in Japanese history that rises very high as an example of pure

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<sup>104</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 327-328.

altruism attained in spite of the obligations of “loyalty” but—for this very reason, perhaps—it is not greatly exalted by the Japanese moralists themselves. For people of Christian training, it possesses peculiar interest as indicating the latent possibilities of this most interesting race towards an acceptance and practical application of the gospel.<sup>105</sup>

Scherer’s perspective demonstrated that Nitobe’s framing of *bushido* to distinguish Japan on the world stage was effective because Scherer observed the *bushido* trait of loyalty and associated it with the Japanese. However, for Scherer, these values were found wanting when compared to the salvation of Jesus Christ. Consequently, Scherer saw an opportunity to convert the Japanese to Christianity, as he believed the moral parallels between *bushido* and Christianity would make the Japanese receptive and amenable to conversion. Scherer did not appear to realize, however, that Nitobe was also a Christian.

#### Nathaniel Schmidt

Nathaniel Schmidt, a Baptist minister and Orientalist professor from Cornell University, wrote a 1904 review in the *International Journal of Ethics* endorsing Nitobe as a speaker “with the authority of a man intimately acquainted with the institution he describes.”<sup>106</sup> Schmidt was particularly impressed with Nitobe’s preservation of “a deep sympathy with the ancient system of Mikado’s empire and its chief support (the warrior class with its peculiar training)” despite Nitobe being “manifestly influenced by his

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<sup>105</sup> James Scherer, *The Morality of Japan* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Times, 1906), 28.

<sup>106</sup> Nathaniel Schmidt, “Review: Bushido: The Soul of Japan,” *International Journal of Ethics* 14, no. 4 (1904): 507.

occidental environment, the non-feudal type of social life, democracy, and Christianity in the form of Quakerism.”<sup>107</sup>

Schmidt’s review of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* highlighted Nitobe’s effectiveness in presenting *bushido* as an invented tradition, and crafting a unique, morally based *bushido* identity of Japan for the world stage. Schmidt presented Japanese *bushido* as a historical institution with the value of moral reflection that is encouraged by Shintoism.<sup>108</sup> However, unlike his fellow Christian James Scherer, whose religious background and missionary objectives were openly discussed in his response to *bushido*, Schmidt’s discussion of Nitobe’s Christian references in *Bushido* were merely observational. Schmidt pointed to Nitobe’s contention that “Christian missions have done and will do great things for Japan—in the domain of education, and especially for moral education.”<sup>109</sup> However, Schmidt also pointed to Nitobe’s wariness that “Christianity, in its American and English form—with more of Anglo-Saxon freaks and fancies than grace and purity of the founder—is a poor scion to grasp on Bushido stock.”<sup>110</sup> Although Schmidt had no religious bias (most likely due to the academic nature of his work), his presentation of Nitobe’s view that Christian missionaries could be a moral blessing or a colonial curse for Japan, better informs our understanding of Scherer’s Christian missionary perspective as a cautious, optimistic, and opportunistic response to Nitobe’s *Bushido*.

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<sup>107</sup> Schmidt, “Review,” 507.

<sup>108</sup> Schmidt, “Review,” 507.

<sup>109</sup> Schmidt, “Review,” 508.

<sup>110</sup> Schmidt, “Review,” 508.

## Conclusion

Nitobe Inazo's professed Christianity, his mastery of the English language, and prolific use of Western literary allusions, likely helped his presentation of *bushido* as the soul of Japan to be more compelling, engaging, and relatable to Western audiences. The academic, artistic, and religious profiles of a select few in Nitobe's Western audience appear to have influenced their responses in terms of their literary tones, emphases on Japanese/Western cultural parallels and affinities, as well as levels of skepticism and opportunism.

Yet, even the most skeptical of these Westerners indirectly acknowledged how Nitobe's *Bushido*, through the cultural charisma of the samurai, addressed a national desire to weave a distinctively Japanese cultural tapestry of virtue-ethics, inspirational symbols, and patriotic traditions:

Patriotism, too, is a mighty engine working in the interests of credulity. How should men not believe in a system that produces such excellent practical results, a system which has united all the scattered elements of national feeling into one focus, and has thus created a powerful instrument for the attainment of national aims? Meanwhile a generation is growing up which does not so much as suspect that its cherished beliefs are inventions of yesterday.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Chamberlain, *Invention*, 2010.



Figure 6.<sup>112</sup>  
1891: A Space Odyssey (Monolith Column)

Sources: Alamy. Meiji 1890s. 2022. Newspapers Publisher Extra. Nitobe and Mary. 2022.  
<https://www.alamy.com/search/imageresults.aspx?imgt=0&qt=Meiji+1890s>  
<https://www.newspapers.com/clip/28475079/mary-nitobe-news/>

<sup>112</sup> A race oddity in their day, Nitobe Inazo and his wife Mary P.E. Nitobe were married on New Year's Day 1891 in New York City--- against the wishes of their families.



Bridge Across the Pacific<sup>113</sup>

A Space Odyssey<sup>114</sup> (Postludes)<sup>115</sup>

*New York City's so much more less crowded when you're in love  
 Île- de France is so much more less shrouded when you're in love  
 Santa Barbara is somehow more sunnier when you're in love  
 Even hell's a tad bit more beautiful when you're in love*

*Step down to reality they say; now that I'm here I don't want to stay  
 When I'm up there hope steals me away; I'm going back up there by the way*

*You're looking so good but with no place to go; oh no for sure  
 You're so oblivious to all that you know; that's right you know  
 So pardon me while I tell you where not to go; oh no you've gone  
 And if I crash and burn into your ocean of love; what had happened was*

*Step down to reality they say; now that I'm here I don't want to stay  
 When I'm up there hope steals me away; I'm going back up there by the way*

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<sup>113</sup> By Demo Adamolekun

<sup>114</sup> By Demo Adamolekun

<sup>115</sup> By Demo Adamolekun

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