

Proefstudereren Japanstudies 27 maart 2020



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Hoorcollege:

Titel: The Samurai in Japanese History and Imagination

Korte omschrijving: Where did the idea of the samurai originate, and why have samurai continued to capture the imaginations of Japanese and international observers for almost a thousand years? We will look at where samurai came from, their place in history, and the myths and legends that surround them – all of which have wielded a tremendous influence on Japanese culture and society.

Werkcollege:

Titel: Samurai and “The Way of the Warrior” in Literature, Film, and Culture

Korte omschrijving: The samurai code of bushido or “the way of the warrior” is a familiar concept from film, television, video games and anime. But how accurately do these depictions reflect the historical reality of the samurai? What are the everyday Japanese perspectives on bushido? How do authors and filmmakers use the samurai code of honor to comment on their own times? Students will use short readings and film clips to discuss and critically analyze the role of the samurai in traditional and modern Japanese culture.

Voorbereiding:

Lees het artikel ‘Tale of the Heike’.

THE TALE OF THE HEIKE

The Tale of the Heike (“Heike monogatari”) is one of the great works of Japanese literature, sometimes compared to Homer’s *Iliad* in scope and theme. Originally performed orally by blind monks in the 13th-century, the work tells a highly fictionalised account of the Genpei War (1180-1185), in which two warrior clans, the Genji and the Heike, fought for control of Japan. Although the Genji ultimately won the war, becoming the first shoguns of Japan, the work is named for the losing side. This established a tradition in Japanese literature of celebrating lost causes and warriors who face certain defeat with honor and bravery. Much of what came to be associated with the samurai code of honor can be traced back to episodes in the *Tale of the Heike*, several of which are given below. The tale’s opening lines are some of the most famous in Japanese literature.

EXCERPTS FROM ‘THE TALE OF THE HEIKE’

ADAPTED FROM A TRANSLATION BY A. L. SADLER.

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PROLOGUE:

The sound of the Gion Shoja temple bell echoes the impermanence of all things. The hue of the flowers of the sala tree reveals that to flourish is to fade. The proud endure but for a moment, like an evening dream in springtime. The mighty are destroyed at last, as the dust before the wind.

BOOK IX, CHAPTER IV. THE DEATH OF LORD KISO

Now Lord Kiso Yoshinaka of the Heike had brought with him from Shinano two beautiful girls named Tomoe and Yamabuki, but Yamabuki had fallen sick and stayed behind in the Capital. Tomoe had long black hair and a fair complexion, and her face was very lovely; moreover she was a fearless rider whom neither the fiercest horse nor the roughest ground could dismay, and so dexterously did she handle sword and bow that she was a match for a thousand warriors, and fit to meet either god or devil. Many times had she taken the field, armed at all points, and won matchless renown in encounters with the bravest captains. Now, in this last fight when all the others had been slain or had fled, among the last seven of Lord Kiso’s retinue there rode Tomoe.

At first it was reported that Kiso had escaped to the North either through Nagasaka by the road to Tamba, or by the Ryuge pass, but actually he had turned back again and ridden off toward Seta, to see if he could hear aught of the fate of his lieutenant Imai Kanehira. Imai had long valiantly held his position at Seta till the continued assaults of the enemy reduced his eight hundred men to but fifty, when he rolled up his banner and rode back to Miyako to

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ascertain the fate of his lord; and thus it happened that the two fell in with each other by the shore at Otsu.

Recognizing each other when they were yet more than a hundred yards away, they spurred their horses and came together joyfully. Seizing Imai by the hand, Kiso burst forth: "I was so anxious about you that I did not stop to fight to the death in the Rokujo Kawara, but turned my back on a host of foes and hastened off here to find you."

"How can I express my gratitude for my lord's consideration?" replied Imai; "I too would have died in the defence of Seta, but I feared for my lord's uncertain fate, and thus it was that I fled hither."

"Then our ancient pledge will not be broken and we shall die together," said Kiso, "and now unfurl your banner, for a sign to our men who have scattered among these hills."

So Imai unfurled the banner, and many of their men who had fled from the Capital and from Seta saw it and rallied again, so that they soon had a following of three hundred horsemen.

"With this band our last fight will be a great one", shouted Kiso joyfully, "who leads yon great array of our foes?"

"Kai-no-Ichijo Jiro, my lord."

"And how many men has he, do you think?"

"About six thousand, it seems."

"Well matched!" replied Kiso, "if we must die, what death could be better than to fall outnumbered by valiant enemies? Forward then!"

That day Kiso was arrayed in a sash of red brocade and a suit of armour laced with Chinese silk; by his side hung a magnificent sword mounted in silver and gold, and his helmet was surmounted by long golden horns. Of his twenty-four eagle feathered arrows, most had been shot away in the previous fighting, and only a few were left, drawn out high from the quiver, and he grasped his rattan bound bow by the middle as he sat his famous grey charger, fierce as a devil, on a saddle mounted in gold.

Rising high in his stirrups he cried with a loud voice: " Lord Kiso Yoshinaka you have often heard of; now you see him before your eyes! Come, Kai-no-Ichijo Jiro! Take my head and show it to your master Yoritomo if you can! "

"Hear, men!" shouted Ichijo-no Jiro in response; "On to the attack! This is their great Captain! See that he does not escape you now!" And the whole force charged against Kiso to take him.

Then Kiso and his three hundred fell upon their six thousand opponents in the death fury, cutting and slashing and swinging their blades in every direction until at last they broke through on the farther side, but with their little band depleted to only fifty horsemen, when Doi-no-Jiro Sanehira came up to support their foes with another force of two thousand. Flinging themselves on these they burst through them also, after which they successively

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penetrated several other smaller bands of a hundred or two who were following in reserve. But now they were reduced to but five survivors, and among these Tomoe still held her place.

Calling her to him Kiso said: "As you are a woman, it were better that you now make your escape. I have made up my mind to die, either by the hand of the enemy or by mine own, and how would I be shamed if in his last fight I died fighting alongside a woman?"

Even at these strong words, however, Tomoe would not forsake him, but still feeling full of fight, she replied: "Ah, for some bold warrior to match with, that Kiso might see what I can do in battle!" And she drew aside her horse and waited.

Presently Onda-no- Hachiro Moroshige of Musashi, a strong and valiant samurai, came riding up with thirty followers, and Tomoe, immediately dashing into them, flung herself upon Onda and grappling with him dragged him from his horse, pressed him calmly against the pommel of her saddle and cut off his head. Then stripping off her armour she fled away to the Eastern Provinces.

Tezuka-no-Taro was killed and Tezuka-no-Betto took to flight, leaving Kiso alone with Imai-no-Shiro.

"Ah", exclaimed Kiso, "my armour that I am never wont to feel at all seems heavy on me today."

"But you are not yet tired, my lord, and your horse is still fresh, so why should your armour feel heavy? If it is because you are discouraged at having none of your retainers left, remember that I am equal to a thousand horsemen, and I have yet seven or eight arrows left in my quiver. O let me hold back the foe while my lord escapes to that pine wood of Awazu that we see yonder, that there under the trees he may put an end to his life in peace."

"Was it for this that I turned my back on my enemies in Rokujo-kawara and did not die then?" returned Yoshinaka; "by no means will we part now, but meet our fate together."

Kiso reined his horse up beside that of Imai towards the foe, when Kanehira, alighting from his horse, seized his master's bridle and burst into tears: "However great renown a warrior may have gained ", he pleaded, "an unworthy death is a lasting shame. My lord is weary and his charger also, and if, as may be, he meet his death at the hands of some low retainer, how disgraceful that it should be said that Lord Kiso, known through all Japan as the 'Demon Warrior' had been slain by some nameless fellow. Listen to reason, I pray you, and escape to those pines over there."

So Kiso, thus persuaded, rode off toward the pine wood of Awazu. Then Imai-no-Shiro, turning back, charged into a party of fifty horsemen, shouting: " I am Imai Shiro Kanehira, foster-brother of Lord Kiso, aged thirty-three. Even Yoritomo at Kamakura knows my name, so take my head and show it to him, anyone who can!"

Imai quickly fitted the eight shafts he had left to his bow and sent them whirring into the enemy, bringing down eight of them from their horses, either dead or wounded. Then,

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drawing his sword, he set on at the rest, but none would face him in combat hand-to-hand: "Shoot him down! Shoot him down!" they cried as they let fly a hail of arrows at him, but so good was his armour that none could pierce it, and once more he escaped unwounded.

Meanwhile Kiso rode off alone toward Awazu, and it was the twenty-third day of the first month. It was now nearly dark and all the land was coated with thin ice, so that none could distinguish the deep rice fields, and he had not gone far before his horse plunged heavily into the muddy ooze beneath. Right up to the neck it floundered, and though Kiso plied whip and spur with might and main, it was all to no purpose, for he could not stir it.

Even in this plight he still thought of his retainer, and was turning to see how it fared with Imai, when Miura no Ishida Jiro Tamehisa of Sagami rode up and shot an arrow that struck him in the face under his helmet. Then as the stricken warrior fell forward in his saddle that his crest bowed over his horse's head, two of Ishida's retainers fell upon him and struck off his head. Holding it high on the point of a sword Ishida shouted loudly: "Kiso Yoshinaka, known through the length and breadth of Japan as the 'Demon Warrior', has been killed by Miura-no-Ishida Jiro Tamehisa."

Imai was still fighting when these words fell on his ears, but when he saw that his master was indeed slain cried out: "Alas, for whom now have I to fight? See, you fellows of the East Country, I will show you how the mightiest champion in Japan can end his life!" And he thrust the point of his sword in his mouth and flung himself headlong from his horse, so that he was pierced through and died.

BOOK IX, CHAPTER XII. YOSHITSUNE'S ATTACK FROM THE CLIFF

...Thereafter the battle became general and the various clans of the Genji and Heike surged over each other in mixed and furious combat. The men of the Miura, Kamakura, Chichibu, Ashikaga, Noiyo, Yokoyama, Inomata, Kodama, Nishi, Tsuzuki and Kisaichi clans charged against each other with a roar like thunder, while the hills re-echoed to the sound of their war-cries, and the shafts they shot at each other fell like rain. Some were wounded slightly and fought on, some grappled and stabbed each other to death, while others bore down their adversaries and cut off their heads: everywhere the fight rolled forward and backward, so that none could tell who were victors or vanquished.

Thus it did not appear that the Genji had been successful in their attack, when at dawn on the seventh day Kuro Onzoshi Yoshitsune with his force of three thousand horsemen, having climbed to the top of the Hiyodori-goe was resting his horses before the descent. Just then, startled by the movements of his men, two stags and a doe rushed out and fled over the cliff straight into the camp of the Heike.

"That is strange ", exclaimed the Heike men-at-arms, "for the deer of this part ought to be frightened at our noise and run away to the mountains. Aha! it must be the enemy who is preparing to drop on us from above!"

They began to run about in confusion, when forth strode Takechi-no-Mushadokoro of the province of Iyo, and drawing his bow transfixed the two stags, though letting the doe

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escape. "Thus", he cried, "will we deal with any who try that road and none are likely to pass it alive!"

"What useless shooting of stags is this?" said Etchu Zenji Moritoshi when he saw it; "one of those arrows might have stopped ten of the enemy, so why waste them in that fashion?"

Then Yoshitsune, looking down on the Heike position from the top of the cliff, ordered some horses to be driven down the declivity, and of these, though some missed their footing halfway, and breaking their legs, fell to the bottom and were killed, three saddled horses scrambled down safely and stood, trembling in every limb, before the residence of Etchu Zenji.

"If they have riders to guide them", said Yoshitsune, "the horses will get down without damage, so let us descend, and I will show you the way"; and he rode over the cliff at the head of his thirty retainers, seeing which the whole force of three thousand followed on after him. For more than a hundred yards the slope was sandy with small pebbles, so that they slid straight down it and landed on a level place, from which they could survey the rest of the descent. From thence downwards it was all great mossy boulders, but steep as a well, and some fifty yards to the bottom.

It seemed impossible to go on any further, neither could they now retrace their steps, and the soldiers were recoiling in horror, thinking that their end had come, when Miura-no-Sahara Juro Yoshitsura sprang forward and shouted: "In my part we ride down places like this any day to catch a bird; the Miura would make a re-course of this"; and down he went, followed by all the rest.

So steep was the descent that the stirrups of the hinder man struck against the helmet or armour of the one in front of him, and so dangerous did it look that they averted their eyes as they went down. "Ei! Ei!" they cried under their breath as they steadied their horses, and their daring seemed rather that of demons than of men.

So they reached the bottom, and as soon as they found themselves safely down they burst forth with a mighty shout, which echoed along the cliffs so that it sounded more like the battle cry of ten thousand men than of three. Then Murakami no Hangwan-dai Yasukuni seized a torch and fired the houses and huts of the Heike so that they went up in smoke in a few moments, and when their men saw the clouds of black smoke rising they at once made a rush toward the sea, if hopefully they might find a way of escape. There was no lack of ships drawn up by the beach, but in their panic four or five hundred men in full armour and even a thousand all crowded into one ship, so that when they had rowed out not more than fifty or sixty yards from the shore, three large ships turned over and sank before their eyes. Moreover those in the ships would only take on board those warriors who were of high rank, and thrust away the common soldiers, slashing at them with their swords and halberds, but even though they saw this, rather than stay and be cut down by the enemy, they clung to the ships and strove to drag themselves on board, so that their hands and arms were cut off and they fell back into the sea, which quickly reddened with their blood.

Thus, both on the main front and on the sea shore did the young warriors of Musashi and Sagami strain every nerve in the fight, caring nothing for their lives as they rushed

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desperately to the attack. What must have been the feelings of Noto-no-kami Noritsune, who in all his many battles has never been vanquished until now? Mounting his charger Usuzumi, he galloped away toward the West, and taking ship from Takasago in Harima, crossed over to Yashima in Sanuki.

BOOK IX, CHAPTER XIV. THE DEATH OF TADANORI

Satsuma-no-kami Tadanori, commander of the western Heike army, clad in a dark-blue battle robe and a suit of armour with black silk lacing, and mounted on a great black horse with a saddle enriched with lacquer of powdered gold, was calmly withdrawing with his following of a hundred horsemen, when Okabe-on-Rokuyata Tadazumi of Musashi espied him and pursued at full gallop, eager to bring down so noble a prize.

"This must be some great leader!" he cried. "Shameful to turn your back to a foe!"

Tadanori turned in the saddle; "We are friends! We are friends!" he replied, as he continued on his way. As he had turned, however, Tadazumi had caught a glimpse of his face and noticed that his teeth were blackened.

"There are none of our side who have blackened teeth", he said, "this must be one of the Heike Courtiers." And overtaking him, he ranged up to him to grapple. When Tadanori's hundred followers saw this, since they were hired retainers drawn from various provinces, they scattered and fled in all directions, leaving their leader to his fate.

But Satsuma-no-kami, who had been brought up at Kumano, was famous for his strength, and was extremely active and agile besides, so clutching Tadazumi he pulled him from his horse, dealing him two stabs with his dirk while he was yet in the saddle, and following them with another as he was falling. The first two blows fell on his armour and failed to pierce it, while the third wounded him in the face but was not mortal. As Tadanori sprang down upon him to cut off his head, Tadazumi's page, who had been riding behind him, slipped from his horse and with a blow of his sword cut off Tadanori's arm above the elbow. Seeing that all was over, Tadanori flung Tadazumi away from him so that he fell about a bow's length away and cried, "Give me time enough for ten invocations to the Buddha before I die!"

Turning toward the west Tadanori repeated: "O Amida Buddha, who sheddest the light of Thy Presence through the ten quarters of the world, gather into Thy Radiant Heaven all who call upon Thy Name!" And just as his prayer was finished, Tadazumi from behind swept off his head.

Not doubting that he had taken the head of a noble foe, but quite unaware who he might be, he was searching his armour when he came across a piece of paper fastened to his quiver, on which was written a verse with this title; "On a Journey, Lodging beneath the Blossoms":

"Seeking where I may lodge on my weary way, in the evening under a tree I lie; And make its blossoms my host for the night."

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Tadazumi knew that this could be none other but Satsuma-no-kami. Then he lifted up the head on his sword's point and shouted with a loud voice: "Commander Satsuma-no-kami, the demon-warrior of Japan, slain by Okabe-no-Rokuyata Tadazumi of Musashi!"

When they heard the news friends and foes alike moistened the sleeves of their armour with their tears, exclaiming: "Alas! what a great captain has passed away! Warrior and artist and poet; in all things he was preeminent."

BOOK IX, CHAPTER XVI. THE DEATH OF ATSUMORI

Now when the Heike were routed at Ichi-no-tani, and their nobles and courtiers were fleeing to the shore to escape in their ships, Kumagai Jiro Naozane of the Genji came riding along a narrow path on to the beach, with the intention of intercepting one of their great captains. Just then his eye fell on a single horseman who was attempting to reach one of the ships in the offing, and had swum his horse out some twenty yards from the water's edge. He was richly attired in a silk battle robe embroidered with storks, and the lacing of his armour was shaded green; his helmet was surmounted by lofty horns, and the sword he wore was gay with gold. His twenty-four arrows had black and white feathers, and he carried a black-lacquered bow bound with rattan. The horse he rode was dappled grey, and its saddle glittered with gold mounting.

Not doubting that he was one of the chief captains, Kumagai beckoned to him with his war fan, crying out: "Shameful to show your back to an enemy! Return! Return!"

The warrior immediately turned his horse and rode back to the beach, where Kumagai at once engaged him in mortal combat. Quickly hurling the Heike warrior ground, Kumagai sprang upon him and tore off his helmet to cut off his head, when he beheld the face of a youth of sixteen or seventeen, delicately powdered and with blackened teeth, just about the age of his own son, and with features of great beauty.

"Who are you?" Kumagai enquired; "Tell me your name, for I would spare your life."

"Nay, first say who you are"; replied the young man.

"I am Kumagai Jiro Naozane of Musashi, a person of no particular importance."

"Then you have made a good capture "; said the youth. "Take my head and show it to some of my side and they will tell you who I am."

"Though he is one of their leaders", mused Kumagai, "if I slay him it will not turn defeat into victory, and if I spare him, it will not turn victory into defeat. When my son Kojiro was but slightly wounded at Ichi-no-tani, did it not make my heart bleed? How pitiful it would be to put this youth to death."

And so he was about to set him free when, looking behind him, he saw Doi and Kajiwara coming up with fifty horsemen. "Alas! look there", he exclaimed, the tears running down his face, "though I would spare your life, the whole countryside swarms with our men, and you

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cannot escape them. If you must die, let it be by my hand, and I will see that prayers are said for your re-birth in bliss."

"Indeed it must be so", said the young warrior, "so take off my head at once and be quick about it!"

Then Kumagai, weeping bitterly, and so overcome by his compassion for the fair youth that his eyes swam and his hand trembled so that he could scarcely wield his blade. Hardly knowing what he did, at last he cut off his head.

"Alas!" he cried, "what life is so hard as that of a soldier? Only because I was born of a warrior family must I suffer this affliction! How lamentable it is to do such cruel deeds!" And he pressed his face to the sleeve of his armour and wept bitterly. Then, wrapping up the head, he was stripping off the young man's armour when he discovered a flute in a brocade bag that he was carrying in his girdle. "Ah", he exclaimed, "it was this youth and his friends who were amusing themselves with music within the walls this morning. Among all our men of the Eastern Provinces I doubt if there is any who has brought a flute with him. What esthetes are these Courtiers of the Heike!"

And when he brought these battle trophies and showed them to the Commander, all who saw them were moved to tears; and he then discovered that the youth was Taiyu Atsumori, the youngest son of Shuri-no-taiyu Tsunemori, aged seventeen years. From this time the mind of Kumagai was turned toward the religious life and he eventually became a monk. The flute of Atsumori was one which his grandfather Tadamori, who was a famous player, had received as a present from the Emperor Toba, and had handed down to his father Tsunemori, who has given it to Atsumori because of his skill on the instrument. It was called Saeda, "Little Branch."

How moving that for all their exaggerated phrases and flowery touches, even music and the arts can lead a many to praise the Buddha's way.