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武士的沒落—西鄉隆盛

The Fall of Samurais – Saigo Takamori

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中文摘要

西鄉隆盛在日本歷史上是一位重要的人物，他經歷了新舊世代的大轉變並面對了武士道的凋零與消失。由於他特殊的身分與歷史定位，此人物之作為值得更深入地探究。根據電影「末代武士」，我們在時間軸與背景可以得到一個基礎，而武士們的際遇亦可被了解。接下來，我們會尋找專業刊物、書籍、網站與藝術作品。蒐集足夠的資料之後，我們會選擇出與西鄉隆盛有關的特定或主要事件，並分析這些事件如何發展。藉此，我們可以得到一個與武士道和武士消失有關的原因及過程。我們的研究結果，是使日本現代化的明治維新過去漸漸地讓武士的地位消逝。

關鍵字：

1. 廢刀令
2. 明治維新
3. 西鄉隆盛
4. 征韓論
5. 西南戰爭

Abstract

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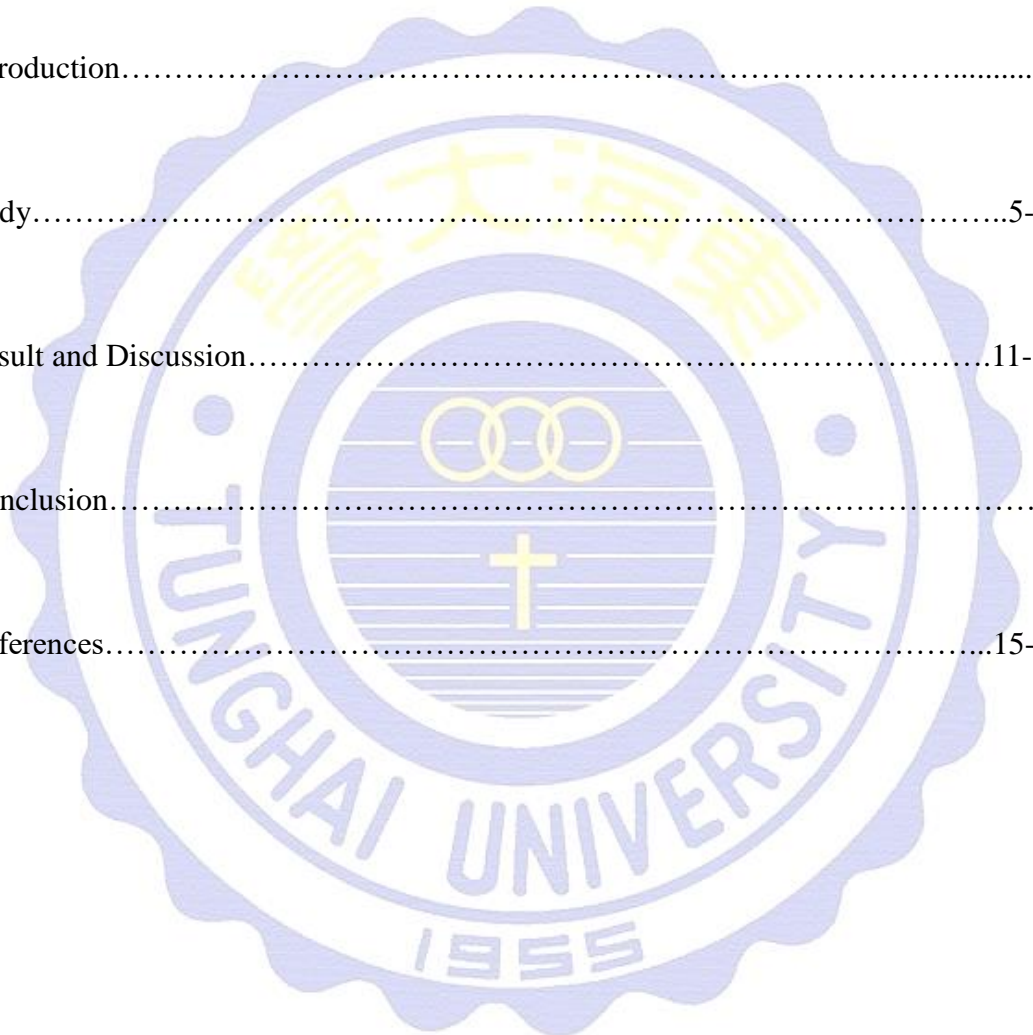
Saigo Takamori, who was an important figure in Japanese history, went through the big alteration of old and new ages and faced the fall and disappearance of Bushido. Because of the special identity and historical position, this figure's actions are worth researching more deeply. According to the movie "The Last Samurai," we have a base of the timeline and the background. The encounter of samurais can also be understood. Next, we would search for professional journals, books, websites and art works. After gathering enough datas, we would select certain or major events related to Saigo and analyze how these events were developing. By doing these, we can get a conclusion about the cause and process of Bushido and samurais' disappearance. The result we get is that the Meiji Restoration, which made Japan modernize, was gradually wiping off samurais' positions.

Keyword:

1. Haito-rei
2. Meiji Restoration
3. Saigo Takamori
4. Seikanron
5. Seinan Senso

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Introduction

Journal, Thesis, Quantitative method

“The Last Samurai,” a renowned film produced by Edward Zwick, makes us deeply feel the extraordinary spirit of samurais. In the film, Moritsugu Katsumoto leads those who supporting traditional Bushido to fight against Meiji Restoration and even influences an American general. Although some plots are fictitious, the movie reveals a historical reality. At that time, many samurais faced the threat that their social positions were declining and the Bushido was disappearing. Moritsugu Katsumoto, this character actually reflects Saigo Takamori, who was the samurai making efforts to regain the Bushido.

Being curious about this figure, we’d like to investigate more about mysterious and legendary life of Saigo Takamori at that changing age through several events. From overthrowing Shogunate ([1] Kimura, 22-23), devoting to the Emperor, delivering Seikanron to dying in Seinan Senso ([2] Wang, 161-163), people can see Saigo was not only a heroic leader in the war with more courage than the government, but also spend whole life preserving Bushido ([3] Chang, 129-132). And in most Japanese people’s minds, Saigo Takamori possesses the honorable name “The Last Samurai.”

Body (should contain Method and Results)

Searching resources from the Internet and library.

Saigō Takamori (西郷隆盛)



(Figure 1) The Portrait of Saigo Takamori ([14] Chiossone)

Early Life

Saigō Takamori(see figure 1), known as the last samurai, is a samurai, a soldier, and a politician in the late Edo period and the early Meiji period. He played an important role in these two periods since he took part in most of the political activities at that time. However, his political position was unsteady, for example, he supported the activity that help shogunate to maintain the power, but he then went against shogunate's power. Interestingly, his unsteady political position actually shows his core purpose— to reserve the power of samurai. Therefore, this research choose Saigō Takamori as the very person to represent the struggling of samurai at that time.

In 10th year of Bunsei (1827), Saigō was born in Kagoshima, which is the capital of Satsuma Domain at that time. He took the position as assistant clerk in the county office (郡方書役助) at the age of 18, learning the ideas of Zhu Xi (朱熹) and Wang Yang-Ming (王陽明) with Ōkubo Toshimichi(大久保利通), who devoted himself into Meiji restoration as Saigō. ([4]Ravina, 36-39)

Important Event in Saigō's Life

Saigō supported different policies and had an unsteady political position. Among the political actions he took and the policies he supported, these five events can briefly reflect his life.

1. Kōbu Gattai (公武合体)

During the time that Shimazu Nariakira (島津齊彬) was the Daimyo of the Satsuma Domain, Saigō supported Shimazu to advocate the Kōbu Gattai, which is to combine the power of the shogunate and the emperor in order to hold a stable position of shogunate.

2. Sonnō Jōi (尊皇攘夷)

After Shimazu die, Ii Naosuke (井伊直弼) challenge the emperor's power, so Saigō became to supported the movement Sonnō Jōi, which was against shogunate's power. In 1858-1860, Ii started taking action to persecute people who was anti-

shogunate, and the event is known as Ansei Purge in history. Saigō was exiled to Amami Ōshima(奄美大島) in the event.

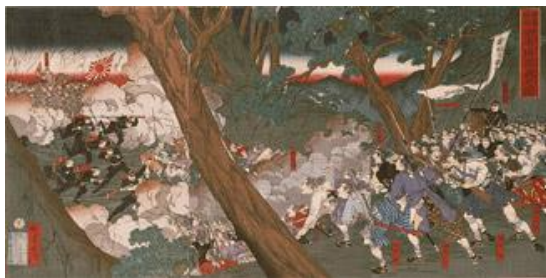
3.Meiji Restoration (明治維新)

Saigō was back to Satsuma Domain with Ōkubo's help in 1862 and then formed the Satchō alliance with Katsura Kogorō (桂小五郎). Then, they started a coup d'état with other domains and forced the shogunate return the power to the emperor, which is known as Taisei Hōkan (大政奉還, the restoration of Imperial Rule), and this ended the dominance of shogunate. After the downfall of shogunate, the Meiji government was established and Katsura, Saigō, and Ōkubo was in power successively. They started the Meiji Reform (Meiji Restoration), and the policy included the abolition of class and Haitōrei(廢刀令, Sword Abolishment Edict.)

4.Seikanron (征韓論)

The reformed policy deprived the samurai's power, so Saigō came up with the idea to start war with Korea and Taiwan in order to help the samurai regain the power. However, his idea was opposed by other officials in the Meiji government, he hence resigned the government position and went back to Satsuma Domain, founding a private military school to teach Bushidō.([5]Kumamoto, Nishi, and Satō)

5.Satsuma Rebellion/ Seinan sensō (西南戰爭) (see Figure 2)



(Figure 2) The Oil Painting of Seinan Senso([15] Tsukioka)

After he went back to Satsuma Domain, the conflicts between the government and the disaffected samurais intensified, and the rebellions were risen all over Japan. Finally, the Satsuma Rebellion broke out in 1877. Although Saigō was not the mastermind who rose the rebellion, as a prestigious person in Satsuma Domain, he became the leader of the rebellion and led the disaffected samurais to attack the government. Saigō finally lost the battle and committed suicide by seppuku.

Saigō's Reputation

Generally, Saigō was evaluated positively. Izumi regarded Saigō as a kind-hearted man because of the fact that Saigō asked the governor to reduce the tax after Saigō saw the struggling of a peasant family.[6] Besides, Uchimura(29-32) explains that the rebellion was against Saigō's will, and Saigō led the rebellion for samurais who decided to rise the rebellion, rather than for his own ambition.[7] However, an editorial explains the reason why Saigō hold the idea of attacking Korea and Taiwan and regarded it is reckless to attack Taiwan.[5]

Specific Events in Saigo's Lifetime

In this section, we'll discuss two of the major events in Saigo's lifetime, which are the announcement of Haitō-rei and the outbreak of Seinan Sensō. We believe that these two events have a strong relation with the fall of Samurais. Therefore, we select them as topics in this section to discuss the causes and effects of the Samurais' downfall.

1. Haitō-rei (廢刀令)

In 1876, Emperor Meiji declared a law, "Haitō-rei," which forbade the wearing of swords, and officially ended the age of Samurais. The Samurais lost their profession and privilege to wear swords. Their position as a special class came to an end ([8] McGee, Mark.). Meanwhile, this law indirectly resulted in the outbreak of Seinan Sensō, which was launched by Saigō Takamori.

In fact, before Haitō-rei was announced, the Samurais had started to go downhill. In 1868, Emperor Meiji introduced the "Charter Oath," which had already begun the dismantling of the Samurai class ([8] McGee, Mark.). An article provided by Columbia University lists these five oaths. Here is the content of the second oath: All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state ([9] THE CHARTER OATH (OF THE MEIJI RESTORATION), 1868.).

Furthermore, in 1873, Emperor Meiji established an army based on conscription, which represented an army opened to any one ([8] McGee, Mark.). The situation of Samurais worsened step by step. Until the declaration of Haitō-rei in 1876, the Samurais officially lost their position.

At that time, Saigō Takamori had retired and went back to his hometown in Kagoshima. He established a school to teach his Samurais disciples. When the Haitō-rei was released, Samurais totally lost their social position, including disciples of Saigō Takamori. Thus, students persuaded Saigō Takamori to be their leader to fight against Emperor Meiji ([10]王哲.).

2. Satsuma Rebellion/ Seinan sensō (西南戰爭)

In 1877, the conservative forces led by Saigō Takamori, which represented the Samurais, launched a war against the innovative forces. This war was a severe battle between the conservative forces and the innovative forces, and it also had a great influence on the modern Japan ([10]王哲.).

The Meiji government aimed to wipe out the conservative forces to promote westernization. Thus, the government began to deprive Samurais' benefits, like the Haitō-rei, which resulted in this war. ([10]王哲.).

This Meiji government won the victory in the war, and Saigō Takamori then committed suicide. It finished the age of Samurais, and completely opened the

modernization of Japan. First, it brought a stable social environment with the deprivation of Samurais (the conservative forces). New army replaced the Samurais, and sped up the development of military construction, which made Japan gradually become a powerful country. Second, this war encouraged the development of financial groups, like Mitsubishi. Because a war would cost a lot of money and resources, some financial groups would provide materials to the government, which brought them big benefits. Third, the disappearance of the conservative forces promoted the development of the middle class. Japan started the westernization. Fourth, it developed freedom and people's rights movements. At first, those promoters of movements supported the conservative forces to fight against the government. However, the failure of the conservative forces proved that fighting against the government with arms wouldn't work. Thus, after the war, they started to pursue freedom with peaceful means. They asked for participating in politics, which also had a great influence on Japan's political democratization ([10]王哲).

Result and Discussion

1. Saigo Takamori's Influence to Samurais

Saigo Takamori put a lot of effort on protecting samurais and tried to change the fall of samurais. His courage had affected many samurais and made them unite

together and fight against the Meiji government.

Saigo Takamori is the last samurai in the late Edo period and the early Meiji period. He is an important person to represent the struggling of samurais at that time. Saigo Takamori was born in Kagoshima. He had taken the position of as assistant clerk in the country office(郡方書役助). In Meiji restoration, Saigo supported the movement of Sonno Joi(尊皇攘夷), but he opposed the power of shogunate. Then he forced the shogunate return the power to emperor, which is known as Taisei Hokan(大政奉還). After the downfall of shogunate, the Meiji government started the Meiji Restoration, and the policy included abolishing of class and Haito-rei(廢刀令). The policy deprived the power of samurais, so Saigo wanted to launch the war in Korea and Taiwan, which is known as Seikanron(征韓論), in order to regain the power. However, his idea was opposed by the government. Finally, he rose the Satsuma Rebellion to attack the government. Saigo made Samurais stand together and fight against the government. Saigo lost the war in the end. The downfall of samurais dues to the Meiji Restoration. But Saigo and other samurais tried very hard to protect the dignity, honor, and life. Although they lost the war, they had already struggled to fight against the government.

1. The Change of Bushido

Bushido is Japanese culture. Samurais regard it as the most important thing. They

abide by bushido and do not break the rule. Although the fall of samurais, Bushido still exist in Japanese culture. However, people do not behave like samurais anymore. Samurais follow Bushido strictly, but modern Japanese people don't. People nowadays see bushido as a heritage of culture. Bushido shows up in their works of art, kendo(剣道), comic books, etc. Bushido still is an important part of Japanese culture.

From Saigo Takamori, we find out Bushido deeply influences Japanese culture. Samurais consider katana to be their spiritual symbol. With the changing of time, Katana(武士刀) is still important to Japanese culture.

「Katana is not only just a weapon, but also a work of art. Katana is not only a tool of killing people in Japanese mind, but also a symbol of spirit.」 ([11]廖弘凱)
The sentences fully express the significance of Kanata.

Samurai made a supreme effort to fight against Haito rei because they see katana as their life. We can know that samurai really respect their Bushido.

「Samurais have to abide by morality, especially 『fame』 is human dignity. If necessary, samurais will die to repay, and 『loyalty』 is to sacrifice for monarch. It's not shameful」 ([12]日本武士精神) Bushido is samurais' follow, and it's also their spiritual symbol.

The Meiji Restoration had deeply influenced samurais' benefit and living. Their rebel reflected Bushido has deeply rooted in Japanese mind. Through the Haito-rei

and Seinan Senso, their spirit and respect of Bushido revere us a lot. We just know bushido is just a kind of Japanese culture before, until we investigate its background from the beginning to declining. We were impressed a lot by their spirit.

「 Japanese bushido is a mixture of loyalty, universal love, spirit of meditation, patriot, and wisdom. 」 ([13]日本武士道對當代日本漫畫的影響) Although the time of samurais passed, bushido still exist nowadays and changes to another level.

Conclusion

Referring to introduction and topics or events written in body

Saigo Takamori, who is called “The Last Samurai,” truly preserved Bushido until the last second of his life. After looking at so many deeds, people can understand even the generation was changing, what couldn’t be altered was the only value of every samurai. Being involved in these historical events, Saigo encountered threat or difficulties. However, Bushido’s spirit, supporting the honoring value from the beginning to the end, is thoroughly done by Saigo Takamori. He even committed suicide in the Seinan Senso afterwards. Although samurais don’t exist anymore after Meiji Restoration, samurai’s images won’t fade away. Because there used to be a last samurai making modern people remember with his honor.

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