

ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE:
AN EXAMINATION OF SAIGŌ TAKAMORI AND HIS EFFECT UPON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF JAPAN DURING THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Blaise J. Adams

West Texas A&M University

Attebury Honors College – Capstone Thesis

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ABSTRACT

In the strictest sense the preceding title can be somewhat misleading. Rather than merely an examination of Saigō Takamori the man, the following essay will instead attempt to explore more specifically the *actions and legacy* of that aforementioned Japanese historical figure. The purpose of this work will be to determine the effect which Saigō had upon the formation of Japan and the development of its citizenry during the late 19th century and beyond. It should be noted that a concerted effort has been made to avoid the creation of an uncomplicated historical biography in favor of keen historical analysis at every possible opportunity. While a fair amount of narrative is indeed required by virtue of the task at hand, it is used primarily for illustrative purposes: to depict Saigō as a relatable human being rather than a far-off and irrelevant personage, and to faithfully portray the vibrant Japan in which he lived, fought, and died. In terms of difficulties encountered by this author during the process of research and analysis, perhaps most obstructive was the language-barrier which so often arises whenever an historian attempts to study a history or culture which is not originally their own. During his lifetime, Saigō Takamori was nothing short of a prolific writer. Numerous letters, poems, and personal reflections written by Saigō still exist as a testament to his intelligence and unique perspective. However, this makes the fact that so few of these musings have been translated into English all the more painful. Notwithstanding, every effort has been made to manufacture an original and thought-provoking examination given the materials available.

A man of true sincerity will be an example to the world even after his death...a man of deep sincerity will, even if he is unknown in his lifetime, have a lasting reward: the esteem of posterity.

- Saigō Takamori¹

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Within the academic realm of modern Japanese history there are few dates more widely referenced by historians than that of July 8th 1853. As is well known, on that day American naval officer Matthew Perry forcibly navigated an envoy of warships into Japan's Edo Bay with the intent of delivering a letter from U.S. President Millard Fillmore. This letter, which urged mutually-beneficial "friendship" and "commercial intercourse" between Japan and America, also made the effect of any refusal to engage in such diplomatic relations quite clear through the use of thinly veiled threats and boasts of America's wealth and advancements.² During even the most casual reading of Japanese history one will find that there is certainly no shortage of authors enamored by this incident. Perry's 1853 expedition has become heavily romanticized by dramatic claims that it was Commodore Perry who "shattered Japan's self-imposed isolation," leading to outbreaks of violence against a government "unable to deal effectively with the foreign intrusion."³ In actuality, this episode is often invoked by historians who are far too eager to trace the turmoil and transformation which Japan experienced during the late 19th century back to a single point in time, as if doing so would make sense of the carnage and mayhem of the Bakumatsu and early Meiji periods. While an origin for these events would be convenient it is perhaps self-defeating to use so-early a date as a reference point for the rest of the century.

¹ Ivan Morris, *The Nobility of Failure* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Ltd., 1975), 243.

² *Letter from U.S. President Millard Fillmore: Requesting a Japan – U.S. Agreement*, U.S. Sen., 33rd, 2nd, Exec. Docs. #34 (1854-5), Vol. 6, pp. 9-11.

³ Edward J. Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 1.

A far better indicator of Japan's development into its first modern incarnation can arguably be found some decades later, on February 22, 1889. It was on that day that Saigō Takamori, honored samurai, revered military commander, respected politician, and traitor to Imperial Japan, was officially pardoned by the Emperor for all transgressions and elevated to his former imperial court rank.⁴ All of this mattered little to Saigō by this point. He had, in fact, died over a decade earlier, slain by the very government which now issued him pardon in honor of the promulgation of Japan's new constitution earlier that month. Such dramatic shifts in attitude and policy were certainly not uncommon among members of the administration during the Meiji period. Staffed with opportunists at every conceivable level, the Meiji government had leapt at the chance to "capture some of Saigō's legendary aura for itself."⁵ Unfortunately, under this youthful and 'modern' regime Japan's colorful history had become something to be plundered rather than treasured. On a daily basis Japan's cultural touchstones and hallowed, often centuries-old, traditions were being elevated or discarded by the government based solely on their ability to "serve, esteem, or blaspheme the present."⁶

Surely, this treatment begs the question of Saigō Takamori's true identity. Who was this incredible man who, within the scope of roughly two decades (only the first of which he was alive), was able to transform so dramatically in the eyes of his nation and its people? What sort of human-being could assume all the roles of conspirator, commander, political-strategist, champion, and enemy-of-the-state only to emerge unstained on the other side and revered as the

⁴ Mark Ravina, *The Last Samurai* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2004), 11.

⁵ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*

“perfect embodiment of the ideal samurai?”⁷ To what extent was Japan and its populous irrevocably changed by the life of this single strong-willed individual and his unbelievably persistent ghost? These questions, equally fascinating and daunting, are to be the subject of examination in the following essay.

The field of history is rife with elaborate tales of powerful men emerging from humble backgrounds to enact change on a grand scale. Given the veritable mania revolving around Saigō Takamori, it is not surprising that he would possess modest origins commensurate with his impressive life. This is not to say that any information pertaining to Saigō’s early-years is unreliable. In fact, Saigō’s childhood (as well as the rest of his life for that matter) is incredibly well documented. As a result of numerous surviving diaries, letters, and records of all kinds, much is understood about even the most mundane aspects of this intriguing man’s life. What is known for certain is that Saigō Takamori was born on December 7, 1827 near the castle-town of Kagoshima in Satsuma domain.⁸ As the eldest son among seven children, responsibility was an inescapable element of life for young Takamori.

Saigō’s father, a samurai under the Satsuma banner, possessed the relatively low rank of *koshōgumi*. Author and historian W.G. Beasley describes this position as “the lowest and most numerous of the Satsuma *heishi*, having stipends between 50 and 150 koku.”⁹ Combined with the sheer number of family members for whom this meager stipend had to provide (as many as sixteen at one point), one would certainly not describe Saigō or his family as affluent. Saigō’s own sister-in-law, who lived (as was not uncommon) with the family of her husband, once

⁷ Charles L. Yates, *Saigō Takamori: The Man Behind the Myth* (London: Kegan Paul International, Ltd., 1995), 23.

⁸ Ravina, 13.

⁹ W.G. Beasley, “Councilors of Samurai Origin in the Early Meiji Government, 1868-9,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 20 no. 1/3 (1957), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/610366> (accessed July 11, 2011), 98.

described the Saigō house as “really a decrepit thing,” stating that “the floor sagged like a duck’s nest.”¹⁰ Beasley asserts that, given this adversity, the fact that “both men [referring to Saigō Takamori and his childhood-friend Okubo Toshimichi] rose to offices close to the daimyo's person, the only road to advancement open to them, was therefore no mean feat.”¹¹

While some authors may marvel at Saigō and Okubo’s ability to ascend beyond the limitations of their station, other historians assert that such progression to the national stage was inevitable. Author Robert Sakai states that it was, not in spite of, but *because* of their “relatively low social status that samurai of the type of Saigo and Okubo could devote their energies to national interests.” According to Sakai, these samurai, unencumbered by the petty squabbles and political power-struggles of their superiors, “saw and seized the opportunity to exercise their talents in a larger arena for worthier objectives.”¹² Moreover, Sakai cites travel as a major cause of unrest among Satsuma samurai of Saigō’s rank. By meeting other likeminded officials and engaging in discussions of a political, military, and even cultural nature, the formation of such “patriotic indignation” was unavoidable.¹³

Perhaps one of the most bizarre facets of Saigō Takamori’s life is the extent to which he is remembered and acknowledged, even to this day, for his martial abilities. While in fact, these accounts of his soldierly-prowess could not be more false. As author Charles Yates describes him, Saigō “certainly knew which end of a sword to pick up, but he had neither the taste nor the talent to become the master swordsman some say he was.”¹⁴ This distaste for the martial arts

¹⁰ Ravina, 25.

¹¹ W.G. Beasley, “Councilors of Samurai Origin in the Early Meiji Government, 1868-9,” 98.

¹² Robert K. Sakai, “Feudal Society and Modern Leadership in Satsuma-han,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 16 no. 3 (May 1957), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2941231> (accessed July 11, 2011), 375.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Yates, 26.

likely stemmed from an injury Saigō suffered to his forearm at the age of thirteen, one which stunted the growth of his right arm and was apparently so recognizable that it would ultimately be used to identify his decapitated corpse. Whatever the case, Saigō markedly preferred scholastic pursuits to those of a martial nature and became well-versed in the Confucian classics and even some aspects of Zen meditation. Given this love for scholarship, the fact that Saigō would ultimately become famous for his ability to strategize and infamous for his penchant for conspiracy is not at all surprising.

The remainder of this essay could easily be spent describing the various exploits of Saigō Takamori. And yet such would be a wasted opportunity to afford a select number of events the examination they so-rightly deserve. If history is any indication, it would seem that Saigō was a man in possession of an inexhaustible amount of energy and a résumé of experiences which would put any normal man to shame. Of the events in which he played a role during his lifetime, three stand out as being either particularly important or influential. They are: Saigō's actions as a military commander during the Boshin War, his role in the *Seikanron* debate and the subsequent political fallout, and finally (and most tragically) the events of the Satsuma Rebellion. In any discussion of Saigō Takamori's effect upon the development of Japan during the early modern period, an historian would be derelict in their duties not to examine these three incidents in detail, as they inarguably enacted some of the greatest effects upon Saigō's world.

Given the conspiratorial nature of the Boshin War an exact starting date for the conflict can be somewhat difficult to provide, though the seizure of the imperial palace in Kyoto by the combined forces of Chōshū and Satsuma on January 3, 1868 is generally regarded as the

struggle's first major military strike.¹⁵ The *bakufu*'s response in the resultant Battle of Toba-Fushimi was executed largely to take possession of the emperor. As author Edward J. Drea asserts "possession of the emperor, real or symbolic, was essential for the new army" in order to avoid the impression that "fighting was merely a personal quarrel pitting Satsuma and Chōshū against the *bakufu*."¹⁶ Whatever had been the intentions of the Shogunate's forces, by the end of the battle they had failed in this task and now began a singular elongated retreat northward through the island of Honshu and eventually into Hokkaido. It is this retreat which would allow Saigō to execute arguably his greatest military accomplishment.

Shortly before the military engagements at Toba and Fushimi, a Tokugawa official only slightly older than Saigō himself, Katsu Kaishū, was unexpectedly promoted to chief of military affairs for the *bakufu*. In accordance with this new rank Katsu was also given command over the Shogun's capitol city of Edo, a role which placed him directly opposite Saigō Takamori and his task to "seize Edo Castle and bring the former bakufu capital under imperial control."¹⁷ However, if there existed any individual within the ranks of the *bakufu* capable of matching Saigō in terms of strategy that man was Katsu Kaishū. In fact, Katsu was so confident in his ability to prevent bloodshed through negotiation that he is on record as having claimed: "I am not worried that a day may come when a vast army of one million brave men will descend upon us. I would obtain an audience with their general and clear up whatever and all that was wrong."¹⁸ Luckily for the inhabitants of Edo, Katsu's confidence in his own abilities was not misplaced.

¹⁵ Drea, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ M. William Steele, "Against the Restoration: Katsu Kaishū's Attempt to Reinstall the Tokugawa Family," *Monumenta Nipponica* 36 no. 3 (Autumn 1981) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2384439> (accessed July 11, 2011), 301.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

In a similar vein to the rumors that Saigō Takamori was an expert warrior and martial artist, the conception that he possessed some sort of bloodlust or constant desire to pursue victory on the field of battle is equally false. For confirmation of this fact one need look no further than Saigō's actions as a military commander throughout the Boshin War, but particularly in regards to his reluctance to resort to violence during his quest to capture of the city of Edo. Saigō repeatedly met with the peace-seeking Katsu in order to offer, refuse, and barter the terms of that city's surrender. The final conditions agreed upon by these two men (with the approval of their respective governments) truly show the extent of both Saigō and Katsu's commitment to avoid needless slaughter. In exchange for the peaceful turn-over of Edo Castle, Saigō agreed on behalf of the Emperor to a number of abnormal provisions, including the following: "Yoshinobu [the Tokugawa Shogun] is to retire to Mito and live there in seclusion," also "war vessels and firearms are to be surrendered; a suitable portion of these will be returned later." Finally, in an extraordinarily gracious act of pardon, Saigō petitioned Kyoto for leniency resulting in the following condition: "Persons who assisted Yoshinobu in his rebellion are guilty of flagrant offense and deserve the severest punishment. By His Majesty's special clemency, however, their lives will be spared."¹⁹

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts put forth by Katsu Kaishū and Saigō's own natural "disinclination to turn the city into a battleground,"²⁰ armed conflict within the city of Edo could not be avoided. As a result of an increasing number of attacks against pro-Satsuma forces in and around the capitol by radical elements loyal to the *bakufu* known as *Shōgitai*, the Imperial central command dispatched Ōmura Masujirō to circumvent Saigō's seemingly infinite patience and

¹⁹ Ibid., 304.

²⁰ Drea, 14

neutralize the *Shōgitai* threat. 120 of Saigō Takamori's own troops would later be killed or wounded in an attack upon the main *Shōgitai* stronghold, and yet success was undeniable.²¹ Edo now rested in the hands of Imperialist forces after a single day of battle and the armies of the Emperor were now free to pursue those forces still loyal to the Shogunate northward. Given this conclusion one might understandably wish to make the case that Saigō's efforts to negotiate a peaceful surrender of Edo were all for naught. However, Saigō and Katsu had shown that, no matter what the situation, pursuit of a peaceable resolution was always an option, albeit an extremely fragile one.

The aforementioned perception of Saigō Takamori as a severe warmonger is most often derived from an 1873 incident known as the *Seikanron*, or the 'Subdue Korea debate.' An intense deliberation among members of the highest echelons of the Meiji government, the *Seikanron* hinged upon the question of whether Japan would be best served by intentionally inducing war with Korea, not for the sake of conquest, but rather as a "show of military force for limited diplomatic purposes."²² As early as June, 13 1873, at a time when most members of Japan's oligarchy were still abroad on the Iwakura Mission and Saigō Takamori had been entrusted with limited power to oversee the basic function of the Meiji government, the question of whether to incite war with either Taiwan or Korea was being discussed by members of the *Daijōkan* (Japan's congressional system of ministerial committees). Korea, with its refusal to engage in diplomatic relations with Japan, particularly irritated members of the Japanese government. According to Ōkuma Shigenobu, the reason for this irritation was that most

²¹ Ibid., 14-15.

²² Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 39.

Japanese believed that “Korea had been [Japan’s] subject country for more than two thousand years, although our past regimes neglected to control the country.”²³

Driven by his typical consideration for the samurai population of Japan, Saigō openly supported the chastisement of either nation as a means “to give vent to [anger over the reduction of samurai pensions] outside the country.”²⁴ Moreover, Saigō fervently professed his desire to lead the envoy which might spark conflict with Korea, and in a statement which has been dramatically misinterpreted throughout history, claimed in a letter to Itagaki Taisuke that “if it is decided to send an envoy officially, I feel sure that he will be murdered...but if it is a question of dying, that, I assure you, I am prepared to do.”²⁵ According to author Peter Duus, rather than indicating any intention to sacrifice himself as a means of inciting war between Japan and Korea, Saigō was merely utilizing “a bit of hyperbole to strengthen his candidacy.”²⁶ Whatever his intentions, Saigō was ultimately chosen for and then refused the opportunity to act as Japan’s emissary in Korea. In fact, the entire expedition was ultimately and indefinitely postponed, a decision which would have fateful consequences for both Saigō and Japan.

Disappointed and disenchanted, by October 1873 Saigō had resigned from all positions which he held within the Meiji government and returned to his home in Satsuma. This fact bears repeating: Saigō chose to completely abandon the institution which he had spent years of life helping to develop and protect. Saigō was soon followed by five other senior councilors including Itagaki Taisuke as well as a host of other imperial guard officers and military officials. The problem of resignation became so pronounced that an imperial rescript was issued on

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, *Gaiseika to shite no Okubo Toshimichi* [Translated by Theodore Debary], (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1942), 736-38.

²⁶ Duus, 40.

October 25th demanding the allegiance of all officers within the military.²⁷ Ironically, Saigō's act of defiance, which had done so much to fracture the delicate balance of power among the members of Japan's oligarchy, also "went some way towards increasing the solidarity of the Satsuma and Chōshū leaders who remained in office."²⁸ According to author Andrew Fraser, despite having close ties to his childhood friend, Okubo Toshimichi "had performed the key role in defeating the war party of Saigo and Itagaki" and consequently ascended to a position of informal leadership within the Meiji government. Thus, Saigō and his resignation instituted what would be the ruling mechanism of Japan for at least the next four years.

To assert that much has been written about the *Seinan-sensō*, also referred to as the 'Southwestern War' or Satsuma Rebellion, would be a dramatic understatement. Something about Saigō Takamori's ultimate act of defiance against the Meiji government has proven itself to be particularly irresistible to eager historians. Thus, much of what could be related herein on the subject would be of a narrative or even derivative nature. What is important to understand is that almost nothing could have prevented the clash between Satsuma domain and Japan's central government. The goals of both administrations had simply grown too far apart. As Charles Yates explains, while officials in Tokyo were busy attempting to fortify a centralized national government, Saigō and his allies "sought to perpetuate as much as they could of the local autonomy they remembered from the regime of the Tokugawa."²⁹ It is truly ironic that the domain most responsible for dismantling the institutions of the Edo period would then desire so fervently to preserve them.

²⁷ Drea, 35.

²⁸ Andrew Fraser, "The Osaka Conference of 1875," *Association for Asian Studies* 26 no. 4 (Aug. 1967), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2051238> (accessed July 11, 2011), 389.

²⁹ Yates, 156.

Further evidence as to the inevitability of hostilities between Satsuma and Tokyo can be found in the simplest Satsuma census report. Living within that domain was an abnormally high number of samurai. Of Satsuma's total population of 812,327 people, exactly 204,143 were reported as being of the samurai class prior to the rebellion.³⁰ Given Saigō's natural ability to attract fellow malcontents this was obviously a recipe for disaster. Faced with this statistic, it becomes apparent that Saigō's decision to begin a series of private military academies, or *Shigakkō*, in Satsuma was born out of necessity more than anything else. One shudders to consider the mayhem which these disgruntled warriors would have wrought without any supervision whatsoever. In fact, one of Saigō's own deputies, Murata Shinpachi, claimed that attempting to keep the members of the *Shigakkō* under control was a task akin to attempting to hold together "a rotten barrel full of water with a rotten rope."³¹

Tensions eventually came to a head in January of 1877 when Meiji officials attempted to remove the munitions from government armories located in Satsuma. Viewed as an act of war by some members of Saigō's *Shigakkō*, they retaliated by raiding and then destroying a government munitions warehouse in an act completely unsanctioned by Saigō himself. Rather than abandoning his students or condemning their actions as radical in nature, Saigō Takamori, after much deliberation, instead chose on February 7th to issue a proclamation of hostile intent against the Meiji government, in effect declaring himself to be an imperial rebel.³² Preparations for war began on both sides, but by September of that same year, Saigō's force had already suffered an astonishing 18,000 casualties with approximately 7,000 samurai killed in battle or as a result of

³⁰ E. Herbert Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription (Part II)" *Pacific Affairs* 16 no. 2 (Jun. 1943), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2751956> (accessed July 11, 2011), 155-6.

³¹ Ravina, 200.

³² *Ibid.*, 201.

disease.³³ By the last day of fighting Saigō's army, which at one time had numbered over 12,000 troops, had been reduced to little over 40 men by an Imperial army supported by factories able to produce roughly 500,000 rounds of ammunition daily.³⁴ In a modern war where production capacity is just as important as proper weapon maintenance, the forces under Saigō Takamori had lost before the first shot had even been fired. And so the leader of Satsuma, just two months before his 50th birthday, was slain by the very government he had so boldly helped to create.

Saigō Takamori's futile attempt to overthrow the Meiji government was perhaps most significant in that it provided a proving-grounds for Japan's new conscript army. The concept that a force of trained peasants could utterly route the "most savage and reckless warriors of feudal Japan" would have been laughable less than a decade prior.³⁵ And yet the Imperial army stood triumphant while Saigō lay decapitated and his force destroyed. Nevertheless, Saigō's struggle during the Satsuma Rebellion would remain a significant event in Japan throughout the next century. Anytime an individual would struggle against the confines imposed upon him by the Meiji administration, parallels would immediately be drawn to Saigō. Even the February 26 Incident, perpetrated by members of the Imperial Japanese Army, the very institution which had defeated Saigō, is interpreted by authors Kojin Karatani and Seiji M. Lippit as being a restoration of Showa ideals, one which "inherits the spirit of Saigō Takamori...and realizes the Meiji Restoration to its fullest extent."³⁶

³³ John Rickman, "Sunset of the Samurai," *Military History* 20 no. 3 (Aug. 2003), <https://login.databases.wtamu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=9926177&site=ehost-live> (accessed June 30, 2011), 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁵ Norman, "Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscript (Part II)," 154.

³⁶ Kojin Karatani and Seiji M. Lippit, "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan," *Boundary 2* Vol. 18 no. 3 (Autumn 1991) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/303209> (accessed July 11, 2011), 196.

For any normal historical figure death would have meant the end of influence and the cessation of any semblance of command or authority. However, Saigō Takamori would prove (much to the chagrin of the Meiji government) that it is possible to be just as influential and persistent in death as in life. The immediate effects of Saigō's passing can be likened to a modern grassroots movement. Saigō's death was used by many groups (whether or not they were associated with Saigō's ideals) as an excuse to become abnormally outspoken. Particularly popular was the organization of what author Richard Devine calls 'village study groups' which he claims were often formed by local school teachers and "served to heighten political consciousness in the rural areas."³⁷ Intellectual exercises of a purely peaceful nature, these meetings and their attendants shared Saigō's belief in the accumulation of knowledge as a moral imperative and notably studied such Western philosophers as Mills, Locke, and Rousseau.

As previously stated, the death of Saigō Takamori was invoked by all manner of bands and collectives as a *cause célèbre* and in some cases even as a *casus belli* regardless of whether the aims of those groups actually coincided with those of Saigō himself. One instance of this involved Okubo Toshimichi, the aforementioned childhood friend of Saigō. These two men had grown up in similar situations near Kagoshima and risen to corresponding positions in the Meiji government. Before the events of the Satsuma Rebellion (and some would argue even during) Saigō and Okubo were *nakama* (comrades) in every sense of the word. Therefore it is extremely difficult to believe that Saigō would have supported the assassination of Okubo on May 14, 1878 by Shimada Ichiro and his group of samurai from Ishikawa Prefecture.³⁸ And yet, this violent

³⁷ Richard Devine, "The Way of the King: An Early Meiji Essay on Government," *Monumenta Nipponica* 34 no. 1 (Spring 1979), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2384281> (accessed July 11, 2011), 52.

³⁸ James L. McClain, "Failed Expectations, Kaga Domain on the Eve of the Meiji Restoration," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 14 no. 2 (Summer 1988), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/610366> (accessed July 12, 2011), 442.

counteraction is interpreted by a number of historians, including James L. McClain, as an act of “revenge for Saigō's death and as the samurai's last, futile gesture of protest against the new state.”³⁹

To refer to Saigō Takamori as a pop-culture icon, while disturbing, would not be entirely outrageous. Saigō has been kept perpetually relevant even into the 21st century with routine appearances of his likeness in film, television, and literature within and without the nation of Japan. Of these genres, perhaps most notable (and least distressing to the average scholar), would be that of literature. Considered to be one of the finest examples of Japanese prose produced following the end of Meiji period, *Kokoro* by Natsume Sōseki has been described as “a literary text representing modern Japan, and nation-state formation”⁴⁰ Whether or not this is the case, *Kokoro* is certainly heavy-laden with a recurring discussion of what the author refers to as “the spirit of the Meiji era.”⁴¹ Literary critic Karatani Kōjin asserts however, that this term does not refer to “the spirit of the entire age of Meiji, which [the author] detested.” Moreover, Karatani claims that the suicide of General Nogi Maresuke, rather than invoking a sense of honor and loyalty to the Emperor within Natsume’s work, recalls for the author “the repressed and forgotten revolution represented by Saigo Takamori.”⁴² Thus, according to Karatani, General Nogi, who had been a member of the government taskforce charged with neutralizing Saigō during the Satsuma Rebellion, continued to seek atonement for those sins perpetrated near Kagoshima some 35 years after the fact. Such an interpretation certainly alters one’s view of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Stephen Dodd, “The Significance of Bodies in Soseki’s *Kokoro*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 53 no. 4 (Winter 1998), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2385741> (accessed July 11, 2011), 473.

⁴¹ Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro* [Translated by Edwin McClellan] (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1957), 245.

⁴² Isamu Fukuchi, “*Kokoro* and ‘the Spirit of Meiji,’” *Monumenta Nipponica* 48 no. 4 (Winter 1993), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2385293> (accessed July 11, 2011), 486.

General Nogi's act of suicide, described by a contemporary newspaper as a "splendid illustration of patriotism and devotion to duty."⁴³

The first theatrical appearance of Saigō Takamori's likeness was not in the form of an American film production. In fact, more than a century before Hollywood would attempt to portray the Satsuma Rebellion, the character of Saigō (or as he was known on stage in order to circumvent Meiji censorship laws: 'Saijō') appeared in an 1878 Japanese kabuki production entitled *The Morning East Wind Clearing the Clouds of the Southwest*.⁴⁴ The performance of Ichikawa Danjuro as Saijō would later become immortalized in the form ukiyo-e. Within that woodblock print a bearded Saijō is shown issuing orders to his commanders while wearing a full Western-style military dress uniform. Ichikawa's performance and its accompanying artwork is significant in that it shows that there was demand among Japan's citizenry for media related to Saigō Takamori despite the Meiji government's clear opposition to any depiction by artists of current events.

Another example of Saigō Takamori invading the artistic realm is the Japanese short story *Kaijin*. Translated into English as *Ashes*, it was written by Tokutomi Roka and published in the year 1900. As a social critic Tokutomi portrays Saigō in a dramatically different manner than most authors and historians, referring to him as little more than a troublemaker for the average inhabitant of Kyushu. However, it quickly becomes apparent that Tokutomi's use of satire is not meant to malign the name of Saigō, but rather to criticize the fickle attitudes of Japan's peasantry.

⁴³ "All Japan in Grief; Praise Nogi's Deed," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1912, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F50717FD345813738DDDAC0994D1405B828DF1D3> (accessed July 1, 2011).

⁴⁴ Yoshu Chikanobu, *Ichikawa Danjuro IX in the role of Saigo Takamori, with other actors*, (March 1877), Retrieved from Claremont Colleges Digital Library, http://cdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/cyw&CISOPTR=219 (accessed July 1, 2011).

Certainly, the idea of a Satsuma farmer remarking that “Saigō made a big fuss for a while, but now that he’s six feet under, he can’t do any more,”⁴⁵ or a disapproving mother stating that “ever since Saigō, even the neighborhood children all want to play soldier,”⁴⁶ is a comical occurrence to say the least. *Kaijin* is perhaps most remarkable in the sense that it deals with the issue of Saigō and his rebellion directly. Tokutomi employs no subterfuge through the use of alternative names or representational settings. By the dawn of the 20th century the separation of time had become significant enough that one could discuss Saigō without fear of offending a third party, or heaven forbid, the Meiji government. For over two decades Saigō had evolved within the minds of Japan’s populous and would continue to do so throughout the 20th century.

By the dawn of the new millennia one would assume that any strife or conflict the name Saigō Takamori could evoke would have long since been resolved. However, as the recent publication of a Japanese textbook has proven, any ‘revisionist’ interpretation of Saigō as he relates to Japanese history can still result in a fair amount of contention. The *Tsukuru-kai*, or Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, was accused of representing “certain voices of the radical right” when it published a new junior high school history textbook in 2005. Targeted largely for its discussion of the aforementioned *Seikanron* debate, the textbook had attempted to describe the ideology Saigō employed in the debate as follows: “if the government had to pursue the reforms to construct a modern state, it was also important to keep the spirit of the samurai and to defend their role and honour in society.”⁴⁷ Upon further reading, the *Tsukuru-kai*’s

⁴⁵ Tokutomi Roka, “Ashes,” in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2005), Vol. 1, 279.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁴⁷ Noriko Berlinguez-Kōno, “How Did Saigō Takamori Become a National Hero After His Death? The Political Uses of Saigō’s Figure and the Interpretation of *Seikanron*,” In *The Power of Memory in Modern Japan* ed. Sven Saaler and Wolfgang Schwentker (Kent: Global Oriental, Ltd., 2008), 226-227.

attempt to emphasize Saigō's historical importance during the early Meiji period becomes blatantly obvious. Moreover, according to author Noriko Berlinguez-Kōno, this narrative concerning Saigō is “embedded in the framework of the praise of *bushidō* and Japanese traditional values.”⁴⁸ The result of this phrasing, a product likely intended by the authors of the *Tsukuru-kai*, is that Saigō becomes inexorably linked with the principles of samurai virtue. If this incident and the fact that it has occurred so recently are an indicator of anything, it is that Saigō shall remain relevant, at least in the academic arena, for many years to come.

If Saigō Takamori's enduring legacy can be attributed to any one thing it would undoubtedly be the manner in which the citizenry of Japan simply refused to believe (at least during the late 19th century) that Saigō had been killed at all. Despite overwhelming evidence, stories of Saigō's imminent return continued to emerge even decades after his death. Not even the government's possession of Saigō's decapitated body could dissuade the average devotee's faith. The final stages of the Satsuma Rebellion, including the initial presentation of Saigō's remains, were recorded by John Capen Hubbard, a captain for the Mitsubishi Steamship Company. In a letter to his wife, Hubbard states:

When we arrived there we found eight bodies laid out in two rows. The first was Saigo. He was a large powerful looking man, his skin almost white. His clothing had been taken off and he lay there naked... While looking at the bodies, Saigo's head was brought in and placed by his body. It was a remarkable looking head and any one would have said at once that he must have been the leader.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Ibid., 227.

⁴⁹Elizabeth Tripler Nock, “The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877: Letters of John Capen Hubbard,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 7 no. 4 (Aug. 1948), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2049726> (accessed July 11, 2011), 374.

Given such incontrovertible proof as must have been relayed by those Japanese soldiers present alongside Hubbard, one would expect mourning, acceptance, and memorial among Saigō's followers. Yet, as late as 1891 rumors abounded throughout Japan that Saigō would be arriving by Russian battleship alongside Crown Prince Nikolai, ready to resume his crusade, "purge corrupt officials, revise Japan's unequal treaties with the Western powers, and lead an invasion of Korea."⁵⁰ It seems that Saigō, or rather the virtues which he represented: loyalty, tradition, incorruptibility, and selflessness, could not be killed so easily.

Rumors of Saigō's survival even went so far as to enter the realm of the supernatural. In August of 1877, scarcely a month after Saigō's death, a particularly curious ukiyo-e print entered production. This illustration portrayed Saigō, using vibrant red hues reminiscent of the recent bloodshed, as a star floating serenely in the night sky above Kagoshima. Below Saigō, well-dressed patrons, using telescopes and pointing towards the heavens, admire their champion from rooftops across the city-skyline.⁵¹ The *Saigō-boshi*, or 'Saigō Star' as it came to be known, was an actual celestial body thought to be the transcendent spirit of Saigō Takamori. It was believed that Saigō, rather than dying on the battlefield during that fateful day in September, had instead ascended to the next logical plane of existence and now remained visible as a source of inspiration and as a symbol of the continuing rebellion for those below. This rumor continued to gain popularity until newspapers finally explained that the heretofore unnoticed red star was actually the planet Mars travelling abnormally close to Earth.

⁵⁰ Ravina, 7.

⁵¹ Baido Kunimasa, *Curious Southwestern Stories of Kagoshima Prefecture: The 'Saigo Star,'* (August 1877), Retrieved from Waseda University Library, http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/bunko10/b10_8333/index.html (accessed June 30, 2011).

Why was it that the average Japanese citizen wanted so earnestly to believe that Saigō Takamori was still alive? It is not enough to say that Saigō had become the ““Chief of the General Staff” of samurai discontent.”⁵² For, this does not explain Saigō’s enduring popularity with the peasantry of Japan, an entire segment of the population that shared none of the connections to battle and the martial arts exhibited by samurai. Perhaps it was, as author E. Herbert Norman asserts, that “Saigo could be grossly rude to men of finer intellect or higher position whom he found wanting in his particular brand of patriotism.” Indeed, something about Saigō’s general attitude hinted at the possibility of a world in which one was treated, not based upon lineage, but as a result of competence and ability regardless of social-standing. Moreover, Saigō was known to take “a personal interest in the welfare of the rank and file soldier.”⁵³ Given the amount of effort put forth by Saigō’s forces and their general willingness to fight until death, this appreciation of the lowest echelons was clearly not a wasted endeavor.

Possibly Saigō Takamori’s greatest weakness as a man was, in essence, his own humanity. A normal human-being may be imprisoned, exiled, or killed, but by becoming a symbol, Saigō had transcended any threat which the Meiji government might pose to him. A symbol cannot be pursued or burned; it cannot be intimidated or frightened into silence. Moreover, with each collective that cites Saigō as an influence or role model, his true meaning becomes more ephemeral, more difficult to ascertain. Takeuchi Yoshimi, a Japanese social critic born more than three decades after Saigō’s death, would later comment that the question of “whether to view Saigō as a counter-revolutionary or as the symbol of eternal revolution is a

⁵² E. Herbert Norman, “The Genyosha: A Study in the Origins of Japanese Imperialism,” *Pacific Affairs* 17 no. 3 (Sep. 1944), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2751627> (accessed July 11, 2011), 263.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 264.

problem that will not be resolved easily.”⁵⁴ Perhaps the answer to Takeuchi’s quandary is that neither alternative is entirely correct. Saigō Takamori, as the title of this essay asserts, has become all things to all people: an ideal to be admired by anyone in need of a champion and a name whose reference instantly lends credence and strength to any struggle. However, as a result Saigō’s original motives and ideals have become increasingly lost with time.

Much has been written about this remarkable historical figure since that fateful September morning described by John Capen Hubbard as the “closing act of the Satsuma Rebellion.”⁵⁵ Examinations of Saigō’s exploits now fill tomes in libraries across Japan and throughout the world. And yet, amidst all of this mania and analytical noise, one fact persists: Saigō Takamori was a man who fought and died for what he believed in, and should be afforded the respect commensurate with such deeds. The historian Mark Ravina, author of the *The Last Samurai*, would have his readers believe that “the death of Saigō meant the death of an entire conception of the Japanese polity.”⁵⁶ However, such a statement is far from correct. Rather, the death of Saigō Takamori, as Saigō himself had predicted, ensured that his ideals would advance to a place where neither the sharpest sword nor the swiftest bullet could ever harm them.

⁵⁴ Karatani, 199.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Tripler Nock, “The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877: Letters of John Capen Hubbard,” 375.

⁵⁶ Ravina, 5.

Bibliography

“All Japan in Grief; Praise Nogi’s Deed.” *The New York Times*. September 15, 1912.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F50717FD345813738DDDAC0994D1405B828DF1D3> (accessed July 1, 2011).

An early 20th century newspaper article and primary-source document, it describes the suicide of General Nogi and provides a Western interpretation of Japan’s reaction to his death.

Beasley, W.G. “Councilors of Samurai Origin in the Early Meiji Government, 1868-9.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 20 no. 1/3 (1957).

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/610366> (accessed July 11, 2011).

This article provides a detailed examination of several prominent Meiji era politicians, chronicling their rise from the position of low-ranking samurai to that of the Japanese oligarchy. Beasley also examines the transition of Japan’s central government as it slowly left the hands of the Tokugawa.

Berlinguez-Kōno, Noriko. “How Did Saigō Takamori Become a National Hero After His Death?

The Political Uses of Saigō’s Figure and the Interpretation of *Seikanron*.” In *The Power of Memory in Modern Japan* ed. Sven Saaler and Wolfgang Schwentker. Kent: Global Oriental, Ltd., 2008.

A rather short, but incredibly useful, article contained within a compendium which discusses the effects of various figures and events on the national memory of Japan.

Chikanobu, Yoshu. *Ichikawa Danjuro IX in the role of Saigo Takamori, with other actors.*

(March 1877). Retrieved from Claremont Colleges Digital Library.

http://ccdlib.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/cyw&CISOPTR=219 (accessed July 1, 2011).

An ukiyo-e print portraying a depiction of Saigō Takamori in Kabuki theatre. Given the lack of any language barrier within the realm of art, images such as this were incredibly useful during the research process.

Devine, Richard. "The Way of the King: An Early Meiji Essay on Government." *Monumenta Nipponica* 34 no. 1 (Spring 1979). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2384281> (accessed July 11, 2011).

Rather than any far-off consequences of Saigō Takamori's death, this article discusses the immediate effects of that incident as seen in small villages across Japan. Devine's work is most useful when incorporated into an examination normally dealing with events separated by large amounts of time.

Drea, Edward J. *Japan's Imperial Army*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009.

Perhaps one of the most important secondary non-journal resources utilized herein, Drea's work traces the evolution the Japanese Imperial Army, thus frequently coinciding with the events of Saigō Takamori's life.

Dodd, Stephen. "The Significance of Bodies in Soseki's Kokoro." *Monumenta Nipponica* 53 no. 4 (Winter 1998). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2385741> (accessed July 11, 2011).

Combined with Isamu Fukuchi's work, this article granted a fair understanding of Saigō Takamori as he related to Soseki's most famous novel.

Duus, Peter. *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

This work was invaluable to the examination of Saigō Takamori as he related to the *Seikanron* incident. However, Duus' book also covers the entirety of Japan's gradual breach of the Korean peninsula.

Fillmore, Millard. *Letter from U.S. President Millard Fillmore: Requesting a Japan – U.S.*

Agreement. U.S. Sen., 33rd, 2nd, Exec. Docs. #34 (1854-5), Vol. 6, pp. 9-11.

The famous letter delivered by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853 to representatives of the Tokugawa Shogun. This is an uncomplicated primary source often cited in works pertaining to modern Japanese history.

Fraser, Andrew. "The Osaka Conference of 1875." *Association for Asian Studies* 26 no. 4 (Aug. 1967). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2051238> (accessed July 11, 2011).

Fraser's article is valuable to this examination for its discussion of Saigō Takamori's resignation from office in 1873 and Okubo Toshimichi's subsequent assumption of power.

Fukuchi, Isamu. "Kokoro and 'the Spirit of Meiji.'" *Monumenta Nipponica* 48 no. 4 (Winter

1993). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2385293> (accessed July 11, 2011).

Combined with Stephen Dodd's work, this article granted a fair understanding of Saigō Takamori as he related to Soseki's most famous novel.

Gluck, Carol. *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

So much of Saigō Takamori's importance following 1877 is entrenched in the realm of myth. Gluck's work serves as an excellent examination of Saigō as he fits into the national mythology which slowly evolved in Japan throughout the Meiji era.

Kiyoshi, Kiyosawa. *Gaiseika to shite no Okubo Toshimichi* [Translated by Theodore DeBary].

Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1942. Retrieved from Indiana University of Pennsylvania website. http://www.chss.iup.edu/baumler/SAIGO_TAKAMORI.html. (accessed June 30, 2011).

One of only a handful of primary sources available to the average historian with less than a perfect ability to read written Japanese, these letters from Saigō contain his famous admission that death as the envoy to Korea would not be an unexpected or undesired fate.

Kunimasa, Baido. *Curious Southwestern Stories of Kagoshima Prefecture: The 'Saigo Star.'*

(August 1877). Retrieved from Waseda University Library.

http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/bunko10/b10_8333/index.html (accessed June 30, 2011).

Another ukiyo-e print from the early Meiji period, this rather beautiful artistic piece is a valuable addition to any discussion of Saigō's invasion of the supernatural following his death.

McClain, James L. "Failed Expectations, Kaga Domain on the Eve of the Meiji Restoration."

Journal of Japanese Studies 14 no. 2 (Summer 1988). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/610366>
(accessed July 12, 2011).

McClain's article is useful for its interesting interpretation of the assassination of Okubo Toshimichi as a direct result of Saigō Takamori's death.

Morris, Ivan. *The Nobility of Failure*. Canada: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Ltd., 1975.

In a climate where primary sources are so difficult to come by, Morris' numerous translations of artistic quotes from Saigō were quite helpful.

Natsume, Sōseki. *Kokoro* [Translated by Edwin McClellan]. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1957.

Soseki's most famous work concerning the relationship between a young Japanese man and his mentor, this work of course had to be consulted in order to examine Saigō's literary treatment by Soseki.

Nock, Elizabeth Tripler. "The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877: Letters of John Capen Hubbard." *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 7 no. 4 (Aug. 1948). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2049726>
(accessed July 11, 2011).

The usefulness of this article cannot be overstated. Any English-language primary source documents (even those 'repackaged' in the form of a journal article) which are readily available to the average Japanese historian are incredibly valuable.

Norman, E. Herbert. "The Genyosha: A Study in the Origins of Japanese Imperialism." *Pacific Affairs* 17 no. 3 (Sep. 1944). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2751627> (accessed July 11, 2011).

While much of this article deals with a subject which has no bearing up the attempted research, Norman's article does include a fine discussion of Saigō and the manner in which he has been immortalized since his death.

Norman, E. Herbert. "Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The Origins of Conscription (Part II)." *Pacific Affairs* 16 no. 2 (Jun. 1943). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2751956> (accessed July 11, 2011).

Norman's article was a fine resource to consult when considering the immediate effects of the Satsuma Rebellion upon the Japanese Imperial Army.

Ravina, Mark. *The Last Samurai*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2004.

Ravina's book was quite useful when any basic knowledge of Saigō's life was desired. However, over-reliance on such a source would have resulted in a narrative essay rather than an analytical one.

Rickman, John. "Sunset of the Samurai." *Military History* 20 no. 3 (Aug. 2003).

<https://login.databases.wtamu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=9926177&site=ehost-live> (accessed June 30, 1011).

A factual, if somewhat idealized, portrayal of the Satsuma Rebellion. Clearly aimed at a readership with little-to-no knowledge of Japanese history, Rickman's article none-the-less proved constructive with its many statistics.

Roka, Tokutomi. "Ashes." in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*, Vol. 1. ed. J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel. West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2005.

A quaint short story notable for its unique and incredibly satirical portrayal of Saigō Takamori as he appeared in the eyes of the Satsuma peasantry.

Sakai, Robert K. "Feudal Society and Modern Leadership in Satsuma-han." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 16 no. 3 (May 1957). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2941231> (accessed July 11, 2011).

Sakai's article was most helpful for its discussion of samurai rank and its effect upon Saigō Takamori and Okubo Toshimichi's ability to transcend their family's station.

Steele, M. William. "Against the Restoration: Katsu Kaishu's Attempt to Reinstate the Tokugawa Family." *Monumenta Nipponica* 36 no. 3 (Autumn 1981). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2384439> (accessed July 11, 2011).

The main source consulted in reference to Saigō's role in the surrender of Edo. Steele's article is a fine balance of primary source material, secondary references, and astute examination.

Yates, Charles L. *Saigō Takamori: The Man Behind the Myth*. London: Kegan Paul International, Ltd., 1995.

A source similar in many respects to Ravina's *The Last Samurai*, Yates' book provides abundant information about the life and deeds of Saigō Takamori. It is up to the reader however, to use this information for proper analysis.