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**Reminiscence:
Bushido in Modern Japan**

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

Grant Mather

May 2013

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I. Introduction

There has always been something that I have found interesting about Japan, that has always evoked a sense of amazement about the country. There are many things that I find admirable about Japan as a whole, and it will be my goal here to interact with and explain those interests to a greater degree. Most of what I find interesting and admirable about Japan is the nation's sense of honor, what loyalty means and in general how the Japanese conduct themselves in regard to their country. I believe that the Japanese's love for their country goes beyond mere nationalism and is of a scope that is much greater and profound. Where does the intense loyalty that one finds in some Japanese people stem from? I believe that the theory of bushido or the code of the warrior was incredibly influential in what it means to be Japanese. After the Meiji Restoration, the samurai no longer existed as a class in the formal sense of the word, and while their way of life was essentially destroyed, their values and code of honor would continue to live on in the hearts and souls of certain Japanese individuals as a nostalgic reminiscence for the past.

To the best of my ability I plan to give a summary of the thought of *bushido*, how it is formulated and what exactly it means. I will discuss the samurai way of life, and I hope that in doing so I will show how many of the traits emphasized in bushido continue to be emphasized through a reminiscence for the past. As a primary source I have the *Hagakure*, which one author describes as an "epitome of *Bushido*"¹. I feel that with this and a number of secondary sources, I should be able to give a good exposition of what

¹ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 91.

exactly bushido was. After having examined what bushido is, I will provide a few examples of modern Japanese who in their life exemplify the samurai spirit in their own way, given their own modern circumstances.

Some may argue that the samurai are dead and that their way of life has disappeared from modern day Japan. They are probably right, Japanese culture now has much more in common with the West than the samurai. Despite this, I hope to show that while many forms of this samurai culture, which I have classified as bushido, have been dissolved in Japan, much of the devotion and loyalty to this ideal has lived on in certain individuals. Despite the thesis of Nitobe Inazo, that the “light and [...] glory [of bushido] will long survive [its] ruins.”²; I believe that while bushido is certainly dead, it lives on in a form of romanticism for the past, exemplified by certain individuals.

II. Origins

I would briefly like to give a short overview of some of the origins of the samurai class, as a form of introduction to this paper. By no means will this account be exhaustive, nor should it be taken as such. According to Ikegami Eiko, the emergence of the samurai as a cultural factor in Japan occurred during the ninth and tenth centuries during the Heian period, up to this point there wasn't really a warrior culture in place as a distinct class³. However, one may ask why a warrior class emerged in Japan, which was separate from any other class (at least initially). It should be pointed out that this arrangement was unique for Asia as well, Ikegami notes that “No other East Asian

² Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 141.

³ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 47.

society experienced such a long-lasting domination by its warrior class.”⁴ and furthermore “the rise of the samurai class and the establishment of its rule in medieval Japan were a clear departure from the pre-dominant pattern of East Asian political development.”⁵ This fact is interesting and noteworthy, so the question as to why the samurai emerged as a class needs to be answered.

To first answer the question as to why the samurai emerged as an individual class within Japan, it’s important to discuss the cultural value of purity within Japan. The Japanese (particularly during the Heian period) had a huge cultural aversion to any sort of perceived impurity. There were numerous types of impurity in ancient Japanese culture, and Ikegami names three different types, however the distinctions amongst impurity are not overly relevant and will be ignored⁶. However the impurity that seems to have caused the most problem, or at least is the most relevant to the emergence of the samurai class is that revolving around death. In ancient Japan, there was a huge stigma associated with death, and this extended beyond human death, but also to animal death as well. The Japanese court and Emperor would go to great lengths to avoid any contact with impurity, and this extended also to Shinto shrines and temples as well⁷. Under this context, there arose a class of people who needed to deal with this pollution from death which was is invasive in the world. This class of people were the *hinin* (non-humans) who, as noted by Ikegami appeared around the same time as the samurai as a distinct

⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵ Ibid., 16

⁶ Ibid., 114.

⁷ Ibid., 114-5.

class⁸. The *hinin* would deal with most activities that resulted in any type of association with the impurity that resulted from contact with death.

Regarding the rise to power of the samurai, Ikegami rejects the view that the samurai rose simply as wealthy farmers and states that “it is now generally accepted that many, if not all, early samurai had nonagricultural backgrounds.”⁹ It would seem that many samurai came from a hunter background and initially lived on the edges of Japanese society due to their contact with death and violence. Once more, Ikegami writes that “[t]he professional use of violence was endemic to the samurai world view – in sharp contrast with the imperial court culture of the mid-Heian period.”¹⁰ It is not difficult to see the conclusion that follows from what has been stated, but the samurai counter-culture would eventually be incorporated into mainstream Japanese culture, albeit as a culture different from the Imperial court. The definition of the samurai as warrior class would be made even more profound in the Tokugawa period due to the confiscation of weapons on the non-samurai population. Violence is sadly inevitable in society, and the samurai knew how to deal with violence. Ikegami believes that the understanding of samurai as warriors skilled with dealing with violence is crucial to understanding their early role in Japanese culture. Ikegami states that:

the samurai were the people who were able to adjudicate the various village conflicts accompanied by the breakdown of the ancient village structure. The resolution of such conflicts was impossible within the existing village system if the ancient local system of power relied only on myth. The essence of samuraihood was the warrior’s marginality and ambivalence, which allowed them

⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁹ Ibid., 57-8.

¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

to emerge as mediators, something that resulted from their ability to use violence.¹¹

I will not entirely attempt to define bushido per se, but will rather give examples of what bushido is and how it has historically been practiced. By looking at its implementation in the past, I hope that we can see similarities in the lives of modern individuals to the theory of bushido. This is because, to a certain degree, bushido is a modern notion, and the term is not of ancient origin¹². So, thus said, I will attempt to define what bushido is through examples and not through words. After all, the way of the samurai is found not in words, but rather in actions. The main primary text we will use is *Hagakure*, which was written by the aging samurai Yamamoto Tsunetomo in the late 17th century.

The focus of this work is how bushido has manifested itself after it ceased to exist as a dominant philosophy in the lives of Japanese samurai, and even the life of Yamamoto is reflective of this. After the period of Sengoku, the samurai class largely found itself 'out of work' so to speak, or at least they had to refrain from fighting in wars and battles as they had previously been used to. To the samurai, battle is everything, and this would come as a major blow to their character and way of life. As such, after the Tokugawa *bakufu* would gain power in Japan, there was some what of a foretaste of the classes' dissolution in the Meiji period. As violence was increasingly forbidden, the samurai would have to turn to outlets such as *jumshi*, or suicide in the form of seppuku

¹¹ Ibid., 63.

¹² Ibid., 279.

after the death of one's master, of which Ikegami gives an account.¹³ Ikegami writes that after

the increase of governmental restrictions on private violence, combined with progressively tighter political and economic incorporation into the daimyo's system, they [the samurai] lost a permissible expressive form for their violence-ridden culture of honor.¹⁴

Ikegami then goes on to state that "The sudden rise in the incidence of *junshi*, or suicide by *seppuku* following one's master's death, in the first half of the seventeenth century was a sign of this reflexive aggression."¹⁵ The situation that Ikegami has described is even more relevant for Yamamoto because he was forbidden by his master to commit *junshi*. Forbidden to commit *junshi*, and unable to fight due to the Tokugawa peace, Yamamoto would become a Buddhist priest¹⁶. The fact that Yamamoto "never once participated in a battle, and the values that he advocated are redolent of an era almost one hundred years before his lifetime."¹⁷ is even more relevant to our thesis, as it shows how the romanticism built up around bushido existed even in one of the main formulators of the philosophy of bushido.

Now that we have finished this brief distraction, we will return to the question at hand and begin to provide some examples of what bushido means and ultimately what it means to be a samurai, rather than the effeminate type that Yamamoto so disdains. We will split our examination of bushido into two parts, one that concerns the life of a samurai and one that concerns death (as death is so important to this way of life). In our

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ William Wilson, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), x.

¹⁷ Ibid., xvi.

exposition of the life of a samurai, we will focus on the concepts of conduct in general, education and upbringing, and finally determination and courage. With the section on death, we will examine revenge (as the eye for an eye policy of the Tokugawa government made death usually follow from revenge) and how one ought to die in general.

III. Life

In our examination of bushido I will begin with an examination of how one ought to live according to this philosophy. As I will discuss later in this paper, how one dies is integral to bushido and to the life of the samurai, however the role of an honorable life should not be down played for this reason. In order to live an honorable life, a samurai must behave properly and according to the proper conduct of the time. In addition to proper conduct, we will examine the samurai outlook on education and the upbringing of samurai children into the philosophy of bushido. Finally we will examine how determination and courage shape and form the samurai ethos.

After reading many of the texts about samurai, and about bushido in general, it would be easy for one to come to the conclusion that the samurai were a hot-headed bunch and were willing to get into fights over nothing. To a certain degree, this aforementioned thesis may be true, however it is not fair to conclude from this that the samurai did not value calm-headedness. What is more, politeness and honesty were also held to the highest degree among samurai, and were certainly important within the concept of bushido. In the true way of bushido there was no love for one who was hot-headed and got into arguments easily with others. Simplicity in speech and conversation

were always considered values and they should be sought over pointless arguing. The samurai was above this type of debate, and as such even saying nothing could be considered better than needlessly saying something. Yamamoto writes that

At times of great trouble or disaster, one word will suffice. At times of happiness, too, one word will be enough. And when meeting or talking with others, one word will do. One should think well and then speak.¹⁸

In saying this, Yamamoto goes even further later and praises lack of speech even more saying:

The essentials of speaking are in not speaking at all. If you think that you can finish something without speaking, finish it without saying a single word. If there is something that cannot be accomplished without speaking, one should speak with few words, in a way that will accord well with reason. To open one's mouth indiscriminately brings shame, and there are many times when people will turn their backs on such a person.¹⁹

It can easily be seen from the above that the ideal samurai spoke little, however each word was weighted and significant.

Not only did the samurai value being men of few words, but they also valued honesty and abhorred lying. A samurai's word held such weight and purpose that it was valued above swearing to the gods. In America we have those in court swear to tell the truth upon a Bible, but for a samurai this would be unnecessary, on their honor their word is true. Yamamoto relates the following story:

Because of some business, Morooka Hikoemon was called upon to swear before the gods concerning the truth of a certain matter. But he said, "A samurai's word is harder than metal. Since I have impressed this fact upon myself, what more can the gods and Buddhas do?" and the swearing was cancelled.²⁰

¹⁸ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

From this it can be seen the great weight that the samurai places on honesty and telling the truth in general. One may question why honesty was valued so greatly, and like many things it is based upon courage, Nitobe explains that “Lying and equivocation were deemed equally cowardly.”²¹ Because of this understanding, Nitobe writes that

Bushi no ichi-gon – the word of a samurai, or in exact German equivalent, *Ritterwort* – was sufficient guaranty for the truthfulness of an assertion. His word carried such weight with it that promises were generally made and fulfilled without a written pledge, which would have been deemed quite beneath his dignity.²²

To a certain degree honesty is tied with keeping one’s conversation simple, and Yamamoto writes that “For a samurai, a single word is important no matter where he may be.”²³

Finally on the subject of conversation we must mention politeness or sincerity that a samurai was expected to hold in all of his dealings. Nitobe relates that politeness is a virtue that the Japanese have continued down to the present time and states that the politeness of the modern Japanese is based upon

a sympathetic regard for the feelings of others. It also implies a due regard for the fitness of things, therefore due respect to social positions; for these latter express no plutocratic distinctions, but were originally distinctions for actual merit.²⁴

While Nitobe believes that politeness should not be based upon ‘fear’²⁵, I believe that to a certain degree politeness may also be to cause unnecessary blood shed amongst samurai.

Nitobe states that “At the slightest, nay – imaginary insult – the quick-tempered braggart

²¹ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 61-2.

²² Ibid.

²³ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 37.

²⁴ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 54.

²⁵ Ibid.

took offence, resorted to the use of the sword, and many an unnecessary strife was raised and many an innocent life lost.”²⁶ and furthermore Ikegami believes that the samurai “cultivated a hypersensitivity to challenges to their honor. As a consequence, they learned to react swiftly and instinctively within the confines of the code of honor.”²⁷

We will now turn away from conversational ethics that are contained within bushido and turn to the upbringing of the youth, which shows how the main focuses of bushido were taught from an early age. Yamamoto quotes a story about a certain Uemonnosuke who begins to teach his child about honor and the way of the samurai at a very young age, and Uemonnosuke states that “It is good to breathe these things into their ears even when they are too young to understand.”²⁸ Yamamoto furthermore relates himself that it is important that “From the time of infancy one should encourage bravery and avoid trivially frightening or teasing the child.” and again that if “a person is affected by cowardice as a child, it remains a lifetime scar.”²⁹ The upbringing of samurai children is quite brutal especially from the perspective of an American. Samurai children are basically expected to behave like samurai from a very young age, and this is continually ingrained in their brains. Nitobe remarks that “Parents, with sternness sometimes verging on cruelty, set their children to tasks that called forth all the pluck that was in them.” and that “Occasional deprivation of food or exposure to cold, was considered a highly

²⁶ Ibid., 69.

²⁷ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 198.

²⁸ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 85-6.

²⁹ Ibid., 26.

efficacious test for inuring them to endurance.”³⁰ However, Yamamoto relates an even crueller episodes that perhaps Nitobe was want to relate to his readers. He writes:

Yamamoto Kichizaemon was ordered by his father Jin’emon to cut down a dog at the age of five, and at the age of fifteen he was made to execute a criminal. Everyone, by the time they were fourteen or fifteen, was ordered to do a beheading without fail. When Lord Katsushige was young, he was ordered by Lord Naoshige to practice killing with a sword. It is said that at that time he was made to cut down more than ten men successively.³¹

From what we have written above, one may wonder how the samurai viewed learning and education as a whole, not just in relation to that of children. The samurai were not men of words, but rather men of action and did not praise education to any extent. However, despite this fact it would be incorrect to completely write off the samurai as ignorant and uneducated. Bellah notes that “Almost all the *samurai* were literate and had acquaintance with at least some of the Confucian classics.”³² It is true that many samurai were great beacons of education and scholarly work in general, however at least as far as bushido is concerned education is not to be praised in and of itself. Bellah writes that “Learning for its own sake, as we shall see, tends to be despised.”³³ and Nitobe states that “A typical samurai calls a literary savant a book-smelling sot.”³⁴ In agreement with these two is Yamamoto who believes that “scholars and their like are men who with wit and speech hide their own true cowardice and greed.

³⁰ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 41.

³¹ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 90.

³² Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 96.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁴ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 32.

People often misjudge this.”³⁵ The reasons for this is that the samurai praised action, and someone was only as good as their actions showed them to be. This praise for action versus knowledge can be seen in how the samurai conducted battles (or at least the ideal way of conducting battles). The samurai did not want to learn tactics, and simply wanted to battle with emotion and frenzy. Ikegami writes that “The samurai in this period did not like *uchikomi no ikusa*, or the organized movement of troops, because their honorable behavior and performance could not stand out in a mass of warriors.”³⁶ In addition to this Yamamoto quotes two samurai who would share the same opinion. A certain Nakano Jin’emon believes that “Learning such things as military tactics is useless. If one does not strike out by simply closing his eyes and rushing into the enemy, even if it is only one step, he will be of no use.”³⁷ and another Lord Aki says that his “descendents will not practice military tactics.”³⁸

Finally, in this section I would like to consider determination and courage as depicted in bushido. I have grouped the two terms together, because in the way they are encountered in Yamamoto’s *Hagakure*, they serve relatively the same role. A samurai is to show an unbeatable determination in order to achieve his goals. To a certain degree the samurai’s sense of determination can be considered almost an example of a non-Western humanism. Basically, the samurai can achieve anything if only he wills it. If the samurai

³⁵ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 31.

³⁶ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 98.

³⁷ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 149.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

has not achieved something it is probably because he is thinking too much about it. In defining the above notion, Yamamoto believes that:

No matter what it is, there is nothing that cannot be done. If one manifests the determination, he can move heaven and earth as he pleases. But because man is pluckless, he cannot set his mind to it. Moving heaven and earth without putting forth effort is simply a matter of concentration.³⁹

and in the same vein he writes that “Although this may be a most difficult thing, if one *will* do it, it can be done. There is nothing that one should suppose cannot be done.”⁴⁰

Along with this sense of determination, comes the concept of desperation or fanaticism.

If one is desperate or fanatical enough to do something, they can. Yamamoto quotes a certain Lord Naoshige who states that:

The Way of the Samurai is in desperateness. Ten men or more cannot kill such a man. Common sense will not accomplish great things. Simply become insane and desperate. In the Way of the Samurai, if one uses discrimination, he will fall behind.⁴¹

In a semi-humorous example Yamamoto quotes a samurai who says that:

Young men should discipline themselves rigorously in intention and courage. This will be accomplished if only courage is fixed in one’s heart. If one’s sword is broken, he will strike with his hands. If his hands are cut off, he will press the enemy down with his shoulders. If his shoulders are cut away, he will bite through ten or fifteen enemy necks with his teeth. Courage is such a thing.⁴²

Related to the samurai’s determination is the samurai’s sense of courage, even in the face of an undefeatable enemy. In fact courage and its counterpart cowardice play a large role in the life of samurai. One of the worst things that could happen to a samurai is

³⁹ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 95.

to be accused of cowardice or to seem un-manly. The fear of death is especially detrimental for samurai, and those who flee from death have no respect according to those who follow bushido. So much so, that the one who was suspected of cowardice could be ordered to commit seppuku simply for their lack of courage. Yamamoto relates one story where a samurai who was standing in a field away from a battle because of having extreme abdominal pains was forced to commit seppuku when he was discovered for being a coward⁴³. A samurai who might defend their name would be admonished for his great courage, and even if he kills several other men, he will be praise-worthy for not being a coward⁴⁴.

I believe that for the most part we have covered the ideals and values that the samurai valued in life and which form an important part of bushido. However, there is one more value that is practiced in one's life that would be a gross error to pass over. This is the samurai practice of obedience and its importance for bushido can not be overstated. It could be probably stated that obedience for samurai comes in importance only after an honorable death. As the practice of obedience often comes with death, whether through *junshi* or death in a battle, we have decided to put its section chronologically between life and death in our exposition of bushido.

IV. Obedience

The concept of obedience is integral to understanding bushido as a whole and to understand the way of life of the samurai in general. The importance of obedience is readily available to the reader from the following remark of Yamamoto: "If one were to

⁴³ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 93-4.

say in a word what the condition of being a samurai is, its basis lies first in seriously devoting one's body and soul to his master."⁴⁵ As we will examine from a few examples, the importance of obedience and loyalty for bushido takes on a sort of quasi-ascetic character. Death of course for the samurai follower of bushido may emerge from death in battle or *junshi* after the death of a master.

However, based on what we have said above, I think that it would be a mistake to misjudge the obedience and loyalty as practiced by the samurai as simply a form of asceticism. In this writer's opinion the practice of obedience is more for reasons of practicality due to the position of being a samurai rather than simply for the sake of obedience as a virtue itself, which would be the case were it simple asceticism. What I have said above coincides with what Wilson writes, who says: "When the ego inserts itself between master and retainer, there will not be true loyalty; when it is attached to the warrior's sword, that warrior is vulnerable to defeat."⁴⁶ In other words, much of the philosophy of the samurai is based upon practical considerations, rather than just for the innate virtue contained in such an action of obedience. This is of course not to belittle the samurai's concept of loyalty or obedience, and it is evident to all that the samurai valued obedience as one of the highest virtues, but perhaps to simply show its origin.

As with many things in Japanese culture and philosophy, the origin of loyalty comes originally from Chinese Confucianism. Bellah relates that

⁴⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁶ William Wilson, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), xxi.

Such central concepts as loyalty (*chu*) and filial piety (*ko*), though they may have been thoroughly Japanized, never lost, as at least part of their significance, the full meanings of these terms in the Confucian tradition.⁴⁷

In addition to this Wilson notes that “Confucius frequently touches on loyalty in the *Analects*”⁴⁸ which “was at the top of the reading list for the children of the samurai class.”⁴⁹ To further emphasize the Confucian origins of loyalty in bushido, let us once more quote Wilson who explains that “Loyalty and its true meaning was at the center of the controversy of the forty-seven ronin, [...] and his [Tsunetomo’s] thoughts about it in *Hagakure* no doubt reflect the Confucianism he learned from his mentor Ishida Ittei.”⁵⁰

To support my above thesis that loyalty or obedience within bushido is largely based upon practical considerations, I think that it will be important to show who loyalty is targeted towards, and secondly who it is that deserves loyalty. It is important to note that for bushido, loyalty is given first to one’s master and then only secondly to their family. This isn’t to belittle family ties for the samurai, and often revenge is enacted by the samurai for offenses against their families, but to show that loyalty is given first and foremost to one’s master. Again, we can see that practical considerations may be at hand here, as a feudal type society (such as Japan), would fall apart if one’s loyalty was first to their family, and then to their master. If one’s loyalty was for their family over master, it may be unlikely that they would sacrifice themselves in battle for their master. In a similar vein, Bellah writes that:

⁴⁷ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 54-5.

⁴⁸ William Wilson, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), xix.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xix.

Filial piety did not compete with loyalty, it reinforced it. Nakea Toju, when questioned as to whether the obligation to preserve one's body as a gift of one's parents would prohibit one from going into battle, replied that the obligation to preserve one's virtue was higher than to preserve one's body, and that if need be one should willingly die for one's lord. This is true filial piety.⁵¹

We have spoken about loyalty to one's master, but again it should be emphasized that "Everybody is well aware that one who is ungrateful towards parents is also ignorant of a master's favors, even of humanity itself, and naturally is not an honorable *samurai*."⁵² according to a certain Mitsukuni.

Another point that should be emphasized if we are to fully explore the samurai's notion of obedience and loyalty, is that not everyone is deserving of loyalty. It would be completely erroneous to postulate that loyalty should be given to someone simply based upon their status or relation to the samurai in question. While it is true that loyalty is often status based for the samurai, it is important that samurai only give loyalty to those masters who are worthy of their loyalty. Ikegami writes that:

The samurai always sought to test the capability and trustworthiness of their masters so that they could join themselves only to the men who deserved their loyalty. Only a master who shared the prevailing military ethos and honor could elicit such a strong response from his followers. This tendency constrained masters to use self-control in order to gain a good reputation as a worthy leader of honorable samurai.⁵³

To further emphasize the point that loyalty for a samurai is not some sort of mindless slavery, but rather a loyalty based on honor and proper relations between individuals, we should quote a story that Ikegami relates to us:

⁵¹ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵³ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 94.

when the shogun Yoritomo attacked the Fujiwara clan of Oshu, Kawada Jiro, a vassal of Fujiwara Yasuhira, betrayed his master and brought the head of Yasuhira to the shogunate's headquarters. Jiro not only failed to receive the reward he expected, but was executed as an "example to others." Kawada Jiro's conduct was considered dishonorable because, as a hereditary vassal to the Fujiwara clan, he should have paid his debt of loyalty.⁵⁴

This begins to show us that while I have said that loyalty most likely initially spread from practical considerations it would begin to take on it's own nature and shape and eventually would be considered a virtue itself. We have spoken about how obedience is not blind for the samurai, now we will show that it is a virtue itself and is based upon compassion.

As noted, while obedience is based upon status relations, it is also based upon the worth of the person to whom the loyalty is for. But it would again be wrong to say that obedience was based only upon fear or just a cold notion of loyalty itself. Obedience is much more than this and is based upon compassion. Yamamoto relates in a story that "the warrior pursues the compassion of the monk."⁵⁵ and amidst all these violent stories of the samurai we must note the value of compassion that they held and how it relates to obedience. Obviously one must be compassionate for another person, and for the samurai, great examples of compassion would often stem from relationships based upon loyalty. Yamamoto notes that actions for other people should initially be done for the other people based upon compassion, "Whatever you do should be done for the sake of your master and parents, the people in general, and for posterity. This is great

⁵⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁵ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 82.

compassion.”⁵⁶ and furthermore that those who do things without a compassionate spirit are adverse to bushido: “When one punishes or strives with the heart of compassion, what he does will be limitless in strength and correctness. Doing something for one’s own sake is shallow and mean and turns into evil.”⁵⁷ Ikegami comments similarly considering Yamamoto’s beliefs on loyalty:

Tsunetomo attempted to bring living personal and emotional ties back into the reality of Tokugawa vassalage. He considered loyalty in the master-follower relationship a highly personal bond predicated on a feeling of absolute unity between the two parties.⁵⁸

Yamamoto also relates a beautiful story about a soldier who would even spend entire nights in the rain to make sure that his master was safe and to try to protect him from hidden attacks. Apparently this foot soldier did this for his entire life⁵⁹. Hopefully these examples will attempt to shed some light on the more compassionate side of the samurai and to show that their loyalty was often based on the sake of the person themselves rather than just on loyalty.

Lastly, despite the fact that we have initially tried to downplay the ascetic element of loyalty and obedience in bushido to a certain degree, we should again mention that true loyalty for the samurai extends even to death itself. In the writings of the *Hagakure* we find that even if loyalty does not end in physical death for one’s master, one should die to a certain degree for their master. This could probably be considered the death of the self

⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 288.

⁵⁹ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 88.

according to Zen Buddhism as described by Wilson⁶⁰. In describing this Yamamoto relates about one samurai that he “was completely at one with his master and served him as though his own body were already dead. He was one man in a thousand.”⁶¹ In a similar vein, although not mentioning death specifically Yamamoto goes on to describe through quoting someone the extent to which this loyalty should go:

A person who serves when treated kindly by the master is not a retainer. But one who serves when the master is being heartless and unreasonable is a retainer. You should understand this principle well.⁶²

It should be apparent that one should ‘die’ in their obedience to their master, but often this extends to physical death as well. Ikegami states that the relationship of a samurai to their master was based upon “a close personal bond” and as such the motto “We have vowed to die at the same place”⁶³ stems from this. In addition to what we have written the very practice of *junshi* suggests that loyalty to one’s master often indicated death as a result.

I believe that I have demonstrated with examples and some quotations the importance of loyalty for the samurai, and furthermore how loyalty was practiced. Hopefully the notion has been conferred to the reader that while often based upon status relationships or on simple practicality it was much more than a blind obedience. Loyalty to one’s master is based upon that master’s actual worth, but also on a compassion for other human beings, in particular one’s master. Obedience itself was a virtue, and as such

⁶⁰ William Wilson, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), xxi.

⁶¹ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 121-2.

⁶³ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 84.

the practice of obedience often led to death, if not physical death, then death of the self. Since we have ended here with death, we will not turn to the understanding of death for the samurai in general as it is critically important for understanding bushido.

V. Suicide

If living an honorable life was important to the samurai way of life, it can easily be argued that an honorable death was as important if not more important. If anyone were to question this, one only needs to turn to the *Hagakure* in which it is written that “*Bushido*, or the way of the samurai, means death.”⁶⁴ This is of course well quoted, and the reasoning is to show what emphasize was placed on death in bushido and for samurai in general. In exploring what it means to die honorably, its necessary to look at the attitudes of samurai in battle and to focus on how this attitude was carried outside of battle, most notably in terms of seppuku.

Samurai culture is one which is obviously based around battle and warfare, and for this reason battle has become almost the reason for a samurai to live, it is the most important moment in their existence. Because it is very likely that death will occur on the battlefield it was important for the samurai to ensure that they died an honorable death on the battlefield as opposed to one which was dishonorable. Firstly it must be noted that cowardice and fleeing from battle is always dishonorable and not in line with the manly ethos of the samurai. In a way such an action was almost worst than death, because it would indicate living a life in dishonor⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 285.

⁶⁵ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 84.

In what seems to be an odd practice, the Japanese samurai had an extensive tradition regarding decapitation and the severing of heads on the battlefield. In samurai battles, it could basically be summarized that it is honorable to cut off the opponents head, but dishonorable to have your own head cut off⁶⁶. Because of this practice a large tradition in samurai battles was based around cutting off the opponent's head. Having your own head cut off was such a great dishonor that it often happened that your ally in battle would cut your own head off if he saw you mortally wounded, to keep you from dishonor⁶⁷.

A tradition regarding honorable death that is even more pervasive in samurai culture, is that of seppuku. In early samurai periods "samurai committed *seppuku* mainly on the battlefield, when it was obvious that they were on the losing side."⁶⁸ Because seppuku is an honorable death, I believe that this explains the practice of having your head cut off after disemboweling yourself, to prevent an opponent from cutting off your head. Regardless of the reasons, seppuku is very important to samurai culture and bushido in general. Ikegami stresses that the importance of seppuku lies in its self-willed character: "The war literature from the Kamakura period onward often describes *seppuku* in battle, emphasizing the self-willed character of the warriors' deaths [...]"⁶⁹ and again states that "Personal will is always an important element in assessing the honor of the medieval samurai."⁷⁰ In a similar vein, Bellah states that "The attitude toward death is

⁶⁶ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 101.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 104-5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 109.

closely related to the mystical state in which one is beyond life and death. Being determined to die, death has no sting. The self is eliminated.”⁷¹ (Bellah; p. 92)

Seppeku is often joined with devotion to one’s master and many occurrences of suicide with one’s master or after the death of one’s master take place in samurai literature. This practice is called *junshi*, and it would become so popular in Tokugawa times that it actually had to be outlawed in the mid-seventeenth century, which is quite telling of time⁷². In the pre-Tokugawa period it seems that *junshi* was the result of emotional ties with one’s master: “The old warrior and his master are described as being united, not by a calculated exchange of debt and service, but by a close personal bond.”⁷³ As a result of this emotional bond or due to “special favors [received] from their deceased master, committing suicide was considered normal behavior.”⁷⁴ The author of the *Hagakure* laments that he was unable to commit *junshi* after his master’s death, because his master had forbidden it, thus hoping to prevent more deaths⁷⁵. While the death of the 47 ronin cannot be considered *junshi* proper, it is noteworthy that they became heroes overnight due to their act of selflessness to avenge their master’s death. *Junshi* was very important to samurai, and it became even more important to samurai during the Tokugawa *bakufu* because of the lack of violence during that period⁷⁶. Finally it must be commented that “[d]eath in the service of one’s lord was considered the most

⁷¹ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 92.

⁷² Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 219-20.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

appropriate end for a *samurai*. Indeed such a death had almost a “saving” quality, in the religious sense [...]”⁷⁷ (Bellah; p. 93).

VI. Death

Perhaps more than anything, death is the most important thing for a samurai, or perhaps better put, an honorable death is of the utmost importance for bushido.

Yamamoto quite explicitly states that “The Way of the Samurai is found in death.”⁷⁸ It would not be an exaggeration to say that everything in a samurai’s life is meant to prepare the samurai for a proper death. As an example of this, Yamamoto suggests that a samurai should keep their appearance clean and hygienic, not because of pride, but rather that “if you are slain with an unseemly appearance, you will show your lack of previous resolve, will be despised by your enemy, and will appear unclean.”⁷⁹ It can be seen from this, and numerous other examples, that a samurai’s life is really preparation for death. We will speak more upon this briefly, but first I would like to speak a bit upon the idea of revenge, which is largely connected with death, and comes up often.

It would seem that within bushido, there is not a large tradition of forgiveness, or if there is, it is certainly not emphasized. A samurai will often be looking for ways to take revenge on his enemies if he is insulted in some way. A samurai who does not take revenge, will often be depicted as a coward, and this is most dishonorable. In Yamamoto’s *Hagakure*, we find numerous stories of samurai taking revenge, and in many of these stories, it must be said, that the logic seems a bit off to this reader.

⁷⁷ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 93.

⁷⁸ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

However, one must understand that when a samurai's honor is insulted, they must do something about it, often the only way is revenge on the person who had insulted their honor. Nitobe connects the tradition of revenge within bushido to protecting a samurai's honor, in an explanation of why samurai are so quick to fight each other. Nitobe writes that:

For the most part, an insult was quickly resented and repaid by death, as we shall see later, while honour – too often nothing higher than vainglory or worldly approbation – was prized as the *summon bonum* of earthly existence. Fame, and not wealth or knowledge, was the goal toward which youths had to strive.⁸⁰

And furthermore, a bit earlier Nitobe speaks in a similar vein that “At the slightest, nay – imaginary insult – the quick-tempered braggart took offence, resorted to the use of the sword, and many an unnecessary strife was raised and many an innocent life lost.”⁸¹

Furthermore, the concept of revenge within bushido is often connected with the previously discussed concept of desperation or fanaticism. Revenge as it is described by Yamamoto, must be performed immediately, without thinking about it, because one may lose their resolve after meditation upon revenge, or perhaps their enemy may even die. Yamamoto states that if “Lord Kira had died of illness within that period, it would have been extremely regrettable.”⁸² On the subject of the 47 ronin, Ikegami is in agreement that revenge is primarily to protect one's honor, stating that:

It was a matter of *ichiban* that they had to defend for the sake of their manhood. Although the radical group realized that their act of revenge would violate the laws of the shogunate, they felt that, as vassals of a daimyo house, they had no

⁸⁰ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 72.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸² Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 15.

direct obligation to the shogun. The more important goal was to vindicate their personal honor as samurai.⁸³

However, without desperation one cannot be successful in revenge, because: “The way of revenge lies in simply forcing one’s way into a place and being cut down.”⁸⁴

I had previously said that a samurai’s whole life is preparation for death, and it is thus important to understand the notion of meditation on death. A samurai is expected to constantly be meditating on their own death, and in many respects the notion of meditation on death in bushido takes on an ascetic character. However, this author believes that for the samurai, meditation on death for the samurai is not simply a form of asceticism, but it is more that the form of the samurai’s death must be proper, and thus he must be ready. If a samurai is always meditating on his death, then his death will be proper according to Yamamoto:

The person without previous resolution to inevitable death makes certain that his death will be in bad form. But if one is resolved to death beforehand, in what way can he be despicable? One should be especially diligent in this concern.⁸⁵

What then does this meditation upon death consist of? The *Hagakure*, gives multiple examples of how one must conduct meditation on death, however two notable examples are as follows: “Thus, the Way of the Samurai is, morning after morning, the practice of death, considering whether it will be here or be there, imagining the most sightly way of dying, and putting one’s mind firmly in death.”⁸⁶, and again:

⁸³ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 234.

⁸⁴ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 15.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily. Every day when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate upon being ripped apart by arrows, rifles, spears and swords, being carried away by surging waves, being thrown into the midst of a great fire, being struck by lightning, being shaken to death by a great earthquake, falling from thousand-foot cliffs, dying of disease, or committing seppuku at the death of one's master. And every day without fail one should consider himself as dead.⁸⁷

In closing our examination of meditation on death, we should once more emphasize that it is not simply a form of asceticism, but it serves a practical purpose, because a warrior who is not ready to die, will admittedly not be the perfect warrior. "If a warrior is not unattached to life and death, he will be of no use whatsoever." and "With such nonattachment one can accomplish any feat."⁸⁸

Besides death from seppuku or *junshi*, death in battle is the primary way of honorable death for a samurai. Death in battle, incorporates many aspects, but it is a way which emphasizes the warrior nature of the samurai, and furthermore shows obedience to one's lord or master. Bellah writes that "Death in the service of one's lord was considered the most appropriate end for a *samurai*. Indeed such a death had almost a "saving" quality, in the religious sense..."⁸⁹. What's even more shocking is that in the *Hagakure*, it becomes apparent that in battle one should be more concerned with dying honorably than in defeating the enemy. This is completely contrary to what most people would think of when they think of war and battles, but this emphasizes the fact that the proper samurai dies in battle for their master. Yamamoto writes: "Concerning martial valor, merit lies

⁸⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁸⁹ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 93.

more in dying for one's master than in striking down the enemy."⁹⁰ To justify this notion, Yamamoto provides a story about a battle which Ieyasu was in, in which he did not win against his enemy, however the battle was good for him because: "Of his retainers who died in battle, not one of them died with his back turned. They all died facing the enemy lines."⁹¹, in other words, his men died honorably. Ikegami gives similar examples about dying in battle for one's master, that one older samurai in a battle was recorded as having said: "I have been serving this master until my old age. Now the master is also not young. Since he is facing his last moments of life, why should we not perish together?"⁹² And furthermore, that samurai "[o]n the battlefield, samurai often – though not always – preferred honorable death to the possibility of living in disgrace. That a man's honor was conceived by samurai as something to die for in fact signified the strong internalization of the norm."⁹³

Everything in a samurai's life leads up to the moment of death, and it could be posited that an honorable death is the real purpose of life. In light of this, death is always chosen for a samurai if given the option,

When it comes to either/or, there is only the quick choice of death. It is not particularly difficult. Be determined and advance. To say that dying without reaching one's aim is to die a dog's death is the frivolous way of sophisticates. When pressed with the choice of life or death, it is not necessary to gain one's aim.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 42.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹² Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 83-4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 95-6.

⁹⁴ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 3.

The finality, and single importance of a good death is emphasized by Ikegami, that:

The moment of death became an important occasion for making a point of honor: a man's control, dignity, and concern for posthumous reputation all fused together with particular intensity at this point. From there, an obsession with honorable and "beautiful" death gradually permeated the samurai culture of honor.⁹⁵

So it must be said that the focus on death within bushido is not only to create good, fearless warriors, but even more so it is *the* focus of bushido, it is the purpose of bushido, to create an honorable death. To summarize,

The fact that the samurai regarded the question of death as the central issue of his existence infused his culture with depth and complexity of meaning. Thus, the samurai's attitude toward death was the clearest expression of the conjunction of violence, autonomy, individuality, and dignity contained within and enveloped by the sentiment of honor.⁹⁶

VII. Saigo Takamori

In looking for a man who best described the samurai spirit, one could look no further than Saigo Takamori. As we have said previously, even in the time of Yamamoto, true bushido along with true samurai had started to become a thing of past. Really, since after the Sengoku period, and the rise of the Tokugawa bakufu, the ideas in the *Hagakure*, began to waver and be less prominent. Even more so was this true in the time of Saigo Takamori, and the samurai in this period would probably fall under Yamamoto's cast of feminization⁹⁷. However, if we are to look for samurai (and Japanese in general) who embodied the spirit of bushido given their own time periods and circumstances, then there is no doubt that Saigo Takamori would be one of the first on the list to exemplify

⁹⁵ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 103.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁷ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 10.

those who represented bushido best for their times. Saigo lived in a time in Japan, straddling between ancient and modern, tradition and innovation and to a large degree these contradictions were present in his own life. In describing Saigo's thoughts about being recalled from exile, Ravina writes that Saigo "wanted both to be a great and loyal servant of the realm and to lead a quiet life fishing with his friends."⁹⁸ However, Saigo was not just contradicted in his want for a quiet life and a political life, but also in his desire for tradition and modernism all the same.

It would be difficult to sum up Saigo Takamori's life in this paper, and it's actually far beyond the scope and purpose of this section, so it will only be necessary to mention a few details here and there. What is important to know, is that Saigo was a Satsuma samurai who was fiercely loyal to the Shimazu (*daimyo* family of Satsuma) and the emperor of Japan. Saigo's reverence for the emperor, combined with his hatred of the Tokugawa *bakufu* would lead him to become one of the pioneering leaders of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Like most samurai of his time, Saigo fought in few actual battles, and only towards the end of his life during the period of civil strife against the Tokugawa *bakufu* and in his rebellion against Meiji Japan. However, despite Saigo's standing as one of the founders of the Meiji state, he would also later become one of its opponents along with other samurai, mostly coming from western Japan, due to the Meiji states perceived decadence. Again, Ravina states that "This unspoken and unresolved tension became a latent crisis for both Saigo and for the Meiji state: one of the founders of the modern

⁹⁸ Mark Ravina, *The Last Samurai: The Life and Battles of Saigo Takamori* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 90.

Japanese state was deeply ambivalent about his own creation.”⁹⁹ In discussing Saigo Takamori, I will focus on what aspects of his personality that I believe most exemplify his samurai spirit, and depict him of an inheritor of the idea of bushido expounded by Yamamoto.

An important element of Saigo’s life, was his loyalty to his lord Shimazu Nariakira, who was the daimyo of the Satsuma *han*. Saigo had a close relationship with Nariakira, and as such, his loyalty to Nariakira would know no bounds, even after the death of his lord, Saigo would continue to pay him reverence through his obedience to the Shimazu house. Saigo’s relationship with his daimyo was atypical for the time as “[m]ost samurai lived and died without having ever enjoyed a private conversation with their daimyo, so Saigo was uniquely privileged.”¹⁰⁰ Ikegami writes that

Master and follower were united not only by the exchange of interests – the foundation of their relationship – but by emotional and personal ties as well. Compared with the other contemporary forms of social alliance and patronage, samurai vassalage had a distinctive advantage in its ability to mobilize men’s devotion to the point where they were willing to fight to the death.¹⁰¹

The relevance of this is that this is precisely the type of relationship that Saigo had with his lord Nariakira, and the relation is important to specify. Ravina claims that “Saigo wanted nothing less than the ideal lord-vassal relationship: a bond cemented by both deep personal affinity and a mutual commitment to duty”¹⁰² Saigo’s loyalty to his lord is described as an “intense, almost frenzied devotion” and it must be noted that Saigo

⁹⁹ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 165.

¹⁰¹ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 84.

¹⁰² Mark Ravina, *The Last Samurai: The Life and Battles of Saigo Takamori* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 165.

claimed he would gladly die for his lord, Nariakira¹⁰³. Saigo also, purportedly considered *junshi* after Nariakira's death as well, following the ancient samurai tradition of loyalty¹⁰⁴.

As we are discussing loyalty, some dissenters might put forward the notion that Saigo was disloyal, due to his status as a rebel against the emperor and against the Meiji state. It is certainly true that Saigo was a rebel, but it is important to realize the important distinction that was made between loyalty to a person, and to what they represent. When we understand this correctly, Saigo's rebellion was not disloyalty to the emperor per se, but rather to what he and others believed were destructive policies on the part of the imperial government. We will quote at length from Ravina to explain this dichotomy of loyalty.

Part of samurai loyalty was personal, in the sense that as vassals they were loyal to a specific man. This tradition was reflected in the medieval tradition of *junshi*, or following one's lord into death. Rather than serve another lord, samurai would commit suicide after their master's death.¹⁰⁵

and furthermore explaining the other form of loyalty, Ravina writes that:

The other aspect of samurai loyalty was institutional, in the sense that a samurai was loyal not to his lord, but to his lord's "state". Institutional loyalty meant that a samurai could oppose his lord's decisions without being disloyal. The vassal had a higher purpose: to serve the lord's polity or "state" and the broader principles of propriety.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

It is in this latter context of ‘institutional loyalty’ that we should understand Saigo’s rebellion against the Meiji state. Saigo was loyal to Japan, and what the emperor represented, but perhaps not the person of the emperor specifically.

Continuing from Saigo’s rebellion, we must note that it was fueled largely from a sense of desperation. We have discussed at length, the sense of determination and fanaticism for a cause that a samurai must have, and we find this same determination in the person of Saigo Takamori. Ravina writes that “Saigo was moved by their selfless and single-minded devotion to a cause. To strategize and strategize badly was a failing, but to reject strategy in the name of pure motives was, for Saigo, sublime.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the fact that it seems Saigo thought his rebellion against the Meiji government would be successful, I think that it should be taken in this previously mentioned sense. Saigo believed that sensing the moral correctness of his actions, that men would follow him into battle against the empire, and to a certain degree this was true, but it did not cause the rebellion he would have liked¹⁰⁸. Saigo wished that he could die in battle and “[h]e was not fighting for victory but for the “chance to die for principle” in his rebellion against Meiji Japan¹⁰⁹.

Why did Saigo object to the Meiji government that he worked so hard to create? It would perhaps be wrong to say that Saigo objected solely to the Meiji government for traditional reasons, or from some sort of conservative reactionism¹¹⁰. This could probably

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 206.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 154, 208.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 199.

be true for many who joined in his rebellion, but according to Ravina, this was not true for Saigo. Ravina believes that

Saigo's central objection to the Meiji state was moral. He was not satisfied by the 1875 attack on Korea because it was not rooted in a Confucian sense of honor. Similarly, Saigo was not anti-Western, but he detested the trappings of Western culture. The Tokyo government, it seemed, was eager to adopt such frivolities as ballroom dancing but loath to emulate the probity of Western government officials.¹¹¹

Saigo's rebellion could also most likely be described as coming out of loyalty as well.

However, this was not loyalty to the emperor, but rather loyalty to the Shimazu house, and to Satsuma as a whole. Saigo felt that "the abolition of the daimyo class was necessary to secure the foundations of the Japanese state, but he felt nonetheless that he was betraying the Shimazu house."¹¹²

Saigo Takamori, more than anything should be considered much of a realist. Rather than a fanatic conservative samurai, or simply a Satsuma loyalist, Saigo did what he felt was best for Japan, even if it contradicted his own wishes and desires. Saigo sought to create a strong Japan, that could resist foreign powers and intrigue and keep his country powerful. However, Saigo was a samurai, and his desire for this way of life, and moral rule, would lead him into a clash against the Meiji state.

The two armies were also fighting for two different visions of Japan. The rebels had neglected to draw up a manifesto, but their implicit cause was the restoration of samurai honor. The new government in Tokyo had abolished the samurai monopoly on military service and government offices. It had challenged one of the principle precepts of the old order: the idea that samurai alone had the courage to serve as warriors and the moral fiber to serve as government officials.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid., 195.

¹¹² Ibid., 171.

¹¹³ Ibid., 3.

However, Saigo's death at the end of his rebellion did not leave him a traitor of Japan, but rather a hero. In concluding the life of Saigo Takamori, Ravina writes that:

To the government's dismay, Saigo had come to represent all that was commendable in the samurai estate. Despite a formidable government propaganda campaign, Saigo remained immensely popular. He was widely seen as the model samurai: loyal, courageous, fearless in the face of death, incorruptible, fair, and compassionate.¹¹⁴

It is claimed that Saigo committed seppuku before his death at the Battle of Shiroyama, and while this fact is claimed to be historically inaccurate, it doesn't really matter, "Saigo had become a legend, and the Japanese media decided to print the legend, not the man."¹¹⁵ This is why Saigo Takamori is important for my thesis, he was a brave man who believed in his convictions, and was not afraid to die for them. Saigo was loyal to his samurai lord, and to his government, he was a man of determination who would do whatever it took to do what he believed was right. This is why, despite the fact that Saigo would create a modern state that was largely adverse to the principles of bushido and of the *Hagakure*, he should be considered the best representative of what it meant to be a samurai in early Meiji Japan.

VIII. Onoda Hiroo

The soldier Onoda Hiroo, who fought in the Philippines between 1944 and 1974 is a noteworthy example of a modern man who embodied the 'samurai spirit' and bushido at least in so far as modern times are concerned. I believe that Onoda best exemplified the samurai spirit because of his determinacy to not give up, and to continue fighting the war for Japan, even after it had ended. A brief background on Onoda is in order to explain his

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

basic struggles in the Philippines. Onoda was born in 1922 and was somewhat of a typical youth for the time. He practiced kendo and later would go on to be a business man in Hankow, in Japanese occupied China. After being drafted into the Japanese army, and excelling in his training he would be put in a special group to conduct guerilla warfare in the Philippines during the end of the war. Onoda was stationed on the island of Lubang, with a few other soldiers. The other soldiers on Lubang with Onoda would soon die out (due to poor leadership) or defect after the end of the war. Onoda and a few others with him would not surrender imagining the war to still be going on despite information to the contrary that they believed to be allied propaganda. Onoda would then spend the next thirty years warring against the people on the island of Lubang, and hoping to secure the island for a Japanese force he believed would come at some point. Eventually, Onoda would receive direct orders from his commanding officer that the war was over, and he would return to Japan.

When I first heard of Onoda's story, I thought what type of man could fight a war for thirty years, basically by himself, when it was already over? I thought that this type of person could be nothing short of a fanatic. Of course there is some fanaticism in Onoda's story, however this is the good kind that is spoken of in the *Hagakure*. However, to the contrary, Onoda's first hand experience comes off as rational, well thought out and reflective. He seems like an intelligent, sincere and reasonable individual. If this is true, then what could possess a seemingly rational man to wage an irrational war? For Onoda, however this war was not irrational, but simply the right thing to do. We will focus on a number of reasons for Onoda's determination to this war, and in doing so we will focus

on Onoda's determination, in which he demonstrates the spirit of bushido for WWII Japanese. To a large degree Onoda is a relic of WWII, who was able to keep the same spirit that was kept alive in WWII for all those years in the jungle. It is important to understand the cultural milieu that Onoda lived in before the war, to understand why he kept on fighting for so long.

Despite the fact that WWII Japan was modern and for most purposes on par with the other Western countries in many ways, Japan still harbored much of the warrior spirit that was alive when samurai still reigned the country. This is the Japan that Onoda came from, and that he kept alive while he was living in the forest of the Philippines. Much of the important elements of the *Hagakure* were kept alive in this time as is apparent from Onoda's exposition. Onoda writes that

if a soldier who had been taken prisoner later managed to return to Japan, he was subject to a court martial and a possible death penalty. Even if the penalty was not carried out, he was so thoroughly ostracized by others that he might as well have been dead. Soldiers were supposed to give their lives for the cause, not grovel in enemy prison camps.¹¹⁶

This is similar to Yamamoto's statement that "Concerning martial valor, merit lies more in dying for one's master than in striking down the enemy."¹¹⁷ The Japanese soldier was quite literally supposed to fight to the death, and if he could not die at the hands of the enemy he was to commit suicide to refrain from being captured, a notion so dear to the hearts of medieval samurai. Onoda states that his mother gave him a dagger that was passed down for generations for him to use, she parted him with the words "If you are

¹¹⁶ Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, trans. Charles Terry (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1974), 33.

¹¹⁷ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 42.

taken captive, use this to kill yourself.”¹¹⁸ Onoda once spoke to his brother that “If a man is not prepared to take a few risks, he will get nowhere!”¹¹⁹ and truly, this aligns with Yamamoto’s sense of courage in the face of adversity.

It is interesting to note that this warrior spirit, and desire for death rather than surrender, according with Yamamoto’s junction that “[w]hen it comes to either/or, there is only the quick choice of death.”¹²⁰, is that this extended not just to warriors, but to the Japanese population as well. Bellah states that “[b]*ushido* become in Tokugawa and modern times the national ethic, or at least a large part of it.”¹²¹, and it can be said that this extended to a large degree to WWII Japan as well. One of the many reasons that Onoda failed to believe newspapers and pamphlets speaking about modern Japan, that were distributed in the forest to try and make him surrender, was that he believed the fact that Japan even existed suggested that the war was not over. Onoda states that “We were sure that even if the enemy did land in Japan, in the end Japan would win. Like nearly all of our countrymen, we considered Japan to be the invincible land of the gods.”¹²² However, what would happen if Japan was invaded and lost the war? According to Onoda there would be no Japan, because every last Japanese citizen would fight to the death. Onoda writes that

¹¹⁸ Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, trans. Charles Terry (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1974), 37.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁰ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 3.

¹²¹ Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 90.

¹²² Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, trans. Charles Terry (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1974), 34.

When I arrived in the Philippines in 1944, the war was going badly for Japan, and in the homeland the phrase *ichioku g yokusai* (“one hundred million souls dying for honor”) was on everybody’s lips. This phrase meant literally that the population of Japan would die to a man before surrendering. I took this at face value, as I am sure many other young Japanese men my age did.¹²³

and furthermore that “If Japan had really lost the war, there should not *be* any life in Japan. Everybody should be dead.”¹²⁴

Speaking of death, one may question as to why Onoda did not commit suicide with the desperate situation he was in, being left alone on an island with no contact from his superior officers. Onoda never speaks negatively about suicide, and mentions it from time to time, that it was simply the expected thing to do. However, despite this, suicide was not the course of action for Onoda, he would not commit suicide and if he did die, he vowed to die at the hand of his enemies. Why was this? One of the important reasons for this was that Onoda was explicitly forbidden from killing himself. As Onoda was meant to conduct guerilla warfare, if he killed himself, he would no longer be a valuable resource as a spy and man who knew the terrain of Lubang where he was stationed. Even if he should be captured Onoda, should not commit suicide, because he could be a valuable asset as a spy if he ever returned. Onoda’s commanding officer General Muto Akira said to him

You are absolutely forbidden to die by your own hand. It may take three years, it may take five, but whatever happens, we’ll come back for you. Until then, so long as you have one soldier, you are to continue to lead him. You may have to live on coconuts. If that’s the case, live on coconuts! Under no circumstances are you give up your life voluntarily.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 118.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 44.

Like Yamamoto Tsunetomo, Onoda was forbidden by his master to commit suicide and as such he must follow these orders as a matter of loyalty. There is more to this desire to stay alive than just following orders however. Onoda explains at length his feelings about suicide and it's relation to his life:

People had often told me that if I was really cornered, I should save the last bullet for myself, but I intended to use every bullet I had against the enemy. Why should I waste a bullet on myself when the enemy would take care of me soon enough anyway? I had held on to those bullets and kept them clean all these years. I wanted each one to do as much damage as possible. If I could kill one more enemy with the last bullet, so much the better. That, rather than commit suicide, seemed to me to be what a soldier ought to do.¹²⁶

Rather than Onoda's desire for staying alive contradicting bushido, it enforces it because of his determination to fulfill his goal that he was sent to Lubang to fulfill, and that was to carry out guerilla warfare. Onoda was willing to carry out his task on Lubang despite whatever costs it may take. Onoda's determination is one of his most admirable traits, and I think it is what aligns him the most with bushido. Yamamoto says that "Although this may be a most difficult thing, if one *will* do it, it can be done. There is nothing that one should suppose cannot be done."¹²⁷ And this was the path that Onoda carved out for himself in the jungle. Onoda really believed that forces were coming back for him, and he took his commanders statement that they would come back for him eventually at face value. Onoda believed that he was paving the way for a future Japanese army to come and take the Philippines away from America. When Onoda received newspapers and documentation that suggested the war was over, he (and his comrades

¹²⁶ Ibid., 116.

¹²⁷ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 59.

when they were alive) would interpret them according to this world view and assumed they were forgeries. Onoda states that

Thinking that any advance Japanese agent would certainly come ashore on the south coast, we were trying to “secure” that area. We believed that if, when this agent, arrived, we were unable to give him all the information he needed about the island, we would be severely reprimanded, and rightly so.¹²⁸

Given these notions Onoda went forward with an impossible goal. Onoda was loyal and determined to his mission, he states that “When I became a soldier, I accepted my country’s goals. I vowed that I would do anything within my power to achieve those goals.”¹²⁹ and again he states that

I came to the conclusion then that I would probably go off to the Philippines and carry on my guerrilla warfare in the mountains until I died there all alone, lamented by no one. Although I knew that my struggle would bring me neither fame nor honor, I did not care.¹³⁰

Far from being a crazy straggler of a long over war, or an insane fanatic unwilling to admit defeat, Onoda was sincere and determined to carry out his mission on Lubang. Onoda could not die until that mission was finished and he lived his life to carry out this mission. Japan had lost, but Onoda could not accept that the ‘land of the gods’ had been defeated, and furthermore his commanding officer promised they would come back and get him. Onoda writes that

I had come to this island on the direct orders of the division commander. If the war was really over, there ought to be another order from the division commander releasing me from my duties. I did not believe that the division commander would forget orders that he had issued to his men.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, trans. Charles Terry (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1974), 114.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹³¹ Ibid., 92.

Since this did not happen Onoda continued fighting in Lubang until someone would come back to get him. According to Yamamoto “Neither wisdom nor technique has a place in this. A real man does not think of victory or defeat.”¹³² To a certain degree I don’t think it even mattered to Onoda that the war may have been over. He was sent to Lubang to perform a task, and would continue it out until told otherwise. I believe this for him was a personal battle and war. In the words of Onoda “My military assignment was my life and my support.”¹³³ and again when asked to return to Japan by someone who found him in the jungle he exclaimed “No, I won’t go back! For me, the war hasn’t ended!”¹³⁴ Onoda’s determination, loyalty and sincerity are what make him admirable and a true proponent of bushido and the spirit of the samurai in modern Japan.

IX. Mishima Yukio

Is *Hagakure* and bushido in general still relevant for modern day Japan? Do these philosophies hold any lesson that modern man can take, or are they merely dusty history books of a time long gone. At least one modern Japanese feels that this is not the case, and that *Hagakure* and bushido are as relevant today as they were back in the time of the samurai. This is the writer Mishima Yukio, who is well remembered for his attempted coup of the Japanese Self Defense Force and his death by seppuku in 1970¹³⁵. While Mishima’s manner of death is of course relevant, I would prefer to focus on his thoughts

¹³² Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 16.

¹³³ Hiroo Onoda, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, trans. Charles Terry (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1974), 215.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 198.

¹³⁵ Kathryn Sparling, *The Way of the Samurai: Yukio Mishima on Hagakure in Modern Life*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977), vii.

on Yamamoto's *Hagakure* and how he interpreted the book in light of modern times. Mishima's thoughts are important, because it would seem from his perspective that while bushido is not alive today, the fact that he embraced bushido as a whole, and his very writings and theatrical mode of death suggest the very opposite. The translator to Mishima's book on bushido notes to this effect that "One of Mishima's many self-images was that of a modern day samurai. It was essential to him that he die while still in his prime and that his death be worthy of the samurai tradition."¹³⁶

Mishima begins his book lamenting with the treatment that *Hagakure* has been given in modern Japan. The reasons for this negative treatment of the book in question are because the book had become associated by modern Japanese with the militant Japan of WWII, which they would like to forget. Ikegami notes that

Because of its idiosyncratic expressions and ideas, *Hagakure* was preferred reading for pre-World War II Japanese militarists and right-wing ultra-nationalists, who considered it an unsurpassable behavioral guide for soldiers who wished to exemplify the true spirit of the samurai.¹³⁷

It is interesting to note that Ikegami also mentions that many modern Japanese avoid the book to this day because of its association with our writer in question, Mishima Yukio as well. Mishima comments that *Hagakure* "came to be thought of as a loathsome, ugly, evil book, a tainted book to be wiped from memory, tied roughly in bundles, and consigned to the rubbish heap."¹³⁸ However despite these negative things we have just said about

Hagakure, Mishima believes that the book has relevance for people today in modern

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 279.

¹³⁸ Yukio Mishima, *The Way of the Samurai: Yukio Mishima on Hagakure in Modern Life*, trans. Kathryn Sparling (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977), 6.

Japan, and to a certain degree he assigns a universality to bushido that seems to surpass even Japanese nationals as well.

Mishima, in his exposition on Yamamoto's book writes that the things contained within the book "are teachings with a universality applicable to any age, no matter how conditions may change. And yet they are also full of practical knowledge gained by individuals through practical experience."¹³⁹ If we will remember that the age in which Yamamoto originally wrote his book was one of moral decline, and one in which the true way of bushido was coming to end, we will find that Mishima draws out numerous parallels to his own time as well. Yamamoto was writing his book after the Sengoku period of Japanese history, when intense fighting had come to an end, and he now lived in a relatively peaceful time under Tokugawa rule. Mishima felt that he too lived in a similar time period, now that WWII was over and again Japan was relatively peaceful. In this vein, Mishima writes that "Thanks to the postwar industrialization process, the age of mass consumption has arrived and it seems that this characteristic virtue of the Japanese has been swept away forever."¹⁴⁰ However, in his critique of modern Japanese society, Mishima draws up other numerous parallels between his time and Yamamoto's time as well.

One interesting line of comparison that Mishima draws out is regarding what he (and Yamamoto) refer to as the feminization of males. Yamamoto writes regarding his own time that "When looking at the men of today with this in mind, those who could be thought to have a woman's pulse are many indeed, and those who seem like real men

¹³⁹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

few.”¹⁴¹ Mishima expounds on this idea for modern Japan as well, citing examples such as men’s concern for fashion and what not. Mishima writes responding to Yamamoto

Moreover, we are constantly being told of the feminization of Japanese males today – it is inevitably seen as the result of the influence of American democracy, “ladies first,” and so forth – but this phenomenon, too, is not unknown in our past. When, breaking away from the rough-and-tumble masculinity of a nation at war, the Tokugawa *bakufu* had securely established its hegemony as a peaceful regime, the feminization of Japanese males immediately began.¹⁴²

Mishima comments on a number of other trends he finds negative in Japanese society that are similar to trends Yamamoto was able to observe in his own Tokugawa society.

Mishima mentions artists and other professions and applies Yamamoto’s critiques on them as well. However, the issue that Mishima focuses the most on when describing his perceived decadence of modern Japan, is that of modern Japanese’s feelings on death.

Mishima writes that

We simply do not like to speak about death. We do not like to extract from death its beneficial elements and try to put them to work for us. We always try to direct our gaze toward the bright landmark, the forward facing landmark, the landmark of life. And we try our best not to refer to the power by which death gradually eats away our lives.¹⁴³

I feel that in his exposition on death, Mishima is able to explain why he believes that the theory of bushido outlined in the *Hagakure* is still relevant to today.

Why then must we focus on death, according to Mishima? I believe that Mishima holds relatively nihilistic views about human existence, and thus he clings on to

¹⁴¹ Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Wilson (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 10.

¹⁴² Yukio Mishima, *The Way of the Samurai: Yukio Mishima on Hagakure in Modern Life*, trans. Kathryn Sparling (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977), 18.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 28-9.

Yamamoto's thoughts on death, and in particular on determined action as a way in which to make sense out of our existence here on earth. Mishima says that

Hagakure is an attempt to cure the peaceful character of modern society by the potent medicine of death. This medicine, during the hundred years of war preceding the Tokugawa Period, had been all too liberally resorted to in the daily lives of the people, but with the coming of peace, it was feared as the most drastic medicine and avoided.¹⁴⁴

Again, Mishima draws out connections between Tokugawa Japan, and his own modern Japan, and uses bushido as the medicine that modern man needs. Mishima feels that through constant meditation on death, as advocated by Yamamoto, we can make each and every element of our life, no matter how trivial important in the grand scheme of things. This not only gives value and meaning to our lives, but also allows us to excel at what we do. He writes: "When we do our work thinking that we may die today, we cannot help feeling that our job suddenly becomes radiant with life and meaning."¹⁴⁵ And again in the same vein, Mishima says that "The philosophy of *Hagakure* creates a standard of action which is the most effective means of escaping the limitations of the self and becoming immersed in something greater."¹⁴⁶

As I said earlier, Mishima values Yamamoto's theory of action, and believes strongly in the idea of plunging head first towards some goal, whether it is reached or not. Mishima aligns his thoughts here quite closely with those of Yamamoto. Mishima believes that Yamamoto's

ideal is the purest form of action, which automatically subsumes the virtues of loyalty and filial piety. A samurai cannot predict beforehand whether his own

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 39.

actions will come to embody loyalty and filial piety. But human action does not always take a predictable course.¹⁴⁷

Mishima lays such stress on this idea, that like Yamamoto he feels that *what* one dies for is not as important as *how* one dies. In Mishima's writings we find a complete approval of seppuku (not surprising as this was his own form of death), and he believes that Yamamoto places such emphasis on this mode of death because of its free nature, and as an expression of freedom. For Mishima,

What Jocho [Yamamoto Tsunetomo] means by "death" is the deliberate choice to die, and no matter how constrained the situation, when one breaks through the constricting forces by choosing to die, one is performing an act of freedom.¹⁴⁸

I believe that this emphasis on freedom is connected to Mishima's thoughts on action. Finally it must be said that for Mishima it does not really matter if one dies for a noble cause or not, because whether a cause is noble or not is largely subjective and can be interpreted in various ways. But ultimately for Mishima death is important in and of itself, a natural part of life and what it means to be a human being, and as such it is not so important whether one dies for a noble cause or not. Mishima closes his book stating:

We tend to suffer from the illusion that we are capable of dying for a belief or a theory. What *Hagakure* is insisting is that even a merciless death, a futile death that bears neither flower nor fruit, has dignity as the death of a human being. If we value so highly the dignity of life, how can we not also value the dignity of death? No death may be called futile.¹⁴⁹

X. Conclusion

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 105.

In the course of this paper, I have briefly outlined what I believe to be the most important elements regarding the samurai theory of bushido, and how a warrior should conduct himself in regards to this philosophy. In addition to this, I have tried to highlight a few individuals, who I believe exemplify the spirit of bushido in modern times. It can, and probably should, be acknowledged that these men, of course with the exception of Saigo Takamori, were not samurai. Onoda Hiroo was a simple soldier in WWII, who had perhaps let his long stay in the jungle go to his head. Mishima Yukio was a ultra-conservative fanatic, who liked to look at himself as a samurai. Even Saigo Takamori was likely far from practicing the proper life of a samurai, at least insofar as Yamamoto Tsunetomo would have been concerned. With this being said, one could probably come to the conclusion that bushido is dead in Japan, and the way of the samurai is no more. There is certainly a great amount of truth in this, and it would be hard to argue otherwise. However, the purpose of my thesis was to qualify this death of bushido and to show that perhaps it is not completely dead.

I have concerned my thesis with individuals, because I believe that bushido is best exemplified through individuals. Bushido is an individual practice and philosophy and is not concerned with groups, but rather manifested through individuals. Nitobe writes that “in Japan [people] differ by originality of character”¹⁵⁰, and Ikegami believes that “the Japanese have an indigenous cultural resource for the expression of individuality”¹⁵¹. And for this reason I have provided examples of bushido within the lives of a few modern

¹⁵⁰ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 35.

¹⁵¹ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

individuals. While the code of bushido was largely something that only concerned samurai, it is of course true that this philosophy would shape the ethos of the average Japanese person as well. According to Bellah, “[t]hough the *samurai* might best embody the ethical code which bears their name [bushido], it was by no means restricted to that class.”¹⁵² However, the class that originated bushido is dead, and it could rightly be said that with the death of the samurai class, bushido died as well.

While it is true that bushido is dead, it doesn’t necessarily mean that there are no Japanese who will remember this philosophy and try to implement portions of it within their lives. If bushido lives at all today, it is in a form of romanticism for the past, one which looks to it as something to be remembered and cherished. The life of Mishima is of course suggestive of this romanticism for the past. However, in the lives of Saigo and Onoda we find some of the same traits present that were contained within the theory of bushido as well. According to Nitobe,

The heart of the people responds, without knowing a reason why, to any appeal made to what it has inherited, and hence the same moral idea expressed in a newly translated term and in an old Bushido term, has a vastly different degree of efficacy.¹⁵³

If bushido lives at all, it is not as a formal philosophy as such, but as something to be remembered from the past. In the hearts and souls of certain Japanese who have lived in modern times, we can see how bushido has influenced their lives and how they exhibit some of the same morals once preached by Yamamoto. As such we have focused on these individuals who were evocative of a way of life long gone. Bushido will no longer

¹⁵² Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 98.

¹⁵³ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002), 132.

be a national philosophy or ethic of Japan, but rather something to be remembered by a few select individuals, who best show what it means to be a samurai today in their individual lives and struggles.

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