

“It was back when I was a student. It was when I returned to my homeland of Shinshu, for my mother’s funeral.”

As seen in the film, the Iikura Family resided in Shinshu. Located in present-day Nagano (site of the 18th Winter Olympics in 1998), Shinshu was a large province, sandwiched by Suruga and Kai to its south, and Echigo to its north.

“It began by saying that after the fall of his clan in the Battle of Sekigahara, our ancestor, Iikura Jirozaemon Hidekiyo, now a ronin obtained a position with Court Minister Hori of Yazaki in Shinshu Province.”

The Battle of Sekigahara (in present-day Gifu Prefecture), also known as the Realm Divide, took place on October 21, 1600, and decisively cleared the path to the Shogunate for Tokugawa Ieyasu. The battle pitted Tokugawa Ieyasu and the Clans of Eastern Japan (80,000 troops) against Ishida Mitsunari and the Clans of Western Japan (80,000 troops). It was a clear victory for Ieyasu, and the Western bloc was quickly crushed.

Immediately after the victory at Sekigahara, Ieyasu divided up the spoils -- in particular, the land and the income it generated -- to the vassals who had served him, and though he had many western nobles captured and killed, he left some of the Daimyo relatively untouched. Toyotomi Hideyori (son of Hideyoshi) lost much of his territory and status, becoming just another Daimyo instead of one of the most powerful men in Japan.

Sekigahara is considered as the unofficial beginning of the Tokugawa shogunate, and even though it took three more years for Ieyasu to consolidate his power over the Toyotomi Clan and the Daimyo, he was now the de-facto ruler of Japan. He was 60 years old when he received the title of Shogun in 1603, and though he abdicated his official position only 2 years later, henceforth acting as the retired Shogun, he remained the effective ruler of Japan until his death. The Tokugawa Shogunate would rule Japan for the next 265 years.

“15th year of the Keicho period (1595-1614), fifth month, day five.”

It should be noted that dates such as "fifth Month" do not refer to May since the Chinese calendar (not the Gregorian calendar) was used by Japan until 1873. According to Samurai Archives, "The Japanese calendar was behind the Western calendar by three to seven and a half weeks, depending on the year, so if one wants to get a feel for the season based on the Japanese date, it is probably adequate to think of a date one month later."

“27 years later, in the 14th year of the Kan-er period (1624 - 1644), I helped suppress the Shimabara Rebellion.”

Although persecution of Christians started soon after the arrival of missionaries in the late 1500s, it wasn't until January of 1614 that an official edict was issued by Tokugawa Ieyasu and persecution (and executions) began in earnest. By Tokugawa Iemitsu's time (the third Tokugawa Shogun), it is estimated that several thousand Christians had been put to death.

This persecution continued for many decades and some groups of Christians were ordered to live within designated districts, where they were taxed severely. It was in one such colony, on Amakusa Island in Shimabara Peninsula, where the inhabitants staged a general uprising in 1637. With the help of local ronin, they went to Shimabara where they won support from certain insurgents. According to Mikiso Hane, "About 37,000 people, including women and children, entrenched themselves in a strategically located castle and defied the Bakufu forces that besieged them. They were finally reduced to near starvation and the stronghold was taken. Virtually all of the insurgents in the castle were massacred. The siege lasted for three months, and the Tokugawa Shogunate Government employed 100,000 warriors against them, suffering a loss of 13,000 men."

Overall, the fight lasted from December 11, 1637 to April 12, 1638. The Shimabara Rebellion spelled the end of Japan's contact with the outside world, and the nation was to remain closed to most of the world until Commodore Perry's arrival in 1853.

Note: The famed swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, while fighting for the Shogunate at the Shimabara Rebellion, was injured by a rock thrown by a peasant.

“He was punished, and the 70-koku stipend granted because of the loyalty of Jirozaemon was revoked.”

70-koku is equal to 10.5 tons of rice.

Of koku, George Sansom says that: "...the product of one choo (approx. 2.5 acres) of first-class paddy," which are wet fields where rice is grown, "is of the order of 10 koku, a koku being the equivalent of about 5 bushels of dry measure in England or the United States." Furthermore, "...in all discussion of the amount and quality of the crop, the ruling fact is that 1 koku of rice is the average annual consumption of one person." He also states the amount of labor that's needed for producing such a sizable amount: "To cultivate one choo of mixed (wet & dry) arable land required the full-time labor of four or five men."

To give you a better idea, the Shogunate, combining all of its scattered fiefs, controlled about 7 million-koku. There were almost 300 Daimyo, who altogether controlled 25 million-koku. Kaga, which was the richest fief, was a "million-koku fief."

Note: This is the mantra of the Goma Fire Ritual.

The mantra for the fire-ritual (known as "Goma") is the incantation given below and is the traditional, phonetic version of the Sanskrit mantra:

“Namah samanta-vajranam chanda maha-rochana sphotaya Hum Trat Ham Mam”

“Over the next 30 years, nothing noteworthy happened. It became the Genroku period (1688-1704).”

The Imperial Era of Genroku is remembered as a period of incredible wealth among the commoner merchant classes of Japan's cities, and of a great flowering of popular culture. Kabuki, joruri puppet theatre, ukiyo-e and a wide range of forms of humorous literature, along with the culture of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters came into their own at this time, though they would mature later in the 18th century.

Tokugawa Tsunayoshi became shogun in 1680, and exercised absolute rule without a Tairo to serve as chief adviser. His rule was quite strict at times, but it was also quite arbitrary, and Tsunayoshi is generally regarded as one of the least competent of the shoguns. Even so, the bureaucrats and administrators under him did well, maintaining the day-to-day governance of the nation, and Japan saw several decades of incredible prosperity before the bubble burst and real problems began to sink in.

Even the peasantry of the most rural districts are said to have enjoyed some degree of prosperity at this time, but it was the merchant classes of Osaka, Kyoto and Edo who truly benefited. The myriad economic developments of the previous century converged at this time to create immense wealth for those best in a position to take advantage of it. Merchants flaunted their wealth, and while the period is remembered as a Golden Age of art and literature, it was also a period of hedonism and frivolous expense. Stories abound of merchants, courtesans, and others who frivolously wasted away their money on drink, clothes, and other pleasures; a few merchants are known to have even bought out the entire Yoshiwara (red light district) solely for themselves for a night or two. One must grudgingly admire their ambition if not their sense of proportion.

“Yes. Even the Ukiyo-e artists... would be astounded by this work.”

Ukiyo-e is a genre of Japanese painting and woodblock prints, comprising a number of closely related styles, which formed one of the core genres of Edo-period popular art. The term literally means "pictures of the floating world," and ukiyo-e images generally depict elements of urban commoner culture, especially kabuki actors, courtesans and other beautiful women, sumo wrestlers, and famous places around Edo and elsewhere.

One of the key concepts at the heart of the ukiyo-e aesthetic is the ephemeral nature both of the art itself and of its subjects. The notion of the "floating world" speaks primarily of ephemeral, short-lived experiences in the entertainment districts of the city, a beauty and enjoyment which is fleeting. While ukiyo-e paintings remained expensive objects which were meant to be kept and cherished, the nature of the medium of the woodblock print, along with mass production, allowed ukiyo-e prints to be produced and sold quite cheaply. While only the more wealthy merchants, and other elites, could generally afford to commission paintings, prints were available

to the general masses. They were collectibles, but also ephemeral souvenirs of one's experiences in the theatre or other entertainment districts of the city.

The genre originated in the late 17th century, reached its climax around 100 years later, and continued into the Meiji period, declining and coming to an end shortly after the turn of the 20th century.

The influence of Ukiyo-e on western artists is referred to as Japonisme. Painters such as Vincent Van Gogh, Claude Monet and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec are among the artists who were inspired by the prints they saw.

“This very evening, I will boil some red rice.”

Red rice is customary for festive occasions and holidays.

“In the seventh month of the 3rd year of the Tenmei period (1781-1789)... there was the great eruption at Mount Asama.”

The August 5, 1783 eruption of Mount Asama (with casualties estimated at over 20,000), combined with the Great Tenmei Famine, which lasted almost ten years, was widely taken as an ominous omen and symbol that the country was in need of serious change and a return to virtuous leadership.

“Father. And older brother Noda... my congratulations.”

Here, it should be noted that "older brother" (onisan) does not necessarily refer to a sibling, but is an affectionate designation used by children toward older young men. It can also be used by grownups in casual social situations.

“What? The farmers have made a direct appeal?”

In Japan's feudal system, it was unlawful to directly appeal to authorities for any request.

“What? He let farmers into his mansion?”

Class distinctions during the Edo period included: nobility/samurai, farmer, craftsmen, merchant and outcast. This system was severely enforced.

Symbols: “Kyo” “Nin” “Gyo” Banner: “Kyo-ningyo” (“Kyoto Doll”)

Kyoto Dolls are traditional, high-quality delicate dolls made with detailed crafting skills.

“Are you going to the castle, Mother? I sure wish I could go too.”

As is commonly done, Jujiro refers to himself by name. He literally says, "I sure wish Jujiro could go too."

"May I borrow perfumed powders?"

The perfumed powders that were used during this time contained toxic chemicals.

“The two criminals are kneeling about six feet in front of you. Alright?”

The actual phrase used here is "one ken", which is equal to approximately six feet.

“It has become the Meiji period (1868-1907).”

The Meiji Restoration

Modern Japan begins in the fall of 1868, when the era name “Meiji” was proclaimed and ruling authority was officially restored to the new emperor, Meiji. At that time only sixteen years old, he had been petitioned by the final Tokugawa Shogun, Keiki, to accept the restoration of power the year before in order to resolve political chaos that the Shogunate could no longer control. Emperor Meiji, who ascended the throne in 1867, and

reigned until his death in 1912, was a firm supporter of Western ideas, unlike the Tokugawa isolationists. He helped Japan to emerge from feudalism into a modern age, quickly transforming the nation into an Eastern superpower. Meiji's centralized bureaucracy replaced the balance of power between the Shogunate and the autonomous domains. The military authority of the samurai class was replaced by a conscript army, based on the Prussian model. Many official missions (some in the form of foreign exchange students!) were dispatched to examine Western countries. The sudden modernization was not universally embraced. Importing Western philosophies, several of which contradicted long-held traditions, outraged many. Others, however, enthusiastically viewed anything Western as the new ideal.

As Japan's isolationist policy ended, it became clear that other nations viewed it as a backward nation. To correct this, the leadership devised a new policy of "Fukoku Kyohei" (lit. "Enrichment of the Nation, Strengthening of the Army") in the belief that the rapid enlargement of trade and the establishment of foreign colonies were essential for Japan's survival in the modern age. In other words, they stole a copy of the Western powers' playbook. The new government also cooperated closely with "zaibatsu" --- major merchant families and other plutocrats. By 1872, private banks were established, and the government offered for sale, at low prices, many previously government-run enterprises, such as mining and shipping, to prominent zaibatsu houses such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi (the same giants which prosper to this day). These successful ventures not only boosted the economy, but also played a major role in enhancing the nation's military capabilities.

"Farmers are rioting in Niigata. We have to go and suppress them, on the double."

The city of Niigata, located in the Niigata Prefecture is located approximately 254 km (158 miles) from Tokyo.

"I feel that you lack 'adaptability.'"

Since the Meiji period was a time of westernization, here Shingo's brother-in-law is referring to Shingo's inability (or reluctance) to give up "ancient" feudal standards.

"Having received a new master in the 27th year of Meiji (1894), he went to fight in the Sino-Japanese War and from that war, he did not return."

From before the official declaration of war on August 1, 1894 to the Treaty of Shimonoseki on April 17, 1895, China and Japan battled for control of Korea. Japan's eventual victory in the Sino-Japanese War symbolized the weakness and decline of China's Qing dynasty in the wake of the successful modernization of Meiji Restoration Japan. Fearing Russian expansion into China and Korea, Japan looked outward for foreign conquests, which would preserve its status in the region as a major military force. Yi dynasty Korea sought to preserve its traditional isolation and tributary relationship with China, which in turn strove to protect its principal vassal. However, Japan's military might was too much for China.

"The Kamikaze Special Attack Group, 3rd Mitate Squadron shall immediately attack enemy forces located 50 miles east of Ishigaki Island."

Kamikaze is the name given to the Japanese suicide attacks that occurred near the end of the Pacific campaign of WWII. Although there were other similar attacks throughout the war, the "suicide attack" became synonymous with the time period during Japan's imminent defeat, near the beginning of 1944, a time when the Allied forces were advancing toward the Japanese islands.

During these attacks, Kamikaze pilots attempted to intentionally crash their aircraft into opposing ships, with the hope of inflicting more damage than a conventional attack would have caused. To ensure maximum damage, the aircrafts were usually stocked with extra explosives and full fuel tanks.

Kamikaze pilots were the most common form of Japanese suicide during the war, however the military used other suicide attacks involving midget submarines, human torpedoes, speedboats, and divers.

Nakamura Kinnosuke (aka Ogawa Kin'ichi, aka Yorozya Kinnosuke)

(November 20, 1932 - March 10, 1997)

Born in Tokyo to the son of a famous kabuki actor, Kinnosuke became one of the biggest stars in post-war

Japanese cinema. Beginning with his first film in the early 1950s, Kinnosuke worked almost exclusively for Toei Studios during the decade, completing over 80 films, an average of over 13 a year.

By the start of the 1960s, Kinnosuke was a certified movie star and one of the top contract actors at Toei. Some of his highlights of the decade include a monumental five-film series based on the life of Mushashi Miyamoto, directed by Uchida Tomu; Gosha Hideo's cult classics, *Secret of the Urn* and *Gyokin*; Inagaki Hiroshi's final film, the star-studded *Incident at Blood Pass*; and the Golden Bear winning *Bushido zankoku monogatari* (*Bushido: The Cruel Code of the Samurai*).

When *Bushido* premiered in 1963, he was only 30 years old and it was already his 109th film. After the film won the Golden Bear at Berlin, Kinnosuke only worked with Tadashi once more, on 1964's *Adauchi* (*Revenge*). Over the course of the decade, he appeared in almost 50 films.

During the 1970s, Kinnosuke split his time between television and film. His most notable small screen work was the hit Japanese television series *Lone Wolf and Cub*, playing Ogami Itto from 1973-1976. At the end of the decade he appeared in two Fukasaku Kinji films, *Ako-Jo danzetsu* (*Swords of Vengeance*) and *Yagyu ichizoku no inbo* (*The Shogun's Samurai*).

His last film was 1989's *Sen no Rikyu* (*Death of a Tea Master*). During the 90s, he appeared in a handful of television dramas, culminating in an appearance on the Japanese television series *Kanpani* (*Company*) in 1996. A year later, he died from pneumonia at age 64.

By the end of his career, Kinnosuke had acted in over 140 films.

He was twice nominated by the Japanese Academy, for the 1978 film *The Shogun's Samurai* and for the 1989 film *Death of a Tea Master*. A year before his death, the Academy presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award and one year after his death he was bestowed a Special Award for his career.

Mita Yoshiko (Kyoko)

(b. October 8, 1941)

After graduating high-school in 1960, Yoshiko joined Toei Studios and immediately began to appear in minor film roles. Within a few years, she had become a studio favorite; when *Bushido* was released, Yoshiko was only 22 years old.

Some of her more prominent roles include 1968's *Samaritan Zatoichi*; 1978's *Ako-Jo danzetsu* (*Swords of Vengeance*); 1982's award-winning *Mikan no taikyoku* (*The Go Masters*); 1988's *Tora-san 40*, aka *Tora-san's Salad-Day Memorial*; Teshigahara Hiroshi's 1989 classic *Rikyu*; and 2003's *Battle Royale 2*.

At the time of this writing, Yoshiko is still acting. She is set to appear in the 2010 film, *Ningen shikkaku* (*No Longer Human*).

She has won two Best Acting awards from the Japanese Academy: Best Supporting Actress for 1984's *W no higeki* (*W's Tragedy*) and Best Actress for 1992's *Toki rakujitsu* (*The Distant Setting Sun*).

Imai Tadashi (Director)

(January 8, 1912 - November 2, 1991)

Imai Tadashi grew up the son a priest in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. While attending Tokyo Imperial University, he joined a communist youth league and was arrested a handful of times for "radical" activities. In 1935, Tadashi dropped out of school and joined J.O. Studio as an assistant director. Four years later, at age 27, he directed his his first film, *Numazu Military Academy*. Regarding his quick immersion into film, Donald Richie states, "Unlike other directors of his generation, notably Kinoshita and Kurosawa, who underwent long apprenticeships under directors Shimazu Yasujiro and Yamamoto Kajiro, respectively, Imai entered the cinema untrained. This does not mean that his point of view is amateurish or awkward, but it explains his stylistic diffusion or, another way of looking at it, his freedom from limitations."

During WWII, Tadashi was forced to direct pro-war propaganda films for the studio. However, his first film following the war, *Minshu no Teki* (An Enemy of the People), took a pro-Communist stance and attacked the rulers of Japan. As Donald Richie points out, Tadashi's film passed the US censorship boards "because it was anti-Zaibatsu and heaped scorn and ridicule on the emperor system." The film did not go unnoticed to Japanese critics, as they awarded him Best Director at the Mainichi Film Concours.

In 1951, Tadashi helped usher-in the postwar independent film movement with *Dokkoi ikiteiru* (Still We Live). It is credited with being the first independently produced Japanese feature film made outside of the studio.

Over the next ten years, Tadashi became influenced by Italian neo-realism and focused his attention to several films that dealt with social injustice. *Himeyuri no to* (The Tower of Lilies) and *Nigorie* (Muddy Waters) were released in 1953 and both films deal with the oppression of women in Japanese society. Three years later, he made *Mahiru no ankoku* (Darkness at Noon), a film about four young men who were arrested, beaten, and coerced into confessing to a crime they did not commit; the film was based on a similar trial that was occurring simultaneously in Japan at the time. By the end of the decade, Tadashi's films had amassed over 30 nominations from various Japanese and international festivals.

When *Bushido* premiered in 1963, it was his 33rd film. After it won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1963, it would be 39 years until another Japanese film was awarded with the prize (Hiyao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* in 2002).

His last film, *War and Youth*, was released less than one month after his death in 1991. Although Tadashi was not nominated for his direction, the film garnered nine Japanese Academy nominations (winning two); at the Montreal World Film Festival, Tadashi was awarded the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury.

In addition to the Golden Bear, Tadashi won Best Director at the 1958 Berlin Film Festival for *Junai monogatari* (The Story of Pure Love). Two of his films were nominated at the Cannes Film Festival: 1953's *Nigorie* (An Inlet of Muddy Water) and 1957's *Kome* (The Rice People).

Over a career in film that lasted over 50 years, Tadashi directed almost 50 films. Having never received a nomination from the Japanese Academy during his lifetime, he was awarded a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992.

Bushido: The Soul Of Chambara

by Randy Schadel, film historian and Samurai Archives staff member (www.samurai-archives.com)

Bushido-the code of loyalty and courage-the stuff of which legends are made. So it is usually portrayed-but was it really? Many adherents of Bushido claim that it was around in one form or another for hundreds of years, but in fact it was an artificial construct of the Edo period (1603-1868) largely dreamt up by scholars with too much time on their hands. The word 'Bushido' rarely, if ever, turns up in Japanese literature pre-Edo. In an age in which there were no wars, samurai such as Daidoji Yuzan (author of *Budo Shoshinshu*) and Yamamoto Tsunetomo (whose reminiscing formed the basis of the *Hagakure*, containing the famous line 'the way of the samurai is found in death') looked back fondly on the 'good old days' and put together a theoretical code of conduct drawn from the glorified exploits of samurai as told in *gunkimono* (quasi-fictional war tales). Their writings borrowed liberally from concepts set down by Buddhism, Shinto, Neo-Confucianism, and daimyo house codes. Bushido (usually translated as 'The Way of the Warrior') was in essence an unwritten philosophy that stressed honor, loyalty, and courage (and depending on the source, rectitude, respect, wisdom, benevolence, filial duty and care for elders)-an idealized form of behavior for the warrior-statesmen of the Edo period.

The problem with Bushido as a code of ethics lies largely in the fact that the manifestos produced in the Edo period so rarely mesh with what was seen as acceptable and commendable warrior behavior throughout Japanese history. Bushido scholars of the Edo period also disagreed quite often as to just what exactly constituted honorable behavior, so that they were likely to argue over whether any given act displayed loyalty, honor, or any of the other traits. This is exactly what happened with the famous 47 Ronin incident (which we'll expound on later). Even some of the concepts borrowed from other philosophies by Bushido tended to contradict themselves-for example, many daimyo house codes considered the study of music and theater arts commendable, but at least one daimyo considered the practice of them to be punishable by death. With so

many influences intertwined and mingled, how was a samurai to know what was the correct course to take?

Modern Western scholars such as Thomas Conlan, Karl Friday, Beatrice Bodart-Bailey, and Henry Smith have done much to chronicle how the tenets of Bushido were almost never followed in the real world. Fire attacks, ambushes, night raids, attacks on unarmed opponents, and all manner of 'dishonorable' acts were perfectly acceptable to the samurai, and indeed, considered praiseworthy. Storied heroes such as Minamoto no Yoshitsune thought nothing of burning down a village to provide a distraction for an attack. Leaders praised as wise and compassionate kidnapped villagers for ransom and, failing that, sold them into virtual slavery, as in the case of 16th century warlord Takeda Shingen. Loyalty was prized so highly by Bushido because there was so little of it displayed by samurai. Many a conflict was decided when a warlord would switch sides, sometimes during the middle of a battle (as happened at Dan-no-Ura in 1185 and Sekigahara in 1600). As far as the 'way of the warrior is found in death' goes, samurai were more than happy to run off to fight another day-casualties rarely would exceed 10% in a battle. During the many years of warfare in Japanese history, the samurai proved to be as brutal and practical as any other warrior society-what mattered were results and being on the winning side through whatever means possible.

Bushido was such an obscure concept that Nitobe Inazo thought he had invented the word when he wrote 'Bushido: The Soul of Japan' in 1900. Nitobe was in many ways more Western than Japanese-he was a Christian, spoke English fluently, and was far better educated in Western history than that of Japan. In the words of G. Cameron Hurst III, 'Nitobe was the least qualified Japanese of his age to have been informing anyone of Japan's history and culture'. Wanting to impress his Western friends, Nitobe glorified the warrior tradition of Japan-and eager Europeans and Americans bought into the 'exotic code' as the samurai never did, causing a reverse effect that saw the book catch on with nostalgic Japanese audiences. Without Nitobe's book, it seems likely that Bushido would be little more than a minor footnote in Japanese history.

In the coming decades, the Imperial government of Japan latched onto this fascination and carried out a bastardized form of Bushido preceding and during World War II. 14th century samurai Kusunoki Masashige was held up as their ideal. Kusunoki attempted to restore power to Japanese Emperor Go-Daigo in an age where the reins of government had largely passed into the hands of the samurai, and he died in the effort, loyal to the end. Stressing the importance of absolute personal loyalty to the Emperor and a complete willingness to die for him, this form of Bushido provided apparent justification for kamikaze and banzai attacks. A famous Japanese propaganda poster from WWII underlines the implied connection between the samurai of yesterday and the Imperial forces. With the flags of the Axis fluttering in the background, it portrays an enormous samurai rising up out of the ocean to strike down an Allied warship.

Western fascination with Bushido continued to rise after the war, fueled mainly by misinformed martial arts instructors and books that espoused Zen Buddhism as the singular light of Japanese culture. This not only ignored the fact that Zen was only one among many Buddhist schools in Japan (and far from the largest or most influential), but that Zen philosophy is incompatible with Bushido in many areas. James Clavell's enormously entertaining novel Shogun (along with the TV miniseries based on it starring Mifune Toshiro and Richard Chamberlain) became a huge hit, and formed the basis for what many Westerners know (or think they know) about Japanese culture. The book reinforced the images of Japan that had been drawn by World War II-a fiercely loyal people who thought nothing of giving up their lives for a cause. Shogun took this a step further-almost all the Japanese characters seem to be constantly searching for excuses to die in service to their lord or to commit seppuku (ritual suicide, usually known as harakiri in the West). Thomas Conlan has speculated that the allure of Bushido among Westerners stems from the fact that it provides a form of chivalry divorced from its religious aspects. And what of the Japanese themselves? Thanks to self help books, Manga, anime, video games, movies, and TV shows, even they have bought into the myth of Bushido.

Perhaps it would be helpful to examine the lives of some figures closely associated with Bushido in the popular imagination and see how their lives stack up to the samurai ideal. While we normally would never use Wikipedia for research, it seemed perfect for this purpose-and it did indeed yield a set of 'major figures associated with Bushido'. Amusingly enough, included in this list was a completely fictional figure, Ogami Itto from the Kozure Okami/Lone Wolf and Cub Manga/movie/TV series, demonstrating once again the major role pop culture has had in forming the public perception of Bushido. But we chose to examine three other well known samurai from the list-Kato Kiyomasa, Miyamoto Musashi, and Asano Naganori (and the 47 Ronin).

Kato Kiyomasa was a retainer of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (one of Japan's 'three great unifiers'). He has a justly deserved reputation of having been a fierce fighter, capable field general, and master builder of fortifications.

Kato's small force achieved a stunning victory during the siege of Ulsan in 1597-98, breaking a huge combined Chinese/Korean army into terrified pieces. He is most famously known for tiger hunting armed only with his three-bladed spear. Kato surely was not lacking in courage-but otherwise, hardly fits the mold of Bushido at all. Respect? He was an adherent of the Nichiren school of Buddhism, one of the very few exclusionist Buddhist schools, and fiercely derided rival forms of Buddhism and other religions. Kato had little respect for many of his fellow samurai, allowing his personal hatred for fellow commander Konishi Yukinaga to manifest itself in petty squabbles, infighting, and a decided lack of cooperation during the Bunroku War of 1592 (the Japanese invasion of Korea). Benevolence? A man who wrote in his house codes that dancing should be made a capital offence hardly qualifies on that front. Using his spear to petulantly rip apart a captured Korean woman tied to a tree after some negotiations with a Chinese commander does not seem to paint Kato as much of a humanitarian, either. Well, certainly Kato was loyal, right? Well, no. When offered the opportunity to join the side of Tokugawa Ieyasu (the enemy of the Toyotomi faction) during the Sekigahara campaign of 1600, Kato happily did so and fought Toyotomi vassals on the island of Kyushu.

Miyamoto Musashi should be a much better example of Bushido. After all, he was a master swordsman who never lost a duel and wrote one of the most important works to be linked to Bushido-the Go Rin No Sho (The Book of Five Rings). But again, under the microscope of history, Musashi comes up lacking. Many older Japanese will tell you before the 1930's, Musashi was known primarily for his artwork and sculptures. However, that all changed with Yoshikawa Eiji's serialization of Musashi in the Asahi Shimbun in 1935. Eventually collected into book form, much of the story sprang directly from Yoshikawa's imagination, and Musashi's legend is largely built on its fictitious foundation. Musashi made the swordsman/artist a posthumous star, and renewed interest in Go Rin No Sho-a sword training manual that over the years has been applied to many aspects of life, including success in the business world, that it was never intended for. The historical Musashi had little honor, at least in the sense that Bushido defines it. He would use any edge he could to win a duel, whether it involved killing a child or ambushing his foes. In his famous duel at Funajima (later named Ganryujima in honor of his slain foe) with rival swordsman Sasaki Kojiro, many historians now believe that Musashi failed to kill his foe. Instead, it's thought that he merely wounded Sasaki and that it was Musashi's retinue (that's right-contrary to popular belief, it seems Musashi didn't arrive on the island alone) that later ambushed and killed him. Even lesser known to the public seems to be Musashi's stint as an officer in the Shogunal army at Shimabara in 1638. Musashi fought as a staff officer for the Ogasawara daimyo's forces against a large uprising of peasants. However, his exploits amounted to very little, being put out of action when the master swordsman was hit on the leg by a lowly peasant with a rock. Rather than charge his enemy and find the way of the samurai in death, Musashi instead scurried back (or, given the nature of his injury, hopped) to his own lines. While Musashi was certainly a gifted artist and excellent swordsman, he doesn't quite qualify as Bushido's poster boy either.

Perhaps the 47 Ronin are the most enduring popular symbols of Bushido, but they fall well short of the ideal. The tale of the 47 loyal retainers of Lord Asano who avenged his death by killing the evil Lord Kira has been chronicled in hundreds of Edo period novels, dramas, movies, and TV shows. However, the truth about the Ronin deviates substantially from the legend-in fact, it's often called a 'feudal drive-by' among those in the know. Asano Naganori, usually characterized as an honorable and upright samurai who bridled at having to bribe an official with gifts, was in reality a rather shallow individual who was lightly thought of by his peers. The Shogunal report Dokai Koshuki (prepared years before Asano's assault on Kira) shows Asano as possessing neither literary nor military skills and being only concerned with his personal amusement. The report derided him for sexual profligacy and noted he promoted and rewarded retainers based on their ability to procure attractive women for him. As the daimyo of Ako domain, Asano would have received many bribes himself as elaborate 'gifts' from those wishing to win his favor. From the actions of the Ronin after Asano's death, it appears that trying to preserve their positions was far more important to them than avenging their lord. The raid on Kira's household, while perfectly in line with samurai history and behavior, would also be 'dishonorable' according to Bushido-the Ronin conducted a surprise night raid while the enemy was asleep and unarmed-and they outnumbered Kira's guards roughly nine or ten to one. The actions of the Ronin afterward (by not immediately committing seppuku) have led some historians to believe that they conducted their unsanctioned vendetta with an eye towards being pardoned and gaining employment with another lord (as happened with a different unsanctioned vendetta in the Jorurizaka incident of 1672). Interestingly, the Ronin were heavily criticized by Yamamoto Tsunetomo in the Hagakure and by other Bushido scholars for these very reasons. Yamamoto wrote that 'These Kamigata types (the Ronin) are clever and good at doing things that earn them praise,...but they are unable to act directly without stopping to think'.

Bushido as concerns the samurai can be said to have made a real and substantial impact in at least one field-entertainment. Whether in Edo period novels, kabuki and bunraku (puppet) plays, jidaigeki (period) films or

chambara (swordplay) extravaganzas, loyal samurai willing to die for honor and their lord have provided the gist for many memorable works of fiction. As film author Patrick Galloway illustrates in his book *Warring Clans, Flashing Blades* the classic conflict of giri (obligation) and ninpo (conscience) crops up in virtually every effort of samurai cinema, with giri usually resulting from the ties and tenets of Bushido. Bushido continues to be highly influential in the world of Japanese entertainment and in this way, it is an important part of Japanese culture—showing their heroes as they imagine them to be at their best. Perhaps Ogami Itto really does make an appropriate front man for Bushido. It would be no exaggeration to say that Bushido, while not the soul of Japan, is certainly the soul of chambara. This includes the excellent DVD you are about to watch, 'Bushido: The Cruel Code of the Samurai'. But to paraphrase Karl Friday, while Bushido was the stuff of which legends were made, it does not appear to be the stuff of which history was made.

Many sources were used in the preparation of this essay; however, these were the most useful and would provide a good starting point for those wishing to learn more about Bushido, the samurai, and Japanese history:

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