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12/10/2011 What purpose did Samurai serve during Feudal Japan Research topic influenced by one of the two Main sources: The last Samurai Directed by Edward Zwick and Rurouni Kenshin Anime series written and illustrated by Nobuhiro Watsuki. My research is based on Samurais and their way of living. I want to bring out the history behind feudal Japan where Samurai warriors were a big part of. The movie Last Samurai, directed by Edward Zwick, main actor Tom Cruise, and Rurouni Kenshin's Anime series which was written and illustrated by Nobuhiro Watsuki which is one of the two things that inspired me to research and write about Samurais. Last Samurai is based on the Japanese history during the end of the 18th century and the start of the 19th century. The movie shows how desperate the Samurais became to preserve Japanese culture during the era of globalization in Japan and the struggle between thousand year old traditions of a Samurai soldier using a sword as his weapon, with the establishment of modern day weapons in Japan. During this time period the Japanese started to exchange modernized products and education with various other cultures such as the European's and the American's. This change became a threat to the old Japanese culture which the Samurai warriors devoted their life to. Rurouni Kenshin is a name of a Samurai who fought the great Boshin war during the Meiji Restoration and at the end of Tokugawa era. After the war he was labeled as the legendary man slayer. Soon he realized how many innocent life he has taken and devoted his life to a reversed blade sword where the blade is at the opposite side of the sword and became a wonderer who traveled the through the country sides of Japan, protecting the life of innocent from harm's way. Samurai warrior's draw precision and perfection, from their razor sharp swords which bring them great honor on the battlefield, and fulfill their duty as a Samurai

warrior which they devote their life to. Feudal Japanese culture was dominated by the Samurai warriors and high ranking Samurai classes. Even though they made up only about 15% of the warrior populations, Samurais and their daimyo, who are lords and higher ranking than Samurais, wielded enormous power. ( Source of Japan History pg223). Shogun, who was the army general in command, held the absolute power over all the ranked classes in feudal Japan, even the Japanese emperor who is referred to as a " puppet for show" and above the shogun but did not wield enough power to over throw the shogun. (Sources of Japanese History pg229) When a Samurai or a high ranking personal passed by in the local streets of Japan citizens of the lower classes were mandatory to bow and show respect (The Last Samurai, 80: 39). If a farmer or artisan or local shop merchant refused to bow and show respect the Samurai was legally entitled to chop off the person's head as they will. Samurai warriors answered only to the daimyo. Daimyos population was very few if they are compared to the Samurais but higher ranks than Samurais. Daimyos was also called powerful territorial lords who in turn, answered only to the shogun. (Sources of Japanese History pg168-169) There were about 260 daimyo by the end of the Japanese feudal era. (Japans Memory of Secret Empire. web) Each daimyo controlled a broad area of land, and had an army of Samurai who were loyal to their lords. Just below the Samurai and Ronin " who were Samurais without a Daimyo or lord" (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg73) were the farmers or peasants in the Japanese feudal social pyramid. According to Confucian ideals, farmers were superior to artisans and merchants because they produced the food that all the other classes depended upon. (Sources Of Japanese History, pg130) Even if the pay was decent and life was peaceful

for the farmer class they were considered an honored class but lived under a crushing tax burden throughout Japanese feudal era. During the Tokugawa regime the third Tokugawa shogun, name Iemitsu was one of the few considerate shoguns who gave back some of the tax money that was collected to the farmers and lower working classes. (Japans Memory Of Secret Empire. web) Purpose of Samurai The Samurai warriors were not mercenary warriors or roaming swords man in Japan. They did not fight for whatever their daimyo or feudal lords would pay them. Samurais were bound to a specific lord, or daimyo, and also bound to their village or area they were subjected to by duty and honor. The word Samurai originally meant "one who protects" (The Last Samurai 39: 30) and they followed an unwritten code of honor which is known as Bushido, and comes from the word bushi, which means "warrior". So Bushido means, "The way of the warrior." (The Last Samurai 40: 22) This unwritten code changed a significant amount from an earlier period, when Samurai were mainly archers and horsemen with different weaponry oppose to a sword. (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg130) The training and devotion needed to master the skills and bonding with a chosen horse was known as Yabusame or Kyuba no michi which led to the word, "the way of the horse and bow" which evolved through out time and became the word bushido. (Kyudo - The Way Of The Bow. web) Although Bushido is referred to as a set of code, it was not a formal set of rules that all Samurai followed.( SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg103) In fact, Bushido changed greatly throughout Japanese history and even from one clan to the next. Bushido did now become a written law until the 17th century to respect the Japanese Samurai warrior who became existence for centuries. (Japan Past and

Present pg87) The first and foremost duty of a Samurai is to stay loyal to his lord under every circumstance. Japan had a feudal system, in which a lord's powers were meaning less without his foremost loyal Samurais who acted as the lords vassals. Samurais received economic and military protection from the lords and freely roamed through the district or land they were bound to. If the lord couldn't count on absolute loyalty from his Samurai, the entire feudal system would have collapsed. (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg360) Samurais first objective is to protect and show every form of loyalty to his lord. ( Japan Past And Present pg89) Samurais carry this distinct message in their heart and honorable gives their life way if the feudal lord they are bound to has fallen in battle or has been ashamed by the Samurai's duty to protect. (The Last Samurai. 17: 20) Many Samurais who do not comet suicide become a ronin and spend their life as a lord less warrior. (Rurouni Kenshin chapter 60, 35: 24) Japanese Swords and Sword Mastery Samurai used many weapons throughout the history of Japan. As time went by Samurais have evolved and became more skilled at using Japanese swords. Samurais believed being with their swords was to be one with themselves, the interconnection with their two swords is important for Samurais to perfect their sword mastery skills. (The Last Samurai 35: 40) One of the primary privileges of the Samurais was their right to wear two swords during feudal times when other of lower ranks and classes were not allowed to carry any weapons at all. The Samurais wore two swords the long sword, called a Daito or katana which was over 24 inch and mainly used for offence and one short sword called a Doto or Wakizashi which was mainly used for to block and defensive purposes. The Shoto was between 12 and 24 inches. (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg272) A

Tanto is a sword under 12 inches and was more commonly used by high rank like the shogun for personal protection. (Rurouni Kenshin chapter 39, 20: 21)

Japanese swords are useless as swinging a tree branch around without proper sword mastery. Japanese sword mastery had lots of variation and techniques most of them are taught in *dōjō* which are individual school and training temples for Japanese martial art. (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg288) *Kenjutsu* which means " the art of the sword" is a sword technique or sword art that utilizes Japanese sword (The Last Samurai, 43: 30). Although *Kenjutsu* type of sword technique can be practice alone during the first part of the learning process of sword mastery. More advances from of Japanese sword techniques are called the *Battōjutsu* techniques which then branches of to *Iaijutsu* and *Iaidō*.

*Iaijutsu* is a technique that was used before the Tokugawa era even before 1603. *Iaidō* is more of a modern type of sword mastery. (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg331) Samurais had to undergo harsh training with a wooden sword at first before using a sword with actual blade. They were taught different styles of sword mastery by their master whom they were loyal to and expected to please the master as a student as well as a Samurai. Even though Samurais come from a loyal bloodline, some of the apprentice of the masters who have been training in the dojo who aren't from a loyal bloodline, were to demonstrate their skills and swordmanship in front of the shogun or the feudal lord to have a spot in his army of Samurai. (SECRETS of the SAMURAI The Martial Arts of Feudal Japan, pg130) Western Influence on Japan and end of Samurais Western influence and changes started take place in Japan during the Meiji Restoration itself. This political involvement of the western power and the great revolution "

restored" the emperor to power, but he did not rule directly. (The Last Samurai, 24: 22) Japan's Emperor was assigned to accept the advice from the main leaders who helped overthrow the shogun out of power during the revolution. (Japans Memory Of Secret Empire, web) The founding father of the Meiji Restoration was a small group of Samurais who believed by giving the new government a chance they would bring equal opportunity to all classes in the Japanese caste system which would bring peace and prosperity towards Japan. In the beginning their strength was the emperor who accepted the small group of founding fathers of the Meiji restoration and took their advice and gave several powerful feudal domains military support to bring them under the government's control. (Sources Of Japanese History pg89) The central government of Japan used western technology and modern weapons to build their own military and law enforcement and economic control. At the end of July 1869 the feudal lords have been requested to give up their power and land that they have been assigned to by the shogun. (Rurouni Kenshin chapter 43, 13: 00) In 1871 all the lands of Japan were unified under the central government of Japan. All the feudal lords and the Samurai class were offered some sort of political power and jobs in law enforcement and a yearly grant, which was then changed to a one-time pension under the government's bonds. The Samurais lost their class privileges and the luxury they had under their feudal lords. Under the central government of Japan all classes declared to be equal. (. Sources Of Japanese History, pg183) In 1876 former Samurais and local citizens were abolished from carrying swords or any type of weaponry instrument under the government. (Japan Past And Present, pg252) Former Samurais who had no other skill other than sword mastery had to change and adjust themselves to the modernized Japan. Some

Samurais took up jobs in business and other professions. Some Samurais educated them self to have some sort of steady pay and some opened their own dojo to pass down their sword mastery ability to others. This was a peaceful era for Japan after then great Boshin War which was one of the biggest civil war for Japan. (The Last Samurai, 63: 00) This war was between the imperialist who wanted Japan to welcome the modernized society verses the Samurais and their lords who believed that the feudalistic society and the way of the warrior cannot be over thrown by foreign idealistic democracy. (The Last Samurai, 96: 34) Synthesis The purpose of a Samurai during the feudal Japan was to serve his feudal lord and show complete loyalty to them. Samurai warriors are not just warriors who kill but they are the protector of the land they are bound to by the feudal lords. Samurai warriors come from a loyal bloodline in all of Japan. These privileges included being able to have a surname that comes from the loyal blood line, a family crest which symbolizes the family's that the Samurai is from, and carry two swords once they undergo the training and fully become a Samurai. People with Samurai family names are still treated with great respect in Japan today. Although most Samurai were not well educated or knew the value of education, they had a strict code of honour which was not written but carried in their heart was the " way of the warrior", known as bushido in Japanese. If a Samurai broke the bushido code and brought dishonour to the feudal lords and upon them self they would be expected to commit or ritual suicide. Samurais are type of warriors who puts themselves in front of the enemy front line without any fear of death because of the bushido which was engraved in their mind and soul and they strongly believed death in a battlefield brings a Samurai great honour upon them self even when they are



past down to the afterlife. During the Meiji Restoration and at the end of Tokugawa era Samurai warriors fought the great Boshin war which is considered as one of the biggest civil war in Japan. When the Samurais fought the Great Boshin War they did not just fight for the feudal lords they worked under, all the Samurais with exception of few fought for the cultural value of Japan trying to preserve all things that matters to them including their sword man ship and bushido. With ending of the Tokugawa and removal of the shogun the Japanese feudal system collapses. With the start of the Meiji government Samurais lost their ability to carry swords which left them helpless for the new society where they have no source of income. In time Samurai warriors became a past for modern Japan.

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