

# Struggle for the soul of japan



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Ancient and modern civilization at war for the soul of Japan is the main idea that revolves around the whole plot of the movie. The story takes place in the year 1876 where a rebellion took place in Yoshino Province. The revolt is primarily due to the rapid modernization of Japan through having an opened border for trading with the rest of the world. The movie encompasses the transition from Tokugawa shogunate up to the Meiji era as it illustrates the difference between the traditional ways of life to the newly found western lifestyle. Manifestation of the transition It was illustrated in the movie that by the year, 1876, a part of the period of Meiji Restoration, Japan was beset by numerous changes. From a feudalistic type of society, the emperor Meiji dreamed to have a unified Japan, a country that is strong, independent, and modern. He wanted to be of equal to other modern countries in the west by adopting American culture and technology. In politics, there was a formalized political structure which gave many responsibilities and powers to the emperor, few of which was seen in the movie such as the control over the country's army and navy. Besides, for 2, 000 years, no commoners were able to see the emperor, and it was through this time that foreigners or ambassadors were allowed to have a glimpse of him. During that era, Japan signed a treaty with the America, granting U. S. exclusive rights to supply arms in exchange of hiring military experts and gunpowder weapons. Japan got in mind to have a civilized army. Indeed then, it can be seen that there was a desire for a military might in preparation for it's colonization of other countries due to lack of raw materials. They even sent abroad its cadets to study in European and United States military and naval schools. While in its economy, one of the major developments was the creation of the railroad. It basically helped the transportation of products in a more efficient and fast

way. Other than that, shipyards and factories were promulgated and introduced. However, the advancement of Japan could not be only seen from its political, economical, or its military aspect, but also the very formation of its society. As was exemplified in the movie, the Yokohama harbor, which was the gateway for the foreign ships, was largely populated by merchants and foreigners. For the most part, samurai gave up on their tradition and embraced a new standard of living by means of adjustment. Many of them became merchants and were, therefore, called the " zaibatsu", or the family owned business corporations. Samurai Culture Nevertheless, some samurais still profess their beliefs and disciplines in some provinces and they revolt against the emperor. They were dissatisfied with the direction that the government is taking. The modernization of Japan, also, paved way for dismantling feudalism or the traditional social structure which meant that the samurais no longer have the power and privileges that they once had. Their social status was abolished and they were undermined from a financial position. Furthermore, on a more apparent level, certain traditions or customs were made illegal such as bringing katana or sword in public, and having top knot which is a characteristic of being a samurai. Indeed then, the very sword of samurai, which is his soul, is threatened by these changes.

Reaction It was gratifying to see the actualization of the terms and concepts of our study in a movie. Since it was my first time to watch the movie, I was really amazed and appreciated its cinematography and direction. However, what I really got my attention was the demonstration between the traditional and modern ways. Few of the traditional ways that was depicted were the off-taking of shoes inside a house, group-orientation through the familial and clan ties, discipline and control to oneself, and the utmost respect given to a

" Divine Meiji emperor" by permitting commoners to look but not speak unless spoken to, by bowing to him when he stands, and by bowing lower if he bows. While the modernization includes the technological advancements such as the howitzers, bayonets, and the machine guns, and entry of foreign experts from different fields such as lawyers from France, engineers from Germany, architects from Holland and warriors from America. Therefore, I was able to understand and appreciate more the history of Japan as the movie was greatly enabled to capture the era of Meiji Empire.