

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

As the background of *The Last Samurai* movie, Meiji Restoration era that happened in Japan long time ago has big influence in the movie. Several scenes in the movie shows the situations happened at that era. Scenes in the movie mostly show political, economy, military, and also cultural settings. In this chapter writer wants to analyze the situation in Meiji Restoration Era described or shown in *The Last Samurai* movie.

#### 4.1. Military Sector

As the writer stated above, in the process of restoration, Japanese Government wanted to modernize their military system to get stronger and to make Japan equal to Western country. The movie is focused on Algren, an American soldier whose job is to give training to newly-formed Japanese army. Algren has to train the Japanese new army with a new strategy, the western war strategy as well as train the army with the modern weapons coming from western country. In the movie, there are scenes which show the development of Japanese military from the traditional military system and weapons to modern system and weapons.

Japanese traditional military system was applied by the samurai in the movie. This system can be seen in the movie when a group of *samurai* led by Katsumoto ambushes Japanese Shogunate army. The traditional military strategy was held by the *samurais* when they tried to stop railroad development by Japanese Government. Wearing their traditional armor, they fully attacked the new Japanese army which was trying to put off their rebellion. Realizing

that the Japanese army's weapons were more modern, they formed a strategy of attacking the army in the middle of the mist. There, they scream loudly to weaken the mental of the armies and made the other army afraid and panic.



**Figure 4.1** The ambush in the mist by the samurai (01:47:23)

The Japanese traditional Army is also not equipped with modern weapon They still use arrows, bow, spears, and also *katana* as their main weapon while at the same time as a way to retain their identity as *asamurai*.

The scene below shows how the Samurai fights with their *katana*.



**Figure 4.2 Algren raises his own katana given by Katsumoto(01:47:23)**

In English, Katana is described as a long singled-edge sword used by Japanese samurai (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/katana>, 2017). This kind of sword is mainly used by the samurai on their duty as the guardians of the Emperor to protect him. Beside that, katana is also used by the samurai to end their life when they feel dishonored. The traditional suicide process is called *seppuku* or *harakiri*. The picture below is a picture of *katana* used by the *samurai*.



**Figure 4.3 Japanese traditional weapon, *Katana*.**

Different from Japanese traditional weapon, modern military weapons possess different characteristics. The modernization of Japanese military weapons can be seen in the movie when western countries came to Japan and held treaties of trading. The trades furthermore opened the possibility for western countries to bring modernization to Japanese government.

Because their gate was opened, Japanese government felt that they should protect themselves with modern army. They believed if they did not do that, they became a country that can be easily attacked by the other countries which were stronger than them. Thus, they started to develop their military system. Not only equipped with modern weapon, the new Japanese Army was also trained with Western tactical war strategy.

In the movie, the new Japanese Army is trained by American army officers named Colonel Bagley, Captain Nathan Algren, and Sergeant Zebulon Grant. They are recommended by Emperor's Advisor named Omura and are hired by Japanese government to train the new army with western war technique and strategy. The new army is aimed to face *samurai* rebellion that was led by Katsumoto. As shown in figure 4.4, Captain Nathan Algren was giving instruction to the new Japanese Army.



**Figure 4.4** Algren trained basic strategy of modern army for New

Japanese Army (00:14:50)

In figure 4.4, Algren gave order and explained how to be ready in a war to Japanese New Army. Algren explained that the army should kneel before they load their weapons and are ready to shoot.



**Figure 4.5 Algren gave order to fire the weapon (00:15:10)**

Then, Algren teaches the Japanese New Army to fire the weapons. Algren explained to the Japanese New Army that they have to fire their weapons in accordance with the commands.

The weapons used by the Japanese New Army as shown in the movie, *The Last Samurai*, are Winchester Hotchkiss rifle.



Winchester-Hotchkiss, early pattern carbine (photo courtesy RIA)

Figure 4.5 Winchester Hotchkiss Rifle (source:

<http://www.forgottenweapons.com/rifles/winchester-hotchkiss/>)

Winchester Hotchkiss is described as:

The rifle ... was a bolt action, five-shot, tube magazine weapon. As specified by the Ordnance Board for all candidates, the rifle was .45 caliber

designed to take the government cartridge. The tube magazine was in the stock and was loaded by opening a gate in the butt. Safety and magazine cut-off were located on opposite sides of the stock behind the bolt. The magazine cut-off allowed the weapon to be fired as a single-shot piece, with the loaded magazine kept in reserve. (Brinckerhoff & Chamberlin, 1968, p. 22).

The weapons were produced by Benjamin Berkeley Hotchkiss, an American who invented weapons. Hotchkiss was born in Watertown, Connecticut, in 1826. He studied machinists' trade and established hardware business. In the hardware business, Hotchkiss worked together with his own brother whose name is Andrew. Later, Benjamin and Andrew produced a new type of cannon projectile. This projectile was manufactured and sold to the government of Japan in the late 1850's (Brinckerhoff & Chamberlin, 1968, p. 21).

To replace their Katana, the Japanese army also learns to use Gatling Guns. According to Zimmerman (2012), gatlingguns produced in the United States. It was invented in 1862 by Richard Gatling (Zimmerman, 2012, p. 114) and is used around the world.

The Gatling gun's design was both simple and revolutionary. The original 1862 model consisted of six rifled barrels revolving around a central axis, turned by a hand crank. This assembly was mounted on a modified artillery-type carriage.(Zimmerman, 2012, p. 112).

In general, Gatling gun is a rapid-fire, crank-driven gun with a cylindrical cluster of several barrels. Because of Gatling gun have several barrels of bullets chamber, rate of bullet that can be fired to bring more damage to the enemy. So basically Gatling gun can kill much more people effectively than the traditional Japanese weapon.



**Figure 4.6 Japanese New Army kills the *Samurais* using modern  
Gatling Gun (02:05:38)**

Japanese new army also uses Cannon. Cannon is introduced in Japan for the first time in 1270, but the usage of Cannon in that era was not so significant because it is still primitive. The real usage of Cannon started in 1543 when the Portuguese entered Japan for the first time. After the arrival of Portuguese, Cannon became major in every war (Perrin, 1979, p. 93).

Cannon is a type of gun classified as artillery that launches a projectile using propellant. The main propellant of Cannons in the past was gunpowder. The projectile itself commonly used ball-shaped steel. Cannon commonly has big cylindrical shape. Cannon has various kinds of caliber size, shooting range, angle, and shoot capacity. In the battle, types of cannon commonly used are more than one based on the purpose. In figure 4.7, the cannons are used by the Modern Japanese Army when they are facing the *Samurais* in *The Last Samurai* movie.

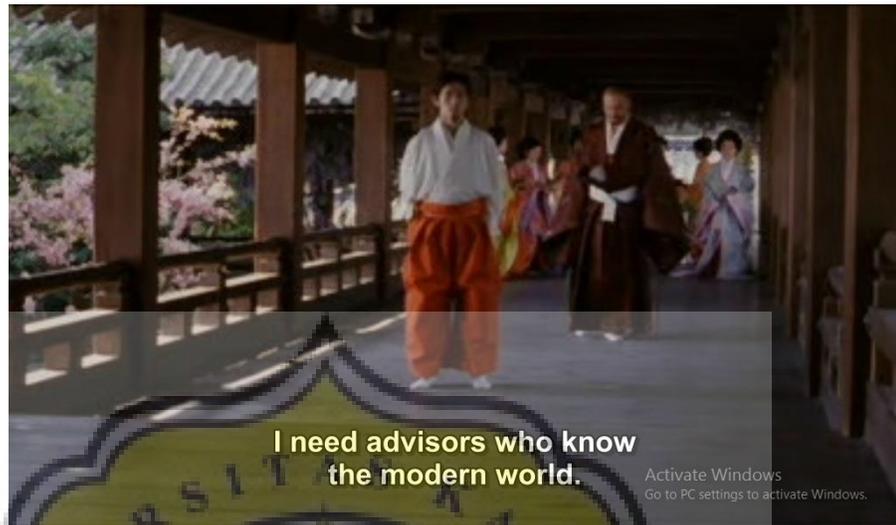


**Figure 4.7 Japanese Modern Army using cannon in the battle against Samurais (01:51:58)**

In short, the ambition of Japanese government to develop their Military sector is shown in the movie by the modern weapons which are used to handle *samurai* rebellion. Modern weapons like cannon, fire gun, and Gatling gun were used to win the war against *samurai* rebellion.

#### **4.2. Political Sector**

During Meiji Restoration era, Japanese government started a new system of government to make the country stronger and able to reach the level of Western countries (Sumikawa, 1999). In the movie, the need to compete with the Western countries is portrayed in a scene where the Japanese Emperor says to Katsumoto that he needs “advisors who know modern world.” The sentence means that the Emperor needs new advisors who know about the new world. The sentence reflects the Emperor’s will to start changing his government system. The Emperor wants to gain a better system with the purpose to reach the same level as Western countries.



**Figure 4.8**The Emperor talked to Katsumoto about the New System of Politics (01:17:01)

To reach the purpose, advisors with knowledge on modern world are needed as they can help the Emperor to establish a modern system, a system which definitely is used in Western society.

The Emperor's need to have "advisors" as shown in the movie is in line with the real political situation in Meiji restoration era where the government after Tokugawa shogunate promised Japanese people to get a better life by establishing a constitutional government (Sumikawa, 1999). As mentioned earlier in the review of literature, Japan declared a constitution which guarantees people freedom and human right in 1889. The existence of a constitution was supported by the once Tokugawa samurais who have position as statesmen in Meiji restoration era because the statesmen thought that constitution will make Japan stronger.

The presence of advisors in Japanese government is essential in a constitutional government to guarantee that the Emperor is not the only person who decide the course of the government policy. In the constitutional

government, the advisors give influence to the Emperor in making decision in economy, military, political and other sectors.

The movie shows that the Emperor put his trust on Omura, his new advisor who has connection with the ambassadors from Western countries. Omura's connection is expected to open an opportunity for Japan in that era to learn and borrow the idea of Western constitution or Western political system to create the new modern Japan. The new system is shown by figure 4.9 which portrays a negotiation between the Japanese Emperor's advisor, Omura, and the representative of Western country. Omura's role in the negotiation is in line with the Emperor's plan to have a new advisor who knows the new world.



**Figure 4.9 Emperor's advisor held a treaty with foreign country  
(01:18:16)**

The movie scene is based on the real Meiji Restoration process when the Japanese government opened their ports to make a treaty with Western countries in order to support their decision to equalize their power with the Western country. The modernization of the government system as seen in the movie shows multiple stages of Japanese government development to modernize themselves.

However, the advantage of having modern system is not the only matter shown in the movie as it also shows the disadvantages of the new system. For example, the role of the advisors which is supposed to limit the Emperor's power is corrupted with motivation for personal gain. In *The Last Samurai* movie, the corrupted role of an advisor is presented by Omura, the Emperor's advisor who tries to get personal profits from the cooperation between Japan and America.

Another disadvantage is shown in that of the treaty with the Westerners weakens the position of *samurai* as the guardian of the country.

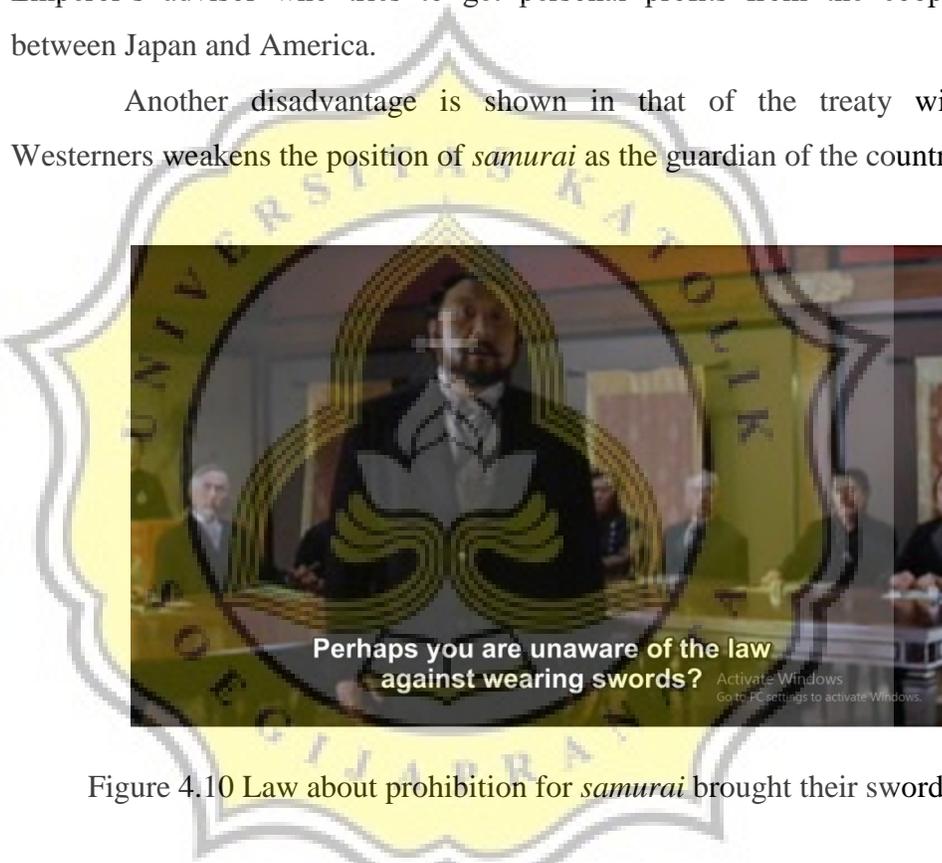


Figure 4.10 Law about prohibition for *samurai* brought their swords

For centuries before the Restoration happened, *Samurai* which has literary meaning “to serve” was already served and protected The Emperor. Their way of life “*bushido*” took a part in the Japanese culture at that moment. Their swords as their symbol of protection and service to the Emperor and people were changed with the fire gun and the modern army. At that time *samurais* were free to bring their swords anywhere their go. But, after the modern constitutions were borrowed to create the new modern Japan, a kind of

act released as a prohibition for *samurais* to bring their swords again. In this case, modernization started to decrease the real culture of Japanese people started from the *samurai*. The once powerful position of Samurai in Japan is depicted in the movie to be replaced by the Westerners who in Meiji restoration are the supporters of the new system. Thus, the samurai representing the traditional Japan begins to rebel against the modern government which is backed up by the Westerners.

In short, the new political system of Meiji Restoration era is portrayed in the movie in which the Emperor has advisors to run the country. However, the new system is not always good because the advisors can also have underlying motive for their own profits. Besides, the new system eliminates the traditional Japan system of government.

### **4.3. Education Sector**

On the portrayal of education sector in Meiji Restoration era, the movie contains no particular scene on the reformation in education. The movie does not show how the compulsory of education established or that started in 1872 education was not only for the upper class and the male only (Sumikawa, 1999). However, the movie implicitly shows some scenes which show how the education changed during Meiji Restoration era especially that related to western influence.

One portrayal in the movie is when the Emperor uses English language to converse with the westerners. Before Japan opened their ports or harbors to the foreigners and signed the treaty with the westerners, they mostly were confined of using Japanese language. After Japan opened the harbors and worked with the foreigners especially the westerners, people start to study English language. Another person in the movie who uses English language to converse with foreigners is Katsumoto. Katsumoto is the samurai who live in

the mountainous area and hold Japanese tradition strictly. However, when he talks to the westerners, he can speak English almost fluently. It means that learning a foreign language is not an illegal action that deems punishment but something necessary to communicate with the foreigners.

Another scene in the movie may not be very particular on education; however the writer chooses to put it under the heading of education because it has something to do with western influence. The scene is where the Japanese bureaucrats wear western suit. In the movie, Omura, the advisor of the Emperor is portrayed of wearing western costumes in some occasions:



Figure 4.11 Western clothes worn by Omura, the Emperor's advisors

Western-style clothes are also worn by the Emperor:



Figure 4.12 Japanese Emperor wearing western clothes

#### 4.4. Economical Sector

Similar to the education sector, the economic sector of Meiji Restoration era cannot be clearly seen in *The Last Samurai*. The development of social and industrial infrastructures such as railroad, shipping, communication, harbor, and also the light house (Sumikawa, 1999).is not portrayed in the movie.

However, the development of railroad can be seen in the setting of the movie. For example, in one of the scene, the samurais led by Katsumoto attacked the Japanese new army in the railroad. The samurais want to stop the development of the railroad because the railroad destroys village life.

Another development can be seen in the scene which depicts the city. In the city, people use horse-carts as means of transportation. The modernization of the city is also represented by the electric cables that can be seen in the street. In the lifestyle of the people, the modernization can be seen in the top-hats worn by the people.



Figure 4.13 Western clothes and top-hat in worn by the people (11:45)



Figure 4.14 Electric cables in the modernization in Japan (1:14:11)

