

The Satsuma Students

A prominent, 12-metre monument of nineteen youngsters clad in suit stands before the JR Kagoshima Chuo Station. They are the Satsuma Students, youths from Kagoshima who went to study in the West, during a time where overseas travel was banned.



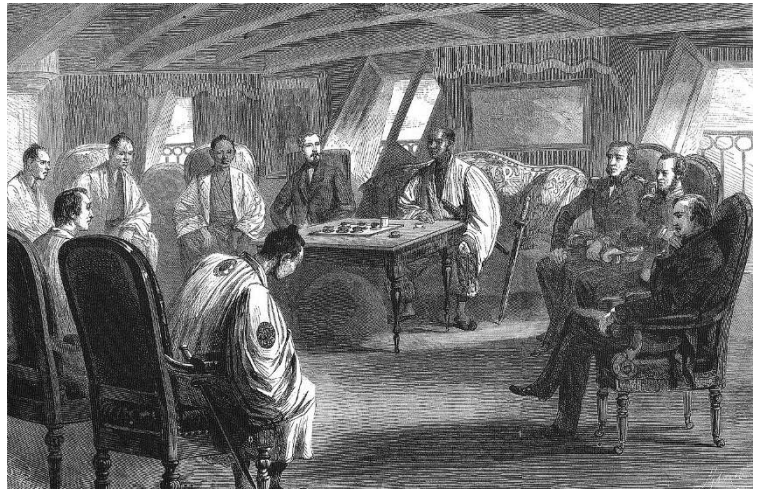
Shimadzu Nariakira, 28th Lord of the Shimadzu Clan which ruled over the domain of Satsuma (present day Kagoshima prefecture), believed that Japan needed to acquire Western knowledge and technology to strengthen itself to avoid being colonised by the Western powers. Nariakira passed away in 1858, but his vision was being realised in 1865, when Satsuma assembled a group of youths and secretly sent them on a study mission to Europe. Except for one, all the other youths returned to Japan and contributed greatly to the modernisation of the country.

Namamugi Incident and the Anglo-Satsuma War

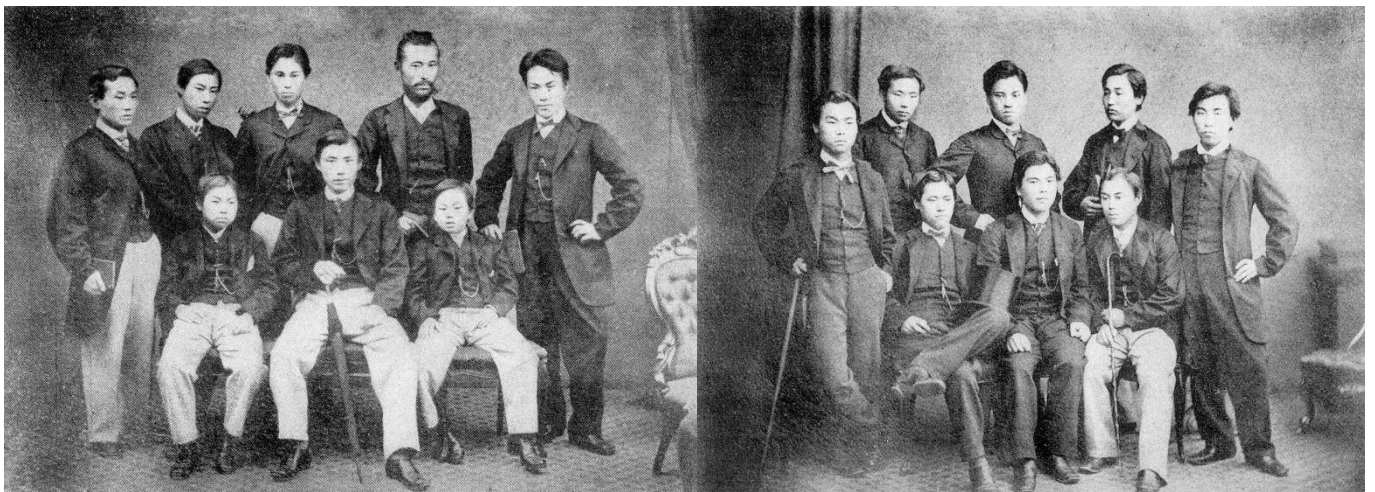
In 1862, four British nationals were being attacked by Satsuma samurai retainers in the town of Namamugi (present day Yokohama), for disrespecting their Lord. Although the unfortunate incident was born out of cultural misunderstanding, two of the British were seriously wounded and one died. As a result, the British demanded heavy reparations from the Bakufu government and the domain of Satsuma, which Satsuma refused.



By the following year, a series of failed negotiations had led to the British Royal Navy sailing into Kagoshima Bay, demanding reparations directly from Satsuma. In attempt to coerce Satsuma into submission, the British seized three steamships in the bay, which were owned by Satsuma. Interpreting this as an act of aggression, Satsuma opened fire at the British, leading to the Anglo-Satsuma war. While the British navy suffered higher casualties, they burnt down the northern part of the castle town and destroyed some artillery batteries.



Although the victor of the conflict remains debatable, Satsuma witnessed first-hand the prowess of Western military strength, which reaffirmed the late Nariakira's belief for the urgent need for Japan to acquire Western knowledge and technology. They had quickly gotten down to assemble a team of 15 youths and four government officials, later known as the "Satsuma Students", to be sent to Great Britain for studies.



Setting Sail for the World

On April 1865, the Satsuma students, determined to learn from the world, set sail from the port of Hashima in present day Ichiki-kushikino city (Kagoshima) on the pretext of an inspection trip to Koshikijima, a small island located 40km west of Kushikino (overseas travel was prohibited during that time). Under the arrangement by a Scottish merchant

Thomas Blake Glover, the Satsuma students transferred to a merchant steamship bound for Hong Kong.

Their first stop was Hong Kong, where they witnessed gas lamps lighting up the city at night. In Singapore, they tried pineapples for the first time, and were also shocked to see a Dutch family bid goodbye to their family members by kissing one another in public. Their journey also brought them to Penang (Malaysia), Goa and Mumbai (India), Aden (Yemen), Suez and Alexandria (Egypt), Malta, and Gibraltar, before finally arriving in Southampton (England).

They enrolled for courses in the University of London (except for one member, Nagasawa), sought to expand commercial ties with Europeans, and even arranged for Satsuma domain to exhibit independently at the French Expo (Exposition Universelle de Paris) in 1867, showcasing textiles, sugar, lacquerware, pottery, etc.



Upon the completion of their studies, they returned home and contributed to the modernisation of Japan, with some of them taking up important roles as national leaders. Some of their achievements are listed below.

- Machida Hisanari : Founder of Japan' s first museum (present day Tokyo National Museum)
- Terashima Munenori : One of Japan' s pioneer foreign diplomats
- Godai Tomoatsu : Contributed to the modernisation of Osaka' s economy
First president of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Yoshida Kiyonari : Contributed to the modernisation of Japan' s financial policies
Vice Minister of Agriculture and Commerce
- Hatakeyama Yoshinari : Contributed to the modernisation of Japan' s education system
First president of Tokyo Kaisei School (present day Tokyo University)
- Mori Arinori : Contributed to the modernisation of Japan' s education system
First education minister of Japan
- Samejima Naonobu : Japan' s first overseas foreign diplomat (stationed in France)
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Asakura Moriaki : Contributed to the development of Japan' s mining industry
Brought Western mining technology to Japan
President of Ikuno Mines (Hyogo prefecture)
- Nakamura Hakuai : French language lecturer at the Kaiseijo School
Ambassador (diplomat) to Italy, Holland, and Denmark

The Young and Brave - Nagasawa Kanae

At 13 years of age, Nagasawa Kanae was the youngest member of the Satsuma students. While his comrades enrolled for courses across various fields of discipline in the University of London, Nagasawa ventured alone to the Aberdeen Grammar School in Scotland. After spending about two years in Scotland, Nagasawa left for the United States in July 1867, and spent the rest of his life in Santa Rosa in California running vineyards and producing wine. He was later given nicknames such as the “King of Wine of California” and “Baron Nagasawa” .