

Seppuku

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from Harakiri)

Seppuku (切腹, "stomach-cutting") is a form of Japanese ritual suicide by disembowelment. Seppuku was originally reserved only for samurai. Part of the samurai bushido honor code, seppuku was either used voluntarily by samurai to die with honor rather than fall into the hands of their enemies (and likely suffer torture), or as a form of capital punishment for samurai who had committed serious offenses, or performed for other reasons that had brought shame to them. The ceremonial disembowelment, which is usually part of a more elaborate ritual and performed in front of spectators, consists of plunging a short blade, traditionally a tantō, into the abdomen and moving the blade from left to right in a slicing motion.^[1]

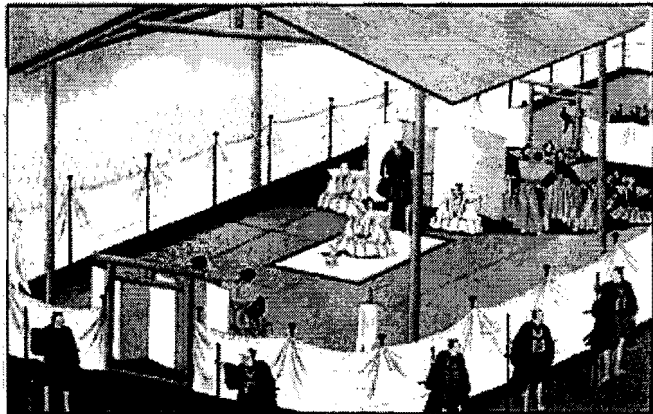


Illustration from "Sketches of Japanese Manners and Customs", by J. M. W. Silver, Illustrated by Native Drawings, Reproduced in Facsimile by Means of Chromolithography, published in London in 1867.

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Seppuku with ritual attire and second (staged)

Vocabulary and etymology

Seppuku is also known as **harakiri** (腹切り, "cutting the belly"), a term more widely familiar outside Japan, and which is written with the same in kanji as *seppuku*, but in reverse order with an okurigana. In Japanese, the more formal *seppuku*, a Chinese *on'yomi* reading, is typically used in writing, while *harakiri*, a native *kun'yomi* reading, is used in speech. Ross notes,

"It is commonly pointed out that hara-kiri is a vulgarism, but this is a misunderstanding. Hara-kiri is a Japanese reading or *Kun-yomi* of the characters; as it became customary to prefer Chinese readings in official announcements, only the term seppuku was ever used in writing. So hara-kiri is a spoken term and seppuku a written term for the same act."^[2]