

The Truth in the Fictions:  
The Exploration of the *Chūshingura* World  
by

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B.A., Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1972

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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This thesis explores the world of *Chūshingura*. It is a story based on the actual vendetta referred to as “the Akō incident” which occurred on December 14<sup>th</sup> of 1702. The forty-seven Akō rōnin (masterless samurai) avenged their lord’s death on Kira Yoshinaka, a high-ranking official of the Tokugawa bakufu. They were the former vassals of Asano Naganori, *daimyō* (feudal lord) of the Akō *han* (domain), who was forced to commit *seppuku* (suicide by disembowelment) as a punishment for attacking Kira in Edo Castle on March 14<sup>th</sup> of 1701. The Asano vassals became rōnin. They believed that this affair was a *kenka* (fight), but Kira was declared innocent. Infuriated by the unfair bakufu judgement, the Akō rōnin led by Ōishi Kuranosuke, *karō* (chief retainer) of the Akō *han*, successfully carried out the vendetta. A month and a half later, all the vendetta league members were sentenced to *seppuku*. This incident had a strong impact on the people in the peaceful Genroku era and it has since been taken up in various forms of entertainment and art. Among them, a kabuki and *jōruri* play (Japanese traditional puppet play) *Kanadehon Chūshingura* has maintained an unsurpassed status since its first performance in 1748. After *Kanadehon*, the term *Chūshingura* has become the title of almost all the *Akō-mono* (works with the theme of the Akō incident). However, this play mainly depicts the fate of fictional characters outside the vendetta league. The first purpose of this thesis is to investigate the reasons for the long-lasting popularity of *Kanadehon* as the most representative *Chūshingura* story, in spite of the clear absence of historical facts. As the second purpose, this thesis will examine the recent polarization trend in *Chūshingura* productions. Until a few decades ago, the straightforward vendetta stories with Ōishi the hero versus Kira the villain boasted overwhelming popularity. While the popularity of these “orthodox” stories is rapidly diminishing, *Chūshingura* stories with diverse perspectives, such as those featuring defectors, have been steadily increasing in the modern age. Performances of *Chūshingura* parodies written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV in the early 1800s are also increasing both in traditional and contemporary plays. After having investigated this polarization trend and ascertained its reasons, I will try to forecast the future of *Chūshingura*.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this to my husband.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Until a couple of decades ago, almost all Japanese knew the story of *Chūshingura*. This story has been taken up in numerous forms of entertainment and art.<sup>1</sup> Theatrical performances range from traditional kabuki and bunraku<sup>2</sup> to modern avant-garde or underground plays, as well as one opera, one ballet and one Takarazuka musical (*Takarazuka Kagekidan* is an all-women revue group which has theaters both in Tokyo and in Osaka). The story has also been featured in films and TV programs including dramas, documentaries, dialogue or discussion, quiz, variety shows, travel and even one cooking show (Dec. 1975). Additionally, it has been represented in a variety of *engei* (vaudeville-type traditional Japanese popular entertainment) such as *kōdan* (oral story-telling), *rōkyoku* (story-telling accompanied by *shamisen* music), *rakugo* (comical story-telling) and *manzai* (slapstick and wisecracks by a comedy duo). Some *Chūshingura* songs are found in *enka* (Japanese traditional popular music), as well. Printed works including *ukiyo-e* (Japanese woodblock prints) and various types of writings such as *jitsuroku* (historical records), popular fictions, more serious novels and academic papers have also addressed the story. This thesis will explore such a dazzling *Chūshingura* world.

Foreigners will wonder, “What on earth is *Chūshingura*?” Even in Japan, some young people do not know *Chūshingura* these days. It is a story based on an actual incident. The following is a rough outline of the story referred to as “the Akō incident”:

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<sup>1</sup> Data from comprehensive *Chūshingura Vol.5* compiled by Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu (Akō-Shi City History Compilation Room).

<sup>2</sup> Traditional puppet play accompanied by *gidayū* chanting. This performance was originally called *ningyō jōruri*; however, “bunraku” is usually used in modern days. In the Edo period, the term *jōruri* seemed to be more common. So, I’ll use the either term depending on the situation.

On the fourteenth day of the twelfth month of 1702,<sup>3</sup> the former vassals of the late Asano Naganori, the lord of the Akō *han* (domain), avenged death of their lord on Kira Yoshinaka,<sup>4</sup> a high-ranking official of the Tokugawa bakufu. One year and nine months before that incident, on the fourteenth day of the third month of 1701, Asano was sentenced to *seppuku* (ritual suicide by disembowelment) by the bakufu because he attempted to kill Kira in Edo Castle during the welcoming ceremony for the imperial envoys from Kyoto. His *han* was confiscated and his vassals became rōnin (samurai unemployed by the loss of their lord, for one reason or another). Meanwhile, there was no punishment against Kira. The Akō rōnin became infuriated by this fact, thinking that the judgment of the bakufu was one-sided and blatantly unfair. They believed that Kira was to blame for this scandalous affair because his outrageous taunting made Asano attack him. So, they decided to seek justice for this unfair judgment by killing Kira with their own hands. Eventually, the forty-seven Akō rōnin led by Ōishi Krasuke, *karō* (chief councilor of a domain) of the Akō *han*, successfully executed their lord's vengeance on Kira.

There had been no war for one hundred years since the establishment of the Tokugawa bakufu in 1603. The peaceful society contributed to the remarkable development of economy and culture which is especially referred to as *genroku-bunka*

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<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, the incident occurred at around four o'clock in the morning of the next day, but people at that time thought it was still December 14<sup>th</sup> because those vassals stayed awake from the previous day. In the Edo period, the lunar calendar was used. By the solar calendar, it was January 30<sup>th</sup> of 1703 (Keene, *Chūshingura: Studies in Kabuki* 5). Because of this discrepancy, academic papers usually describe the dates as follows: on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month of 1702. I will adopt the same notation in my thesis. Incidentally, the year 1702 was the fifteenth year of the Genroku era (1688-1704) of the Edo period (1603-1868). During the Edo period, Japan was under the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate (the government of a shogun, a hereditary commander of the Japanese army). The Fifth Shogun Tsunayoshi ruled the country in the Genroku era.

<sup>4</sup> Some people call him Yoshihisa.

(culture). While *chōnin*<sup>5</sup> (townsmen) started to gain economic power, most samurai (warriors) were reduced to mere salaried employees, rather than warriors, without any opportunity to show their fighting skill and spirit (Kawahara 160-163). This incident occurred in such a historical context. Both samurai and commoners were deeply impressed by the determined action of the forty-seven vendetta league members. These Akō rōnin became legendary heroes when the bakufu decided to sentence *seppuku* to all of them<sup>6</sup> in spite of the strong popular support for them.

This incident was immediately adapted into a kabuki play entitled *Akebono Soga no Youchi*, as kabuki was one of the most popular entertainments for commoners those days (Matsushima 128-132). Although this play was banned after three days of performances, many *Akō-mono* (works covering the Akō incident) continued to be staged in kabuki and *jōruri* theaters, specifically after death of Shogun Tsunayoshi in 1709. There was no concept of copyright in those days, so, new productions used to borrow important episodes and characters from the preceding plays. In this way, the *Akō-mono* plays became gradually more sophisticated, and *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was created in 1748.

This play was the culmination of the *Akō-mono*. It was first performed as *jōruri*. Because of its great success, this play was immediately adapted into kabuki. Since then, it has been performed either in kabuki or *jōruri* theaters almost every year, totalling 1,671 times (kabuki 1404; *jōruri* 267) between 1748 and 2011 (See Table 1 in Appendix II)

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<sup>5</sup> “*Chōnin* were generally merchants, though occasionally craftsmen and artisans were included in their number” (Online Encyclopedia Britannica). They were different from commoners in general. Only the townsmen who owned their houses were regarded as *chōnin*.

<sup>6</sup> The number of the Akō rōnin who committed *seppuku* was actually forty-six. Terasaka Kichiemon left the league after the attack. Various speculation has been made about the reason. I will elaborate on this issue in Chapter 2.

(Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu 10-790; Osaka Shochikuza Senden-bu Jan. 2010; Kokuritsu Gekijō Data Base).<sup>7</sup> *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was so popular that the term *Chūshingura* became the title of almost all the subsequent stories with the theme of the Akō incident (Matsushima, 177; et al.). In actuality, though, *Kanadehon* does not depict the historical events faithfully. It consists of eleven acts, and the protagonists change from act to act. Most of them are fictional characters outside the vendetta league. All the same, this play has remained the most influential *Chūshingura* story up to the present time. In some cases, the world of *Chūshingura* means that of *Kanadehon*. Therefore, the first purpose of this thesis is to scrutinize *Kanadehon Chūshingura* and investigate the reasons for its long-lasting popularity as the most representative *Chūshingura* story, even though it neglects the historical truth and focuses on the fictional characters who did not, or could not, join the vendetta, rather than highlighting loyal league members who actually became heroes in history.

As the second purpose, this thesis will explore the reasons for the recent polarization trend in *Chūshingura* productions. As mentioned above, *Chūshingura* has been taken up by various forms of popular entertainment. Especially, many films (207) and TV dramas (116) have been created with this theme (See Table 3 in Appendix II). However, the number of new films drastically decreased in the 1970s after the spread of television. The other traditional entertainment such as *kōdan* and *rōkyoku* had already disappeared from the mainstream media by then with the maturing of post-war generations who could choose from more diverse entertainment including Western films

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<sup>7</sup> Until 1946, I referred to the data provided by Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu (City History Compilation Room). From 1947, I referred to programs of Shochiku affiliated theatres and Kokuritsu Gekijō Data Base. However, the data of the latter two references cover the performances only in major cities. Many *Kanadehon* have been staged in local cities in addition to the performances included in Table 1.

and music. Then, the number of new TV dramas started to decrease in the 1990s. In the 2000s, only seven TV dramas with the theme of *Chūshingura* were created. Furthermore, five out of the seven dramas have turned out to be either *meimeiden* (each member's story) or *gaiden* (the story of the people outside the vendetta league) (Table 3).

In contrast, the number of performances of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* has not shown any notable decrease until today (Table 1). Another interesting trend is that *Chūshingura* performances by modern small theatrical groups started to increase in the 1990s. Some of them were known as avant-garde or underground play groups. In the 2000s, their performances outnumbered the orthodox *Chūshingura-mono* usually staged in large theaters. By “orthodox,” I mean the straightforward vendetta story with Ōishi the hero versus Kira the villain. If *Chūshingura* parodies written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV<sup>8</sup> are added, almost one hundred (95 to be exact) plays have been performed in small to medium theaters between 1990 and 2011 (See Table 2: Most of them are small theaters with a capacity of less than five hundred, which are predominantly used by modern fringe play groups). Nanboku's plays started to attract the interest of underground play groups as early as the 1960s. Since then, his popularity has continued to increase. In this way, the polarization of *Chūshingura* productions has been proceeding. After having investigated this trend and ascertained its reasons, I will forecast the future of *Chūshingura* including Nanboku's parodies.

### The Composition of This Thesis

---

<sup>8</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV is a playwright who created many sarcastic but insightful plays in the Bunka and Bunsei era (1804-1830). He became a popular writer at the age of 50, and remained to be active until he died at the age of 75 in 1829 (*Engeki-kai* Jul. 2011). He wrote four *Chūshingura* parodies. Two of them, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* and *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu*, started to gain high popularity after THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

This thesis consists of four chapters and conclusion. Chapter 1 is the Introduction. In Chapter 2, I will examine the historical Akō incident. In order to explore the *Chūshingura* world, it is imperative to find out what actually happened. The first task is to distinguish between the facts and the legends of the Akō incident. A considerable amount of historical records were left about this incident; however, some of them are based on rumors and speculation. Various legends also developed from unreliable records and people's expectation or imagination. It is crucially important to discern the facts among those mixed-up records and stories.

Next, I will explore legal, moral and philosophical issues. No difficult legal issue was involved in the sentence of *seppuku* to Asano Naganori because he violated the law prohibiting the drawing of a sword inside Edo Castle. His conduct was a crime deserving of death penalty. Shogun Tsunayoshi ordered Asano's *seppuku* immediately after the incident. Yet, a moral issue came up. The fact that Kira was declared innocent was the cause for this vendetta incident. Kira did not attempt a counterattack against Asano. From Tsunayoshi's viewpoint, there was no reason to punish Kira. The subsequent grave consequences must have been beyond Tsunayoshi's imagination because he simply acted in accordance with the bakufu law, even though his decision may have been too hasty. In contrast, it took more than a month and a half before the bakufu finally delivered the judgment of *seppuku* to the Akō rōnin. I will investigate four different arguments by four Confucian scholars to find out how the disposition of the Akō rōnin was decided in the course of this long debate.

A philosophical issue also needs investigation. Viewed from the outside, this vendetta league appeared to be firmly united. In actuality, though, members had been

facing serious internal strife because of philosophical differences until the government decided not to restore the Asano house. They were divided into two groups: moderate Ōishi's group and Edo radicals under Horibe Yasubei Taketsune. Ōishi's group prioritized the restoration of the Asano house, while the Edo group insisted on killing Kira under any circumstances. Their conflict arose over their different conceptions of the samurai honor. Organizational honor came first for Ōishi, whereas Edo radicals emphasized personal honor (Ikegami 228). Just as the vendetta league was falling apart, the bakufu finally rejected the Ōishi's plea to restore the Asano house. Receiving this news, Ōishi eventually decided to carry out the vendetta.

In the last section of Chapter 2, I will explore chronologically the social impact of the Akō incident, as well as the change of people's interest in this incident over years. During the Edo period, the Akō rōnin were criminals although they were heroes, specifically among commoners. After the Meiji Restoration, Japanese governments started to utilize the Akō incident to enhance patriotism, and the detailed accounts of the incident were included in school history textbooks. Meanwhile, *Chūshingura* stories with new perspectives appeared during the Taisho and the early Showa periods; for instance, Kikuchi Kan recuperated Kira Yoshinaka in his novel *Kira Kōzuke no Tachiba* (1931). This trend was noticed only in literature, though. Popular entertainments continued to focus on loyal and self-sacrificial *gishi* (righteous samurai). After the Second World War, the inclusion of the Akō incident in textbooks drastically decreased (See Table 4 in Appendix III). The incident has no longer been used as a tool for patriotic education. Still, orthodox *Chūshingura* stories praising heroic deeds of the *gishi* maintained its popularity

until the mid-90s, when they were then steadily replaced by stories with diverse perspectives (See Tables 2 & 3).

Chapter 3 will be devoted to the discussion on the stage adaptation of the Akō incident. After examining the stage adaptations preceding *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, I will scrutinize this play and elucidate the reasons why *Kanadehon* is regarded as a masterpiece of kabuki and *jōruri* plays (Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History 9; et.al). Following the discussion on its component elements including title, composition, playwrights, main characters and play structure, I will explore the reasons for the popularity of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. Aesthetic elements are one of the reasons, but more important are its themes.

The most common notion may be that its main theme is the unconditional loyalty of the faithful vassals to their lord. Donald Keene says in the introduction of his translation of *Kanadehon*, “The whole point of the play is the unconditional nature of loyalty” (17). The Allied Occupation banned *Kanadehon Chūshingura* after the Second World War because they thought this play was based on feudalistic ideas with the theme of loyalty.

However, I argue that its main themes are love and death. In actuality, various interpretations have been given about its themes, but many critics and writers agree that this play mostly depicts the destiny of people who were not members of the vendetta league. Its protagonists change from act to act. Ōboshi Yuranosuke (the name of a character who corresponds to the historical Ōishi Kuranosuke) is the protagonist only in Acts Four and Seven. Besides, in the second half of Act Seven, *ashigaru* (the lowest rank of samurai) Teraoka Heiemon is the protagonist, and the play depicts his desperate efforts

to be included in the vendetta league, as well as the sibling love between him and his sister Okaru. He was originally excluded from the league because of his low rank. Only after he showed his sincere loyalty by trying to kill Okaru who happened to know the content of Yuranosuke's confidential letter, was he allowed to join the league. None of the other protagonists are league members, either.

Kabuki was the entertainment mainly for commoners in the Edo period. This fact may explain the above characteristics of *Kanadehon*. Although commoners applauded the dramatic vengeance prepared over one year and nine months' period and finally carried out successfully, they were ordinary people. They presumably had strong sympathy with the sufferings of the members' families and even defectors who could not become heroes because of their different personal circumstances. None of the three playwrights of *Kanadehon* were samurai, either.

The ulterior side of this vendetta story was more grossly exposed by Nanboku's parodies. He was from the lowest class of the society, and was most active as a playwright in the Bunka and Bunei era, which witnessed the corruption of the bakufu and the breakdown of the established order (*Engeki-kai: Yonsei Tsuruya Nanboku* 8-9). Such a milieu could have influenced his life philosophy and play style. Since his plays are attracting considerable attention in the modern age, I will discuss his most popular *Chūshingura* parody, *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan*, in detail in the section on stage adaptations after *Kanadehon*. I will also analyze *Genroku Chūshingura* as the most frequently performed kabuki piece after *Kanadehon*, and investigate the reasons for its lower popularity compared to *Kanadehon*.

In Chapter 4, after having investigated the recent polarization trend in *Chūshingura* productions, I will examine the reasons for the emergence of diverse perspectives about this story. I predict *Chūshingura-mono* including its parodies will survive a changing society, although the orthodox vendetta stories will continue to decrease. *Kanadehon* will also maintain its strong popularity in the future, if it preserves the plurality of the original script.

### Theory

In order to support my argument, I will adopt the text theory of Roland Barthes. He distinguishes between “the *readerly* text” and “the *writerly* text”: The former is solely to consume, while the latter is produced by readers’ cooperation (*S/Z* 4-6). In the *writerly* text, a reader is inspired to join in, because it is open to plural interpretations. I agree with his theory. Popular entertainment, just like literature, can be demarcated with this theory. I argue that films and TV dramas with a simple storyline of Ōishi the hero versus Kira the villain are *readerly* texts. They present an exclusive and absolute viewpoint. There is no room for other interpretations; they are just consumed and gone. On the other hand, kabuki and bunraku are *writerly* texts which have multiple perspectives in a single play. *Kanadehon* interweaves plural threads of various materials such as style (*jidaimono*, *sewamono*, *shosagoto*<sup>9</sup>), history (the Muromachi and Edo periods), culture (those of samurai and commoners), philosophy (Confucianism, humanism, etc) and so on, and it has allowed multiple interpretations from different viewpoints. However, there has been a tendency to impose specific perspectives by omitting some acts indispensable to this play,

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<sup>9</sup> *Kanadehon* is a combination of *jidaimono* (history plays), *sewamono* (plays of common people) and *shosagoto* (dances).

especially after the Akō rōnin became ethical models in the Meiji period. In order for *Kanadehon* to survive a rapidly changing society, it will be crucial for this play to return to the original script and spirit of the Edo period.

## Method

I concentrated on the literary review. Aside from the close reading of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, I covered the following genres in addition to perusing academic books and papers: kabuki and bunraku; an opera; films; TV dramas; *rakugo* inspired by *Kanadehon (Shichidanme)*; *rōkyoku* performed by a new-generation *rōkyokushi* (*rōkyoku* performer) who plays *shamisen* like a rock guitar; *kōdan*; three *ukiyoe* exhibitions; and a wide variety of *jitsuroku* and fictions. Most of the theatrical performances were DVD recordings, but I saw a few live kabuki stagings, as well. I had been to kabuki theaters almost every month for fifteen years before I became a graduate student in University of Victoria; however, never have I viewed the performances so intensively, and I could enjoy them academically – only a little bit. I also enjoyed *Chūshingura* novels with diverse perspectives. Some novels were written from the standpoints of either *fu-gishi* (defectors) or Kira's side. It is amazing that so many writers have felt challenged to create their versions of *Chūshingura*. This story has also been taken up by various theatrical groups as aforementioned. This fact shows that *Chūshingura* has enchanted Japanese people regardless of the difference of their ideologies or standpoints.

Lastly, I would like to attach a couple of photos of *Gishi-sai* (Festival in commemoration of the Akō rōnin's vendetta) held by Sengakuji Temple in Tokyo (the forty-seven rōnin are buried there together with their lord Asano Naganori) and Akō-Shi

on December 14<sup>th</sup> every year. In addition to participants in the parades and other ceremonies, many tourists visit the two places. In 2002, the year of the three hundredth anniversary of the vendetta, 130,000 people visited Akō-Shi with a population of only 50,000<sup>10</sup> (Kyōdō Tsūshin, Dec. 15 2002). In 2010, on the 108<sup>th</sup> festival, the number decreased to 70,000 (Kobe Shimbun, Dec. 15 2010). Still, it is a large number. Festivals are also held in several other places, including the former Kira residence site in Honjo Matsuzaka-chō, Yamashina (Kyoto: Kuranosuke's temporary residence before he moved to Edo), Shibata-Shi (Niigata: the hometown of Horibe Taketsune), Fukuoka-Shi and Sunagawa-Shi (Hokkaido).<sup>11</sup> *Chūshingura* is alive in the mind of Japanese people even now. Most festival participants may support orthodox *Chūshingura* stories. All the same, these festivals will serve as important agents to transmit *Chūshingura* to future generations, whatever forms it may take.

**Figure 1: Akō-Shi Gishisai (2009)**



**Figure 2: Sengakuji Temple Gishisai (2009)**



<sup>10</sup> Source: Website of Akō-Shi. As of 2000, the exact number was 52,077. The number is based on national population census.

<sup>11</sup> Both cities have temples where graves of the forty-seven rōnin were built in the Showa Era (Fukuoka 1935; Sunagawa 1953).

## Chapter 2: The Akō Incident

### Historical Background and Its Impact on the Society

#### I. Facts and Legends

##### A. Facts: What Actually Happened?

1. **Records of historical events (*Jitsuroku*):** The Akō incident is a very rare case in that a considerable amount of historical records were left, although this incident involved the crucial issue of the relationship among shogun,<sup>12</sup> *daimyō* (Japanese feudal baron with 10,000 *koku*<sup>13</sup> or more) and his vassals (Tahara 7). These historical records are called *jitsuroku*, and includes “primary documents from the league itself - such as the manifesto of the league, or Horibe Yasubei’s account” (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 16), as well as many commentaries and articles written by outsiders. These documents are generally regarded as true records of historical events, although we should treat them with great care because many inaccurate secondary manuscripts and rumors are also included. Other *Chūshingura*<sup>14</sup> texts which are mostly regarded as fictions also rely on *jitsuroku* for the description of the historical background. In actuality, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between *jitsuroku* and fictions because legends have been

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<sup>12</sup> One of a line of military governors ruling Japan until the revolution of 1867-68 (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

<sup>13</sup> A unit of the measurement for rice. A *koku* of rice weighs about 150 kilograms and it was supposed to be the amount enough to feed one person for one year in the Edo period.

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was so popular that the term *Chūshingura* became the title of most of the subsequent stories with the theme of the Akō incident

inseparably incorporated into true stories.

One of the most comprehensive *jitsuroku* is *Akō Gijin Sansho* (赤穂義人纂書) published in 1910-1911. These three-volume collections were mainly assembled by Nabeta Shōzan (鍋田晶山)<sup>15</sup> in the Edo period, and include many important documents about the Akō incident; such as *Akō Gijinroku* (赤穂義人録) by a Confucian scholar Muro Kyūsō (室鳩巢: 1703, revised 1709), *Akō Shōshūki* (赤穂鐘秀記) by Sugimoto Yoshichika (杉本義隣: 1703)<sup>16</sup> and *Kōseiki Kenmonki* (江赤見聞記) which was supposedly compiled by Ochiai Yozaemon (落合与左衛門), the chamberlain of the late Asano's wife, Yōzen-in.<sup>17</sup> *Kōseiki Kenmonki* “includes numerous primary documents that are clearly authentic” (Smith, “The Trouble with Terasaka” 8; Tahara 18).

Bitō Masahide adds *Akō Gishi Shiryō* (赤穂義士資料) (1931) edited by Chūō Gishikai (中央義士会)<sup>18</sup> and *Kinsei Buke Shisō* (近世武家思想) edited by Ishii Shirō (石井紫郎) (150). Miyazawa Seiichi names *Chūshingura Vol. 1 & 3* published by Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu (赤穂市市史編纂室)<sup>19</sup> as highly useful documents (“Akō rōshi” 15). Izumi Hideki refers to *Sekijō Gishinden* (赤城義臣伝) (1719) compiled by Katashima Takenori (片島武矩) not because they include authentic documents but

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<sup>15</sup> A vassal of Iwaki Taira *han* (磐城平藩: domain) (1778–1858).

<sup>16</sup> A vassal of Kaga *han* (加賀藩).

<sup>17</sup> Some of the other important documents included in *Akō Gijin Sansho* are: *Sekijō Meiden* (赤城盟伝) written by Maehara Isume and Kanzaki Yōgorō, two league members; *Horiuchi Den'emon Oboegaki* (堀内伝右衛門覚書) written by a vassal of the Hosokawa house which was commissioned to take care of the seventeen Akō rōnin after their attack on Kira; and *Ogyū Sorai Akō Shijū Roku Shi Ron* (荻生徂徠赤穂四十六士論).

<sup>18</sup> Central Gishi Society. It was established at the end of the Meiji period. *Gishi* means righteous samurai.

<sup>19</sup> A division of Akō Municipal Office in charge of compiling Akō City History.

because almost all the works cited by him were books banned by the bakufu (176-178).<sup>20</sup> Izumi says that we could understand the ideological standpoint of the Tokugawa bakufu by knowing what kinds of books were banned in the Edo period. Katashima also printed a large number of copies in defiance of the bakufu's prohibition against printing documents about the Akō incident (Marcon 450). For the first time in a printed book, the Akō rōnin were described by real name (Smith, "The Trouble with Terasaka" 13).

**2. The true story:** If the Akō incident is to be reconstructed only with the primary reliable documents, the following will be the true story. On the fourteenth day of the third month of 1701, Asano Takuminokami Naganori (浅野内匠頭長矩), *daimyō* of the Akō *han* (domain), suddenly attempted to kill Kira Kōzukenosuke Yoshinaka (吉良上野介義央), a senior bakufu master of ceremony, in the Pine Gallery (Matsu no ōrōka) of Edo Castle. Asano had been entrusted with the task of welcoming the imperial envoys from Kyoto, and Kira was his supervisor. The cause of the attack was unknown because Asano did not give any detailed accounts to his investigators. According to the record written by Kajikawa Yosobei (梶川与惣兵衛), a bakufu official who had happened to witness the incident, Asano shouted at Kira, "Do you remember my grudge from these past days?" (Bito 150). The only other words of Asano known to us are the following: "I should have informed you about this matter in advance, but what happened today could not be helped, and it was impossible for me to let you know" (Bitō 151). This was an oral message Asano left to his vassals, but it was too short and vague to know the reasons for Asano's

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<sup>20</sup> Miyazawa comments that *Sekijō gishinden* served as a model for numerous historical stories of the *gishi* in later years. This book has also had considerable influence on *gishi* studies of modern days ("Chūshingura Gensō" 10).

attack on Kira.

Asano was sentenced to *seppuku* on the same day. The next day, the bakufu decided to confiscate the Akō *han*, and sentenced Asano's younger brother Daigaku Nagahiro (大学長広) to *heimon* (form of house arrest) (Bitō 156). He was the legitimate heir of the childless Asano Naganori. Kira was only slightly injured, and there was no punishment against him, to the great dissatisfaction of the Asano vassals who regarded the incident as a *kenka* (fight) between their lord and Kira. They thought that Kira must have been responsible for causing Asano's violent action and complained that the bakufu decision was "in violation of *kenka ryōseibai* (the principle that both parties to a fight were to be punished equally)" (Bitō 154).

On the nineteenth day of the third month, the first messengers arrived in Akō (a province approximately 660 km away from Edo) and reported the Asano's attack on Kira in Edo Castle. Subsequent messengers brought more detailed information about the incident; however, it was not until the twenty-eighth day of the same month that the Akō vassals received the information about the bakufu order to confiscate the Asano house from a relative of Asano. On receiving this information, Ōishi Kuranosuke Yoshio (大石内蔵助良雄),<sup>21</sup> *karo* (chief councilor) of the Akō *han*, summoned all the vassals to Akō Castle on the same day and fierce debate was undertaken for two days over what actions to take (Miyazawa, "Akō rōshi" 54-55).<sup>22</sup> The opinions of the vassals were divided into *rōjō* (to hold the castle), *junshi* (to follow death of their lord by committing suicide) or

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<sup>21</sup> Some people call him "Yoshitaka."

<sup>22</sup> Kikuchi says this general conference was held for three days from 1701.3.27 to 3.29 (52). The chronological table Inoue attached to his novel shows the same date for this conference (372). However, what is important here is the fact that the conference ended on 3.29 and two messengers were dispatched to Edo.

peaceful surrender to the bakufu. They could not reach agreement. The memorandum of Okajima Yasoemon, who was the Akō *han*'s fiscal officer at that time, recorded what had happened during those chaotic days (Bitō 157).

On the twenty-ninth day, the Akō vassals accepted Ōishi's proposition to dispatch two messengers to Edo to "deliver a petition to the two bakufu inspectors who had been appointed as receivers of Akō Castle" (Bitō 158). In this petition Ōishi wrote, "They (vassals) are unable to hand over the castle so long as their opponent remains alive and well" (Bitō 158). Although Ōishi did not clearly say that Kira should be punished, he expressed the frustration of the Akō vassals against the bakufu decision. However, this petition did not reach the inspectors who had already left Edo when the messengers arrived there. Instead, the petition was passed on to Asano's relatives. Toda Uneme, Asano's cousin and *daimyō* of the Ōgaki *han*, sent a letter to Ōishi, requesting him to surrender to the bakufu peacefully.

Eventually on the eleventh day of the fourth month, the vassals agreed to leave the castle peacefully for the moment, but many of them expected to take actions to defend their honor at a later stage. During this period, more than sixty vassals submitted oaths to Ōishi declaring that they would follow his decision.<sup>23</sup> In many popular *Chūshingura* stories including most of the films I saw, Ōishi urges the vassals to sign the vendetta compact at the general conference; however, Ōishi's priority at this stage was to restore the Asano house (Ikegami 228). His intention to secure oaths from the vassals was to prevent them from taking rash actions (Kikuchi 55), because some radicals had demanded the immediate retaliation on Kira. This conflict of opinions among the Akō

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<sup>23</sup> Less than half of them joined the vendetta (Matsushima 49).

rōnin caused a serious internal strife later on. In any case, Akō Castle was peacefully handed over to the bakufu emissaries on the nineteenth day of the fourth month. By the middle of the sixth month Ōishi moved to Yamashina (a ward in the city of Kyoto), and about three hundred vassals who became rōnin (masterless samurai) dispersed to various places including big cities such as Osaka, Kyoto and Edo.

While Ōishi lived in Yamashina with his family, he dispatched messengers to Edo twice to appease radicals such as Horibe Yasubei Taketsune (堀部安兵衛武庸) who had insisted on attacking Kira immediately (Ikegami 228). In the beginning of the eleventh month of 1701, Ōishi himself went down to Edo and discussed the issues with radicals. Compromising with radicals, Ōishi agreed to execute their lord's vengeance by next March, the first anniversary of their lord's death. Detailed records are included in *Horibe Taketsune Hikki* (堀部武庸筆記) (Kikuchi 61-64). However, in the meeting held at Ōishi's house in Yamashina on the fifteenth day of the second month of 1702, Ōishi's moderate group and some radicals agreed to wait until Asano's second death anniversary of 1703 to carry out the vendetta against Kira (Miyazawa, "Akō rōshi" 109-111). Ōishi persuaded the meeting participants that the bakufu would decide on the issue of the Asano house restoration by then.

Dissatisfied with this agreement, other radicals decided to part with Ōishi's group. They were almost ready for the attack on Kira in the beginning of the seventh month, when the bakufu finally delivered its decision to confiscate the 3,000 *koku* fief of Daigaku Nagahiro and place him in the custody of the Asano's head family in Hiroshima on the eighteenth day of the seventh month (Matsushima 90). On the twenty-eighth day of the same month, nineteen league members held a meeting in Maruyama, Kyoto

(known as *Maruyama Kaigi*), and the attack on Kira was unanimously decided (Miyazawa, “Akō rōshi” 130-131). It was also agreed that all the league members would act as a group, prohibiting individual action by any member. After *Maruyama Kaigi*, many members dropped out of the league and the number decreased by more than half (Matsushima 90-92).

During this period, Ōishi sent his wife and children<sup>24</sup> back to her birthplace in the fourth month,<sup>25</sup> and some *jitsuroku* such as *Kōseki Kenmonki* included accounts about Ōishi’s frequent visits to pleasure quarters in Kyoto and Fushimi. In kabuki plays as well as films and TV dramas, this episode of his “dissipation” (Marcon 458) occupies an important part, but “the reliable historical records offer little” (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 18) about his dissolute life. With regard to the other Akō rōnin, such documents as letters included in *Horibe Taketsune Hikki* refer to some of them, but many anecdotes of the Akō rōnin told by popular entertainment media are rumors, speculation or total fictions.

Finally, in the early morning of the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of 1702, the forty-seven Akō rōnin attacked Kira’s mansion and killed him.<sup>26</sup> They took Kira’s head to the temple of Sengakuji to report to their deceased lord, and then, they surrendered to the bakufu authorities. There was a long debate on the disposition of the Akō rōnin. “Although it is unclear what sort of debates actually took place within the bakufu” (Bitō

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<sup>24</sup> His eldest son, Chikara, remained with him and joined the vendetta.

<sup>25</sup> In the tenth month of 1702, Ōishi divorced his wife before he went down to Edo (Miyazawa, “Akō Rōshi” 137).

<sup>26</sup> As aforementioned, it is customary for Japanese people to regard 14<sup>th</sup> of December as the attacking day because the Akō rōnin actually started their actions in the evening of the fourteenth. Events such as *gishi-sai* (*gishi* festival) are held on this day. In solar calendar, it was January 30<sup>th</sup> of 1703 (Keene, “Chūshingura” 5)

166), it took more than a month and a half before the sentence of execution by *seppuku* was passed on to the Akō rōnin. On the fourth day of the second month of 1703, all of them<sup>27</sup> committed *seppuku*.

## B. Legends Developed from Rumors, Speculation or Imagination

*Chūshingura* legends can be roughly divided into three groups. These legends were transformed from accounts in *jitsuroku* and have been repeatedly adopted in *Chūshingura* stories of popular entertainment media such as bunraku (traditional puppet play: in the Edo period, it was called *jōruri*), kabuki, *kōshaku* (oral story-telling. It was called *kōdan* from the Meiji period), *rōkyoku* (oral story-telling accompanied by a Japanese stringed instrument called *shamisen*. It is also called *naniwabushi*), films and TV dramas as well as historical novels. These legends should be distinguished from the obvious fictions such as most episodes in *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. The playwrights of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* presented this play as a total fantasy based on a real incident. They either borrowed episodes from the world of *Taiheiki*<sup>28</sup> (for instance, the episode of Moronao's amorous feeling for Kaoyo, Enya Hangan's wife,<sup>29</sup> and her rejection) or created new episodes. Many *Chūshingura* anecdotes told in the above-mentioned popular entertainments were assumed to be based on true historical records drawn mainly from *jitsuroku*.

### 1. Kira's harassment of Asano: The first group includes anecdotes about Kira's

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<sup>27</sup> The number of the Akō rōnin who committed *seppuku* was forty-six. Terasaka Kichiemon was missing either before the attack on Kira's mansion or when the league members arrived at the temple of Sengakuji. Whether he should be included in the league members or not has been a controversial issue for three hundred years (Smith, "The Trouble with Terasaka").

<sup>28</sup> A historical book about battles between Northern and Southern Courts of Japanese Imperial Line in the fourteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> Moronao=Kira Yoshinaka, Kaoyo= Asano Naganori's wife and Enya Hangan=Asano Naganori.

harassment of Asano. Asano's attack on Kira seems to have attracted little interest at first; for instance, *Gotōdaiki*<sup>30</sup> includes only brief and simple accounts about this incident (Bitō 156). Besides, Asano died without telling the reasons for his assault on Kira. Lacking in true records, many speculation and rumors spread later on (Smith, "The Capacity of Chūshingura" 4). Among them, "the standard explanation has become that the Asano house had failed to give an adequate bribe to Kira" (Bitō 152), and Kira taunted Asano out of his illogical and illegitimate indignation because bribing is unethical at least theoretically. This episode appears "in both *Akō Shōshūki* and *Akō Gijinroku*, the two seminal chronicles appearing within a year after the incident" (Marcon 453). However, it is likely that this episode is based on rumors (Bitō 152).

The other anecdotes which are frequently included in popular entertainments but highly suspicious are as follows: The overnight change of two hundred *tatami* (Japanese straw mat) in the reception room. This story also became "a standard feature of modern *Chūshingura* films" (Marcon 454); the change of *tsuitate* (a portable partition) with ink brush painting to a color-painting one after Kira's criticism that the ink brush painting is too somber; the change of dinner menus on the very day of welcoming party for the imperial envoys, because of Kira's deliberate wrong information; "Kira's inappropriate guidance about what Asano should wear to the ceremonies for the imperial envoys" (Marcon 457); and Kira's scorn when Asano asked him where to sit to welcome the envoys, either on the top or the bottom of staircases in the entrance (T. Satō 59). The credibility of these anecdotes is limited; however, most Japanese presumably believe that

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<sup>30</sup> "The private account of events during the reign of Tsunayoshi kept by a rōnin scholar Toda Mosui (戸田茂睡)."

all, or at least one or two, of them are true. I myself had believed in the bribe anecdote until I started to explore the facts about the Akō incident.

**2. Legends of Ōishi Kuranosuke:** The second group includes legends concerning Ōishi Kuranosuke. Some *jitsuroku* include a story of the battle between the wasps and the hornets which Ōishi had witnessed as an omen before he received the news of Asano's *seppuku*. "It is clearly the result of a literary imagination" (Marcon 454-455), and this story was not included in any of the thirteen *Chūshingura* films (including TV dramas) I saw, while it may have been a favorite anecdote in older times when people were still superstitious. The most famous legend about Ōishi is a story of his dissipation in pleasure quarters, which I assume a majority of Japanese people believe to be true. As I mentioned previously, though, reliable sources are scarce.

The more historically established anecdote is the story about Ōishi's mistress, Okaru. This historical Okaru is a different person from the famous fictional Okaru<sup>31</sup> in *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. From Ōishi's letter of 1702.11.25 addressed to a priest in Kyoto, Okaru seems to have been expecting a child between her and Ōishi (Marcon 458). Ikemiya Shōichirō wrote *Saigo no Chūshingura* (The last *Chūshingura*) based on this fact. This was a new type of *Chūshingura* fiction with two historical defectors as its protagonists, and a TV drama series with the same title was broadcast in 2004. In this novel, Seo Magozaemon who was Ōishi's retainer was asked by Ōishi, just before the attack on Kira, to serve Okaru and his child after his death. Thus, Ikemiya depicted Magozaemon as a loyal retainer all the more because he decided to live as a defector by accepting a secret mission entrusted by his direct master (Ōishi).

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<sup>31</sup> She appears in Acts Three (a lady-in-waiting), Six (a hunter's wife) and Seven (a prostitute) in *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. She is one of the main characters in this play. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the important roles she assumes in these acts.

3. ***Meimeiden and gaiden***: The last group includes anecdotes of individual vendetta league members, as well as people outside the league. This is the sphere where people's imaginations have been greatly stirred, and many fictitious anecdotes have been created from certain facts. Each member's story is called *meimeiden*, and the story of the people outside of the league is called *gaiden*. From abundant sources, story-tellers and writers picked up some facts and embellished them with prolific imagination.

In *meimeiden*, the anecdotes of the following Akō rōnin are especially popular: Horibe Yasubei, Akabane Genzō, Okano Kin'emon, Isogai Jūrōzaemon, Ōtaka Gengo, Hashimoto Heizaemon and Mōri Koheita.

**Horibe Yasubei** is the most popular Akō rōnin next to Ōishi Kuranosuke in *Chūshingura* stories<sup>32</sup> and he was one of the main characters in many films I saw, although the stories about him are mostly legends transformed from some historical facts.

**Akabane's** anecdote has a title *Akabane Genzō Tokurino Wakare* (赤埴源蔵徳利の別れ)<sup>33</sup> and one of the most favorite stories in popular entertainments (Satō T. 100-101). His episode was included in two films I saw; however, this is not based on historical fact.

**Okano** appears in many stories as a member who obtained the floor plan of Kira's mansion through his girl friend. His episode was included in three films I saw, and he is

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, forty *Yasubei-mono* (films featuring Yasubei) were produced between 1924 and 1959 (Satō, T. 96-97).

<sup>33</sup> Akabane Genzō visited his brother with a Japanese wine (sake) bottle (*tokuri*) to bid farewell just before the attack on Kira. He had been hated by his sister-in-law because he had been disguising himself as a big drinker. Since his brother was absent, he borrowed his brother's *haori* (a kimono jacket) and two wine glasses. He drank sake alone, pretending that the *haori* was his brother. Hearing the news of the vendetta, his brother regretted that he had not been at home during Genzō's visit, and laid up the *tokuri* Genzō had left in lavender.

also one of the two protagonists in the opera *Chūshingura*. This anecdote is also dubious, but Kanzaki Yōgorō's poem is left which implies Okano's love story.

**Isogai's** episode appears in *Genroku Chūshingura* written by Mayama Seika (See Chapter 3.III.A). Based on a presumably historical fact that *koto no tsume* (a plectrum of a Japanese harp) was found in Isogai's pouch after his *seppuku*, Mayama wrote a tragic love story between Isogai and his fiancé. This episode was also included in one of the films I saw. Inoue Hisashi developed a completely different story from this plectrum. In his story, a defector named Nakamura Seiemon and Isogai loved each other. Both of them were good *koto* players. Nakamura defected from the league at the last moment because he realized that he could not die for his lord who, he suspected, had been emotionally disturbed at the time of attacking Kira. Nakamura told Ōishi that he would join the second round of attack and avenge death of Isogai if the Ōishi's group should fail in killing Kira. Isogai understood Nakamura's feelings, and they exchanged their plectrums (7-27). Whether or not Inoue was conscious of Mayama's story, these two fictions show how writers' imagination creates colorful stories from a tiny piece of fact.

**Ōtaka's** anecdote of meeting Takarai Kikaku, Japanese *haikai* (Japanese short poem) poet, on Ryōgoku Bridge on the eve of the vendetta day is another popular story. Answering the *hokku* (opening stanza of a linked poem) of Takarai's, Ōtaka concluded it with lines which implied the attack on Kira. Kabuki plays *Matsuura no Taiko* and *Tsuchiya Chikara* are based on this anecdote. Ōtaka was also a *haikai* poet and knew Takarai; however, a meeting among the league members was being held around the time Ōtaka was said to have encountered Takarai (Kikuchi 114-116).

**Hashimoto** and **Mōri** were defectors, and a variety of fictitious stories exist about them. Hashimoto was the other protagonist of the opera *Chūshingura*.

Marcon refers to **Amanoya Rihei** (456). He was a historical merchant, but “no primary evidence survives about any real ties with the Akō rōnin” (456); nevertheless, he is a popular character in *gaiden*. “Amanoya Rihei wa otoko de gozaru” (Amanoya Rihei is a man) is a very famous line which is uttered by Amanoya Rihei when he (or his son depending on different stories) is tortured and ordered to confess his relationship with the vendetta league. He appears in many popular entertainments including *Chūshingura* films and TV dramas.

## **I. Legal and Moral Issues**

When Asano Naganori was sentenced to *seppuku*, no controversy arose inside the bakufu. His punishment simply followed the legal procedure and precedents; however, the bakufu had to face severe criticism from people who thought the bakufu judgment not to punish Kira was one-sided. As a result, the second attack on Kira by the former Asano vassals occurred. This time, intense debates took place over the disposition of the forty-six rōnin. The followings are the legal and moral issues discussed in the two cases of *seppuku*.

### **A. The *seppuku* of Asano Naganori**

The bakufu decision was based on the argument that Asano violated the law prohibiting the drawing of the sword inside Edo Castle and disrupted the order by his violent behavior especially “on the occasion of a state ceremony” (Bitō 154). There had been four precedents of sword attacks within Edo Castle, and all the attackers, except for

one who was killed on the spot, were sentenced to *seppuku* (Bitō 155). From the viewpoint of the bakufu, the disposition of Asano was totally legal.

However, criticism was sparked mainly over the disposition of Kira, who was declared innocent. The bakufu viewpoint was that Asano unilaterally attacked Kira, who did not fight back. The bakufu did not regard this incident as a *kenka* (fight); Kira was the victim of Asano's violent action and there was no reason to punish him. In contrast, this incident was obviously a *kenka* in the eyes of the Asano's vassals. This conflict of views resulted in the historical vendetta one year and ten months later, ending in the honorable *seppuku* of the forty-six Akō rōnin. Confucians continued to debate the legal and moral issues about these two incidents until the end of the Tokugawa period (McMullen 294). Dazai Shundai (太宰春台), a Confucian scholar, expressed his views about the disposition of Asano in his essay in the early 1730s. He wrote that "the shogun's punishment of Asano had been excessive" (McMullen 308) because Asano did not actually kill Kira. His view may have been the feelings shared by many people since Asano committed *seppuku*.

### **B. The *seppuku* of the forty-six Akō rōnin**

This vendetta incident occurred in the reign of Shogun Tsunayoshi who strongly advocated Confucianism. The imperative concern for Confucians was to maintain order by respecting regulations (Bitō 153). Accordingly, the discussion about the disposition of the Akō rōnin was focused on the issue of conspiracy which was banned by the law. The eventual decision of the bakufu was that the Akō rōnin disturbed the order of the society by acting in conspiracy. This "was more than enough legal cause to sentence them to

death” (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 7); however, it took more than a month and a half before the bakufu finally delivered this judgment on the Akō rōnin.

**1. Four Confucian scholars:** The public including many Confucians seem to have been sympathetic with the Akō rōnin (Matsushima 121-122). Such public sentiments presumably caused the delay in the bakufu decision. **Ogyū Sorai** (荻生徂徠), a Confucian scholar in the service of a shogun councilor Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu, is said to have influenced the bakufu to decide on sentencing *seppuku* to the forty-six rōnin (Bitō 166; McMullen 293).<sup>34</sup> Sorai argued that they “engaged in mass violence without authorization for the sake of one who had been punished by the bakufu” (Bitō 167). Their actions were legally unacceptable. Consequently, the forty-six should be executed; however, Sorai said, it is advisable to sentence honorable *seppuku* to them because they acted to maintain the samurai honor.

Among other Confucians who argued that the Akō rōnin should be strictly punished, the following three scholars are especially notable. **Satō Naokata** (佐藤直方) was the most critical of the forty-six. He expressed the following view a few years after the vendetta incident: Asano was a criminal who violated the law by attacking an innocent Kira. Consequently, the Akō rōnin’s murder of Kira was immoral as well as illegal (McMullen 300). He also claimed that the forty-six should have committed *seppuku* instead of surrendering to the bakufu authorities. Their action was “a devious ruse to escape death and gain employment in other domains” (McMullen 300). The counter argument by Ise Sadatake (伊勢貞丈)<sup>35</sup> would have been the common sentiments

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<sup>34</sup> Tahara doubts the credibility of the document which suggests Sorai’s influence (65-69).

<sup>35</sup> He was a bakufu official in research section of ancient rituals.

of the public. He said that the Akō rōnin would not have planned the vendetta against Kira if they had had the selfish wish to get employed after the incident (Ishii 434).

Contrary to Naokata, **Asami Keisai** (浅見綱齋) regarded the Asano's assault on Kira as a *kenka* and suggested that the shogun's judgment was one-sided in his essay written in 1706 or later. Keisai argued that the actions of the forty-six were righteous because Kira had been responsible for Asano's death. However, the forty-six were "rear vassals of the shogun; it was a rear vassal's duty to obey his lord's lord, whether that lord was right or wrong" (McMullen 303). Thus, Keisai came to the same conclusion as Naokata; the Akō rōnin should be punished because they did not obey the decision of the shogun (their lord's lord). The absolute obedience and loyalty to the shogun was imperative to both Confucian scholars.

**Dazai Shundai** (太宰春台) expressed a different opinion from both of them in his essay written in the early 1730s. He maintained that the forty-six should have resented the shogun's judgment because it was the shogun, not Kira, who had caused their lord's death (McMullen 309). However, they attacked Kira. In this regard, their actions were wrong. They should have showed protest against the bakufu by committing suicide in Akō Castle when the bakufu messengers came there. Or they should have immediately marched to Edo to kill Kira as an open protest to the bakufu decision. It was also wrong that they surrendered to the bakufu after the vendetta. They should have committed *seppuku* at the temple of Sengakuji without waiting for the bakufu judgment. On this point, he shared Naokata's criticism although their rationales were opposite: Naokata claimed that the forty-six should have shown the repentance of their enormous sin by committing suicide at Sengakuji, while Shundai criticized their surrender to the bakufu as

the failure of showing protest and resistance against the authorities. In actuality, many league members had been prepared to commit *seppuku* in the temple of Sengakuji, but Ōishi followed Fuwa Kazuemon's advice that they should report to the bakufu and request for its judgment, lest their vendetta be treated as a simple violent action by rōnin (Kikuchi 151; Miyazawa, "Akō rōshi" 176)

**2. The birth of legends:** As discussed above, Naokata declared that the actions of the forty-six were wrong both morally and legally. Sorai was sympathetic with them, but claimed that they should be executed because their actions were unjustifiable. Keisai clearly admitted the moral righteousness of the forty-six, but he also demanded strict punishment because the bakufu law was absolute. Shundai's views were in a way revolutionary because he argued that the Akō rōnin should have openly protested against the bakufu, and "angrily condemned by later bakufu Confucian scholars as seditious" (McMullen 310). However, Shundai's views meant death of the forty-six because there would have been no possibility for them to survive if they had openly protested against the Tokugawa regime.

The bakufu decision to execute the Akō rōnin by *seppuku* was far removed from the feelings of the general public. "Views critical of the forty-six were likely, in any case, to have been a small minority" (McMullen 310). Shundai complained that everybody admired the forty-six. Ikegami also says that "many Tokugawa people, samurai and commoners alike, revered the forty-seven samurai as cultural heroes" (234). *Chūshingura* legends presumably started because of this unreasonable and tragic ending. People strongly sympathized with the Akō rōnin, being resentful at the discrepancy between the legal judgment and the moral approbation; the Akō rōnin were sentenced to *seppuku* in

spite of their moral righteousness. This fact was an important element to turn the Akō rōnin into heroes of a tragic story.

## II. Philosophical Issues: Motivations of the Forty-Seven Rōnin

### A. Loyalty to a Lord: Was It the Central Motivation?

Most *Chūshingura* stories depict the forty-seven rōnin as self-sacrificial loyal vassals who had deep bonds with their deceased lord. It seems true that some league members had close (possibly sexual) ties to Asano Naganori, but there were those who did not have “any particular indebtedness towards Asano” (Bitō 161; Ikegami 229). Strong family ties also existed among members; Smith says that “just over half league members were related to one another by blood or adoption” (“The Capacity of Chūshingura” 9). In this case, younger members may have been motivated by the filial duty and the inspiration from older family members. In addition, there were even some who admitted that Asano’s behavior in Edo Castle had been thoughtless (Ikegami 229). Thus, the league members were divided into “many different factions and kin groups” (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 12), but they had a common goal of defending the samurai honor.

**Defense for The samurai honor:** The most serious issue in the league was a conflict about the conception of the samurai honor between moderate Ōishi’s group and Edo radicals under Horibe; Ōishi prioritized organizational honor, while Edo radicals emphasized personal honor (Ikegami 228).

a. **Ōishi’s conception of the samurai honor:** At first, Ōishi’s group focused on the restoration of the Asano house. “For him (Ōishi), and for many others, the continuity

of the *o-ie* (the household of the master) was the most important precondition for maintaining the honor of the Asano vassals” (Ikegami 228; Tahara 18-31). Ōishi emphasized that the restoration of the Asano house was the first priority in his two letters sent to Edo radicals in the seventh month of 1701 (Matsushima 65).

In case Daigaku Nagahiro had been allowed to succeed to the lordship, Ōishi might not have joined the vendetta against Kira; he wrote in his letter that he might become a priest if the Asano house was restored (Matsushima 65; Tahara 43).

Nevertheless, it seems to be the general assumption that Ōishi was determined to attack on Kira under any circumstances (Kaionji 208; et al.). Noguchi Takehiko refers to accounts in *Horibe Taketsune Hikki* and *Akō Gijin Sansho* to support his argument that Ōishi would still have killed Kira even if the Asano house had been restored (121). However, *Horibe Taketsune Hikki* also includes the above mentioned Ōishi’s letter about the possibility of entering the priesthood. These contradictory facts may show that Ōishi did not have firm determination to kill Kira, while he had anticipated that the attack on Kira would be inevitable. Smith suggests that the restoration of the Asano house was not realistic (“The Capacity of Chūshingura” 6); however, Ōishi wanted to pursue even the slightest possibility of the Asano house restoration to defend the samurai honor he had conceived (Miyazawa, “Akō rōshi” 96).

- b. **Edo radicals’ conception of the samurai honor:** In contrast, Edo radicals thought that their honor would not be maintained if Kira remained alive while Asano had been sentenced to *seppuku*. They insisted that the *kenka* initiated by their lord should not be left unfinished; they should fight with Kira on behalf of their lord. The core of

their honor was *ichibun* (pride and dignity). “From the beginning, the radical members repeatedly demanded that their sense of pride (*ichibun*) be satisfied” (Ikegami 228-229). The personal loyalty to their deceased lord was emphasized by these radicals. They were not telling lies; however, they were subconsciously concerned with their own honor and reputation, as is revealed from Horibe’s frequent reference to *seken* (the imagined community of honor), *hitomae* (social appearance in the *seken*) and *hyōban* (reputation) in his letters (Ikegami 230-231; Tahara 51-52). In the Edo period, samurai became increasingly concerned with *sekentei* (appearances in the face of public opinion), as the urbanization of samurai class progressed and the samurai “living within the dense information space” (Ikegami 237) increased. Especially Horibe and other Akō rōnin who lived in urban Edo must have been conscious of *sekentei* (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 11). For them, the samurai honor was closely connected to good *hyōban* in *seken*. Ōishi was insightful enough to “criticize their concern for their reputation in the *seken* as too preoccupied with externals” (Ikegami 231).<sup>36</sup>

It was when the hope to restore the Asano house was extinguished that Ōishi finally agreed to kill Kira, and they successfully avenged death of their lord on Kira. After their honorable *seppuku*, the forty-seven rōnin came to be regarded as righteous samurai who showed unconditional and self-sacrificial loyalty to their lord (Smith “The Trouble with Terasaka” 30, 47). Their internal strife had rarely been indicated until a few decades ago (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 9).

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<sup>36</sup> Tsubouchi Shōyō also said that the main motivation of the Akō rōnin was *seken no kikoe* (the public reputation), in defiance of the climate to admire the *gishi* after Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 (Miyazawa, *Chūshingura Gensō* 76-77).

## B. Another Possible Motivation: Appeasing Vengeful Spirits

In the Edo period, people were more superstitious than modern days. As Maruya Saiichi proposes, it is possible that the motivation of the Akō rōnin was to appease vengeful spirits of their lord who had died with a grudge against Kira. Maruya says that people of that time believed in the afterlife and they were in awe of the spirits of the deceased who, they thought, would talk to them (203). Although his proposition is more literary than academic, its possibility cannot be totally denied. There were as many as forty-seven members in the league. It is probable that some of them lived in the world of superstition.<sup>37</sup> Even in modern days, some religious rituals such as *segaki* (feeding the hungry ghosts) are held in temples and shintō shrines across Japan every year. Some people visit shrines to expel evil spirits when they have a sequence of misfortunes, and shamans such as *itako* still live and have visitors. In modern days, people who believe in spirits may be a minority, but people in the Edo period would have feared spirits in the total darkness of night.

Maruya also proposed that the actions of the Akō rōin were inspired by literary sources. Smith refers to Taniguchi Shinko who cited passages from Akō rōnin's letters to support Maruya's notion ("The Capacity of Chūshingura" 12, 15). It is plausible that heroic acts in literary sources become models for living people. The Akō rōnin themselves became models for anti-bakufu samurai of the Satsuma *han* in the *bakumatsu* period (final years of the Edo period) (Izumi 181-182). They may also have been models for *kamikaze* (Japanese suicide) attackers during World War II because the military

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<sup>37</sup> Satō Tadao refers to *Sorei Shinkō* (祖霊信仰: veneration of the deceased). He proposes that the Akō incident developed into a myth because the public regarded it not as a simple vendetta story but as a story of the reunion of the forty-seven rōnin's spirits with that of their lord through a blessed ritual of the rōnin's *seppuku*. I do not intend to argue about his proposition here. I just want to mention that Satō also points out the people's belief in the existence of spirits in the days when the Akō incident occurred (222-224).

upheld the *Chūshingura* story for promoting their campaign of *kokuminteki katakiuchi* (great national revenge) in the final years of the War (“The Capacity of Chūshingura” 27).

### III. Impact on Society

#### A. Impact on the Public in the Edo Period

The vendetta against Kira by the Akō rōnin had a strong impact on people from samurai to commoners. This incident occurred on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of 1702, the Genroku era (1688 – 1704) of the Edo period (1603-1868). There had been no war for one hundred years. The peaceful society contributed to the remarkable development of economy and culture which is especially referred to as *genroku bunka* (culture). While *chōnin* (townsmen) started to gain economic power, most samurai became passive bureaucrats without any opportunity to show their fighting skill and spirit. Samurai had been losing sight of the very reason for their existence as warriors; it was extremely difficult to maintain their dignity in a peaceful world (Kawahara 160-163). In such a historical context, the actions of the Akō rōnin presented the way to defend the samurai honor and were admired as models of true samurai with self-sacrificial loyalty to their lord.

Commoners were also deeply impressed by this incident. On the sixteenth day of the second month of 1703, only twelve days after the *seppuku* of the Akō rōnin, a kabuki play entitled *Akebono Soga no Yo-uchi* (Night attack at dawn by the Soga<sup>38</sup>) was staged in Edo (Matsushima 132). It was based on the Akō incident. This play was banned after three days of performances; however, “between 1748 and 1900, over fifty full-length

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<sup>38</sup> Keene, *Chūshingura* 3

plays on the *Chūshingura* theme were written for the *jōruri* and kabuki theaters” (Keene, “Variations on a Theme: Chūshingura” 10).<sup>39</sup> The most popular play among them was *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, originally written for *ningyō jōruri* (bunraku) in 1748 and immediately adapted to kabuki. I will discuss the stage adaptation of the *Chūshingura* story in more detail in Chapter 3. The *Chūshingura* story was also popular in *kōshaku* (oral story-telling). *Kōshaku-shi* (*kōshaku* performers) created their own versions of *Chūshingura* stories based on *jitsuroku*. These popular entertainments contributed to increasing the popularity of *Chūshingura*. Officially, however, the Akō rōnin were criminals during the Edo period.

### **B. Utilization of *Chūshingura* by the Authorities to Enhance Patriotism**

On the fifth of the eleventh month of 1868, the first year of the Meiji period,<sup>40</sup> the Meiji Emperor dispatched his envoy to the temple of Sengakuji with his message praising Ōishi Yoshio “for his righteousness in following his lord and carrying out revenge” (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 26). The fervent *Chūshingura* fans interpreted this Emperor’s message as the official recognition for Akō rōnin’s actions. Since then, the story of the Akō rōnin as *kokumin densetsu* (national legend) started to spread, surviving a few crises such as the enactment of the law to ban vendetta in 1873 as well as the trend to criticize the Akō rōnin during the period of *bunmeikaika* (modernization and enlightenment period through Western culture in the 1870s – 1880s) after the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the Taisho democracy movement (from 1910s to 1920s) (Miyazawa, “Chūshingura Gensō” 13-15, 31-32).

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<sup>39</sup> If *meimeiden* and *gaiden* are included, the number exceeds one hundred.

<sup>40</sup> Lunar calendar

The government started to include the detailed accounts of the Akō incident in school history textbooks around 1880. The texts were mainly based on *Akō Gijinroku* by Muro Kyūsō (Miyazawa, “Chūshingura Gensō” 49). In the 1890s the trend was reversed and the accounts of the Akō incident suddenly disappeared from the textbooks in 1902 (Miyazawa, “Chūshingura Gensō” 105). However, a “*gishi-mono*” (works featuring the *gishi*, that is, righteous samurai) boom started after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 to 1905 with the explosive popularity of *gishi-den* (the story of the *gishi*) by *rōkyokushi* (*rōkyoku* performer) Tōchūken Kumoemon (桃中軒雲右衛門) and the publication of *Genroku Kaikyōroku* (元禄快挙録) written by Fukumoto Nichinan (福本日南)<sup>41</sup> in 1909. This book made a sharp distinction between the *gishi* and *fu-gishi* (unrighteous samurai) (Miyazawa, “Chūshingura Gensō” 79-80, 87-89). In 1920, the revised elementary school textbooks included the story of the *gishi* again under the title of *Ōishi Yoshio* (Satō T. 101-104). The *gishi*’s actions were praised as having enhanced the public morality which was degenerating during the Genroku era. The Akō incident was not a simple vendetta story of loyal samurai any longer; Ōishi became an ethical model for students (Miyazawa, “Chūshingura Gensō” 132-133).

Gradually, loyalty of the Akō rōnin to their lord came to be regarded as loyalty to the nation (Matsushima 211). The words of Utsumi Sadajirō (内海定次郎), an author of *Shinsetsu Akō Gishi Roku* (真説赤穂義士録) of 1933, represent the ideological stance of patriotic *Chūshingura* partisans of those days. He “declared that the self-denying, self-sacrificing behavior of the *gishi* served as an ideal model of all Japanese citizens in a time of national crisis” (Smith, “The Capacity of Chūshingura” 30). Utsumi’s book was

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<sup>41</sup> He was a journalist and founding member of Chūō Gishikai.

published several years before the Second World War. *Chūshingura* was utilized to enhance patriotism and encourage self-sacrificial actions among the public.

As a typical example, the Japanese military government planned to make *kokusaku eiga* (propaganda film) with the theme of *Chūshingura*. Mizoguchi Kenji accepted the offer of directing this propaganda film because of the unlimited funds he could coax out of the government. He chose to cinematize *Genroku Chūshingura*, a *shin* (new) *kabuki* play written by Mayama Seika (See Chapter 3.III.A). In accordance with the philosophy of Mayama's book, Ōishi Kuranosuke was depicted as a model samurai with sincere loyalty to his lord and deep reverence for the Emperor in this film (First Part 1941; Second Part 1942). Nevertheless, the film turned out to be artistic and in the opinion of one critic, "the most beautiful movie ever made" (Stevenson 53), contrary to the purport of the government, because Mizoguchi did not have any loyalty to the nation (comments by Shindō Kaneto, art director of the film, in the bonus footage of *Genroku Chūshingura* DVD).

After the Second World War, the inclusion of the Akō incident in textbooks drastically decreased. I checked one hundred and thirty-nine textbooks for senior high school students published between 1951 and 2010. The result is shown in Appendix IV. Only thirty-one textbooks (22%) included the accounts of the Akō incident. There was no mention of the incident in the remaining one hundred and eight textbooks. The most common description was to refer to it in the footnote in relation to Tokugawa Tsunayoshi's reconciliation policy with the Imperial Court. The focus in this case was on the welcoming ceremony for the imperial envoys as an example of his policy. Some textbooks described the reaction of citizens as follows: The incident surprised citizens in

the peaceful Genroku era. At the same time, it pleased those who were suffering from Tsunayoshi's "Shōrui Awaremi no Rei" (eccentric decree not to kill any living creatures) and accelerating inflation. A few textbooks referred to the long debate in the bakufu over the disposition of the Akō rōnin. No textbook emphasized loyalty of the Akō rōnin. Even in *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho* for junior high school students compiled by Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform<sup>42</sup> and published by Fusosha in 2009, the Akō rōnin were not praised as ethical models. It gave a full page to the Akō incident, but its description was based on historical facts; however, it made a lengthy reference to Bushido in connection with the notion of loyalty and defined loyalty as working for the public, citing words from *Hagakure* (114).

### C. New Perspectives in Literature

Meanwhile, different perspectives were brought to *Chūshingura* stories in literature during the Taishō and the early Showa periods. Some writers started to focus on the *fu-gishi* as well as "villains" such as Kira and Ōno Kurobei. Ōno was *ichidai karō* (chief retainer of one-generation only) of the Akō *han* in charge of financial administration, and the contributor to the affluence of the Akō *han*. However, he is often depicted as a traitor because he strongly opposed fighting against the bakufu and insisted on peaceful surrender. He moved out of Akō on the twelfth of the fourth month after the surrender of the castle was finally agreed (Miyazawa, "Akō rōshi" 72). Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (*Aruhi no Ōishi Kuranosuke* written in 1917), Kikuchi Kan (*Kira Kōzuke no Tachiba* written in 1931) and Naoki Sanjūgo (*Ōno Kurobei no Shisō* written in 1931) were three big names who wrote *Chūshingura* stories from new perspectives. Smith says, "Akutagawa set a

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<sup>42</sup> This organization is regarded as conservative and reactionary by some civic and political groups.

new pattern for a more psychological understanding of the Akō avengers” (“The Capacity of Chūshingura” 30). Kikuchi and Naoki recuperated Kira and Ōno respectively.

It was a natural development that writers who penetrate people’s inner struggles with sharp eyes gradually turned their attention to the *fu-gishi* and some “villains.” It should be noted that the actual vendetta group was a minority among the Akō rōnin; forty-seven out of three hundred-odd vassals, that is, only fifteen percent of them decided to join the vendetta at the last moment (Noguchi 89). The number “forty-seven” is not small in itself, but its percentage among all the vassals was a small minority. Ōishi was the only *karō* in the list of forty-seven league members (Iio 373-379). None of the other *karō* joined the league. Iio (199-200) and Tsumoto (376) pointed out that almost seventy vassals who had originally submitted the oaths to Ōishi resigned from the league by September 1702, including many high-ranking vassals. Defectors rapidly increased after the final decision of the bakufu not to restore the Asano house. It seems likely that they chose to live in dishonor rather than dying respectfully when they confronted the reality of death. Tahara says that those defectors were less emotional and had a broader view than the radical *gishi* for whom the retaliation against Kira was the only way to live as respectable samurai (58-59). In this regard, the defectors were just realistic and ordinary people. Although the *fu-gishi* could not live as heroes in the *Chūshingura* stories, they surely had their own stories in their diverse circumstances.

This fact probably motivated some writers to feature the *fu-gishi*, or more broadly, unrighteous samurai including traitors and enemies in their novels, and this trend has continued until the present day. For instance, *Fu Chūshingura* (不忠臣蔵) written by Inoue Hisashi (1988) is a story of the nineteen *fu-gishi*. One of the two protagonists in

The opera *Chūshingura* (first performance in 1997) is also the *fu-gishi*, Hashimoto Heizaemon. *Ura-Omote Chūshingura* (裏表忠臣蔵) written by Kobayashi Nobuhiko (1988) and *Genroku Jūgo-nen no Hangyaku* (元禄十五年の反逆) written by Izawa Motohiko reversed the common concept of Kira and treated him as a master of virtue.

#### **D. The Change in the Interest of the Public**

**1. Why were the public interested?:** Why were the public in the Edo period interested in this vendetta incident? Firstly, the sheer number of forty-seven rōnin was startling. As Satō Tadao says, this vendetta may have been ignored as an eccentric and abnormal action if it had been carried out by only one or two rōnin; however, forty-seven rōnin became a kind of pressure group which could claim its righteousness (12-13). Furthermore, they fought a real battle which most of the public had known only in historical stories.

Secondly, this incident started with the *seppuku* of Lord Asano of the Akō *han* on the fourteenth day of the third month of 1701 after his assault on Kira Kōzukenosuke inside Edo Castle, and ended with the *seppuku* of his former vassals on the fourth day of the second month of 1703 after their vengeance of their lord on Kira on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of 1702. This real story was much more dramatic than any fiction.

Thirdly, the vendetta league members seemed to be perfectly united under the leadership of Ōishi Kuranosuke. The Akō rōnin had to leave their beloved ones to pursue their cause. They gave up all the private happiness to defend their honor as samurai, and finally accomplished their purpose without falling apart for almost two years. Since the public probably knew little about the internal strife of the league members, they were impressed with the strong solidarity of the Akō rōnin (Matsushima 131).

Fourthly, the fact that the Akō rōnin were all sentenced to *seppuku* in spite of their moral righteousness stirred the sentiment of *Hōgan Biki* (the sentiment of favoring the weak, unlucky, oppressed or defeated side) among people. The public hailed the Akō rōnin as the heroes and denounced Kira as the villain. An impressive hero story presumably started here.

**2. The gradual decrease of orthodox *Chūshingura* stories:** As discussed earlier, new types of *Chūshingura* stories appeared in literature during the Taishō and the early Showa periods; however, in popular entertainments such as *kōdan*, *rōkyoku*, films and TV dramas, orthodox *Chūshingura* stories maintained their popularity even after the Second World War. By “orthodox” stories, I mean straightforward vendetta stories of “the Akō rōnin the hero versus Kira the villain” with the battle scenes in Kira’s mansion included as the climax. In one of the orthodox films I saw (*Chūshingura* released in 1954), even Mōri Koheita, a famous defector, was depicted as a righteous samurai who died of terminal tuberculosis in the street when he was hurrying to the league’s meeting place on the day of the vendetta. Thus, he spiritually remained the *gishi* although he could not physically join the attack.

Such orthodox *Chūshingura* stories used to promise high revenues and good viewer ratings. Since the first *Chūshingura* film made in 1910,<sup>43</sup> more than eighty full-scale *Chūshingura* films (the number exceeds two hundred if *meimeiden*, *gaiden* and parodies are included) have been released. After television started to become common entertainment among people in the late 1950s, more than one hundred *Chūshingura*

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<sup>43</sup> It was in 1907 that the first film with the theme of *Chūshingura* was shown in movie theaters, but this was a record of kabuki stage performance.

dramas have been made including four NHK *taiga* dramas (a year-long historical drama series). It has also been customary to broadcast *Chūshingura* dramas on television towards the end of every year (Miyazawa, “Chūshingura Gensō” 5-6; Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu 811-888). Most of them were orthodox *Chūshingura* stories. In the 1990s, the situation started to change. The straightforward vendetta stories have been rapidly decreasing, while *Chūshingura* stories with diverse perspectives are steadily increasing, specifically in theatrical performances. Before exploring this polarization trend, I will scrutinize the stage adaptation in the next chapter.

## Summary

A vendetta known as the Akō incident occurred on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of 1702. This incident shook the peaceful society of the Genroku era. The forty-seven Akō rōnin led by Ōishi Kuranosuke, *karo* of the Akō-*han*, avenged their lord's death on Kira Yoshinaka who was a high-ranking official of the Tokugawa bakufu. One year and nine months before this incident, their lord Asano Naganori had been sentenced to *seppuku* because of his attack on Kira in Edo Castle. The former Asano vassals, who became rōnin, believed that this affair was a *kenka* (fight) between their lord and Kira; however, the bakufu did not punish Kira. Outraged by this one-sided and unfair judgement, the Akō rōnin decided to kill Kira with their own hands, successfully carrying out the vendetta. The public was deeply impressed with the apparently unbending cohesion of the vendetta league members. In actuality, there was serious strife among the members over the samurai honor: Ōishi's moderate group prioritized organizational honor and adhered to the restoration of the Asano house, while Edo radicals insisted on

killing Kira to preserve their personal honor. It was only after the bakufu decided not to restore the Asano house that all the league members agreed on the vendetta.

The league members surrendered to the bakufu after the vendetta. It took a month and a half before the bakufu finally sentenced *seppuku* to all the members. Shogun Tsunayoshi was assumedly influenced by the view of Ogyū Sorai, a Confucian scholar in the service of a shogun councilor Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu. Although Sorai was sympathetic with the Akō rōnin, he argued that they should be executed by honorable *seppuku* because their actions were illegal. As regards moral righteousness of the Akō rōnin's conducts, the views of Confucian scholars ranged from the harshest condemnation by Satō Naokata to Asami Keisai's claim that their conducts were morally right because Kira was to blame for death of Asano; however, all the Confucians agreed that the vendetta league members violated the bakufu law and deserved death penalty. The bakufu decision was against the public sentiments. People revered the forty-seven samurai and resented the discrepancy between the legal judgment and the moral approbation. After their death, the Akō rōnin became legendary heroes. Yet, they were criminals during the Edo period.

In the first year of the Meiji Period, the Emperor sent a message to the temple of Sengakuji, and praised Ōishi Yoshio as a righteous and loyal samurai. This message was interpreted as official recognition for Akō rōnin's actions. Since then, loyalty of the Akō rōnin to their lord became deliberately misinterpreted as loyalty to the nation, and the incident started to be utilized to enhance patriotism. This tendency continued until the end of the Second World War, while *Chūshingura* stories featuring defectors, traitors or

even enemies on Kira's side appeared in literature during the Taishō and the early Showa periods.

Although the patriotic education was abolished after the War, *Chūshingura* stories continued to highlight the heroic and loyal deeds of the forty-seven rōnin in the popular entertainment. Many *Chūshingura* films and TV dramas were produced because they promised good revenues and high viewer ratings. Most of them were straightforward vendetta stories, with Ōishi the hero versus Kira the villain. However, the popularity of those "orthodox" *Chūshingura* started to fail in the 1990s (Table 3). By contrast, unorthodox stories and parodies of *Chūshingura* have been steadily increasing, specifically in theatrical performances, since the mid-1990s (Tables 1 & 2).

## Chapter 3: The Stage Adaptation of the Akō Incident

### I. The Kabuki and *Jōruri* Plays Before *Kanadehon Chūshingura*

#### A. The Boom of the *Akō-mono* (Works Covering the Akō Incident)

Following death of Shogun Tsunayoshi in the first month of 1709, pardons were granted to Asano Daigaku Nagahiro and four Akō rōnins' sons who had been exiled to Izu Ōshima Island as the punishment for their fathers' crime.<sup>44</sup> Daigaku returned to Edo from Hiroshima, and the Asano house was restored in the next year, even though the fief granted to Daigaku was only five hundred *koku* (Matsushima 124-125). After the “effective end of the entire incident” (Smith, “The Trouble with Terasaka” 14), the bakufu seems to have loosened the crackdown on the adaptation of this incident into popular forms of entertainment such as kabuki, *jōruri*<sup>45</sup> and *ukiyo zōshi* (popular fictions in the Edo period). The boom of the *Akō-mono* (works covering the Akō incident) started in 1710 (Miyazawa, *Akō rōshi* 2-3).

Toward the end of 1747, Terasaka Kichiemon died. As discussed earlier, there has been a controversy for three hundred years over the reason why he did not surrender to the bakufu authorities together with other league members, although he had most probably joined the attack on Kira. Smith says that “all the evidence works to conclude that his exclusion from the league was in essence a denial of the honorable sentence of *seppuku*” (“The Trouble with Terasaka” 44) due to the fact that he was a low-ranking *ashigaru* (foot soldier). Regardless of whether he should be included in the vendetta

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<sup>44</sup> One of them, Mase Sadahachi, had died during his confinement in the island.

<sup>45</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, *ningyō jōruri* is the formal term for this puppet play. However, it was customarily called *jōruri*. In modern days, it is commonly called bunraku.

league or not, he was the only survivor directly involved in the incident. It is probable that his death enhanced the interest of the public in the Akō incident and brought about the great success of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* the following year.

In kabuki and *jōruri*, more than a dozen *Akō-mono* had been written and performed before *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, which incorporated some characters and episodes of the preceding plays and came to be regarded as the culmination of the *Akō-mono* (Matsushima 132-143). *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was so popular that the term *Chūshingura* became the title of most of the subsequent stories with the theme of the Akō incident (Matsushima, 177; et al.).

## B. Kabuki Plays

The *Akō-mono* boom was triggered by a smash hit of a kabuki play *Onikage Musashi Abumi* (鬼鹿毛無佐志鑑<sup>46</sup>) written by Azuma Sampachi (吾妻三八). It ran for one hundred and twenty days from the tenth day of the sixth month of 1710 (Imao 178). In the same year, *Taiheiki Sazareishi* (太平記さざれ石),<sup>47</sup> another *Akō-mono*, was also staged in a kabuki theater, followed by its sequel *Sazareishi Go Taiheiki* (硝後太平記).

After the successful performance of *Chūshin Iroha Gunki* (忠臣いろは軍記) in 1717 (Watanabe, *Chūshingura* 46), there had been a period of stagnation until the *Akō-mono* came back to kabuki stages in the late 1720s (Matsushima 138-140). In the sixth

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<sup>46</sup> In some books, Chinese characters “武蔵” instead of “無佐志” is used (Kawatake S. 168; Matsushima 135). This is *bet-su-dai* (alternate title) (Nojima, 131).

<sup>47</sup> Playwright is unknown, but Watanabe assumes it was written by Azuma Sampachi (Watanabe, *Chūshingura* 68).

month of 1747, *Ōyakazu Shijū-shichi Hon* (大矢数四十七本)<sup>48</sup> with Sawamura Sōjūrō I (初代澤村宗十郎) playing the role of Ōgishi Kunai (the historical Ōishi Kuranosuke) generated full houses in Kyoto Nakamura Kumetarō-za (Kawatake, S. 171). Ōgishi's drunken behavior in pleasure quarters is said to have become a model for the puppet of Ōboshi Yuranosuke in *Kanadehon Chūshingura* which was first staged as a *jōruri* play in the following year (1748) (Matsushima 154).

### C. *Jōruri* Plays

In 1710, *Kenkō Hōshi Monomi-guruma* (兼好法師物見車) and *Goban Taiheiki* (碁盤太平記) written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (近松門左衛門) as well as the *jōruri* version of *Onikage Musashi Abumi* by Ki no Kaion (紀海音)<sup>49</sup> were staged. The year of the first performances of the two Chikamatsu plays is disputed; either 1706 (Matsushima 133; et al.) or 1710 (Imao 182; et al.). *Kabuki Gedai Nenkan Meiwa Bon* (歌舞伎外題年鑑明和本: a kabuki almanac compiled in the Meiwa era) wrote that *Goban Taiheiki* was performed on the first day of the sixth month of the third year of the Hōei (1706) (Watanabe, *Chūshingura* 42).<sup>50</sup> In the first month of the same year, Kira Yoshichika (吉良義周),<sup>51</sup> Kira Yoshinaka's grandson and his legitimate heir, died in Suwa (a mountainous area approximately 200 km away from Edo). After the vendetta incident, the fief of Yoshichika was confiscated, and he was placed in the custody of the lord of Suwa domain (Matsushima 125). He was a victim of the Akō incident. It is possible that

<sup>48</sup>The same titled play was first performed in 1726. Azuma Sampachi also wrote the same titled play in later years. The play staged in 1747 was written by Namiki Eisuke (ibid. 46-47).

<sup>49</sup>This *jōruri* play was inspired by the same titled kabuki play by Azuma Sampachi.

<sup>50</sup>Watanabe argues that this description is erroneous.

<sup>51</sup>In some documents, his name is read Yoshimasa.

Chikamatsu was inspired by Yoshichika's death to write the above plays, but the performances ran only for a short period. Then, the performance of *Goban Taiheiki* in Osaka Takemoto-za in 1710 after the start of the *Akō-mono* boom achieved success (Miyazawa, *Akō Rōshi* 3). In 1732, a *jōruri* play *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku* (忠臣金短冊) was staged. It was a collaboration with Namiki Sōsuke (並木宗助) as a main playwright. He was one of the three playwrights of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, although he wrote *Kanadehon* under the name of Namiki Senryū (並木千柳) (Matsushima 138).

#### **D. *Gidayū kyōgen***

It should be mentioned that kabuki and *jōruri* were interdependent. A good example is the aforementioned episode of Sawamura Sōjūrō I. Chikamatsu Monzaemon's experience of writing kabuki plays for Sakata Tōjūrō (坂田藤十郎) also contributed to improving the quality of *jōruri* plays from simple folktales or hero stories to insightful human dramas (Kawatake T., *Kabuki no Zaiyō* 12). Conversely, many popular *jōruri* plays were introduced into kabuki especially during the Enkyō and Kan'ei era (1744-1750) when *jōruri* was at the height of its popularity. However, *jōruri* theaters gradually lost audiences to kabuki. In the 1760s, Takemoto-za and Toyotake-za in Osaka, two big theaters which used to specialize in *jōruri* plays, started to accept kabuki and other theatrical troupes (Kodama Ryūichi, "Gidayū Kyōgen no Tenkai" in *Iwanami Kōza Kabuki • Ningyō jōruri Vol. 2*, 255).

Kabuki plays with *jōruri* scripts are called *gidayū kyōgen* (or *maruhon kabuki*) and they are distinguished from regular kabuki plays. *Kyōgen* means "play" and *gidayū* is *jōruri* music named for the narrator Gidayū I. *Gidayū kyōgen* is accompanied by *jōruri* music, which is used to express the psychology and emotions of characters just as in

*ningyō jōruri*, but important lines are delivered by kabuki actors (Kodama 35-37).

Compared with regular kabuki plays, *gidayū kyōgen* are “full of large-scale dynamics and unexpected tricks which were designed to hold the interest of the puppet-theater audiences” (Toita, *Kabuki* 110).

Among many *gidayū kyōgen*, *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* (義経千本桜) and *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami* (菅原伝授手習鑑) are three major representative works (Kodama 35). All of them are lengthy plays. For example, it takes eleven to twelve hours to perform all the acts of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* without omission. This format of performance is called *tōshi kyōgen*. It was customary to perform the plays as *tōshi kyōgen* in the Edo period: theaters opened with the dawn and the performances lasted until the dusk. Theater-going was a day long entertainment. “It was an exciting experience... especially for the womenfolk who had little occasion to appear in their best clothes or to eat and drink in public” (Brandon & Malm & Shively 24). In modern days, *midori*<sup>52</sup> is the more common format of performance (Kodama 43); however, some plays are performed as *tōshi kyōgen* once in a while. Even if the performance is called *tōshi kyōgen*, a couple of acts are usually omitted because of the time limitation, and the *daijō* (grand opening: the first act) is still performed only in *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (Hattori, ed., *Kabuki no Hyōgen* 125). Thus, this play enjoys an exceptional status in kabuki.

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<sup>52</sup> The format to perform only the popular scenes from the *kyōgen* (Kodama 43).

These three plays were collaborations of the same three playwrights: Takeda Izumo (竹田出雲),<sup>53</sup> Namiki Senryū (並木千柳) and Miyoshi Shōraku (三好松洛).

Collaborated plays have a more diverse and complex structure than those written by single playwrights due to the different playwriting styles of the contributors. This fact makes them more intriguing when they are unified as one complete play (Kawatake T., *Kabuki no Zaiyō* 160), in spite of the unevenness of the play resulting from the unequal abilities of the playwrights as well as the noticeable inconsistencies in the characters (Keene, “Introduction” in *Chūshingura* 10).

### **E. The *Sekai* (World) and the *Shukō* (Elements of a Play such as a Plot and Characters)**

The *Akō-mono* borrowed the *sekai* (world) of either *Taiheiki* (太平記)<sup>54</sup> or *Oguri Hangan* (小栗判官)<sup>55</sup> as the setting for their stories because the bakufu “prohibited the dramatization of matters of contemporary political interest” (Keene, “Introduction” of *Chūshingura* 3). Such plays which set the stories in previous periods in order to evade censorship are called *jidaimono* (historical pieces). *Jidaimono* is one of the three categories in kabuki. The other two categories are: *sewamono* (plays of common people) and *shosagoto* (dances). As the table below shows, the names of the main characters in

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<sup>53</sup> Only *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami* was written by Takeda Izumo I. *Kanadehon* and *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* were written by Takeda Izumo II (Watanabe, *Kabuki* 128).

<sup>54</sup> As aforementioned, this is a historical story about battles between Northern and Southern Courts of the Japanese Imperial Line in the fourteenth century.

<sup>55</sup> This is a story of Oguri Hangan, a semi-legendary military hero (Smith, “The Trouble with Terasaka 15). He returned from hell after he was killed by Yokoyama Daizen who had resented the love affair between Oguri and his daughter Terute-hime (She is Yokoyama’s niece in some versions). Oguri and Terute Hime go through hardships but eventually Oguri kills Daizen and marries Terute Hime. The story is set either in the Kamakura or Muromachi period (the twelfth to fourteenth century), depending on the different versions.

the *Akō-mono* differed depending on the *sekai* the plays chose. All of the plays in this table exerted influence on *Kanadehon Chūshingura*.

	The <i>sekai</i> (world)	Main characters				
historical title / name		Ōishi Kuranosuke	Asano Naganori	Kira Yoshinaka	Yōzen-in (Asano's wife)	Chikara
<i>Kenkō Hōshi Monomi Guruma</i> (1706)	<i>Taiheiki</i>	Hachiman Tarō	Enya Hangan	Kō no Moronao	Kaoyo Gozen	Unknown
<i>Goban Taiehiki</i> (1706)	<i>Taiheiki</i>	Ōboshi Yuranosuke	Enya Hangan	Kōno Moronao	N/A	Rikiya
<i>Onikage Musashi Abumi (ningyō jōruri)</i> <sup>56</sup> (1710)	<i>Oguri Hangan</i>	Ōgishi Kunai	Oguri Hangan Kaneuji	Yokoyama Saemon	Terute Hime	Rikinosuke
<i>Taiheiki Sazare Ishi</i> (1710)	<i>Taiheiki</i>	Ōgishi Kunai	Enya Hangan	Kōno Moronao	Izumo no Mae	Riktarō
<i>Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku</i> (1732)	<i>Oguri Hangan</i>	Ōgishi Yuranosuke	Oguri Hangan	Yokoyama Gunji	N/A	Rikiya
<i>Ōyakazu Shiju-shichi Hon</i> (1747)	<i>Taiheiki</i>	Ōgishi Kunai	In this play, only Sawamura Sōjūrō's Ōgishi Kunai is mentioned in a few books I read; however, the names of the characters are assumed to follow other <i>Chūshingura</i> stories which borrowed the <i>sekai</i> of <i>Taiheiki</i>			
<i>Kanadehon Chūshingura</i> (1748)	<i>Taiheiki</i>	Ōboshi Yuranosuke	Enya Hangan	Kō no Moronao	Kaoyo Gozen	Rikiya

(Sources: Imao Tetsuya 134-205; et al.)

The playwrights incorporated the Akō incident in the *sekai* they borrowed. They used the names and the basic attributes of the characters who belonged to that *sekai*. For instance, Kō no Moronao was described as a greedy and amorous man, just as his characterization in *Taiheiki* (Imao 143-146). At the same time, they invented new plots and characters, or added new elements to the original characters. Such new devices are called the *shukō*. The following are some examples of the *shukō*. In describing the characters, I will use their first names because some characters share the same last names.

1. ***Taiheiki Sazareishi***: A league member named Kamata Sōemon plays an important role. He was discharged by Lord Enya because of his love affair. This situation

<sup>56</sup> The script of kabuki *Onikage Musashi Abumi* was not left.

resembles that of Hayano Kanpei<sup>57</sup> in *Kanadehon*; however, Sōemon's discharge had happened long before Enya's attack on Moronao, and he was pardoned by Enya just before his *seppuku*. Since that incident Sōemon became an important member of the vendetta league, helping other members and supporting Ōgishi Kunai. In this play, the sacrifice of the wives of the league members is another important episode. The wife of Sōemon as well as his comrade's wife became prostitutes to support their husbands, just as Okaru<sup>58</sup> in *Kanadehon*. Kunai's wife killed herself to encourage her son, Rikitarō, to join the vendetta league (Imao 168-171).

**2. *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku*:** In this play, Namiki Sōsuke combined the name “Ōgishi Kunai” and “Ōboshi Yuranosuke,” and invented “Ōgishi Yuranosuke” for the historical Ōishi Kuranosuke as part of the *shukō* (elements of a play such as a plot and characters). He also omitted Terute Hime and the pivotal episode of Oguri's resurrection. Only a couple of episodes are reminiscent of the story of *Oguri Hangan*: Oguri's death caused by Yokoyama as well as the taming of a killer-horse named Onikage by Oguri's vassal Ōwashī Dengo. Namiki probably realized that the Akō rōnin's vendetta story could not properly fit in the *sekai* of *Oguri Hangan* (Imao 191-193).

It is also worth noting that Hayano Kanpei appeared for the first time in this play, although his characterization is different from that in *Kanadehon*. In *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku*, Kanpei was a headlong and somewhat unwise samurai who attacked the enemy on his own and was arrested (Smith, “The Trouble with Terasaka” 21). Later, he tried to kill Yuranosuke, thinking that Yuranosuke's dissolute life made him corrupt. In this play, Kanpei is obsessed with killing the enemy just like some historical radicals of the

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<sup>57</sup> One of the most important and popular characters in *Kanadehon*. See II.A.4. Main characters.

<sup>58</sup> She is also one of the most important and popular characters in *Kanadehon*. See II.A.4. Main characters.

vendetta league, and this character does not show the weakness of the human mind, which is Kanpei's attractiveness in *Kanadehon*.

3. ***Goban Taiheiki***: While the influence of those plays on *Kanadehon Chūshingura* cannot be overlooked, *Goban Taiheiki* written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon is especially important because it was the first play which used the name Ōboshi Yuranosuke and it had many elements which were developed into episodes and characters of *Kanadehon* as discussed below.

This play was written less than a month after *Kenkō Hōshi Monomi Guruma*, and Enya Hangan is already dead in this play. It is assumed that Chikamatsu had originally planned to write a sequel to *Kenkō Hōshi Monomi Guruma* but “decided to write an act that treated, more or less openly, the vendetta of Asano's loyal retainers” (Keene, “Introduction” of *Chūshingura* 4). The outline of the story is as follows:

Ōboshi Yuranosuke, whose former name had been Hachiman Tarō, lived as rōnin in a rented house with his son Rikiya. A servant named Okahei lived with them. Okahei is a shortened name of Teraoka Heiemon. His father Heizō used to serve Enya Hangan as *ashigaru*; however, Heizō had been dismissed for misconduct by Lord Enya and lived as rōnin for some time. When Heizō heard about Enya's *seppuku*, he hurried to Enya's castle, with his son, hoping to be allowed to join in defending the castle. However, his plea was not granted. Disappointed, Heizō committed *seppuku*, telling his son to carry out their lord's vengeance on Moronao.

Okahei started to work in Moronao's mansion and waited in vain for the chance of attacking Moronao. Sometime later, he was ordered to spy on Yuranosuke. Okahei was successfully employed as a servant in Yuranosuke's house, and started to work as a

counter-spy. He continued to provide Moronao with false information. One day, Rikiya witnessed Okahei reading a long letter from Moronao during Yuranosuke's absence, although Okahei had said that he was illiterate. Suspecting that Okahei was Moronao's spy, Rikiya fatally wounded Okahei. When Yuranosuke came back, he blamed Rikiya for his unwise action and told his son that he intentionally let Okahei work as a spy in order to put Moronao off his guard. Then, Okahei confessed his real intention, and informed them of the layout of Moronao's mansion using black and white stones of *go* (a Japanese board game). Acknowledging Okahei's loyalty, Yuranosuke promised that he would include Okahei and his father in the vendetta league. Okahei died with satisfaction. The suicide of Yuranosuke's wife and mother followed Okahei's death. They killed themselves to urge Yuranosuke to carry out the vendetta.

The second half of the play is the battle scene in Moronao's mansion and the successful killing of Moronao. In the ending, the league members committed *seppuku* in Kōmyōji, the temple in which their lord was buried. Before their *seppuku*, a bakufu inspector conveyed a shogun's message to them to the effect that the shogun wished to save the lives of the league members for their loyal actions, but that death sentence was unavoidable because they violated the law. Chikamatsu probably wanted to include this message because it reflected the public sentiment. In this play, Enya's son was not punished; to the contrary, he was allowed to inherit his father's fief. This ending was in concert with the actual bakufu decision after Tsunayoshi's death. Because of this ending, some scholars have claimed that this play was written in 1710; however, it is possible that this part was added to the original text when the play was restaged in 1710.

As outlined above, the protagonist in the first half of this play is Okahei. He is a prototype of Teraoka Heiemon in *Kanadehon*, and the historical Terasaka Kichiemon is his model. However, the role of divulging the layout of Moronao's mansion after the confession of his real intention is assumed by Kakogawa Honzō<sup>59</sup> in *Kanadehon*: he is the protagonist in Act Nine (Matsushima 171). In *Kanadehon*, Heiemon does not die: he can live to join the vendetta. It is Kanpei that proves his innocence and loyalty at the cost of his life in *Kanadehon*. In this way, Okahei in *Goban Taiheiki* was divided into three characters in *Kanadehon*: Heiemon, Honzō and Kanpei. The story of a counter-spy was included in *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku* as the story of Terasawa Shichiemon employed by Yokoyama. The story of Teraoka Heizō was included in Mayama Seika's *Genroku Chūshingura* as the story of Izeki Tokubei and his son. The historical Fuwa Kazuemon is Heizō's model, although Fuwa was allowed to join the vendetta league. Thus, Okahei in *Goban Taiheiki* provided the succeeding plays with the basis to create new plots and characters (*shukō*). Many *Akō-mono* were written by borrowing episodes from the preceding plays in this way, and the kabuki masterpiece *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was created in 1748.

## II. *Kanadehon Chūshingura*

*Kanadehon Chūshingura* is called *dokujintō* (Uno 322; et al.): it is “a cure for the theatre's doldrums and can always be expected to draw audiences when all else fails” (Leiter, *Kabuki Encyclopedia* 166). This play was first staged in Osaka Takemoto-za as *jōruri* in the eighth month of 1748. Because of its great success, it was immediately

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<sup>59</sup> Another important character in *Kanadehon*. See II.A.4. Main characters.

adapted to kabuki and performed in three big cities: Osaka, Kyoto and Edo. Since then, this play has been performed many times in kabuki theaters, and it has a record for being the most frequently performed play in the entire kabuki repertory (Fujino, ed. 178).<sup>60</sup> During the Edo period alone, it was performed three hundred and seventy-eight times over one hundred and twenty years (Table 1).<sup>61</sup> It survived the biggest crisis right after the Second World War when many kabuki plays including this piece were banned by the Allied Occupation on the ground that they would promote feudalistic concepts (Kawatake S. 134-135). Since its memorable return to the stage in 1947 with an all-star cast, thanks to Faubion Bowers,<sup>62</sup> it has been staged on important occasions such as the opening of the Kabuki-za in 1951 and the National Theater in 1966 and the closing of the Kabuki-za in 2009 to demolish it and construct a new building. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* will most probably be performed at the opening of the new Kabuki-za building in 2013.

In this section, I will first discuss the following components of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*: title, composition, playwrights, main characters and play structure.<sup>63</sup> After that, I will scrutinize its themes and the aesthetic elements indispensable to the beauty of kabuki, with a view to finding out the reasons why this play has remained highly popular.

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<sup>60</sup> This is not exactly correct. *Kanjinchō* is the most frequently performed kabuki play; however, it is a one-act play with the duration of only a little more than one hour. *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* comes next if *midori* performances are included (Shinbashi Enbujo Program, Aug. 2010). *Kanadehon* is in the third position. If only *tōshi kyōgen* is counted, *Kanadehon* will be the most frequently performed kabuki play next to *Kanjinchō*.

<sup>61</sup> The actual number will exceed this figure, because this data does not include the performances in numerous small playhouses in local villiages.

<sup>62</sup> After THE SECOND WORLD WAR, the Allied Occupation banned many kabuki plays on the ground that they were based on feudalism and incompatible with modern societies. Faubion Bowers committed himself to restore kabuki performances and all the bans were lifted in 1947 (Kawatake S. 147-150).

<sup>63</sup> I will discuss the kabuki version which is different from the *jōruri* script.

## A. The Component Elements of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*

1. **Title:** The different parts of the title have different meanings as follows:

Kana: hiragana<sup>64</sup>

The hiragana syllabary has forty-seven characters.<sup>65</sup>

Hence, “kana” alludes to forty-seven loyal vassals.

The number “forty-seven” also alludes to the same number of helmets scattered around the body of Nitta Yoshisada, the enemy commander killed by Ashikaga Takauji. In *daijō*, Kaoyo is commissioned to discern the commander’s helmet among the forty-seven helmets.

Dehon: liaison form of “tehon” which means “model.” In this title, “tehon” alludes to forty-seven loyal retainers as model samurai, as well as the hiragana practice book.

Chūshin: loyal vassal

Gura: liaison form of “kura” which means “treasury.” “Chūshingura” is the treasury which stores forty-seven loyal vassals who could be compared to important treasure.

2. **Composition:** This play is a combination of *jidaimono* (it is placed in the Muromachi period<sup>66</sup>), *sewamono* (Acts Five, Six, Seven, Ten) and *shosagoto* (Michiyuki between Act Four and Five, and Act Eight). Act Nine is also a variation of *sewamono* because one of its main themes is father’s love for his daughter, although it is not a story about commoners.<sup>67</sup> In the acts of *sewamono*, characters wear costumes and wigs of the Edo period, and they talk and behave like contemporaries of the Edo period.

3. **Playwrights:** As previously mentioned, this play is a collaboration by three playwrights: Takeda Izumo, Namiki Senryū and Miyoshi Shōraku. It is said that *jidaimono* parts (especially Act Four) were basically written by Namiki Senryū and *sewamono* parts (especially Acts Five and Six) were written by Takeda Izumo (Torigoe,

<sup>64</sup> The cursive script that is one of the two sets of symbols of Japanese syllabic writing (Webster online dictionary). Example: かゝふ (kana)

<sup>65</sup> The syllabary used to have forty-seven characters excluding “ん” (n), but there are only forty-five characters excluding “ん” in modern Japanese hiragana syllabary.

<sup>66</sup> 1336-1573

<sup>67</sup> Shuzui Kenji (守随憲治) includes Act Nine in *sewamono* in his short introduction of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (9) published by Iwanami Shoten (first edition in 1937).

et al., eds., *Iwanami Kōza Vol.9* 56-58). It seems that Miyoshi Shōraku was assigned Act Two and Ten which “are inferior to the others,” because “he was apparently no more than a competent hack” (Keene, “Introduction” of *Chūshingura* 9). The episode of the Kakogawa family in Act Nine closely resembles that of Yokoyama’s retainer Ōta Budayū in *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku*, mainly written by Namiki (KawatakeT., *Kabuki Ronshū* 225-226). So, it is reasonable to assume that Namiki also wrote Act Nine; however, Takeda Izumo may have written this act as Jippensha Ikku (1765-1831)<sup>68</sup> assumed (Keene, “Introduction” of *Chūshingura* 8) because it was a common practice for playwrights to borrow the episodes of the preceding plays written by other playwrights.

4. **Main Characters:** Some names such as Ōboshi Yuranosuke, Hayano Kanpei and Teraoka Heiemon imply historical people, but their characterization is almost fictional.

**Ōboshi Yuranosuke:** He is the historical Ōishi Kuranosuke. This name is very cleverly devised, and the credit of course goes to Chikamatsu Monzaemon. First of all, the sound of both names is very similar. “Ōboshi” means “a big star.”<sup>69</sup> “Yura” comes from “yureru,” meaning “waver.” This word implies the wavering mind of Yuranosuke. “Suke” represents the government post (Hashimoto, *Chanbara Jidaigeki* 50). Yuranosuke is the central figure of the entire play; however, the protagonist (s) changes from act to act. He is the protagonist only in Acts Four and Seven.

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<sup>68</sup> A popular writer of the Edo period.

<sup>69</sup> The allusion to his name is made in the very beginning of Act One, as follows: The sweetest food, if left untasted, remains unknown, its savor wasted. The same holds true of a country at peace: loyalty and courage of its fine soldiers remain hidden, but the stars, though invisible by day, at night reveal themselves, scattered over the firmament (Takeda, et al., *Kanadehon Chūshingura* translated by Keene 29).

Figure 3: Ōboshi Yuranosuke<sup>70</sup>



Ichikawa Danjūrō XII

Matsumoto Kōshirō IX

(A master drawing produced by Utagawa Kuniyoshi in the image of the historical Ōishi Kuranosuke)

**Rikiya and Oishi:** Ōboshi's son and wife. "Riki-ya" is written "力弥" in Chinese characters. "力" is also pronounced "chikara." The name of the historical Ōishi's son is Chikara, although the Chinese characters for his name are "主税." Thus, Rikiya is named after the historical Ōishi's son in two steps. Oishi (お石) is almost the same as Ōishi (大石): the name of the historical Ōishi's wife was Riku.

<sup>70</sup> The sources of the figures in Chapter 3 are as follows: Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, ed. *Images of Chūshingura in Ukiyo-e Prints*, 2010; *Engekikai Ichi-gatsu Rinji Zōkan: Chūshingura*, 1999; *Engeki-kai: Kanadehon Chūshingura Tokushū.*, Dec. 2009.

**Figure 4: Father and son**  
 Rikiya (Nakamura Kanjaku V)  
 Yuranosuke  
 (Nakamura Kichiemon II)



**Figure 5: Four characters in Daijo** (from left to right)  
 Momonoi Wakasanosuke (Nakamura Tomijūrō V)  
 Enya Hangan (Onoe Kikugorō VII)  
 Kō no Moronao (Ichimura Uzaemon XVII)  
 Kaoyo Gozen (Bandō Tamasaburō V)



**Kō no Moronao, Enya Hangan and Kaoyo Gozen:** They are the characters borrowed from *Taiheiki* and modeled after historical people, as previously discussed. In *daijo*, Kō no Moronao is the protagonist. Enya Hangan is one of the protagonists of Act Four.

**Hayano Kanpei:** Kanpei is a close attendant to Enya Hangan. Although his name is taken from a historical rōnin Kayano Sampei, his characterization is completely different from Kayano. They share only one episode: both of them committed *seppuku* before the attack on their enemy. He is probably the most popular character in *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. I will discuss him in more detail in the section on the theme of this play.

**Figure 6: Hayano Kanpei**

Kataoka Nizaemon XV

Onoe Kikugorō VII  
Kanto style: Kanpei in a  
light-blue kimono with a  
family crestJitsukawa Enjaku III  
Kamigata style: Kanpei in an  
informal, casual kimono

**Okaru:** She assumes a crucial role in this play. She is an amalgamation of several characters from the preceding plays. In *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku*, for instance, the daughter of an Oguri's former retainer becomes a prostitute to buy medicine for her father who is seriously ill. This situation resembles Okaru in Act Six of *Kanadehon*.

**Figure 7: Okaru**lady-in-waiting  
(Nakamura Tokizō V)Kanpei's wife  
(Kataoka Hidetarō II)prostitute  
(Nakamura Jakuemon IV)

**Teraoka Heiemon:** His model is the historical Terasaka Kichiemon. He is an *ashigaru* (the lowest-rank samurai) and Okaru's brother. He is one of the protagonists in Act Seven.

**Figure 8: Heiemon** (Tomijūrō V)



**Momonoi Wakasanosuke** (See Figure 5): He is the lord of Harima and entrusted with entertaining Ashikaga Tadayoshi, Shōgun Takauji's brother and his deputy, along with Enya Hangan. Kō no Moronao, his arrogant supervisor, insults him at Tsurugaoka Hachimangū Shrine (*daijo*). Because of this affair, Wakasanosuke decides to kill Moronao in Ashikaga Palace (Act Two).

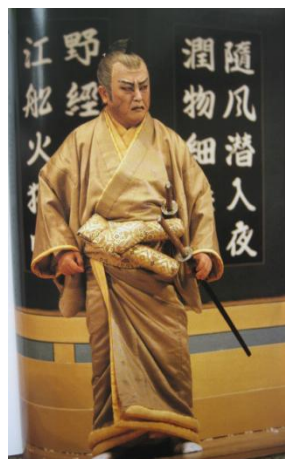
**Kakogawa Honzō**: He is *karō* of the Momonoi house. In order to prevent Wakasanosuke's attack on Moronao, he tries to appease Moronao's anger by bribing him. Just like the historical Kajikawa Yosobei, Honzō holds Enya back when Enya tries to kill Moronao who insulted Enya, shifting his resentment from Wakasanosuke to Enya (Act Three); however, this is the only episode which reminds the audience of Kajikawa. Honzō is the protagonist of Act Nine (Toita, *Chūshingura* 221). I will come back to him in the section on the theme of this play.

**Tonase and Konami**: They are the wife and the daughter of Kakogawa Honzō. Tonase is Konami's step-mother. Tonase is said to be the most difficult character to play because she has to show her complex psychology of caring for Konami all the more because Konami is her step-daughter (Act Nine).

**Figure 9: Wakasanosuke, Honzō, Tonase, Konami**



Honzō (Ichimura Uzaemon XVII)  
Wakasanosuke (Danjūrō XII)



Honzō (Kataoka Gatō V)



Konami (Nakamura Matsue V:  
current Kaishun II)  
Tonase (Nakamura Utaemon VI)

**Ono Kudayū:** The historical model is Ōno Kurobei, who is a traitor in most *Chūshingura* stories. Ono Kudayū is depicted as a blatant traitor who becomes a pawn of Moronao. He is killed in Act Seven.

**Ono Sadakurō:** He is a son of Ono Kudayū and becomes a highwayman after the destruction of the Enya house. In Act Five, he murders Yoichibei, Okaru's father, and robs his money. Although he appears on the stage for only minutes, he is a very popular character. He is a typical *iro-aku* (a good-looking villain). The legendary Nakamura Nakazō I (初代中村仲蔵) (1736-1790) started this acting style and changed a former mediocre Sadakurō into an attractive villain (Tsurumi & Yasuda 44-52). Toita wrote:

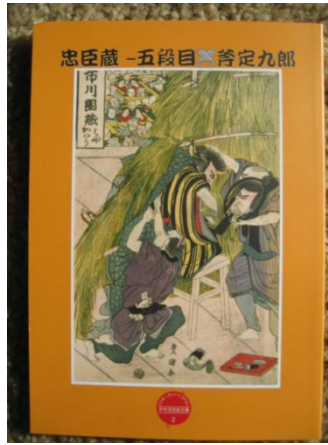
“When Nakamura Nakazo I played the part of Sadakurō, who murders the farmer Yoichibei in the fifth act of *Chūshingura*, he wore a black kimono with a white sash and carried a red-handled sword. This costume has become a symbol of the spirit of kabuki, which portrays even evil in strikingly beautiful colors” (*Kabuki* 81).

**Amagawaya Gihei:** He is the protagonist in Act Ten. He was popular among commoners in the Edo period because he is a *chōnin*. Act Ten is seldom performed in modern days.

**Figure 10: Ono Sadakurō and Amagawaya Gihei**



Ono Sadakurō (Danjūrō XII)



A book of Ono Sadakurō  
*Ukiyo-e* collection



Amagawaya Gihei  
(Tomijūrō V)

5. **The Play Structure:** *Kanadehon Chūshingura* consists of the following eleven acts, starting in spring and ending on a snowy day in winter. Thus, all the four seasons are included in this play: spring (Acts One to Four), summer (Acts Five and Six), fall (Act Seven) and winter (Acts Eight to Eleven).

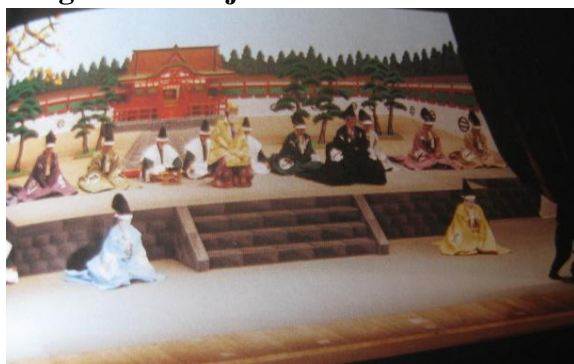
**Figure 11: *Uraomote Chūshingura*** (Utagawa Kuniyoshi)



(All the acts are incorporated in one picture consisting of three panels)

**Daijo:** Act One is called *daijo*. In modern days, *daijo* is omitted even in *tōshi kyōgen* except for this play, as aforementioned. *Daijo* has a role as an important forerunner of tragic incidents in the succeeding acts. This act is famous for its beauty of forms. The color of main characters' costumes has been handed down for generations (Toita, *Kabuki* 88; Figure 5). Actors are expected to play their roles in the *kata* (acting forms), also handed down from their predecessors (Seki 26-43). As the curtain begins to open, the actors gradually raise their heads, emulating the movement of puppets. This is a remnant of the original *jōruri* play. In this act, Kaoyo is called forward by Tadayoshi to identify the helmet of the enemy commander Nitta Yoshisada. After Tadayoshi goes inside the Tsurugaoka Hachimangū Shrine to put Nitta's helmet in its treasury, Kō no Moronao enforces Kaoyo to receive his love letter. Momonoi Wakasanosuke witnesses this scene and helps her leave the place. Outraged, Moronao insults Wakasanosuke.

**Figure 12: Daijo**



(Utagawa Toyokuni)



**Act Two:** This act is usually omitted, even in *tōshi kyōgen*.<sup>71</sup> Yet, it is an important act because the indirect cause of Enya's *seppuku* is revealed here. Momonoi Wakasanosuke confides to Kakogawa Honzō his determination to kill Moronao who insulted him. Honzō encourages his lord to carry out the attack on Moronao, because Honzō knows that

<sup>71</sup> This act was included only twice in 25 performances of *Kanadehon* in Kokuritsu Gekijō (the National Theater) (Kokuritsu Gekijō Dentō Geinō Database).

Wakasanosuke would not listen to him even if he tries to dissuade his lord. However, he is secretly determined to bribe Moronao to appease his resentment against Wakasanosuke.

**Act Three:** In the first part of this act, *sanmame* (comical character) Sagisaka Bannai plays a main role in providing comic relief, immediately before Honzō arrives at the scene with an impressive amount of gifts to Mononao. In the second part, Okaru delivers a letter box to Enya through Kanpei. This box contains a poem implying Kaoyo's rebuff of Moronao's love. After having asked Enya to hand it to Moronao, Kanpei sneaks out with Okaru during the welcoming ceremony for the shogun's deputy. This scene indicates the succeeding tragedy as I will discuss later, but it is usually omitted.

**Figure 13: Scenes of Gift Giving (left ) and Rear Gate (right)**



(Utagawa Hiroshige)



Sagisaka Bannai loves Okaru.  
He is trying to arrest Kanpei, just as two lovers  
are set to run away from Edo.

In the third part of Act Three, Moronao begins to taunt Enya Hangan in Ashikaga Palace after he has learned Kaoyo's definite rejection of his love. Enya attacks Moronao, having failed in containing his anger aroused by Moronao's relentless insult.

**Figure 14: Scenes of Kira's Taunting and Hangan's Attack**



Hangan (Kikugorō VII)  
Moronao (Ichimura Uzaemon XVII)



Yamashina Kodomo Kabuki (2010)  
(by kindergarteners)

**Act Four:** The highlight of this act is the scene of Enya Hangan's *seppuku* and the appearance of Ōboshi Yuranosuke for the first time in this play. *Kokin Iroha Hyōrin* commented that the scene of Yuranosuke hurrying to the venue of Enya's *seppuku* was the most important part for a Yuranosuke actor in the entire play (163 & 168). Different *kata* (acting forms) exist for this scene, handed down from different kabuki families (Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu, ed. 62). An Enya actor has to behave with dignity at the time of *seppuku* (ibid. 61).

**Michiyuki (Ochiudo):** This scene is *shosagoto*, a dance scene by Okaru and Kanpei on their way to her hometown, and it serves as a refreshing moment for the audience in between serious acts. It did not exist in the original *jōruri* script. Okaru's mind is filled with love for Kanpei, whereas his utmost concern is how to behave as loyal samurai to the deceased lord. The discrepancy between the feelings of the two characters is shown in this act (*Engekikai*, "Chūshingura" 22).

**Figure 15: Hangan's *seppuku***Yuranosuke (Danjūrō XII),  
Hangan (Nakamura Shikan VII)**Figure 16: Michiyuki**Okaru (Tamasaburō V),  
Kanpei (Kataoka Takao=current Nizaemon XV)

**Acts Five and Six:** In case of *midori* performance (the performance of only popular acts from lengthy *kyōgen*), these two acts have been most frequently staged in the National Theater.<sup>72</sup> Act Five is the prelude to Kanpei's tragedy in Act Six. In Okaru's hometown, Kanpei lived as a hunter. One night, he mistakenly shot Ono Sadakurō to death, and stole the money he found in the pocket of Sadakurō's kimono, when he was fumbling in it for some medicine. This was originally the money of Yoichibei, Okaru's father. Sadakurō murdered Yoichibei and robbed him of this money a while before. In Act Six, Kanpei came to know that Okaru decided to sell herself to raise the money Kanpei needed for joining the vendetta league, and the money he had stolen was the down payment Yoichibei had received from a teahouse (brothel) in Kyoto. Because of the subsequent unfortunate misunderstandings, Kanpei believed that he had killed Yoichibei and stolen

<sup>72</sup> In the National Theater, *Kanadehon* has been staged twenty-five times (including one *tōshi kyōgen*). Acts Five and Six were included in sixteen performances (Kokuritsu Gekijō Dentō Geinō Database). The next popular act is Act Seven, which has been staged only eight times. However, in Shochiku affiliated theaters, Act Seven has been most frequently performed.

his money. Kanpei eventually committed *seppuku*.

**Figure 17: Act Five** (Utagawa Kuniyoshi)



(All the scenes are incorporated in one picture)

**Figure18: Kanpei's *seppuku***



Senzaki (Yajūrō), Kanpei (NizaemonXV), Fuwa (Sadanji)

**Act Seven:** This Act consists of two parts. Yuranosuke is the protagonist in the first half of this act which depicts his dissolute life in the pleasure quarters. This scene was included in most of the preceding plays. Yuranosuke pretends to have given up the vendetta and indulges himself in debauchery, hiding his true mind. A Yuranosuke actor has to express his inner anguish through his physical movement and manner of speech

(Toita, *Chūshingura* 207-213). The second half depicts the love between siblings, Okaru and Heiemon.

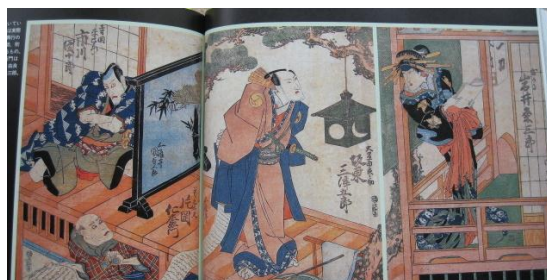
**Figure 19: Gion Ichiriki-Chaya**



Yuranosuke and Ono Kodayū (Utagawa Hiroshige)



Famous scene with Yuranosuke (Nizaemon XIII)  
Okaru (Onoe Baikō VII)  
Ono Kodayū (hiding under the porch)



The same scene by Utagawa Kunisada

**Acts Eight and Nine:** These two acts are the story of the Kakogawa Honzō's family.

Honzō's daughter Konami was betrothed to Yuranosuke's son Rikiya, but the Kakogawa family lost contact with the Ōboshi family after Enya's *seppuku*. Konami had been deeply depressed since then. So, Honzō told his wife Tonase to take Konami to Yamashina, a retreat of the Ōboshi family. Act Eight is *michiyuki* (travel-dance) of Tonase and Konami on their way to Yamashina. Act Nine depicts Honzō's death at the hands of Rikiya. That was Honzō's secret plan. He knew that he was regarded as Enya's enemy because he had

held Enya back when Enya had tried to kill Moronao. The vendetta league members also detested Honzō because of his act of bribing Moronao. Honzō was convinced that Yuranosuke would not accept Konami as Rikiya's wife as long as he were alive. He resolved to sacrifice his life for his daughter's happiness. Death of Honzō is one of the main themes of this play, as I will discuss at length later in this chapter. Nizaemon XIII said that the beauty of kabuki is concentrated in Act Nine (Sekiya 313).

**Figure 20: Act Eight (Michiyuki ) and Act Nine (Yamashina Retreat)**



(Utagawa Kunikiyo)



Honzō (Uzaemon XVII) is prepared to be killed by Rikiya (Yasosuke V).



All the scenes of Act Nine are incorporated in this painting. (Utagawa Toyokuni)

**Acts Ten and Eleven:** Act Ten is seldom staged.<sup>73</sup> This is the only act in which a chōnin is the protagonist, and it was frequently included in *tōshi kyōgen* in the Edo period (Akō Shi- Shi Hensanshitsu 10-125). However, this act is not highly evaluated by drama critics (Toita, *Chūshingura* 229).

**Figure 21: Act Ten** (both paintings by Utagawa Hiroshige)



The Akō rōnin are disguised as policemen, knocking on the door of Gihei's house.



The most famous scene of Act Ten, where Gihei says, "Amagawaya Gihei is a man," meaning he would never concede to any threat.

Act Eleven depicts the events on the day of the raid on Moronao. The original *jōruri* script does not give detailed accounts of spectacular fighting. The battle scenes are very short. In kabuki plays, a mixture of several scripts is used in order to add more battle scenes. Because of this fact, Act Eleven of kabuki plays give the impression that it is different from other acts of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (*Engekikai Ichi-gatsu Rinji Zōkan* 46-48).

<sup>73</sup> It was staged only once in the National Theater (Dentō Geinō Database).

**Figure 22: Act Eleven**

Moronao is drawn out of the hiding place.



After the vendetta, the Akō rōnin are on their way to Kōmyōji Temple.

## B. The Reasons for the Popularity of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*

The following two factors are assumed to be the major contributors to the long-lasting popularity of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*: the universality of its themes and the aesthetic elements.

**1. The Universality of the themes:** I argue that death and love are the two main themes of this play. This section will outline these themes individually.

**Death:** In this play, nearly every male character dies, just as in the historical Akō incident. Among them, the following three deaths are particularly important: *seppuku* by Enya Hangan and Hayano Kanpei, and death of Kakogawa Honzō.

Enya Hangan's *seppuku* is based on the historical fact. The reasons for the historical Asano's attack on Kira were unknown. In *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, Moronao taunted Enya for two reasons: (1) Moronao's love was rejected by Enya's wife Kaoyo. This episode is based on *Taiheiki*; (2) Enya did not bribe Moronao. This episode has been a standard explanation for the historical Asano's attack regardless of its authenticity. Because of the grave humiliation inflicted on Enya by Moronao in Ashikaga Palace,

Enya's anger was understandable and he was not openly criticized for having drawn his sword in the shogun's palace; however, Act Nine contains critical remarks on Enya Hangan. Honzō says, "Lord Enya should have been more prudent."<sup>74</sup> What a rash and unfortunate way to have behaved!" Then, the narrator says, "Yuranosuke recalls his master's quick-tempered action, and in his heart he chokes with impotent rage that he never had the chance to display his loyalty on the battlefield ..." (Keene, *Chūshingura* 148).<sup>75</sup> These passages imply that Enya's death was caused by his shallow-minded and irresponsible action, which deprived his vassals of the chance to show their loyalty in the right place on the right occasion.

Kanpei's death was caused by his lack of willpower and shallow personality. He met Okaru covertly while he was on duty, because she asked for it and he was "powerless to resist" (Keene, *Chūshingura* 55). While he was meeting her, Enya attacked Moronao. Feeling guilty of abandoning his duty, he decided to commit suicide; however, he could not, because Okaru successfully persuaded him to take shelter with her parents and wait for an opportunity to avenge his lord's death.

After he became a hunter in Okaru's hometown, he relied on his father-in-law's favor when he needed money to join the vendetta league. He said to Yagorō, one of the league members, whom he encountered in the mountain one night, "...I am sure Yoichibei (his father-in-law) won't refuse, for his children's sake, to sell the little land he owns" (Keene, *Chūshingura* 80). A while later, he stole money from a stranger whom he had accidentally shot to death. In this way, Kanpei's actions were haphazard and

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<sup>74</sup> This line in a Japanese text goes as follows: "Asaki takumi no Enya dono..." (浅きたくみの塩谷殿...) "Asaki" and "takumi" implies Asano Takuminokami.

<sup>75</sup> This is the English version of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* written by Takeda, et al. and translated by Keene. In order to distinguish this book from the original Japanese text, I will refer to it as "Keene, *Chūshingura*."

inconsiderate. Later on, he mistakenly thought that the man he had killed was Yoichibei, and he committed *seppuku* in the presence of two league members to prove that he did not have any vicious intention. Although his action was out of loyalty to his lord, it was impulsive and thoughtless. Kanpei had to pay for his imprudent actions with death. Only after his death, was he redeemed and included as a vendetta league member. As outlined above, Kanpei is an unrespectable man. He is a man with frailties, just like ordinary people in town. Nevertheless, he is a protagonist in Acts Five and Six, and he is probably the most popular character in *Kanadehon*. This fact shows that *Kanadehon* has enjoyed its popularity because it depicted the tragedies of ordinary people rather than centering on the vendetta by forty-seven loyal rōnin.

Honzō suffered from a sense of guilt ever since restraining Enya Hangan from killing Moronao. He also knew that Moronao shifted his resentment from Wakasanosuke to Enya after he bribed Moronao. Honzō was so desperate to prevent his lord from attacking Moronao that he did not bother about the morality of bribing: he knew bribing was the most effective means to propitiate Moronao. However, Honzō later thought that his daughter was rejected by her fiancé Rikiya because of these two actions which were unforgivable to Enya's former vassals. He felt guilty about his daughter, and decided to be killed by Rikiya so that Yuranosuke's resentment would be appeased and his daughter could marry Rikiya. At the moment of his death, he said to Yuranosuke, "This life, which I never thought I would give up except in my master's service, I yield for my child" (Keene, *Chūshingura* 144). He also told Yuranosuke that he had held Enya back because he had thought that Enya would not be executed if Moronao did not die. In this way, all of Honzō's actions were unselfishly motivated.

Unlike Kanpei who had many faults, Honzō was an admirable man. Nevertheless, he was never as popular as Kanpei in *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. Regardless of his lack of popularity, the story of the Kakogawa family constitutes an important part of *Kanadehon*. Honzō is the counterpart of Yuranosuke. They share many personality traits: Both are insightful, respectable and faithful samurai. Their situation was alike. Honzō said to Yuranosuke, "...I should by rights be in your position" (Keene, *Chūshingura* 143), referring to his master's determination to cut Moronao down the day before Enya's attack on Moronao. However, from the moment Honzō decided to bribe Moronao, out of his loyalty to his lord, he started to be regarded as a villain until the last moment of *modori*.<sup>76</sup> He was the sad antihero of this play.

**Love:** The other theme of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* is love. Moronao's love for Kaoyo was the important episode in the story of Kō no Moronao and Enya Hangan in *Taiheiki* (Imao 137). Nearly all the preceding plays with the *sekai* of *Taiheiki* included this episode, as did *Kanadehon*. Embarrassed by Kaoyo's rejection of his love letter, Moronao turned his indignation to her husband Enya Hangan. Moronao's relentless insult was the direct cause of Enya's attack on Moronao in the shogun's palace.

Love among family members is one of the main themes in Acts Six, Seven and Nine of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. As previously discussed, Honzō's love for his daughter is the important theme of Act Nine. In this act, Konami's pure love for Rikiya and Tonase's self-sacrificial love shown by her determination to die for her step-daughter are also highlighted.

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<sup>76</sup> "This is the term used to refer to what happens when a character who has seemed all along to be a villain shows through some speech or action that he or she is in fact a person of virtue" (Kodama, 205).

Act Seven depicts the love between siblings Okaru and Heiemon. Heiemon truly cares for Okaru. His affection is shown in his words and behavior; however, he decided to kill his own sister who had happened to know the secret about the vendetta, rather than let her be killed by Yuranosuke. Furthermore, he intended to utilize her death for his own purpose. He said to Okaru, “On the strength of having killed a person dangerous to our plot I shall ask to join the league and go with the others” (Keene, *Chūshingura* 121). It never occurred to him to help his sister escape from Yuranosuke, nor escape with her. Heiemon’s description of Yuranosuke as a man who “was single-mindedly and fanatically motivated by loyalty” (Keene, *Chūshingura* 121) could be applied to himself. In contrast, Okaru showed unconditional deep love for her family. She consented to her brother’s request to die for him and even volunteered to kill herself, rather than dying at her brother’s hands, so that their mother would not hate him. All the women survived because they were motivated by love, not loyalty; on the other hand, all the loyal men eventually died.<sup>77</sup>

This rule particularly applies to Okaru. She could survive in spite of her fatal flaw only because love was her motivation. She was to blame for Enya’s *seppuku*. She had been asked by Kaoyo to deliver a letter box to Enya through Kanpei. This box contained a poem implying Kaoyo’s rejection of Moronao’s love. On second thought, Kaoyo told Okaru to wait until the next day when all the rituals would be over. However, Okaru decided to deliver it that day because she “was so anxious to see” Kanpei (Keene, *Chūshingura* 53). Thus, her passionate but inconsiderate action was the root cause of the destruction of the Enya house (Imao 204). However, she was not doomed to death

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<sup>77</sup> Except for Amagawaya Gihei. He was also a loyal man, but he did not die because he was a merchant. In case of Honzō who died for his daughter, his tragedy started when he acted as a loyal vassal.

because of her deep love for Kanpei. In Act Six, she showed her self-sacrificial love in her decision to work in a brothel to raise the money Kanpei needed for joining the vendetta league. Her sacrifice contrasts with Kanpei's *seppuku* to show his self-sacrificial loyalty to his lord.

As discussed above, the central themes of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* are love and death of mainly fictional characters outside the league: Kanpei had been a defector until he committed *seppuku*; Heiemon was not accepted as a league member until he proved his sincere loyalty by attempting to kill his own sister, because he was *ashigaru*, the lowest rank in samurai hierarchy; Honzō was *karō* of Mononoi Wakasanosuke. He was not a league member. Rather, he was regarded as their enemy until the moment of his death; Okaru and other women were naturally excluded from the league. Meanwhile, this play was based on the actual vendetta incident, in which the historical Ōishi Kuranosuke was the league leader and a definite hero. The audience could superimpose historical people and events on the episodes such as Enya's *seppuku* and Yuranosuke's dissolute life in pleasure quarters. Probably because of the universality of the themes and the familiarity of the story, this play has maintained its popularity over many years.

**2. Aesthetic elements:** Aesthetic elements are also indispensable characteristics of *Kanadehon*. Kabuki is a composite art of multiple elements such as color, music, dance and acting forms handed down from generation to generation (Kawatake, T., *Kabuki Bi Ron* 235). In many kabuki plays, these elements weigh more than scripts (Suwa 78-86). In the case of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, the storyline with the themes elaborated above is excellently thought out, but this play also has many other elements.

Here are a few examples. As aforementioned, the **costume color** in *daijo* has been handed down over generations. Traditionally in Japan, black represents viciousness, while white, red and purple represent justice and virtue (Suwa 83). Accordingly, Moronao wears black costumes while Kaoyo wears purple and red costumes (See Figure 5 & 12). In Act Six, Kanpei changes from his hunter clothes into a light-blue kimono with his family crest (See Figure 6). He does not have to do so, but this beautiful color shows that he is the most important character in this scene (Hattori, ed., *Kabuki no Hyōgen* 224).<sup>78</sup>

As already discussed, **jōruri music** is an indispensable element to express the psychology and emotions of characters in *gidayū kyōgen*. Occasionally, traditional or original songs are played as background music to help explain the situation, circumstances or psychology of the characters. In Act Seven, a song entitled “To Father and Mother” begins to play when Okaru secretly starts to read Yuranosuke’s confidential letter, and lasts until she begins to write a letter to her parents. The lyrics of this song imply her past (Seki 272-273). In addition, such musical instruments as drums are used to describe particular circumstances. For instance, a big drum is beaten to indicate the snow-falling in Act Eleven. Also in this act, battle scenes called *tachimawari* are choreographed with dance movement. Two dance scenes in *Kanadehon* are inserted to relieve the tension of the audience.

**Costumes, wigs, make-up and props** are also important elements of kabuki. They serve to identify character types (Seki 317). For instance, the change in Okaru’s circumstances from a lady-in-waiting to Kanpei’s wife to a prostitute is clearly shown by

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<sup>78</sup> In Kamigata kabuki, Kanpei does not change his clothes. People in Osaka are more realistic and think that it is unnatural to wear a kimono with a family crest at home (See Figure 6).

her costumes, wigs and belongings (See Figure 7). Hattori says “Wigs act,” referring to Kanpei’s hair style changing from neatly set to tousled hair at the *seppuku* scene (See Figure 18) (*Kabuki no Hyogen* 357). Even the white color put on a face differs between a hero and a villain. Sadakurō’s face is painted pure white. Then, his skin takes on a slight blue color when it is seen from the audience, and he looks like a villain. In contrast, a Kanpei actor wears white powder with reddish tint (Seki 76-77).

Compared to *Kanadehon, Genroku Chūshingura* (元禄忠臣蔵) written by Mayama Seika (真山青果) (1878-1948) lacks in the aesthetic elements such as music, color, dance, etc. Since its first performance in 1934, *Genroku Chūshingura* has been performed one hundred and twenty-eight times, whereas the number of *Kanadehon* performances during the same period is two hundred and sixty-seven<sup>79</sup> (See Table 1). One of the major reasons for the lower popularity of *Genroku Chūshingura* is presumably the lack of the aesthetic elements. All the same, this play occupies an important place in the stage adaptation of *Chūshingura* in modern days. For this reason, I will elaborate on *Genroku Chūshingura* in the next section.

### III. The Stage Adaptation of *Chūshingura* Stories after *Kanadehon*

More than one hundred plays with the theme of *Chūshingura* were written for *jōruri* and kabuki after *Kanadehon Chūshingura* during the Edo period (Matsushima 187-202), but none surpassed *Kanadehon* and only a few *Chūshingura* plays<sup>80</sup> survived in

<sup>79</sup> The table shows 79 as the total number of *Kanadehon* in the 1930s; however, 35 performances between 1930 and 1933 should be deducted for the purpose of comparison, because the first performance of *Genroku Chūshingura* was put on in 1934 (Akō-Shi Shi Hensanshitsu 478-497).

<sup>80</sup> *Taiheiki Chūshin Kōshaku* (太平記忠臣講釈) and *Chūshin Renri no Hachiue* (忠臣連

addition to some parodies written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV. Because Nanboku's plays, specifically *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* (東海道四谷怪談), are growing in popularity in modern days, I will scrutinize this play in this section. *Genroku Chūshingura* also needs investigation because this play is the second most frequently performed *Chūshingura-mono* in kabuki theaters. I will start with *Genroku Chūshingura*. Chronologically, *Yotsuya Kaidan* was created much earlier, but it is more relevant to modern society. In fact, this play has increased in popularity after the Second World War both in kabuki and contemporary plays. Specifically since the early 1990s, it has been performed by many small modern theatrical groups. For this reason, I will conclude this chapter with *Yotsuya Kaidan*.

#### A. *Genroku Chūshingura*

This is a cycle of ten plays written by Mayama Seika. It is grouped into *shin kabuki* (new kabuki) which is a new genre of kabuki plays created after the Meiji Restoration until the end of World War II by writers “outside of the world of kabuki” (Toita, *Kabuki* 195).<sup>81</sup> The first play Mayama wrote in 1934 (The ninth year of the Showa period) was *Ōishi Saigo no Ichinichi* (The Last Day of Ōishi), which is the last part in this cycle. After he wrote *Sengakuji no Ichinichi* (A Day in Sengakuji) in 1941, his health deteriorated. Although he may have planned to add a few more plays, he became almost bed-ridden and died in 1948 (Powell, *Kabuki in Modern Japan* 147).

The most popular play in this cycle is *Ohama Goten Tsunatoyo-kyō* (Lord Tsunatoyo at Ohama Palace) because “there was something for everyone in *Ohama*

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*理の鉢植え*) are a couple of examples which have survived and are sometimes performed even now.

<sup>81</sup> New kabuki plays written after The Second World War are called *Shinsaku Kabuki* (新作歌舞伎).

*Goten*...intellect and emotion...plenty of colour...even a little humour...a hint of nationalism and a hint of populism” (Powell, *ibid.* 174). This comment of Powell’s also applies to *Kanadehon*, whereas the other plays of *Genroku Chūshingura* cycle lack many of these elements. Referring to the scene of Kuranosuke’s debauchery in the pleasure quarters, Powell says, “Mayama’s version pales in comparison with the splendours of the Gion under Tadayoshi in the classic play” (*The Samurai Ethic* 734).

Because of Mayama’s persistence with accurate details based on historical facts (Powell, *ibid.* 728-730), *Genroku Chūshingura* does not have impressive tableaux irrelevant to the storyline such as the scene of Ono Sadakurō in *Kanadehon*. Although Mayama “allowed his imagination full scope in many of his plays, not least in *Genroku Chūshingura*” (Powell, *ibid.* 728), he never deviated from the story of the loyal Akō rōnin, in contrast with *Kanadehon* which mainly depicts the fate of fictional people outside the league, as aforementioned.

Another major difference between the two plays is the means of expression. Unlike *Kanadehon* in which physical expression accompanied by music is an important element, *Genroku Chūshingura* concentrates on verbal expression. The whole cycle has approximately seven hundred pages in the pocket book version. In contrast, the *jōruri* script of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* has only one hundred pages in the same book version. In spite of such a big difference in page numbers, the length of time needed to stage them as *tōshi-kyōgen* is almost the same. Both plays take eleven to twelve hours to perform all the acts.<sup>82</sup> It would be boring for the kabuki audience with high expectation for a splendid

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<sup>82</sup> In Kokuritsu Gekijō, *tōshi-kōgen* of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was performed in three installments over three months from Oct. to Dec. in 1986. In 2006, *tōshi-kyōgen* of *Genroku Chūshingura* took the same format. It was performed over three months from Oct. to Dec.

stage with music, dance and vivid colors to see characters in subdued color costumes sitting on the stage and talking about samurai ethics for hours.

The main theme of *Genroku Chūshingura* is the importance of carrying through the *shoichinen* (one's first impulsive thought) (Powell, *ibid.* 739). In history, the revenge against Kira was the *shoichinen* of many radicals, whereas Kuranosuke's group prioritized the restoration of the Asano house. As a result, serious philosophical conflicts occurred between the two groups. In this play, however, the *shoichinen* is to act with sincerity. Kuranosuke says, "... revenge (comes) second" (Powell, *ibid.* 741), and all the league members agree with him. This is against the historical facts. Actually, it is Mayama's own philosophy. Kuranosuke apparently serves as a Mayama's spokesman in this play. Probably for this purpose, Kuranosuke is depicted as a model samurai with exalted spirit. In contrast, the protagonists of *Kanadehon* are imperfect samurai such as Kanpei and Heiemon. This fact could be another reason for *Genroku Chūshingura* being less popular. The audience may sympathize more with a character who has human weakness than a faultless saint-like character.

Kuranosuke's reverence for the Emperor may also work against the popularity of this play in modern society. Because of this trait of Kuranosuke, the play seems to have become a tool to advocate loyalty to the Emperor. In 1942, the de facto first year of the Pacific War, it was performed fourteen times in contrast to nine times of *Kanadehon* (Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu 532-539). There was also an attempt to make a propaganda film based on this play, as aforementioned. Then, the whole cycle of *Genroku Chūshingura* was criticized after the Second World War, mainly due to the loyalist scene

at the end of *Daini no shisha* (The Second Messenger) (Powell, *ibid.* 743). Nevertheless, this is a well-written play, and still performed quite frequently.

### **B. *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan***

Tsuruya Nanboku IV (四代目鶴屋南北) (1755-1829) wrote four parodies of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*. In *Kanadesoga Nezashi no Fujigane* (仮名曾我当蓬莱), Ono Kudayū assumes the role of Yuranosuke and deprives Yuranosuke of all the values which were bestowed on him (Tsuruya Nanboku Kenkyūkai, ed. 25). *Kiku no En Tsuki no Shiranami* (菊宴月白波) (1821) was restaged for the first time in more than one hundred and sixty years by Ichikawa Ennosuke III (三代目市川猿之助) in 1984 (*ibid.* 88). The protagonist of this play is Ono Sadakurō. He is depicted as a loyal samurai and the story unfolds in a mirror world. *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* (盟三五大切) has been staged many times since its revival in 1976. Its protagonist is a devilish killer named Satsuma Gengobei, who is actually a historical Akō rōnin Fuwa Kazuemon. In spite of all his crimes, he is allowed to join the vendetta league in the end (*ibid.* 108).

Although all three parodies are interesting pieces, the most famous parody of *Chūshingura* by Nanboku is *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* (東海道四谷怪談) staged in Edo Nakamura-za in 1825. At that time, *Kanadehon Chūshingura* and *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* were performed alternately over two days.<sup>83</sup> *Yotsuya Kaidan* is the culmination of Nanboku's works (*Engeki-kai: Yonsei Tsuruya Nanboku Tokushū* 18).

This is a ghost story which borrowed the *sekai* (world) of *Kanadehon*

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<sup>83</sup> On the first day, the first six acts of *Kanadehon* was first performed, followed by *Yotsuya Kaidan* from Act One to the scene of Onbō Bori (Onbō Canal) in Act Three. On the second day, the scene of Onbō Bori was again performed, followed by acts Seven, Nine and Ten of *Kanadehon*. Then, the remaining acts of *Yotsuya Kaidan* were shown, and Act Eleven of *Kanadehon* concluded the two-day performance (Yokoyama, 179).

*Chūshingura*; however, the characters lived in the Edo period. The story begins after Enya's *seppuku*. The protagonist, Tamiya Iemon, had formerly been employed by Enya but discharged for his misconduct. He was a good-looking villain (*iroaku*) and a *fu-gishi*. His wife, Oiwa, was forced into living separately from Iemon by her father, Yotsuya Samon, who hated Iemon's degrading deeds. Samon was an Enya rōnin. He had been out of a job for some time. For the sake of this poverty-stricken father, Oiwa and her sister-in-law Osode secretly worked as prostitutes. Osode's husband was also an Enya rōnin, Satō Yomoshichi. He was a *gishi*. A petty villain named Naosuke served as Iemon's henchman. Naosuke loved Osode.

One night, Iemon killed Samon to reclaim Oiwa. On the same night, Naosuke also killed Yomoshichi's comrade, mistaking this samurai for Yomoshichi. Hiding these facts, Iemon and Naosuke promised Oiwa and Osode to help them retaliate against the murderers. Persuaded by Naosuke, Osode started to live with him. Oiwa returned to Iemon's house.

However, tragedy struck Oiwa when her next-door neighbor, Itō Kihei, secretly begged Iemon to marry his granddaughter who had been pining for him. Kihei was Moronao's vassal. At first, Iemon was unwilling to divorce Oiwa, but he eventually accepted Kihei's request on the condition that Kihei would recommend him for employment with Moronao (Tsuruya 201). Obsessed with getting rid of Oiwa, Kihei poisoned her. Her face became disfigured by the poison. In order to fabricate an excuse to divorce Oiwa, Iemon asked his acquaintance Takuetsu to rape her. She was accidentally stabbed to death by the sword which she used to defend herself. At the moment of death, she heard from Takuetsu that all the plots had been devised by Kihei and Iemon. With a

deep grudge against the perpetrators, she became a ghost and manipulated Iemon to kill Kihei and his granddaughter. Although Iemon had been tormented by Oiwa's ghost since then, it was not Oiwa's ghost but Yomoshichi that finally avenged death of Oiwa and his father-in-law on Iemon.

Why did Oiwa have to become a ghost, and why was it Yomoshichi, not Oiwa, who killed Iemon? There is one obvious reason: this play was "*natsu kyōgen*", meaning a performance in summer (Hashimoto, *Ōedo Kabuki* 184). Traditionally in Japan, audiences welcome something scary to cool themselves down in summer. In addition, I recognize Nanboku's sarcasm in this *shukō*. Oiwa's fate stands in sharp contrast to that of Enya Hangan. Both of them died with a grudge. In the case of Enya Hangan, the lord of a domain, he could count on his loyal vassals to avenge his death on his enemy. However, Oiwa was betrayed by Iemon who had promised to help her carry out the vendetta. In actuality, the true enemy was Iemon. Since she was no more than a powerless woman, she had no one to trust with the vendetta. Consequently, she became a ghost to retaliate against her victimizers on her own. However, Iemon was a villain without any conscience and his strong attachment to life probably overwhelmed Oiwa's grudge. Iemon would never show remorse or try to reform himself, even if he was frightened to death (Kawatake T., *Ukiyo* 195-196). Hence, only the sword of Yomoshichi could cut down Iemon's strong desire to live. Although this ending looks like the victory of the *gishi* over the *fu-gishi*, Nanboku did not intend to admire the righteous samurai, as is later discussed.

Unlike *Kanadehon*, characters of this play were not rewarded for their love. Oiwa died in spite of her self-sacrificial love. For her father's sake, she became a prostitute. She also endured all the hardships inflicted by Iemon because she needed her husband's

help to avenge her beloved father's death on a murderer. She was an unselfish and good-natured woman.

Iemon was a cold-blooded murderer. He killed several people. Nevertheless, his attitude toward Oiwa was lukewarm (Yokoyama 59). Iemon committed the first murder because of his love for Oiwa: he killed Samon to retrieve Oiwa. Because he was a selfish villain, he decided to throw Oiwa out of his house when she became an obstacle to pursuing his own happiness. However, it was Kihei, not Iemon, who actually poisoned Oiwa. Iemon did not directly harm her. Kihei, in turn, was not a real villain. He deeply loved his granddaughter Oume, just as Honzō loved his daughter Konami. However, his blind love eventually caused deaths of Oiwa and his family including his cherished Oume and himself. Which man is more sinful, Iemon or Kihei? Nanboku seems to throw this question to the audience. Oume was an innocent young woman just as Konami was, and loved Iemon with a pure heart. At the same time, though, it was a forbidden love and she was punished for it. This episode may show Nanboku's sarcastic view that pure love is merely an illusion.

In the case of Naosuke, his illicit love for Osode resulted in the adultery. However, he truly loved Osode, in contrast to her husband, Yomoshichi, whose utmost concern was the vendetta. When Yomoshichi returned to Edo from his secret mission, he went to a brothel instead of going directly back to Osode's house, and unexpectedly encountered his wife Osode there. This episode implies that Yomoshichi's love for Osode was not as passionate as that of Naosuke. Osode forgave Yomoshichi after a small quarrel. Naosuke witnessed this scene. Driven by jealousy, he mistakenly killed Yomoshichi's comrade. Believing her husband to be dead, Osode moved into Naosuke's house. Since then,

Yomoshichi had been looking for Osode. It was not because he loved her but because he thought that he must kill Osode who had happened to read the confidential letter about the vendetta (Tsuruya 264).

This episode is the parody of Act Seven of *Kanadehon*. Yuranosuke decided to kill Okaru who had secretly read his confidential letter from Kaoyo. However, Okaru did not die in *Kanadehon* because she showed self-sacrificial love toward her brother Heiemon. In *Yotsuya Kaidan*, Osode died a tragic death because of her faithful love for her husband. Right after she accepted Naosuke as her husband and slept with him, Yomoshichi visited her. In despair, she decided to die at the hands of two men: her former husband Yomoshichi and her current husband Naosuke. This episode may show Nanboku's cynical insight into the reality that self-sacrificial or faithful love is not always rewarded in real life. Osode left a message with her amulet, which revealed that she was Naosuke's real sister. Knowing this shocking fact, Naosuke killed himself. Thus, the episode of brother and sister in *Yotsuya Kaidan* was incest. This episode looks like Nanboku's bitter ridicule at the story of heart-warming affection between siblings in *Kanadehon*. To put it in a sarcastic way, death was the reward for all the main characters whose actions were motivated by love. Meanwhile, Yomoshichi survived because he prioritized loyalty over love.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the situation of death and love was completely reversed in *Yotsuya Kaidan*.

Nanboku's sarcastic viewpoints are also presented in the episodes of righteous samurai. For instance, Yotsuya Samon had unbending samurai spirit. He became rōnin after Enya's *seppuku*, and lived in extreme poverty. He chose a beggar's life rather than seek employment from his enemy. Because of this stubborn idealism, he unknowingly

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<sup>84</sup> It should be mentioned that he does not die in *Yotsuya Kaidan*. He survives in order to die an honorable death in *Kanadehon*.

obliged his daughters to engage in prostitution. He was too simple minded, valuing principles above his family's wellbeing. Nanboku also included an episode of another Enya rōnin, Koshioda Matanojō. He could join the vendetta, but only as a result of Kobotoke Kohei's death. Kohei was the son of Matanojō's loyal retainer. He stole precious medicine from Iemon for the seriously ill Matanojō. While Matanojō was cured by this medicine and became a *gishi*, Kohei was tortured to death by Iemon as a thief. What is righteousness, if it afflicts good ordinary people? Nanboku is presumably asking the audience this ironic question.

When he wrote these parodies, full of irony and black humor, what was Nanboku's intention? Suwa says that Nanboku intended to disrupt the established order and reverse the conventional views about human relationships in the Confucian society of the Edo period by using farcical dramaturgy (Tsuruya Nanboku Kenkyūkai, ed. 23 & 28). His dramaturgy should be considered in the context of the decadent atmosphere of the Bunka and Bunsei era (1804-1829) (Noguchi, *Edo Hyakki Yakō* 79) when he wrote most of his plays. The audiences were ready to accept the overt mockery at the feudalistic ethics which started to collapse from inside (ibid. 79). People also expected more realistic, rather than idealistic plays. Kawatake Toshio says that *Yotsuya Kaidan* was a reality-based contemporary play which vividly portrayed commoners in Edo (*Ukiyo* 187). At the same time, Nanboku intended to entertain the audiences with something extraordinary which would distract them from daily life. As long as Nanboku observed the rule of *kanzen chōaku* (the good win and the evil lose in the end), he could include as many bloody or scary scenes as he wanted (Hashimoto, *Edo ni Furansu Kakumei o* 94).

Nanboku's parodies, especially *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* and *Yotsuya Kaidan*,

started to draw the attention of small theatrical groups in the late 1960s. His cynicism and deep insight into the ulterior motives of society is assumed to have attracted modern people. I will discuss this issue in Chapter 4.

## Summary

Many kabuki and *jōruri* plays had been performed with the theme of the Akō incident before the creation of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in 1748. They borrowed the *sekai* (world) of either *Taiheiki* or *Oguri Hangan* to evade the censorship of the bakufu which prohibited the dramatization of contemporary political events. Among others, the following plays influenced *Kanadehon: Taiheiki Sazareishi*, *Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku* and *Goban Taiheiki*.

*Kanadehon* was the culmination of the *Akō-mono*, and it has maintained its high popularity until the modern age. One of the main reasons for its long-lasting popularity is the universality of its themes: love and death. The aesthetic elements are also important factors. More than one hundred *Chūshingura* plays were written for *jōruri* and kabuki after *Kanadehon* (Matsushima 187-202)<sup>85</sup>, but none surpassed *Kanadehon* and only a handful survived. The most popular play next to *Kanadehon* is *Genroku Chūshingura*, *shin kabuki* written by Mayama Seika in the early Showa period. A noteworthy trend in modern society is the increasing popularity of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* and *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu*, *Chūshingura* parodies written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV, among modern theatrical groups. His cynicism and deep insight into the ulterior motives of society is assumed to have attracted modern people.

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<sup>85</sup> Including *meimeiden* and *gaiden*.

## Chapter 4: The Future of *Chūshingura*

### Will *Chūshingura* Survive in the Twenty-first Century?

#### I. The End of Glory Days for Orthodox *Chūshingura* Films and TV Dramas

##### A. Drastic Decrease in *Chūshingura* Films

The number of *Chūshingura* films drastically decreased after *Chūshingura* directed by Inagaki Hiroshi in 1962. Only three more full-scale *Chūshingura* films were made in the twentieth century thereafter.<sup>86</sup> Among them, *Akō Jō Danzetsu* of 1978 was the only orthodox film. The other two were stories with different perspectives. One was *Chūshingura Gaiden Yotsuya Kaidan* (1994). As the title shows, it was *gaiden* (a story of people outside the league). Although the film incorporated two stories, more focus was put on the episodes of *Yotsuya Kaidan*. The main theme of the other film entitled *Shijū-Shichinin no Shikaku* (1994) was the information war between the *Akō han* and the *Yonezawa han* where Kira's son resided as a lord. It was not a conventional vendetta story (Satō 127-129). Two more *Chūshingura* films were made in the twenty-first century, but neither of them were orthodox stories.

##### B. TV Dramas with New Perspectives

Replacing the films, many *Chūshingura* dramas have been made in television since the end of the 1950s, as previously mentioned. Most *Chūshingura* dramas in the twentieth century were orthodox; there was no reason to change the storyline while the viewer ratings were still high. However, the popularity of *Chūshingura* dramas gradually

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<sup>86</sup> Excluding *Berlin Chūshingura* made in West Germany in 1985.

started to fail, as was clearly shown in the average viewer ratings of four NHK *taiga* dramas with the theme of *Chūshingura*; 31.9% (1964); 24.7% (1975); 23.7% (1982); 20.2% (1999) (Video Research Ltd.).<sup>87</sup> Although the viewer rating of 20.2% in 1999 was still high, the interest of the public obviously started to change; less and less Japanese were deeply impressed with heroic deeds of the forty-seven loyal rōnin willing to die for their lord. Television producers started to look for new perspectives to attract more viewers. It is also possible that the producers themselves who had grown up under the democratic education system after the Second World War were fed up with manneristic *Chūshingura* stories of loyal samurai the hero versus Kira the villain. Since the end of the 1970s, *Chūshingura* dramas started to deviate from conventional storylines once in a while. One such example is a TV drama broadcast in 1990. It depicted Ōishi Kuranosuke as a timid and indecisive man without the firm intention of the vendetta.

Then, in the twenty-first century, the number of *Chūshingura* TV dramas sharply decreased as is shown in Table 3. Besides, five out of seven *Chūshingura* TV dramas have turned out to be either *meimeiden* or *gaiden*. *Saigo no Chūshingura* (2004) was one of them. Two protagonists were historical defectors as previously mentioned. I saw one of the *meimeiden* entitled *Chūshingura 1/47 (Yonjū-nanabun no Ichi)* (broadcast in 2001). The drama was almost a fantasy with Horibe Yasubei as its protagonist. Only a few historical facts were included. Horibe was depicted as a super-hero whose mind was

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<sup>87</sup> Strictly speaking, *taiga* dramas are not orthodox *Chūshingura*. All of them were based on novels which had new perspectives about the *Chūshingura* story. For instance, the original of the first *taiga* drama was *Akō rōshi* written by Osaragi Jirō in 1927. This was an epoch-making novel in that Osaragi did not present the Akō rōnin as the *gishi*. He depicted Ōishi as a leader of a protest group against the feudalistic regime (Miyazawa, “*Chūshingura Gensō*” 147-151). He also created a nihilistic character Hotta Hayato who lost his purpose to live, and contrasted him with the Akō rōshi who lived with a definite goal of avenging their lord’s death on Kira. However, the *taiga* drama *Akō Rōshi* is said to have lacked in acute critical mind of the novel (Miyazawa, “*Chūshingura Gensō*” 233). In any case, the data clearly shows the failing popularity of *Chūshingura* dramas.

occupied with the retaliation against Kira. In contrast, Ōishi was described as a realistic man who sought for the restoration of the Asano house so that all the vassals could survive. As examined in Chapter 2, the historical Ōishi also insisted on the restoration of the Asano house. Therefore, it is possible that the psychology of the historical Ōishi was close to the depiction in this drama. Its theme was to live, rather than to die. This is a challenge to the orthodox *Chūshingura* story. Horibe told Takada Gunbei, a historical defector who had been one of the most radical Edo members, to live without feeling ashamed, when Takada greeted the former comrades marching to the temple of Sengakuji after the completion of their vendetta. Horibe said, “After having found a place to die, I finally realized that to be left behind and keep living is much harder than dying in honor. So, you Gunbei, live with your head held high.” Takada Gunbei represents all the *fu-gishi* who had to resign from the league because of their different personal circumstances. Mostly thanks to an idol actor Kimura Takuya who played the role of Horibe Yasubei, this drama earned a high viewer rating (23.9%).

## II. The Continuing Popularity of *Chūshingura-mono* in Theatrical Performances

Table 1 & 2 (Appendix II) show some noteworthy trends in theatrical performances. Firstly, quite a number of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was performed even during the Second World War (Table 1). As previously mentioned, this play was banned, together with some other kabuki performances, by the Allied Occupation after the end of the War. Since all the bans were lifted in 1947, the number of performances of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* has not shown any notable decrease up to the present day, in contrast to the

drastic decrease of *Chūshingura-mono* in films since the 1970s and TV dramas in the 2000s as discussed above (Table 3).

In the 1960s, the popularity of kabuki kept failing (*Iwanami Kōza Kabuki Bunraku Vol. 3*, 239 & 248-249) in the face of the rapid societal change caused by the Japanese post-war economic miracle. Against this unfavorable wind, kabuki was recognized by the Japanese Government as an Important Intangible Cultural Property in 1964 and the National Theater opened in 1966 (*ibid.* 254-255). Under this government's policy of preserving and promoting traditional performing arts, *Kanadehon* were staged every year except 1960<sup>88</sup>, totaling twenty (twenty-two including bunraku) performances in this decade (Table 1). In fact, it is possible that *Kanadehon* were positively staged to pull kabuki out of the doldrums. This was the actual case in the 1970s. In November of 1977, two *Kanadehon* performances competed in Tokyo and Osaka. The late Shochiku President Nagayama said in retrospect that they had been ambitious and successful events (Nagayama 81). In this decade, the popularity of Tamasaburō V, Kataoka Takao and Ennosuke III reached their peak and their performances drew full houses, but kabuki as a whole was not attracting big audiences (*Iwanami Kōza Kabuki Bunraku Vol. 3*, 119).

Under these circumstances, *Kanadehon* continued to be staged. In 1980 and 1982, the new generation of kabuki actors including Takao, Tamasaburō V, Kankurō V (current Kanzaburō XVIII) and Ebizō X (current Danjūrō XII) performed *tōshi kyōgen* of *Kanadehon* (*Iwanami Koza Vol. 3*, 262; Fujita 1499 & 1807). Again in 1986 and 1988, *Kanadehon* with young star actors (Takao, Tamasaburō, Danjūrō, Kichiemon, et al.) generated full houses (Fujita 2228 & 2488). With this generational change of kabuki

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<sup>88</sup> Although there was no *Kanadehon* performance in Japan this year, the first America tour was made, and *Kanadehon* was performed in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco (Akō-Shi Shi 586).

actors, kabuki was revived. Such a development clearly shows the important role of *Kanadehon* as *dokujintō* regardless of the changing circumstances.

Secondly, Table 1 shows the dramatic increase in kabuki performances of *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* and *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* after the Second World War. Only fifteen performances were recorded in one hundred and twenty years until the end of the Second World War since their first performances in 1825, while they have been staged forty-nine times in sixty-five years after the Second World War. Specifically, the 1976 performance of *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* by Tatsunosuke I, Tamasaburō V and Takao in the National Theater became a hot topic (*Engekikai July 2011* 28). Incidentally, *Nanboku-mono* started to be taken up by modern theater groups in the mid-60s (*Iwanami Koza Vol. 3*, 253) and his plays became popular among underground play groups in the 1970s (*Engekikai July 2011* 28). In 1976, a *Nanboku-mono* boom occurred (Fujita 1011): three *Yotsuya Kaidan* and one *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* were performed by modern theater troupes, in addition to the aforementioned kabuki version (Tables 1 & 2). The kabuki play *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* has been staged twelve more times since then. In the first half of 2011 alone, it was staged twice. It was performed only once between 1825 and 1975. Its appeal to modern society is obvious. It is most probably because of Nanboku's acute eyes for the unreasonable and unjust society as discussed in Chapter 3.

Thirdly, not just *Nanboku-mono* but *Chūshingura-mono* also became the repertoires of small modern theatrical groups in the late 1980s (Table 2). The number of both productions drastically increased in the 1990s and the 2000s. Many of them were performed in small theaters with less than five hundred seats. In 2010, six plays were staged in such small theaters; in addition, one recitation play was performed in a medium

theater. Besides, two out of three performances in large theaters were unorthodox *Chūshingura* (The opera *Chūshingura* and *Saigo no Chūshingura*).

The diversity of theatrical groups is amazing. They range from neo-kabuki groups such as “Hanagumi Shibai” and “Ryūzanji Kabuki” to some avant-garde or underground theatre troupes. As mentioned above, Nanboku’s plays started to receive attention from underground play groups as early as the mid-60s. In 1970, “Waseda Shōgekijō,” the most representative of these groups, performed a highly-appraised play *Gekitekinarumono o Megutte II (On the Dramatic Passions II)*, which was mainly inspired by Nanboku’s works (*Engekikai July 2011* 27). In the 2000s, *Chūshingura-mono* performed by small theatre companies outnumbered those staged in established large theaters.

Large theaters used to stage orthodox *Chūshingura-mono* or comedies. These performances promised full houses during the period when orthodox *Chūshingura* films and TV dramas were popular. In those theatres, the spectators usually come to see stars in person. The stage shows by popular singers (sometimes TV stars) are typical examples.<sup>89</sup> In the first part of the shows, certain costume plays are performed. *Chūshingura* is one of their popular repertoires. The second part is their concert. The quality of the plays per se is of secondary importance in these shows. Large theaters have not taken the risk of staging unconventional *Chūshingura*.

One of the few exceptions may be *Hakuōki* (薄桜記) which is based on the same titled novel by Gomi Yasusuke. The protagonist is a fictional samurai Tange Tenzen who

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<sup>89</sup> These kinds of popular singer shows used to be one of the main sources of income for large theaters; however, their number has been decreasing for the past several years, mainly due to the diminishing popularity of *enka* (traditional-style Japanese popular music). Shinjuku Koma Gekijō known as *Enka no Dendō* (Hall of Fame for Enka) was forced to close down in 2008. This event may represent an irreversible change in the Japanese society.

is a nihilist just like Hotta Hayato in *Akō Rōshi* by Osaragi Jirō.<sup>90</sup> His friendship with Horibe Yasubei is the theme of this novel. The noteworthy feature of this book is Kira's depiction as the victim of the Akō incident. The author is sympathetic with Kira (Gomi 481 & 575). This book was made into films twice (1959 and 1969). Its TV drama was also made (1991), and it was staged five times: four times as the first part of popular singer shows (1971, 1980 1999 and 2002), but once in a medium theater where high-quality modern plays are frequently performed (1990).

*Onnatachi no Chūshingura* (女たちの忠臣蔵) is also an exception. It has been staged in large theaters seven times since its first performance in 1980. It was originally broadcast as a TV drama in 1979 and recorded the viewer rating of 42.6% (Nostalgic TV Club 118). That is surprisingly high, considering the highest viewer rating of 41.8% which the episode of the attack on Kira earned in *Genroku Taiheiki*, one of the NHK *taiga* dramas broadcast in 1975 (Video Research Ltd.). This drama was rebroadcast several times. In addition, its stage adaptation was made. This is a *Chūshingura* story from the perspectives of women (onnatachi) involved in the incident. In this drama, even Yōzen-in (Asano's wife) tried to persuade Kuranosuke not to attack Kira so that women should not cry over death of their beloved ones (Hashida 120). It is precisely the opposite of Yōzen-in's attitude in orthodox *Chūshingura* where she urges Kuranosuke to kill Kira. Hashida's version of *Chūshingura* contains episodes of several women who willingly, reluctantly or inescapably sacrificed their happiness in the shadow of the spectacular vendetta carried out by men. This was the blind spot of conventional

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<sup>90</sup> See the footnote 87 in this Chapter.

*Chūshingura* stories. Table 2 shows two more unorthodox performances in large theaters in the last few years (The opera *Chūshingura* and *Saigo no Chūshingura*).

Although still gradually, unorthodox *Chūshingura* plays are thus increasing in conservative large theatres, at the same time as *Chūshingura-mono* including Nanboku's parodies performed by small theatrical groups show steady increase. This trend indicates the proliferation of diverse perspectives about *Chūshingura* in modern society. As a result, the number of orthodox *Chūshingura* has been rapidly decreasing. When and why did such a trend start to happen?

### III. **The Reasons for the Emergence of Diverse Perspectives about *Chūshingura***

The following factors are assumed to have contributed to the emergence of diverse perspectives about *Chūshingura*.

#### A. **The Omission of the Akō Incident from School Textbooks**

Even if the Akō incident is included in textbooks, the description is objective and does not emphasize loyalty of the Akō rōnin, as discussed in Chapter 2. This was the result of the education reforms carried out under the Allied Occupation which aimed to “create a more egalitarian and democratic education system” (Schoppa 1). In the 1980s, the movement “to restore moral education to its old central position” (ibid. 52) occurred under Prime Minister Nakasone. This reactionary movement has been proceeding as is shown by the recent publication of controversial history textbooks by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (See Chapter 2. IV. B); however, the feudalistic idea of absolute loyalty to one's lord was not advocated even in their textbook.

Students suddenly faced a radical change in education system after the Second World War following Emperor Hirohito's declaration of his humanity. It is not surprising if they became suspicious about mainstream ideologies imposed by the authorities and started to have more complex views about society. Inoue Hisashi was one such student. He became a popular playwright and wrote many intriguing plays including two unorthodox *Chūshingura* stories: One featured *fu-gishi* (*Fu-Chūshingura*) as aforementioned; the other depicted the attack on Kira from Kira's perspective (*Inu no Adachi*).

Those who were born after the Second World War were educated under the democratic school system from the start. Especially in the 1950s-1960s, progressive teachers' unions were much more active.<sup>91</sup> "Many teachers, experiencing feelings of guilt over their role in sending numerous students off to war, reacted by taking active parts in the post-war teachers' union—set up to defend the 'democratic' reforms of the Occupation period" (Schoppa 31). Those teachers would never have emphasized the feudalistic loyalty even if they had to use textbooks which included the Akō incident. It is natural that orthodox *Chūshingura* stories started to lose popularity among post-war generations. *Chūshingura* TV dramas drastically decreased in the 1990s, so, some young people do not even know what *Chūshingura* is about.<sup>92</sup> However, this story is deeply rooted in the mind of people born in the late 1940s-1960s, because they must have seen a variety of TV programs about *Chūshingura* in their youth with their parents who usually

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<sup>91</sup> According to the statistics issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the organizing rate of the Teachers' Union was 86.3% in 1958. The percentage kept on declining since then. In 1985, it was 49.5% and it was only 28.1% in 2008.

<sup>92</sup> Although I asked only about a dozen young people (my sons, my daughter-in-law, my friend's children, my classmates and other young friends of mine – all in their 20s), none of them exactly knew the story of *Chūshingura*. Many of them confused it with *Shinsengumi* which was formed to protect Tokugawa Bakufu in the turmoil of Bakumatsu (final years of the Edo period).

decided which programs to watch (See Table 3 for the number of TV shows with the theme of *Chūshingura*). It is assumed that these generations started to enjoy *Chūshingura* and its parodies depicted from new perspectives.

### **B. The Burst of the Economic Bubble**

The term “corporate warriors” was often used until the burst of the economic bubble (Liddle & Nakajima, 239-244). This word refers to employees who sacrifice their private lives for the prosperity of their companies in return for lifetime employment and a “corporate-based welfare system” (Kingston 304) provided by the companies. This phenomenon started during the period of the Japanese postwar economic miracle (from the mid-50s to the early 70s) and continued until the burst of the bubble in the early 1990s. Nakane Chie likened the relationship of an employer and an employee to that of a father and a child. When a person was employed by a company, this employee became a member of the employer’s household and he/she inevitably followed the company mottoes and traditions (17-21). There was a phrase “*Chūshingura syndrome*” (Tsurumi & Yasuda 8) to refer to such hard-working salaried men until the 1980s. An observable fact is that young workers who had the “*Chūshingura syndrome*” in the 1980s were those who were educated under the democratic school system. They may not have been fervent fans of orthodox *Chūshingura* stories. All the same, their attitudes of prioritizing their companies over their private lives could be compared to those of the Akō rōnin: Their behavioral principle was collectivism and their first priority was the organization they belonged to.

In the early 1990s the economic bubble burst, and mass layoffs threatened employees even in big companies which used to promise lifetime employment (Jansen

746). Abandonment of benevolent paternalism by the company management (Kingston 266) made their employees take detached attitudes toward companies. Employees stopped throwing themselves entirely into their works and started looking for more individualistic life styles, shifting from “corporate-centered ideology” (Kingston 267) to individualism. In consequence, they started to have more flexible and diverse perspectives about their lives and society.

### **C. Deconstruction of Dichotomies**

The Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the dichotomy of capitalist states versus communist states was eroded. Then, ethnic conflicts resurged (Breen & O’Neill 5). These conflicts are often connected to ethnic nationalism, which is contrasted with civic nationalism. However, countries which advocate civic nationalism have also been involved in war, frequently in the form of proxy wars such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The dichotomy of democratic and dictatorial nations is also moot: For instance, the United States, a supposedly democratic country, has supported some military dictatorships such as Pinochet in Chile. If the democracy of a country is protected at the sacrifice of repressed people in dictatorial nations, can it be regarded as an authentic democracy?

Here is another deconstruction of the dichotomy: North-South problems are emerging inside developed countries. In Japan, the problem of the working poor emerged under the Koizumi Regime (2001-2006). Irregular employees and “internet-cafe *nanmin* (refugees)” with a yearly income of less than \$10,000 increased (Sato 162). Developed countries have been troubled with poor immigrant communities. For instance, the 2005 riots in France were caused mainly by Muslim immigrants of African origin who lived in

the poorest communities (BBC News 31 Jan. 2007). Facing this reality, we cannot divide the world simply between affluent developed countries and poor developing countries. The dividing line is blurring (Iyotani 193-194). In such a modern world, a simple story of hero versus villain would be outmoded. This could be the reason for the creation of diverse *Chūshingura* stories as well as for the increasing popularity of Tsuruya Nanboku. He revealed the subterranean aspect of justice and argued that justice inevitably contains injustice for some people. He also showed that villains have their own justification for their evil deeds. He gained these views and insights by witnessing the rapidly collapsing Tokugawa regime in the Bunka and Bunsei era of the Edo period. Manners and forms which had been established over years started to be nullified and decadent but liberating feelings filled society. In such circumstances, Nanboku invalidated the established values (Hirose 2-5).

#### **D. The Advancement of Women into Society**

From the mid-70s, the percentage of women in the total labour force started to rise. In 1975, it was 37 percent. It steadily kept rising to 41 percent in 1990 (Liddle & Nakajima, 174). In 2009, the percentage rose to 58.1%, its actual number being 27.7 million (Survey on Workforce by Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications). Female Diet members are also gradually increasing: 29 in 1986; 78 in 2000; 96 in 2009.<sup>93</sup> The increase of women's participation in society means the increase of women's voices in society. The smash hit of *Onnatachi no Chūshingura* presumably reflected such a development in the society.

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<sup>93</sup> Source: Gender Information Site (男女共同参画局)

## IV. The Plurality of *Chūshingura*

### A. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* as the *Writerly* Text

1. **The *readerly* text versus the *writerly* text:** Roland Barthes (1915-1980) distinguishes between two types of the text: the *readerly* text and the *writerly* text. He says, "...the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 4). In the *readerly* text, the reader is "left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text" (*ibid.* 4). This type of text is supported by "the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us 'throw away' the story once it has been consumed ('devoured'), so that we can then move on to another story, buy another book" (*ibid.* 15-16). Although Barthes discusses books here, most TV dramas and films are produced with the same intentions. Almost all orthodox *Chūshingura* stories are included in this category.

In contrast, Terence Hawkes describes the *writerly* text as follows: "[The *writerly* text] invites us self-consciously to read it, to 'join in' and be aware of the interrelationship of the writing and reading, and which accordingly offers us the joys of cooperation, co-authorship (and even, as its intensest moments, of copulation)" (114). However, "the *writerly* text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a book store" (Barthes, *S/Z* 5). In order to find the *writerly* text, we have to evaluate a text in accordance with the above criteria as a first step.

Then, we need "a second operation, consequent upon the evaluation which has separated the texts... This new operation is *interpretation*" (*ibid.* 5). To interpret the *writerly* text is "to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it" (*ibid.* 5): Plurality is the fundamental quality of the *writerly* text, which has several equal entrances (no main one),

many and interactive networks, indeterminable codes and abundant signifiers (ibid. 5-6). We can read this type of text either in sequential or arbitrary order. A text is not complete in itself. Numerous networks of the other texts, both past and contemporary, are interwoven into it. Consequently, the codes and signifiers used in this type of text have multiple meanings, none of which can be singled out as a true or definitive meaning. When we read this type of text, “a systematic use of digression” (ibid 13) and the observation of “the reversibility of the structures from which the text is woven” (ibid. 13) is necessary. We should also bear it in mind that even the reader “‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite, or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)” (ibid. 10). Only when we interpret a text in the appropriate method, does it become the *writerly* text.

**2. The colorful texture:** I agree with the argument of Barthes that a text is the colorful texture which interweaves plural threads of various materials such as style, culture, ideology, philosophy, history, and so on. *Kanadehon* is a typical example, even if it is investigated only superficially. First of all, it literally interwove the preceding texts which had been based on the world of either *Taiheiki* or *Oguri Hangan*. Both of them are the stories in the Muromachi period, so, *Kanadehon* is also set in the Muromachi period. Okaru, for instance, has several traits of the characters in the preceding plays as well as the world of *Taiheiki* as a woman of the Muromachi period. In actuality, however, she represents women in the Edo period, specifically in Acts Six and Seven. With regard to a style, it is an amalgamation of *jidaimono*, *sewamono* and *shosagoto*. *Jidaimono* parts focus on loyal samurai, while *sewamono* parts highlight people in the lower class of society in the Edo period.

Ideologically and philosophically, *Kanadehon* was created in a hierarchical society based on feudalism with Confucianism as an official ideology. Among the values of Confucianism, the vassals' loyalty to their lords was advocated as the utmost virtue in the reign of Tsunayoshi. Ōboshi Yuranosuke shows such an absolute loyalty to his lord. However, the behaviors of other protagonists present different sets of ideologies and philosophies.

Okaru was not loyal to her mistress Kaoyo. She followed her honest feelings, ignoring Kaoyo's discreet instruction. Her conduct caused the subsequent tragedies. However, she was not punished with death. Rather, she was redeemed because of her deep love. The basic philosophy here is humanism. Honzō also died for his daughter, giving up his loyalty to his lord at the last moment. This is also a humanistic episode. In the case of Heiemon, he shows absolute and sincere loyalty. At the same time, though, the reality of the samurai world is exposed: he says to Okaru, "The sad thing about being of the lowest ranks is that unless you prove to the other samurai your spirit is better than theirs, they won't let you join in" (ibid. 121). His words seem to represent commoners' criticism about the exclusive and rigid, although privileged, samurai world. The episode of the farmer Yoichibei's family is the clear criticism about loyalty. All the tragedy was caused by Kanpei's loyalty to his deceased lord. If only Kanpei could have given up the desire of joining the vendetta league, everybody would have lived happily and peacefully; however, Kanpei adhered to the inclusion into the league. Consequently, he was doomed to death and the Yoichibei's family could not escape from the tragic ending. This episode may be a warning that commoners should not be involved in samurai affairs. As examined, this play interweaves plural ideologies and philosophies.

**3. The pleasure of re-reading:** Barthes also mentions the increasing pleasure a reader gains from re-reading (*S/Z* 15-16 & Sholes 153). This is true for many kabuki and bunraku audiences. They come to see the same plays repeatedly in anticipation of new discoveries and greater pleasure. Every stage is different, even though the same actors perform the same roles: actors' physical and psychological conditions change every day. When a kabuki play is performed by different actors, its impression could become considerably different, because actors play crucial roles as stage directors and sometimes as playwrights (Kawatake, S. 163). In case of bunraku, each play is produced by a collaboration of the *gidayū* narrator(s), puppeteers and shamisen player(s). The role of the *gidayū* narrator(s) is particularly important. Different performers give the audience an opportunity for new interpretations of the play.

**4. The double meaning:** Another interesting point Barthes makes is the role of double meaning as the reader's nourishment (Sholes 157). By nourishment, I suppose he means rich content from which the reader can draw bigger pleasure. In *Death of the Author*, he gives an example of double meanings, which are borne in the words used in Greek tragedies. Characters in a story cannot understand these double meanings; however, "there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him – this someone being precisely the reader (or here, the listener)" (148). His remark reminds me of Kanpei in Act Six of *Kanadehon*. Kanpei does not know the truth. Only the audience knows that the tragedy of errors is proceeding in front of them. This is not exactly the tragedy caused by double meanings of words: In the case of Kanpei, he is thrown into the situation which can be interpreted in two ways. The audience knows the whole context, but Kanpei does

not. This discrepancy resembles the relationship between the audience and the characters in Greek tragedies. Apart from this act, double meanings are abundant in the script of *Kanadehon*, starting with its title and the naming of Ōboshi Yuranosuke (See Chapter 3. II.A.1&4).

*Kanadehon* has so far survived the change in society because of its quality as a *writerly* text, in addition to the universality of its themes and the wealth of aesthetic elements. Its future depends on the capacity of the readers (the audience and performers) to interpret it in the proper method, specifically by respecting the plurality of the text, digressing from it as appropriate, and turning it inside out just as Nanboku did.

## **B. Room for Plural Interpretations**

In Chapter 3, I argued that the theme of *Kanadehon* is love and death, and protagonists change from act to act; however, many different interpretations exist. They are divided into two groups: The first group focuses on the *jidaimono* parts and the samurai world. This group claims that loyalty is the main theme, with Yuranosuke as the protagonist for the entire play; the second group focuses on the *sewamono* parts and commoners' world. Love, death, money or family relationships are the main themes for this group.

In the first group, foreign scholars such as Keene are included. He says, "From the moment of this superb entrance (Act Four), Yuranosuke is unmistakably the hero of the play, and his particular virtue, loyalty, is its theme" (*Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* 14). He also says, "The whole point of the play is the unconditional nature of loyalty" (ibid. 17). Leiter introduces *Kanadehon* as "the famous revenge on their master's enemy by the forty-seven retainers of Akō" and labels this play as a masterpiece of "loyal

retainer” plays in his *Kabuki Encyclopedia* (166). Above all, the Allied Occupation banned *Kanadehon Chūshingura* because they regarded it as a reactionary feudalistic play, as previously mentioned. It is assumed that this notion of *Kanadehon* became a mainstream when the Meiji government started to intervene with kabuki performances. It issued a series of notices urging kabuki to be moral plays based on the respect of justice and reality (*Iwanami Kōza Vol. 3*, 146). Orthodox films and TV dramas adopted this concept of *Chūshingura*.

Japanese scholars, critics and writers are mostly in the second group. They agree that different characters become protagonists in different acts. They also agree that most protagonists are outside the vendetta league, as discussed in Chapter 3.II. Aside from the above two points, diverse interpretations are presented. For instance, Maruya says, “Kanpei is much more important than Yuranosuke, and he gives the impression that he is the protagonist of the entire play” (214). Watanabe emphasizes the important role of Okaya, Okaru’s mother, and says, “Okaya is in the center of the tragedy of Act Six because the structure of this act is a family drama inside the farmer Yoichibei’s household” (*Chūshingura: Mōhitotsu no Rekishi Kankaku* 228-230). He also cites Shikitei Sanba’s comment that all the events in *Chūshingura* were caused by women (ibid. 231), whereas Hashimoto says, “Kakogawa Honzō triggered all the events in *Kanadehon*” (*Chanbara Jidaigeki Koza* 113). According to Hashimoto, *Kanadehon* is the story of the two *karō* (Yuranosuke and Honzō) who were thrown into bizarre destinies because of the rash action of Enya Hangan (ibid. 113-114).

All those comments seem applicable because *Kanadehon* is a multidimensional story. In case of the *writerly* text, there is no single correct interpretation; however, its

kabuki performances in recent years have omitted some scenes which are indispensable to grasp a whole picture of this play. This trend may limit its capacity for plural interpretations. For instance, Okaru's episode as Kaoyo's messenger in Act Three is usually omitted even in *tōshi kyōgen*. Seki claims that this scene is the beginning of the tragedy of later acts, so, it should be resurrected (68-69). Imao went further. According to him, Okaru's passionate but inconsiderate conduct was the root cause of the destruction of the Enya house (204), as discussed in Chapter 3 (II.B.1). This scene should be included.

Act Ten is also omitted in almost all *tōshi kyōgen* because of the low evaluation by drama critics as mentioned earlier. In the Edo period, this act was often included (Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu 7-125), presumably because the audience was largely made up of commoners and they loved this act where chōnin Amagawaya Gihei is the protagonist. Yuranosuke and his vassals are depicted as maneuverers here. That may be the main reason this act started to be omitted after the Meiji Restoration, as the tendency intensified to view the Akō rōnin as national heroes. Just for the same reason, however, this act should be revived. This is the most cynical episode about the vendetta league members, apparently representing the commoners' feelings against samurai.

Another regrettable trend is the omission of the lines and scenes where women express their feelings. In bunraku they are included, but such omission frequently happens in kabuki (Mizuochi 115-119). Considering the increase of women's influence on *Chūshingura* as is shown by the high popularity of *Onnatachi no Chūshingura*, women's viewpoints should certainly be included in future kabuki performances. It is advisable for kabuki theaters to pay attention to the fact that more than half of the

spectators are women nowadays. A neo-kabuki group Hanagumi Shibai performed a compact three-hour version of *Kanadehon* a few years ago. It included Okaru's scene in Act Three as well as Act Ten in its compressed play. The play was very interesting and persuasive. The popularity of this group is incrementally growing. For the future survival of *Kanadehon*, the respect for the original script and spirit will be important.

### **The plurality of the Akō incident**

We should bear it in mind that the Akō incident per se had ample room for plural interpretations because of the lack of definite evidence in spite of a considerable volume of documentation. For instance, Asano Naganori's personality and his psychology at the time of his attack on Kira can only be imagined. Another example is Kuranosuke's frequent visits to licensed quarters. The authenticity of this episode is questionable, but it is somehow an established legend. The purpose of his debauchery stimulated the imagination of writers. The most common interpretation is that he intended to deceive Kira's spies. It is also possible that he wanted to take his mind off his destiny, that is, his unavoidable death after killing Kira. Or he simply liked women. With the third perspective, Ikenami Shotarō wrote a novel entitled *Ore no Ashioto: Ōishi Kuranosuke*. When it comes to women, a far smaller number of records was left. To put it another way, Hashida could create her highly popular story because of such an insufficiency of documents. In this way, imagination gestates on and on. As a result, a great number of *Chūshingura* stories have been produced. Clearly, the Akō incident itself is the *writerly* text which induces a reader to participate positively in producing his/her version of its story.

## Summary and the Forecast for the Future of *Chūshingura*

As examined in this chapter, *Kanadehon Chūshingura* has maintained its popularity in a changing society. The kabuki performances of *Nanboku-mono* have in fact been increasing in modern society. Another notable trend is witnessed in the realm of contemporary plays, where *Chūshingura-mono* and *Nanboku-mono* performed by modern, and usually fringe, theatrical groups are steadily increasing. This trend makes a stark contrast with the drastic decrease of *Chūshingura* films since the 1970s and TV dramas in the 2000s (Table 3). Thus, the failing popularity of orthodox *Chūshingura* and the emergence of diverse perspectives about this story are proceeding in parallel. The following factors are assumed to be the major reasons for this phenomenon: the omission of the Akō incident from school textbooks; the burst of the economic bubble; the deconstruction of dichotomies; and the advancement of women into society.

*Kanadehon Chūshingura* has so far survived a rapid change in society because of its characteristics as a *writerly* text, in addition to the universality of its themes and abundant aesthetic elements examined in Chapter 3. II. As a *writerly* text, it is open to positive participation and plural interpretations, rather than imposing one single point of view. Its future depends on how it will be interpreted – whether its plurality will be respected or not. As discussed above, the tendency to prioritize specific perspectives has been witnessed particularly after the Meiji Restoration.

It may be the time for all the parties concerned to reconsider the spirit of kabuki when it emerged in the early 1600s. A word “kabuki” is a noun form of “kabuku” which meant to deviate (*Iwanami Kōza Vol. 2, 29*). Kabuki plays used to be modern and even avant-garde when they were first staged (Nomura 85). Kabuki started to thrive, along

with the rapid growth of the population of commoners engaged in small-businesses in big cities such as Edo and Osaka, which promised infinite possibilities (*Iwanami Kōza Vol. 2*, 83). These aspiring commoners supported kabuki. Kabuki plays have improved through the interaction between actors and the audience (Keen 4; *Iwanami Kōza Kabuki • Bunraku Vol.2*, 258), rather than imposing one-sided interpretations on the passive audience. The size of the theatres may have been relevant to the positive participation of the audience. Theatres in the Edo period were much smaller than those in modern days (*Iwanami Kōza Vol. 3*, 269). It would be easier to act as co-producers if people felt physically closer to the actors in smaller theaters.

During the last couple of decades, some attempts to perform kabuki in smaller theatres have been launched. *Cocoon kabuki* is one example. In 1994, Nakamura Kanzaburō XVIII (Kankurō V at the time) introduced a new style of kabuki performance in Theater Cocoon in Tokyo. It is a medium-sized theatre with 747 seats, compared to the capacity of Kabuki-za with 2,017 seats.<sup>94</sup> Kankurō V intended to perform classic plays with new interpretations of modern taste. The play he chose for this ambitious endeavour was *Yotsuya Kaidan*. Furthermore, six plays of *Cocoon kabuki* which were performed twelve times up to 2011 were *Nanboku-mono: Yotsuya Kaidan* and *Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu* were performed twice respectively (The leaflet of the twelfth exhibition of *Cocoon kabuki*). This choice is symbolic of the definitive appeal of Nanboku to the modern audience. In *Cocoon kabuki*, about a dozen rows of front chairs are replaced by box seats of floor sitting, just like the old-time playhouses. In some scenes, actors come down from the stage to the aisles between the audience seats, or enter the auditorium

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<sup>94</sup> This is the old Kabuki-za which was demolished in 2010. A new Kabuki-za will open in spring of 2013.

from outside, and perform for a few minutes right next to the audience. The spectators are also allowed to eat and drink in their seats, which is usually prohibited in this theatre. In this manner, *Cocoon kabuki* tries to revive the atmosphere of old-time playhouses. The use of pop music as background music is also one of the characteristics of *Cocoon kabuki*. I have seen them three times. All the performances were enjoyable.

Another attempt is the kabuki performances in old playhouses in local cities and towns. *Konpira kabuki* in Kanamaru-za (金丸座; 740 seats) of Kagawa Prefecture is most famous. The theatre was built in the Edo period (1835) and restored in 1976. Then, it started to stage kabuki in 1985. Nakamura Kichiemon II was the main actor in its memorable first event. On that occasion, only five performances were staged. Since the ninth year (1993), the number of performances per session has increased to over thirty. In 2011, the performances were staged thirty-two times during the period from April 9<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>. *Kanadehon* was performed on three occasions, although all of them were *midori* performances. In addition, *Michiyuki Tabiji no Hanamuko* and *Matsuura no Taiko* were performed once respectively.<sup>95</sup>

Kōraku-kan (康楽館; 607 seats) in Akita Prefecture has also staged kabuki plays with first-rate actors since 1987. Built in 1910, this theatre had been closed down for fifteen years until 1986. Although one session lasts only three days, the yearly kabuki performance has become a big event in Kosaka-machi, a small town in the northern part of Akita Prefecture. I have been there twice. The atmosphere was fascinating. The small-sized playhouse certainly generated the feeling of closeness with actors. Eiraku-kan (永楽館; 330 seats) in Hyōgo Prefecture originally built in 1901 started the same attempt in

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<sup>95</sup> The data about theatres in this section were obtained from the website of each theatre.

2008, after the completion of its restoration in the same year. These attempts are the new development in modern kabuki scenes. They may contribute to expanding the audience segments.

*Jungyō* (local tours) by major kabuki actors are also indispensable to the future survival of kabuki. They provide local residents with precious opportunities to enjoy kabuki performances. *Kanadehon* (only *midori*) is one of the popular repertoires in *jungyō* (*Engeki Nenkan* 1993, 1994, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2005; Shochiku website *Kabuki-bito* 2007 & 2010). In 2010, three courses of *jungyō* were taken. The total period amounted to three months.

Kanzaburō XVIII has also been challenging to create new kabuki plays in collaboration with the modern writer and stage director Noda Hideki (野田秀樹). These new plays are called *Noda-ban (version) kabuki*. Three plays have been produced up to the present. The first one (*Noda-ban Togitatsu no Utare* in 2001) was based on *shin kabuki* written in 1925 (the fourteenth year of the Taisho period). The second play (*Noda-ban Nezumi Kozō* in 2003) was based on a classic kabuki. The latest one was based on the opera *Aida* (2008). Yet, all of them are the originals written by Noda Hideki and said to be more like modern plays. The former two plays with abundant comical scenes generated full houses every day. Ninagawa Yukio (蜷川幸雄) is another stage director who produced a kabuki version of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in 2005.<sup>96</sup> This play was

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<sup>96</sup> Although I think I saw *Noda-ban Togitatsu no Utare*, *Noda-ban Nezumi Kozō* and *NINAGAWA Jūniya (Twelfth Night)*, I do not remember well about the former two plays. I presume the plays were already over while I was amazed at their slapstick rendering and laughing all through the performances. *NINAGAWA Jūniya*, on the other hand, left a strong impression on me. As readers may know well, a leading character of *Twelfth Night* is Viola, a young woman who masquerades as a young page and serves Duke Orsino. She falls in love with him, but has to suppress her feelings because she must behave as a man. A Viola actress is expected to express such complex feelings. In its kabuki version, the situation becomes all the more intricate because a male actor plays the role of Viola. He has to impersonate a young woman, who masquerades as a young man, who loves a man as a young woman, and so on... Onoe Kikunosuke V played

also extremely popular. These new types of kabuki plays are expected to bring new perspectives into traditional plays.

As regards *Chūshingura*, neither of them produced its kabuki version. However, Noda created a play entitled *Akō Rōshi* in 1988 (See Table 2). Judging from its subtitle (昆虫になれなかつたファールルの数学的帰納法=Mathematical induction by Fabre who could not become an insect), this play seems to be completely different from ordinary *Chūshingura*. Ninagawa also directed the modern-play version of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in 1988 (Table 2). This fact may support my argument that *Chūshingura* has enchanted Japanese people of all spheres.

Based on all the above considerations, I predict that *Kanadehon* will maintain its popularity, if it respects the original script and spirit, preserving its characteristics as the *writerly* text. Orthodox *Chūshingura* will never recover its popularity in modern society where multifaceted views prevail. *Chūshingura* performances by modern small theatrical groups will continue to proliferate, judging from their steady increase in the past few decades. Most of them may be short-lived and quickly replaced by new productions, like almost all *Chūshingura-mono* after *Kanadehon*. However, they are fundamentally different from the previous orthodox *Chūshingura* because many of them deviate from the straightforward vendetta story. Nanboku also deviated from the conventional *Chūshingura* plays. He turned the *Chūshingura* world inside out and challenged the established order of society. As in the Bunka and Bunsei era when Nanboku wrote many intriguing plays, the prevalent ideologies and existing social order have been questioned

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Viola excellently. Shakespeare's plays were originally performed only by men, just like this kabuki version. Such a complicated state of mind must have been exactly what Shakespeare intended to present.

in modern days. The time may be ripe for the emergence of new Nanbokus who will create milestone *Chūshingura* stories capable of surviving in the future.

## Conclusion

I visited Akō-Shi in late May of 2011. It is a small, peaceful city with the population of a little more than 50,000. It faces Seto Inland Sea and the nearest beach is within walking distance of Akō Castle. A legend says that Ōishi Kuranosuke used to go fishing with his son on days-off, and enjoyed his leisurely life. His house was inside the Castle grounds.

**Figure 23: The gate of Akō Castle (restored), street view and Seto Inland Sea**



**Figure 24: Historical goods and spots**



Whistle and *saihai* (baton) used at the attack on Kira

*Kusarizukin* (coif) & *Kusarijuban* (under-wear made of mail) worn by Horibe Taketsune

A well (restored) used by couriers from Edo

Kagakuji Temple (The family temple of Asano House)

Ōishi's former premises are spacious, with a big Japanese garden. Ōishi lived there with his wife and three children. The eldest son was expecting *genpuku* (coming-of-age ceremony) in a few years. Ōishi was a mature man in the early 40s and hereditary *jōdai*

*karō* (chief chamberlain) of the Akō *han* which was affluent thanks to the high revenue from salt production. His main duty was to manage and maintain his *han*. Aside from preserving the organizational honor, it was Ōishi's imperative duty as *jōdai karo* to pursue the restoration of the Asano house, even if there was little possibility of succeeding (Nanjō & Fukuda 208). He inevitably came into collision with Edo radicals who insisted on killing Kira under any circumstances to maintain their personal honor. If the Asano house had been restored, Ōishi would probably have decided not to join the vendetta in order to avoid any risk of the destruction of the Asano house again. According to a legend, he was nicknamed *hiru-andon* (a lantern in the daytime, meaning “a useless object/person”). He would have wished to end his life as *hiru-andon* in his well-managed and peaceful *han*. However, he was eventually involved in the never-imagined incident. He became a hero. He became one of the most famous historical figures in Japan. An abundance of stories have been produced with Kuranosuke as a protagonist.

**Figure 25: The gate (restored) and the garden of Kuranosuke's former house**



(This is only a part of the garden)

This incident was a miracle in a way because as many as forty-seven rōnin remained united, overcoming their internal strife, for one year and nine months and finally achieved their goal. It occurred in the peaceful Genroku era. There had been no

war for one hundred years, and most samurai warriors had never killed anybody. *Kendō* (Japanese art of fencing) training halls were probably the only site samurai fought with each other; however, they used only wooden swords. Their daily lives were not so different from salaried men in the modern age. It was in such a society that the real killing with real swords occurred. Both samurai and commoners were surprised but admired the firm determination and courage of the Akō rōnin to carry out the vendetta.

The person who was most responsible for this incident was Shogun Tsunayoshi. According to some *jitsuroku*, he was short-tempered and capricious. If Tsunayoshi had been more scrupulous, he would have punished Kira as well, or at least ordered his vassals to investigate the cause of Asano's attack in order to deliver a fair judgement. Then, the Akō rōnin would most probably have accepted the bakufu decision. Instead, Tsunayoshi simply burst into a fit of rage when he heard Asano's violent conduct inside the castle on the day of the welcoming ceremony for imperial envoys. It was an important event for Tsunayoshi's reconciliation policy with the Imperial Court. Consequently, he immediately sentenced *seppuku* to Asano. Some writers speculate that Tsunayoshi decided to move Kira to Honjo Matsuzaka-chō where protection by the bakufu could not be easily provided, as if showing his indifference to the vendetta plot of the Akō rōnin, because he regretted his hasty decision in the face of increasing criticism against the bakufu from the public. This speculation sounds plausible. Regardless of its credibility, Kira's move out of the center of Edo greatly helped the Akō rōnin's vendetta.

The bakufu decision not to restore the Asano house also played a crucial role in making the vendetta into an everlasting legendary story. When this decision was finally announced, the league was almost falling apart. This timing contributed to the

strengthening of the bond among league members. What would have been the subsequent story if the bakufu had decided on the restoration of the Asano house? The following is my assumption based on the research I have conducted. Ōishi would try to discourage the league members from the vendetta. Some radicals would not give up the attack plan. They would label Ōishi a coward and traitor, and would carry out the vendetta on their own. The internal strife among the league members would be exposed. The appraisal of their actions would be divided. Some people would even criticize the avengers as fanatics. After a short period of sensational reaction, people would lose interest in this vendetta, and the Akō incident gradually would go out of the people's minds. I presume this is the most likely scenario.

After the vendetta, there was a long debate about the disposition of the league members inside the bakufu. Some bakufu officials are said to have hoped to save their lives; however, the final decision was to sentence all the members to *seppuku*. This was the start of the legend of the forty-seven rōnin, as previously discussed. They became heroes because they died. I would say that the *Chūshingura* legend was the collaboration of the forty-seven rōnin and the bakufu, or more precisely, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi.

Then, forty-seven years later, a kabuki and *jōruri* masterpiece *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was created. This play was a miracle, too. Without *Kanadehon*, the Akō incident would not have become such a popular and famous story. As previously scrutinized, this play mainly depicts the fate of the fictional characters who were not league members. However, *Kanadehon* has conveyed the essence of the Akō incident. It implied that there were many people who were sacrificed or suffered behind the heroic deeds of the league members. Its themes were not loyalty of faithful vassals to their lord,

but more universal issues such as love, death, money, family relationships, and so on. *Kanadehon* has saved the crisis of kabuki many times and it is called *dokujintō*. It has been performed either in kabuki or bunraku theaters almost every year for more than two hundred and sixty years. It is a miracle of theatrical performance.

As examined above, *Kanadehon* has maintained its high popularity up to the present day. It will survive the rapidly changing society, if the plurality of its text is respected. Other *Chūshingura-mono* with diverse perspectives will continue to increase, even if they are short-lived and quickly replaced by new stories. Parodies by Nanboku both in kabuki and contemporary plays will also increase in popularity, as the modern age resembles the Bunka and Bunsei era when Nanboku was most active. New milestone *Chūshingura* may be created by playwrights with the same deep insight into the society as Nanboku.

While I was investigating *Chūshingura*, I started to think that this story is a Japanese cultural asset which should be unfailingly transmitted to the future generations. It involved a great many people: It was not the story of only forty-seven league members. They had families, colleagues and friends. In addition, there were many defectors, traitors and enemies. Each of them had his/her own story from his/her individual standpoint. An amazing variety of stories have been produced with the theme of *Chūshingura*. Some of them redeemed “villains.” Most of them are fictions, but fictions can be a more effective means of revealing the truth with insightful psychological descriptions of the people involved. These fictions from diverse perspectives have made *Chūshingura* even more attractive. I think it is my mission to disseminate my findings to younger generations who have not had the chance of learning about this great story.

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### Films, TV dramas and theater performances in DVDs, videos or actual stages

#### Films and TV dramas

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*Chūshingura Ōkanomaki & Kikkanomaki*. Dir. Matsuda Sadatsugu. Perf. Kataoka Chiezō. 1959. Tōei. DVD.

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*Chūshingura: Sono Otoko Ōishi Kuranosuke*. Perf. Tamura Masakazu. 2010. Terebi Asahi. Television.

*Chūshingura Gaiden Yotsuya Kaidan*. Dir. Fukasaku Kinji. Perf. Satō Kōichi. 1994. Shochiku. DVD.

*Dai Chūshingura*. Dir. Ōsone Tatsuo. Perf. Ichikawa Ennosuke II. 1957. Daiei. DVD.

*Genroku Chūshingura Zenpen & Kōhen*. Dir. Mizoguchi Kenji. Perf. Kawarasaki Chōjūrō IV . 1941 (Zenpen) & 1942 (Kōhen). Shōchiku. DVD.

*Mashō no Natsu: Yotsuya Kaidan yori* (魔性の夏 四谷怪談より). Dir. Ninagawa Yukio. Perf. Hagiwara Ken-ichi and Sekine Keiko. 1981. Shōchiku. DVD.

*Saigo no Chūshingura*. Dir. Shigemitsu Akihiko. Perf. Kamikawa Takaya and Kagawa Teruyuki. 2004. NHK (TV serial dramas: 6 episodes). DVD.

*Shijū-shichi Nin no Shikaku*. Dir. Ichikawa Kon. Perf. Takakura Ken, Nakai Kiichi. 1994. Tōhō. DVD.

**Stage adaptations: Actual stage performances as well as video or DVD recordings**

*Genroku Chūshingura: Tōshi Kyōgen*. Perf. Nakamura Kichiemon II, Nakamura Baigyoku IV, Sakata Tōjūrō IV and Matsumoto Kōshirō IX. 2006. Tokyo: National Theater. Video.

*Kanadehon Chūshingura: Tōshi Kyōgen*. Perf. Matsumoto Hakuō I, Onoe Shōroku II, Onoe Baikō VII, Nakamura Kanzaburō XVII, Nakamura Utaemon VI, Kataoka Nizaemon XIII. 1977. Tokyo: Kabuki za. DVD.

*Kanadehon Chūshingura: Acts Five, Six and Seven*. Perf. Nakamura Kankurō V, Nakamura Kotarō V, Kataoka Takao and Bandō Yasosuke V. 1984. Tokyo: National Theater. Video.

*Kanadehon Chūshingura: Tōshi Kyōgen*. Perf. Kataoka Nizaemon XIII, Onoe Baikō VII, Nakamura Kanzaburō XVII, Ichimura Uzaemon XVII and Nakamura Utaemon VI. 1986. Tokyo: National Theater. Video

*Kanadehon Chūshingura: Acts Five, Six and Eight*. Supervised and Instructed by Onoe Kikugorō VII. Performed by Graduates from Kabuki Actors School. 2010.8.21. Tokyo: National Theater. Live Staging.

*KANADEHON Chūshingura*. Perf. Kanō Yukikazu. Hanagumi Shibai. 2007. Tokyo: Setagata Public Theater. Video.

The opera *Chūshingura*. 1997. Video.

*Yotsuya Kaidan: Tōshi Kyōgen*. Perf. Ichikawa Ebizō XI, Nakamura Kantarō II and Nakamura Shichinosuke II. 2010.8.20. Tokyo: Shinbashi Enbujō. Live Staging.

*Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu: Tōshi Kyōgen*. Perf. Onoe Tatsunosuke I, Kataoka Takao, Bandō Tamasaburō V. 1976. Tokyo: National Theater. Video.

*Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu: Tōshi Kyōgen*. Perf. Nakamura Hashinosuke III, Nakamura Kantarō II, Onoe Kikunosuke V. Tokyo. Theater Cocoon. 2011. Live Staging.

*Miracle Chūshingura (rōkyoku musical)*. Perf. Kunimoto Takeharu. 2002. Tokyo: Theater Tops. CD.

*The Chūshingura (rōkyoku)*. Perf. Kunimoto Takeharu. 1998. CD.

## Appendix I: Note for Tables 1-3

### References for Table 1 & 2:

1710-1946: Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu (City History Compilation Room), ed.

*Chūshingura Vol.5*. Hyōgo-ken Akō-Shi, 1993 print.

1947-2011: Programs of kabuki theaters such as Kabuki-za and Shinbashi Enbujō.

1966-2011: Nihon Engeki Kyōkai, ed. *Engeki Nenkan (Almanac) 1966-2011*.

Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1966-2011 print.

Kokuritsu Gekijō (National Theater) Data Base (website).

➤ See Table 3 for its references.

1. The data in *Chūshingura Vol.5* (hereafter, I will refer to this book as *Vol.5*) are far more comprehensive than other references because this book includes many performances in small playhouses in local areas, in contrast to other references with the records of performances only in major theaters in big cities; however, *Vol.5* covers the period only until 1992. Meanwhile, the programs of Shochiku-affiliated theaters (hereafter, I will refer to them as Shochiku programs) cover the period only after 1947. The coverage of Kokuritsu Gekijō Data Base and *Engeki Nenkan* are further limited: They record the performances only after 1966, because Kokuritsu Gekijō opened in 1966, and the publication of *Engeki Nenkan* started in the same year.
2. In order to maintain coherence for the whole period after THE SECOND WORLD WAR, *Vol.5* is referred to only until 1946 as a general rule. In the case of *Kanadehon*, I strictly kept to this rule. With regard to “*Chūshingura-mono* other than *Kanadehon*,” the number of performances in Table 1 for the period between 1947 and 1965 shows only kabuki plays based on Shochiku programs and the data of *Vol.5*, confined to the number of performances only in Shochiku-affiliated major theaters.
3. From 1966, theatrical performances other than kabuki are also included in the column of “*Chūshingura-mono* other than *Kanadehon*,” based on the data in *Engeki Nenkan*.
4. Bunraku (*jōruri*) column between 1947 and 1965 shows zero performance. This does not mean no performance during this period. It is because I referred only to Kokuritsu Gekijō Data Base which was launched with the opening of Kokuritsu Gekijō in 1966.
5. Table 2 is denoted only in Japanese because it is simply the titles of *Chūshingura-mono* and *Nanboku-mono* plays other than kabuki and bunraku.
6. Tables 1 and 3 are the abridged editions of more detailed tables I created based on the above references. The full-length tables with yearly listings are available on request.

### **Note for Table 1**

1. Each *midori* performance (showing only a few acts), as well as *tōshi kyōgen* (showing all acts), was counted as an independent performance.

2. In the 1800s, the performances of *Kanadehon* started to add various characters to the original version. At the end of the Edo period, most *Kanadehon* performances were such variations.
3. Those performances were entitled *Kanadehon* even if they added new characters and episodes, as long as the main characters of *Kanadehon* were included there. The following three titles basically share the characters: *Kanadehon Chūshingura*; *Uraomote Chūshingura*; and *Chūshingura*.
4. For this reason, I included the above three titles in the column of *Kanadehon* performances. However, I excluded some *Uraomote Chūshingura* which deviated from the original *Kanadehon* too much.
5. *Kodomo Shibai* (plays performed by young people under the age of fifteen: in actuality many older actors joined the plays) are included because those actors were regarded as kabuki players and performed full-scale kabuki plays.  
(The source about *Kodomo Shibai*: *Iwanami Kōza Kabuki Bunraku Vol.3* 95-99)
6. In the Meiji period, *Kanadehon* started to be performed by some other theatrical troupes such as *Onna Shibai* (all-women play group), *Shinpa*, other contemporary theater troupes and comedy troupes. *Kanadehon* was also performed by amateur groups such as *rakugoka* (comic story tellers) and *bunshi* (writers). I picked them out as far as possible and added them in the other *Chūshingura-mono* group.

#### **Titles in English and abbreviations when applicable (Table 1)**

(In chronological order)

- 仮名手本＝仮名手本忠臣蔵 (Kanadehon Chūshingura)  
 碁盤＝碁盤太平記 (Goban Taiheiki)  
 鬼鹿毛＝鬼鹿毛無佐志鑑 (Onikage Musashi Abumi)  
 さざれ石＝太平記さざれ石 (Taiheiki Sazareishi)  
 硝後＝硝後太平記 (Sazareishi go Taiheiki)  
 兼好法師＝兼好法師物見車 (Kenkō Hōshi Monomiguruma)  
 いろは軍記＝忠臣いろは軍記 (Chūshin Iroha Gunki)  
 金短冊＝忠臣金短冊 (Chūshin Kogane no Tanzaku)  
 大矢数＝大矢数四十七本 (Ōyakazu Shijūshichihon)  
 忠臣講釈＝太平記忠臣講釈 (Taiheiki Chūshin Kōshaku)  
 鉢植え＝忠臣連理の鉢植え (Chūshin Renri no Hachiue)  
 菊宴＝菊宴月白波 (Kiku no En Tsuki no Shiranami)  
 四谷怪談＝東海道四谷怪談 (Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan)  
 三五＝盟三五大切 (Kamikakete Sango Taisetsu)  
 清水＝清水一角 (Shimizu Ikkaku)  
 松浦＝松浦の太鼓 (Matsuura no Taiko)  
 土屋＝土屋主税 (Tsuchiya Chikara)

不忠臣蔵 (Fu- Chūshingura)  
 赤穂浪士 (Akō Rōshi)  
 彌兵衛 = 堀部彌兵衛 (Horibe Yahei)  
 元禄 = 元禄忠臣蔵 (Genroku Chūshingura)  
 花婿 = 道行旅路の花婿 (Michiyuki Tabiji no Hanamuko: A dance scene between Acts 4 and 5 of Kanadehon)  
 嫁入り = 道行旅路の嫁入り (Michiyuki Tabiji no Yomeiri: Act 8 of Kanadehon consisting of only dances)  
 増補 = 増補忠臣蔵”本蔵下屋敷” (Zōho Chūshingura "Honzō Yashiki")  
 弥作 = 弥作鎌腹 (Yasaku no Kamabara)  
 忠箭計 = 四十七刻忠箭計 (Shijūshichi Koku Chūya Dokei)  
 をんな = をんな忠臣蔵 (Onna Chūshingura)  
 女定九郎 (Onna Sadakurō)  
 茶道 = 茶道忠臣蔵 (Sadō Chūshingura)  
 十二時 = 十二時忠臣蔵 (Jūniji Chūshingura)  
 競書手本 = 競書手本忠臣蔵 (Kyōsho Tehon Chūshingura)  
 実録 = 実録忠臣蔵・義士銘々伝 (Jitsuroku Chūshingura: Gishi Meimeiden)  
 妻子別れ = 大石妻子別れ (Ōishi Saishi Wakare)  
 赤垣源蔵 = 赤垣源蔵出立の段 (Akagaki Genzō Shuttatsu no Dan)

#### Other abbreviations

歌 = 歌舞伎 (kabuki)  
 文 = 文楽 (bunraku)

\* "素浄瑠璃の会" (The performance of only *jōruri* music) is included following the record of National Theater Data Base.

他・忠臣蔵 = その他の忠臣蔵物 (other Chūshingura-mono)

\* After the Meiji Restoration, *Shinpa* (新派), *Shin-kokugeki* (新国劇) and other theatrical productions are included in this column.

忠臣蔵・合計 (The total number of *Chūshingura-mono* productions)

他・南北 = その他の鶴屋南北による忠臣蔵パロディー (other *Chūshingura* parodies by Tsuruya Nanboku)

南北・合計 = 南北物上演回数合計 (The total number of *Nanboku-mono* productions)

## Appendix II: Tables 1-3

**Table 1: Chronology of Chūshingura: 1710-2011**  
**Kabuki, Bunraku (Jōruri) and Other Theatrical Productions**

年	仮名手本		他・忠臣蔵		忠臣蔵・合計	四谷怪談	三五	他・南北	南北・合計
	歌	文	歌	文					
1710			3 (鬼鹿毛 1; さざれ石 1; 硝後 1)	3 (碁盤 1; 鬼鹿毛 1; 兼好法師 1)	6				
1711-1746			18 (いろは軍記、 他)	2 (金短冊)	20				
1747			1 (大矢数)		1				
1748 (寛延元年)	1	1			2				
* <i>Kanadehon Chūshingura</i> was performed first as a <i>jōruri</i> play, and immediately adapted to kabuki this year.									
1749-1763 (寛延・宝暦)	24	3	8	2	37				
1764 (明和元年)- 1780 (安永 9 年)	29	7	26 (忠臣講釈 13)	17 (忠臣講釈 9)	79				
1781 (天明元年)- 1800 (寛政 12 年)	45	13	50 (忠臣講釈 21)	11 (忠臣講釈 2)	140				
1801 (享和元年)- 1817 (文化 14 年)	48	22	46 (忠臣講釈 18)	24 (忠臣講釈 9)	132				
1818 (文政元年)- 1829 (文政 12 年)	42	13	46 (忠臣講釈 14) *"鉢植え" was staged for the first time in 1828.	12 (忠臣講釈 8; 連理の鉢植え 1)	113	1 (四 谷)	1 (三 五)	1 (菊 宴)	3
* "菊宴" was staged for the first time in 1821. * "四谷怪談" and "盟三五大切" were staged for the first time in 1825.									
1830 (天保元年)- 1843 (天保 14 年)	54	39	58 (忠臣講釈 7)	8 (忠臣講釈 5)	159	3	0	0	3
* In 1837 and 1838, <i>jōruri</i> play "東街道四谷怪談" was performed in Osaka and Kyoto.									
1844 (弘化元年)- 1853 (嘉永 6 年)	62	15	50 (忠臣講釈 5)	2 (忠臣講釈 1)	129	1	0	0	1
1854 (安政元年)- 1867 (慶応 3 年)	73	20	82 (忠臣講釈 9; 鉢植え 5)	5 (忠臣講釈 1; 鉢植え 2)	180	1	0	0	1
<b>Edo: Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>

年	仮名手本		他・忠臣蔵		忠臣蔵・合計	四谷怪談	三五	他・南北	南北・合計
	歌	文	歌	文					
1868(明治元年)- 1879	85	12	131 (忠臣講釈 2; 鉢植え 3; 清水一角 1) * "清水一角" was staged for the first time in 1873.	3 (鉢植え 1)	231	3	0	0	3
1880s	89	7	144 (忠臣講釈 1; 鉢植え 3; 松浦の太鼓 1) * "松浦" was staged for the first time in 1882.	5 (忠臣講釈 1; 鉢植え 1)	245	1	0	0	1
1890s	99	8	168 (忠臣講釈 2; 鉢植え 7)	14 (忠臣講釈 3; 鉢植え 5)	289	1	0	0	1
1900s	177	8	481 (忠臣講釈 5; 鉢植え 2; 土屋; 松浦 1 碁盤 9) * "土屋主税" was staged for the first time in 1907. This play was <i>shin-kabuki</i> , transcribed from "松浦."	6 (鉢植え 1)	672	1	0	0	1
1910 - 1911 (明治 44 年)	49	1	163 (碁盤 4; 土屋 5)	6 (忠臣講釈 1)	219	0	0	0	0
<b>Meiji: Total</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1087</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1656</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

年	仮名手本		他・忠臣蔵		忠臣蔵・合計	四谷怪談	三五	他・南北	南北・合計
	歌	文	歌	文					
1912 (大正元年)- 1919	109	8	500 (碁盤 9; 忠臣講釈 2; 鉢植え 3; 松浦 5; 土屋 18)	17 (忠臣講釈 2; 鉢植え 1)	634	0	0	0	0
1920 - 1925 (大正 14 年)	61	4	345 (碁盤 10; 忠臣講釈 3; 鉢植え 4; 松浦 6; 土屋 8; 不忠臣蔵 2)	14 (忠臣講釈 1; 鉢植え 2)	424	0	0	0	0
<b>Taisho: Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>845</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

年	仮名手本		他・忠臣蔵		忠臣蔵・合計	四谷怪談	三五	他・南北	南北・合計
	歌	文	歌	文					
1926 (昭和元年)- 1929	55	9	230 (碁盤 6; 忠臣講釈 1; 松浦 2; 土屋 10; 赤穂浪士 9 *) * "赤穂浪士" was the stage adaptation of the same titled novel written by Osaragi Jirō. All the nine plays were staged in 1929, the year Osaragi's book was published.	13	307			1(*)	1
1930-1939	79	27	332 (碁盤 12; 忠臣講釈 1; 元禄 17; 松浦 12; 土屋 16; 彌兵衛 1) * "元禄忠臣蔵" was staged for the first time in 1934. * "堀部彌兵衛" was staged for the first time in 1939)	26 (碁盤 1; 忠臣講釈 1)	464	2	0	0	2
1940-1946	46 (*)	13	265 (忠臣講釈 1; 碁盤 6; 元禄 38; 鉢植え 3; 松浦 19; 土屋 8; 彌兵衛 1) * In 1946, only two dance scenes ("花婿" and "嫁入り") were allowed by the Allied Occupation.	12 (忠臣講釈 1)	336	0	0	0	0
<b>Showa until 1946 (昭和 21 年): Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>1107</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>As explained in <i>Note for Tables</i>, the following data are based on different sources with different coverage. The number of <i>Kanadehon</i> performances until 1946 included the plays staged in small playhouses in local areas, whereas the number below shows performances only in Shochiku-affiliated theaters mainly in big cities. For the purpose of comparison, it may be advisable to double the number because there is a big discrepancy between the two sources I referred to, as follows.</p> <p><u>The number of kabuki <i>Kanadehon</i> performances for the period of 1947-1992</u>  Shochiku programs: 132  Ako Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu: 256</p>									
1947-1959	53	0	63 (元禄 19; 鉢植え 2; 松浦 4; 土屋 6)	0	116	12			12

年	仮名手本		他・忠臣蔵		忠臣蔵・合計	四谷怪談	三五	他・南北	南北・合計
	歌	文	歌	文					
1960-1964	10	0	18 (元禄 6; 松浦 1; 土屋 1; 清水 1)	0	28	1			1
* As explained in <i>Note for Tables</i> , the column of "他・忠臣蔵" ( <i>Chūshingura-mono</i> other than <i>Kanadehon</i> ) includes only kabuki plays until 1964. From 1965, this column includes all the genres of the stage adaptation.									
1965-1969	10	2	22 (元禄 7; 土屋 1; 忠臣講釈 1)	1 (増補)	35	4		4	8
1970s	30	6	61 (元禄 17; 碁盤 1; 鉢植え 1; 松浦 7; 土屋 5; をんな 1; 増補 1; 彌兵衛 1; 弥作 1; 女定九郎 1; 茶道 1; 忠箭計 1)	9 (忠臣講釈 2; 碁盤 1; 増補 4; 弥作 2)	106	4	1	10	15
1980s (1989 was the last year of 昭和 and the first year of 平成)	19 *	8	59 (元禄 8; 松浦 5; 土屋 4; 女定九郎 1; 競書手本 1; 十二時 1; 二十四時 1)	3 (碁盤 1; 増補 1; 弥作 1)	90	5 *	1	8 (菊宴 2)	14
* One of them was <i>Chūshingura Yotsuya Kaidan</i> which was performed in 1980. It is included both in <i>Kanadehon</i> and <i>Yotsuya Kaidan</i> .									
1990s	23	9	53 (元禄 4; 松浦 3; 土屋 4; 忠箭計 1; 東下り 1)	8 (忠臣講釈 2; 増補 5; 弥作 1)	93	3	4	21 (菊宴 1)	28
2000s	27 *	12	72 (元禄 12; 鉢植え 1; 松浦 5; 土屋 2; 東下り 1 実録 1; 弥平 1; 清水 1; 妻子別れ 1)	5 (忠臣講釈 1; 増補 3; 弥作 1)	115	6 *	5	26	37
*One of them was <i>Yotsuya Kaidan Chūshingura</i> which was performed in 2003 (The play performed in 1980 was <i>Chūshingura Yotsuya Kaidan</i> ). This play is included both in <i>Kanadehon</i> and <i>Yotsuya Kaidan</i> .									
2010-2011	5	0	8 (松浦 1; 土屋 1)	1 (赤垣)	15	1	2	4	7
<b>1947-2011: Total (昭和 22 年- 平成 23 年)</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>122</b>

**Table2: Theatrical Productions Other Than Kabuki and Bunraku: 1965-2010**(Reference: Nihon Engeki Kyokai, Ed. *Engeki Nenkan 1966-2011*)

\*The size of theaters: L (large) = more than 900 seats; M (medium) = 899-500 seats;

S (small) = less than 499 seats

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
1965	Jan-Feb	L(新歌舞伎座) * 大阪	忠臣蔵聞書・大石内蔵助	
	Nov	L(御園座) * 名古屋	” ”	
	Dec	L(朝日座) * 大阪:1991年に閉場	赤穂浪士	
1966	Dec	L(東宝劇場)	クレージー大忠臣蔵	
		L(新歌舞伎座)	ぜいろく忠臣蔵(現代版忠臣蔵)	
		L(明治座)	討入(新国劇)	
1967	Mar	L(南座)		新篇四谷怪談(大江美智子)
	Dec	L(新宿コマ)	やぶにらみ忠臣蔵	
		L(新歌舞伎座)	お笑い忠臣蔵	
1968	Mar-Apr	L(帝国劇場)	忠臣蔵(帝劇歌舞伎/女優も参加)	
	Aug	L(国立・大劇場)		東海道四谷怪談(俳優座/新劇)
1969	Mar	L(歌舞伎座)	忠臣蔵聞書・大石内蔵助(長谷川一夫)	
	Apr	L(新歌舞伎座)	元禄春夜抄(市川右太衛門)	
	Jul	M(国立・小劇場)		盟三五大切(青年座)
	Sep	L(帝国劇場)		喜劇四谷怪談
	Dec	L(歌舞伎座)	討入前夜・その日の雪(大川橋蔵)	
		L(中座)	忠臣蔵・こぼれ話(松竹新喜劇)	
1970	Jan	S(俳優座劇場)	しんげき忠臣蔵	
	Dec	L(帝国劇場)	おお! 忠臣蔵(帝劇年忘れ公演)	
1971	May	S(四谷公会堂)		東海道四谷怪談(現代人劇場)
	Aug	L(明治座)	忠臣蔵異聞・薄桜記(舟木一夫)	
1972	Feb	L(御園座)	義士外伝・清水一学	
	Apr	L(新橋演舞場)	東おどり・道行旅路の花婿	
	Dec	L(新歌舞伎座)	江戸の淡雪・悲恋毛利小平太(舟木一夫)	
1973	Mar	L(新歌舞伎座)	立花左近(三波春夫)	
	Nov.	L(日本劇場)	堀部安兵衛(水原弘)	
1974	Jan	L(御園座)	立花左近(三波春夫)	
	Jul	L(御園座)	決闘高田馬場(新国劇)	
	Oct	S(西武劇場)		新四谷怪談(西武劇場+青年座)
	Nov.	L(宝塚大劇場)	紅椿雪に咲く“毛利小平太”(宝塚歌劇)	
1975	Sep	L(帝国劇場)	元禄太平記	
	Nov.	S(紀伊国屋ホール)		四谷諧談(芸能座)

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
1976	Jan	L(帝国劇場)	元禄太平記	
	May	S(岩波ホール)		東海道四谷怪談(武智鉄二／岩波ホール演劇シリーズ第2回)
	Jul	S(渋谷ジャンジャン)		東海道四谷怪談(ほぼ歌舞伎の通り)
		L(明治座)		喜劇四谷怪談
	Aug	S(結城人形座)		盟三五大切(結城座)
	Sep	L(御園座)	新雪南部坂(萬屋錦之介)	
	Oct	L(新歌舞伎座)	喧嘩安兵衛(大川橋蔵)	
	Dec	L(新宿コマ)	忠臣蔵(橋幸夫)	
1977	Jun	L(歌舞伎座)	新雪南部坂(萬屋錦之介)	
	Dec	L(新宿コマ劇場)	お笑い忠臣蔵(江利チエミ)	
1978	Sep	M(自由劇場)		民谷伊右衛門の鼠(自由劇場)
	Dec	L(御園座)	快拳! 赤穂浪士(萬屋錦之介)	
		L(中座)	義士迷々伝(松竹新喜劇)	
L(東横劇場)		東海道おらんだ怪談(文学座)		
1979	Jun	L(歌舞伎座)	赤穂浪士(萬屋錦之介)	
	Aug	L(歌舞伎座)	俵星玄蕃(三波春夫)	
	Oct	M(国立・小劇場)		盟三五大切(青年座)
	Dec	L(中座)	こんな忠臣蔵(松竹新喜劇)	
L(帝国劇場)		大石内蔵助・おれの足音(東宝＝前進座提携)		
1980	Jan	L(御園座)	俵星玄蕃(三波春夫)	
	Apr	S(結城人形座)		忠臣蔵～四谷怪談(結城座)
	Aug	L(明治座)	薄桜記(丹下左膳と堀部安兵衛／林与一)	
	Oct	L(南座)	浮世囃おかる勘平(松竹新喜劇)	
	Dec	L(中座)	'' ''	
		L(帝国劇場)	女たちの忠臣蔵	
S(博品館劇場)	爆笑大忠臣蔵(年忘れ浅草大喜劇)			
1981	Jan	L(梅田コマ劇場)	俵星玄蕃(三波春夫)	
		L(新歌舞伎座)	浅野内匠頭(杉良太郎)	
1982	Jan	L(東京宝塚劇場)	大石内蔵助(長谷川一夫)	
	May	S(モリエール)	誠忠義心伝～元禄赤穂殺人事件(空間演技)	
	Dec	L(歌舞伎座)	恋の淡雪～忠臣蔵異聞(大川橋蔵)	
1983	Jan	L(新歌舞伎座)	喧嘩安兵衛(大川橋蔵)	
	Apr	L(御園座)	女たちの忠臣蔵	
1984	Dec	L(帝国劇場)	女たちの忠臣蔵	
1985	Sep	S(ザ・スズナリ) * 東京・下北沢		四谷怪談(美人会議＋加納幸和事務所)
	Dec	L(新歌舞伎座)	四十八人目の男(毛利小平太の話／西郷輝彦)	

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
1986	Apr	L(東京文化会館と大阪フェスティバル・ホール)	ザ・カブキ(演出・振付＝モーリス・ベジャール)	
	Sep-Oct	海外公演	ザ・カブキ(演出・振付＝モーリス・ベジャール)	
	Sep	S(ザ・スズナリ)		東海道四谷怪談(劇団鳥獣戯画)
	Dec	L(中座)	お笑い忠臣蔵(唄啓劇団)	
		L(新宿コマ劇場)	爆笑！忠臣蔵外伝(村田英雄)	
L(御園座)		丁稚忠臣蔵(現代劇／松竹新喜劇)		
1987	Jan	L(新橋演舞場)	喧嘩安兵衛(五木ひろし)	
	Jul	L(名鉄ホール)	お笑い忠臣蔵(唄啓劇団)	
	Sep	全国巡演	ザ・カブキ(演出・振付＝モーリス・ベジャール)	
		S(タイニイ・アリス) * 東京・新宿		いろは四谷怪談(花組芝居)
	Oct	L(梅田コマ劇場)	春秋忠臣蔵(錦秋名作劇場)	
	Dec	L(明治座)	踊る元禄女忠臣蔵(梅沢富美男)	
1988	Jan	L(明治座)	浮さま乱れ舞い(里見浩太郎)	
	Feb-Apr	海外巡演	ザ・カブキ(演出・振付＝モーリス・ベジャール)	
	Mar	L(新歌舞伎座)	喧嘩安兵衛(五木ひろし)	
	Sep-Oct	S(紀伊国屋ホール)	イヌの仇討(作＝井上ひさし／こまつ座)	
	Oct-Dec	M(新神戸オリエンタル劇場)	仮名手本忠臣蔵(演出＝蜷川幸雄／新神戸オリエンタル劇場オープン記念)	
	Dec	L(浅草公会堂)	おかる物語(三浦布美子)	
		S(本多劇場)	赤穂浪士～昆虫になれなかったファーブルの数学的帰納法(作＝野田秀樹)	
1989	Jun	M(大田区民プラザ大ホール)	イヌの仇討(作＝井上ひさし／こまつ座)	
	Jul	L(中座)		愛しやこちの人－新・四谷怪談(脚本＝ちやき克彰)
		S(本多劇場)		BROKEN 四谷怪談(上杉祥三プロデュース・チーム)
	Oct	L(明治座)	大石内蔵助(杉良太郎)	
		M(東京グローブ座)		盟三五大切(劇団青年座創立 35周年記念公演)
	Dec	L(明治座)	年忘れ梅沢の忠臣蔵(梅沢富美男)	
		L(御園座)	快挙！赤穂浪士(萬屋錦之介)	
		S(近鉄小劇場)	忠臣蔵-冬の絵空(劇団そとばこまちプロデュース)	
S(安田生命ホール)		母と子-赤穂浪士(野口企画)		

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
1990	Jan	L(新橋演舞場)	忠臣蔵一花の巻・雪の巻(五木ひろし)	
		L(新歌舞伎座)	大石内蔵助(杉良太郎)	
		全国巡演		盟三五大切(青年座)
	Feb	L(中日劇場)	梅沢の忠臣蔵(梅沢富美男)	
	Jul-Aug	M(サンシャイン劇場)		怖くない四谷怪談(梅沢富美男)
	Aug	S(青年座劇場)		東海道四谷怪談(青年座)
		S(紀伊国屋ホール)	忠臣蔵異聞-薄桜記(舟木一夫)	
	Nov	S(パルコスペース)		いろは四谷怪談(花組芝居・近鉄小劇場提携公演)
	Dec	L(帝国劇場)	雪の華—忠臣蔵いのちの刻—	
L(新宿コマ劇場)		爆笑!大忠臣蔵(12月歌と喜劇の年忘れ公演)		
1991	Jul	L(御園座)	喧嘩安兵衛(五木ひろし)	
	Dec	L(帝国劇場)	仮名手本忠臣蔵 3幕(演出=蜷川幸雄)	
1992	Oct	L(宝塚大劇場)	忠臣蔵(宝塚歌劇)	
	Nov	L(新歌舞伎座)	雪月忠臣蔵(萬屋錦之介)	
	Dec	L(御園座)	珍説忠臣蔵(年忘れ爆笑特別公演)	
1993	Mar	L(東京宝塚劇場)	忠臣蔵(宝塚歌劇)	
	Apr	S(俳優座劇場)	堀部安兵衛(現代劇センター真夏座)	
	May	L(新宿コマ劇場)	堀部安兵衛(細川たかし)	
		M(スペース・ゼロ)		いろは四谷怪談(花組芝居)
	Aug	曹洞宗東長寺		四谷四丁目怪談(演集率3.14)
		M(東京芸術劇場)		新・四谷怪談(松井誠・劇団誠)
	Dec	M(前進座劇場)		盟三五大切(青年座)
		地方公演		“ ”
1994	May	S(近鉄小劇場)*本多劇場および地方公演もあり:全25回		定本いろは四谷怪談(花組芝居)
		S(タイニイ・アリス)	吉良上野介のユウウツ(“アトラクション”プロデュース)	
	Jun	L(御園座)	惜春の別れ(西郷輝彦)	
	Jul	S(青山円形劇場)	阿呆浪士(ラッパ屋)	
		新宿・花園神社境内		贋・四谷怪談(はみだし劇場/翻案=立松和平)
	Dec	L(劇場飛天)	女たちの忠臣蔵	
S(東京芸術劇場小ホール)		赤穂浪士とピストル(獅子座)		

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
1995	Jan	M(水戸芸術館 ACM 劇場)	赤穂浪士(作・演出=長谷川裕久)	
	Jun	M(前進座劇場)	ちうしんぐら〜赤穂浪士伝承〜(玉川大学演劇公演)	
	Jul	S(横浜テアトル・フオンテ)		ネオ・グランギニョルⅢ 四谷怪談・解剖室(第三エロチカ)
	Sep	M(銀座セゾン劇場)		四谷怪談(出演=平幹二郎)
		M(北区滝野川会館)	つか版 北区お笑い忠臣蔵(北区つかこうへい劇団)	
	Nov	M(パナソニック・グロープ座)	赤穂浪士(作・演出=長谷川裕久/SCOT)	
	Dec	L(明治座)	珍説 大忠臣蔵(年忘れ爆笑公演)	
		M(新宿スペース・ゼロ)	忠臣蔵ブートレグ(劇団新感線) *大阪公演もあり	
1996	Mar	M(サンシャイン劇場)	桜吹雪喧嘩安兵衛(舟木一夫)	
	Aug	S(新宿パンブルムス)	真夏の忠臣蔵(かり屋事務所)	
	Nov	L(明治座)	雪の夢 華の夢—大石内蔵助(高橋英樹)	
		L(御園座)	大石内蔵助(里見浩太郎)	
L(帝国劇場)		女たちの忠臣蔵		
1997	May	L(東京文化会館)	オペラ忠臣蔵(三枝成彰)	
	Oct	L(新橋演舞場)	大石内蔵助〜忠臣蔵備忘録〜(里見浩太郎)	
		S(シアター・サンモール)	イヌの仇討(作=井上ひさし/シアトリカル・ベース・ワンスモア)	
	Dec	L(帝国劇場)	花影の花〜大石内蔵助の妻	
1998	Apr	M(彩の国さいたま芸術劇場・大)		盟三五大切(青年座) *世田谷パブリック・シアター(M)でも公演あり
		S(シアター・トップス)	阿呆浪士(出演=国本武春/ラッパ屋) *国本武春は新感覚の浪曲師。彼の創作「ザ・忠臣蔵」は浪曲とロック音楽を組み合わせた作品	
	Aug	M(アーツフィア/東京天王洲)		笑う伊右衛門(春風亭小朝の四谷怪談)
	Dec	S(シアターゆたか)	つか版忠臣蔵(Breath Taking Label)	
1999	May	L(明治座)	忠臣蔵症候群「仇討でござる」(喜劇)	
		清水港イベント広場	忠臣蔵(作=平田オリザ、出演=加納幸和/シアター・オリムピックス参加)	
	Jun	L(南座)	かわら版!「忠臣蔵」	
		S(中野区野方 WIZ ホール)		四谷怪談 1999(池田塾)
	Jul	S(紀伊国屋サザン・シアター)		新版四谷怪談(劇団青年座)
	Aug	L(新橋演舞場)	忠臣蔵異聞-薄桜記(舟木一夫)	
		S(博品館劇場)	元禄仇討事情〜それぞれの忠臣蔵〜(ザ・テヨンマゲ軍団)	
		S(岩波ホール)		四谷怪談(白石加代子「百物語」シリーズ)
	Oct	L(明治座)	忠臣蔵—大石内蔵助—(北大路欣也)	

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
1999	Oct-Nov	シアターアプル (M)、近鉄小劇場 (S)		大正四谷怪談(藤原竜也)
	Nov	L(御園座)	忠臣蔵—大石内蔵助— (北大路欣也)	
		L(劇場飛天)	大石内蔵助(里見浩太朗)	
	Dec	L(新宿コマ劇場)	弥次喜多忠臣蔵道中記(喜劇)	
M(かめありリリオホール)			東海道四谷怪談(トム・プロジェクト・プロデュース): 現代歌舞伎シリーズ	
2000	Jan	L(南座)	「おれの足音」—大石内蔵助(松竹・前進座提携公演)	
	Apr	L(大阪松竹座)	忠臣蔵(上岡龍太郎引退記念)	
	May	L(愛知県芸術劇場大ホール)	オペラ忠臣蔵(三枝成彰)	
		M(江東区文化センター・ホール)		東海道四谷怪談(トム・プロジェクト・プロデュース): 現代歌舞伎シリーズ
	Jul	L(御園座)	喧嘩安兵衛(にしきのあきら)	
	Nov	M(前進座劇場)	「おれの足音」—大石内蔵助(松竹・前進座提携公演)	
		M(山形県新庄市民文化会館大ホール)		東北幻野版/四谷怪談「この黒髪までも」(東北幻野)
	Dec	L(名鉄ホール)	大笑い! 忠臣蔵迷々伝(梅沢富美男)	
		M(東京グローブ座)	忠臣蔵(碓山菜葉 y エラン・ヴィタル フラメンコ公演)	
		S(恵比寿エコー劇場)	軽き者の儀—赤穂第四十七士 (一人舞台吾一座)	
2001	May	S(下北沢「劇」小劇場)		パラノイア版鶴屋南北「四谷奇譚」(PARANOIA AGE)
	Jun	L(大阪松竹座)	おれの足音—大石内蔵助(前進座)	
	Oct	S(両国シアターγ)	Outsiders 忠臣蔵 2001(劇団平成元年)	
	Dec	M(シアターコクーン)		四谷怪談(演出=蜷川幸雄)
2002	Jan	M(世田谷パブリック・シアター)	イヌの仇討(劇団仙台 2001 シアター・ムーブメント・仙台VI)	
		M(シアターコクーン)		四谷怪談(演出=蜷川幸雄)
		L(新国立劇場)	オペラ忠臣蔵(三枝成彰)	
	May	M(世田谷パブリック・シアター)	オペラ「イヌの仇討あるいは吉良の決断」(オペラシアターこんにゃく座)	
	Jun	L(新歌舞伎座)	忠臣蔵異聞-薄桜記(舟木一夫)	
	Sep	S(築地本願寺内ブディストホール)		新版・四谷怪談～左眼の恋～(スパークヒップス・プロデュース・KOtoDAMA 企画後援)
	Nov	S(劇団俳優座5F 稽古場)	不忠臣蔵(劇団俳優座)	
	Dec	S(シアター／トップス)	ミラクル忠臣蔵(うどんに七味武春一味/出演=国本武春、他)	
		S(ベニサン・ピット)		盟三五大切(流山児歌舞伎)
M(三越劇場)			宅悦—雑司ヶ谷四家怪談(劇団民芸提携公演)	

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
2003	Mar	S(こまばアゴラ劇場)	忠臣蔵 OL 編(作・演出＝平田オリザ／青年団プロジェクト)	
	May	L(明治座)	新版・忠臣蔵外伝「喧嘩安兵衛」 (五木ひろし)	
	Jun	L(明治座)	江戸っ娘。忠臣蔵(モーニング娘。主演ミュージカル)	
		S(博品館劇場)	軽き者の儀—赤穂第四十七士 (NPO 日本朗読文化協会設立記念公演)	
	Jul	S(こまばアゴラ劇場)	音楽的時代劇「忠臣蔵」(あなざわーくす Vol4)	
	Sep	S(博品館劇場)	元禄仇討ち裏事情(WAKI組 ザ・チョンマゲ軍団)	
	Nov	M(新神戸オリエンタル劇場)	忠臣蔵コラボレーション 生きてこそ春に花～大石内蔵助とJ.S.パツハ～(New OSK 日本歌劇団 特別公演)	
	Dec	S(下北沢「劇」小劇場)	元禄忠臣蔵シリーズ 第2弾 「歌舞伎草子 ひとり忠臣蔵」(劇団め組)	
2004	May	S(博品館劇場) & M(シアター・ドラマシティ)		いろは四谷怪談(花組芝居)
	Jun	S(深川江戸資料館小劇場)		仮名手本四谷怪談(徒花図鑑)
	Jul	S(東京国立博物館表慶館)		四谷怪談 (Ort-d.d:シアターカンパニー・オルト・ディー・ディー)
		L(明治座)	大笑い! 大忠臣蔵(梅沢富美男)	
	Aug	S(両国シアターχ)		へいせいの IEMON(シアターχ)
2005	Jan	S(ベニサン・ピット)		盟三五大切(流山児歌舞伎)
	Jun	L(御園座)	春の雪～南部坂後日より～(五木ひろし)	
		S(サイスタジオコモネ A スタジオ)	忠臣蔵(作＝平田オリザ／八十八の会 文学座有志による自主企画)	
	Aug	S(両国シアターχ)		四谷怪談 YOTSUYA-KAIDAN (日独共同創造演劇プロジェクト)
	Dec	L(御園座)	おかしなおかしな清・富美男の「お笑い! 忠臣蔵」	
S(アイピット目白)			青春四谷怪談(DJGAGOS)	
2006	Jan	M(兵庫県立芸術文化センター中ホール)	KANADEHON 忠臣蔵(演出＝加納幸和／兵庫県立ピッコロ劇団)	
	Mar	S(パルコ劇場)	決闘! 高田馬場(作・演出＝三谷幸喜・PARCO 歌舞伎)	
	May	S(こまばアゴラ劇場)	忠臣蔵(作＝平田オリザ／文学座+青年団 自主企画交流シリーズ)	
	Jul	S(ネオンホール) *長野市	忠臣蔵デパート編(作＝平田オリザ／演劇ユニット neuf(ナフ))	
	Aug	L(明治座)		新・四谷怪談(松井誠)
	Sep	L(明治座)	女たちの忠臣蔵	
		S(博品館劇場)	忠臣蔵～水戸黄門外伝・元禄仇討ち裏事情～(WAKI組ザ・チョンマゲ軍団)	
	Oct	M(三越劇場)	忠臣蔵外伝 その前夜(劇団若獅子) *劇団若獅子は、1987(昭和62)年の新国劇解散の後、新国劇精神の継承を目的に笠原章が中心になって結成した劇団。	

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
2006	Nov	L(名鉄ホール)	女たちの忠臣蔵	
	Dec	S(笹塚ファクトリー)	ジーザスクライスト・サムライスター 殿中でござる (Project Jesus Vol.2)	
2007	Jan	L(御園座)	赤穂の寒桜～大石りくの半生(川中美幸)	
	Mar	L(明治座)	忠臣蔵～いのち燃ゆるとき(西郷輝彦・松平健)	
		L(中日劇場)	快笑! 喧嘩安兵衛(舟木一夫)	
2007	Jul	S(中野区ウェストエンド・スタジオ)		ヤマト版東海道四谷怪談(笑劇ヤマト魂) * 歌舞伎エンターテイメント&本歌取りファンタジーの劇団
	Aug	S(こまばアゴラ劇場)		yotsuya-kaidan —『東海道四谷怪談』より「雑司ヶ谷四ッ谷町浪宅の場」「同伊藤喜兵衛門内の場」— (木ノ下歌舞伎)
		S(新宿ゴールデン街劇場)		何んにも伊右衛門門(劇団阿佐ヶ谷南南京小僧)
	Sep	S(俳優座劇場)		鏡と涙と伊右衛門と—新・四谷怪談(グループ虎+現代制作舎)
	Nov	M(世田谷パブリックシアター)	KANADEHON 忠臣蔵(花組芝居)	
	Dec	S(新宿ゴールデン街劇場)	赤穂浪士にも三分の魂(劇団阿佐ヶ谷南南京小僧)	
	2008	Apr	S(ACOA アトリエ) * 栃木県那須市	
Jul		S(新宿SPACE107)		盟壻壕大切(劇団東京ミルクホール) * タイトル借用のみ。ストーリーは「盟三五大切」とは無関係
Sep		M(かめありリリオホール)	かな手本忠臣蔵(歌舞伎ルネサンス)	
Oct		S(赤坂RED/THEATER)		東海道四谷怪談 (JAM SESSION 08)
2009	Jun	L(明治座)	忠臣蔵迷々伝 大笑い宝の入り婿(梅沢富美男)	
		S(駅前劇場) * 東京下北沢		盟三五大切(花組ヌーベル)
		S(こまばアゴラ劇場)		大正四谷怪談(劇団 X 旗揚げ公演)
	Sep	L(浅草公会堂) & M(かめありリリオホール)	かな手本忠臣蔵(歌舞伎ルネサンス)	
		S(築地本願寺内ブディストホール)		『なぞらえ屋～奇巡四谷怪談～』四谷於岩稲荷田宮神社 勸進奉納舞台(La・Moon)
		S(池袋小劇場)	逆手本忠臣蔵(劇団バックスの祭) * 大石内蔵助を、まるで手本にならない最悪のダメ人間として描いた作品。	
Dec	L(明治座)	最後の忠臣蔵(中村梅雀)		

Year	Month	The size of theaters	Chūshingura-mono	Nanboku-mono
2010	Feb	L(オーチャード・ホール)	オペラ忠臣蔵(三枝成彰)	
	Apr	S(こまばアゴラ劇場)		武蔵小金井四谷怪談(青年団リンク 口語で古典)
	May	S(厚木市文化会館小ホール)& S(座・高円寺)	神崎与五郎東下り(作・演出=横内謙介、出演=市川笑也/劇団扉座)	
	Jun	S(ザ・スズナリ)、その他		お岩幽霊 ぶゑのすあいれす(演出=流山児祥/日本劇団協会創作劇奨励公演) * 東海道四谷怪談の劇世界にインスパイアされた青春ドラマ
	Aug	S(シアターラム) * 世田谷パブリック・シアター小劇場		死んでみたら死ぬのもなかなか 四谷怪談—恨(ハン)— (作=韓泰淑(ハン・テスク): 鶴屋南北「四谷怪談」より/演劇集団円)
	Sep	L(御園座)	忠臣蔵(松平健)	
	Oct	L(中日劇場)	最後の忠臣蔵(中村梅雀)	
		S(紀伊国屋サザン・シアター)		—裏版「四谷怪談」—「どろんどろん」(民藝)
	Nov	M(日本橋三井ホール)	かな手本忠臣蔵(フジテレビアナウンサー・演劇倶楽部『座』朗読 Legend (伝説) II)	
Dec	S(下北沢「劇」小劇場)	S.W.A.T!大忠臣蔵(劇団 S.W.A.T!)		

**Table 3: Chronology of Films and TV Programs 1907-2010**References:

- \* Akō Shi-Shi Hensanshitsu, ed. *Chūshingura Vol.5*. Hyōgo-ken Akō-Shi, 1993 print.
- \* Kinema Junpōsha, ed. *Rinji Zōkan: Chūshingura-Eizō no Sekai (臨時増刊: 忠臣蔵映像の世界)*. Tokyo: Kinema Junpōsha, 1994 Print.
- \* The National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan, ed. *Nihon Minkan Hōsō Nenkan 1990-2010*. Tokyo: Kōken Shuppan, 1990-2010 Prit.
- \* Nomura Yōichi. *Jitsuroku Terebi Jidaigeki-shi (実録テレビ時代劇史)*. Tokyo: Tokyo Shinbun Shuppanyoku, 1999 Print.

D=Dramas; O=Others

Year	Films	TV Shows		Main Titles
	Total	Total		
		D	O	
1907-1909	5			All films during the 3 years were documentary. 忠臣蔵五段目(仁左衛門)(1907: Documentary. The first film in Japan.)
1910-1928	96			Orthodox stories: the theme was loyalty. 実録忠臣蔵(尾上松之助)(1910: The first story film in Japan)
1929-1931	13			赤穂浪士 (1929: The first film adaptation of <i>Akō Rōshi</i> written by Osaragi Jirō.)
1932-1940	44			忠臣蔵 (1932: Director: Kinugawa Teinosuke) (smash hit)
1941-1942	5			元禄忠臣蔵・前篇 and 後篇 (1941 & 1942 Dir: Mizoguchi Kenji)
1943-1952	9			No film was made between 1945 and 1950. Six of them were made in 1952.
1953	2	1	4	とんだ忠臣蔵 (TV drama: TV broadcasting started in Japan in 1953.)
1954-1959	16	5	80	忠臣蔵 (1954 film: Dir. Ōsone Tatsuo. Perf. 松本幸四郎. The title <i>Chūshingura</i> was used for the first time after THE SECOND WORLD WAR. 大忠臣蔵 (1957 film: Dir. Ōsone Tatsuo. Perf. 市川猿之助. Combination of Kanadehon and Jitsuroku-mono.) 赤穂浪士 (1956 film: Dir. Matsuda Sadatsugu. Perf. 市川右太衛門. The first <i>Chūshingura</i> film in color.) 薄桜記 (1959 film: Perf. 市川雷蔵. Based on the novel by Gomi Yasusuke. Also adapted to stages and TV shows several times) 忠臣蔵の人々 ('56-'57 TV series consisting of 60 episodes: 市川段四郎)
1960-1964	9	24	109	サラリーマン忠臣蔵 (1960 film: Perf. 森繁久弥) 忠臣蔵 (1962 film: Dir. Inagaki Hiroshi. Perf. 松本幸四郎. One of the most popular <i>Chūshingura</i> films overseas) わんわん忠臣蔵 (1963 animation film. Broadcast several times on TV) NHK Taiga (大河) drama 「赤穂浪士」(Perf. 長谷川一夫. Recorded the viewer rating of 53% in the episode of the attack on Kira's mansion)
1965-1969	2	16	115	忍法忠臣蔵 (1965 film: Perf. 丹波哲郎) 秘剣破り (1969 film: Perf. 松方弘樹. Remake of "薄桜記" made in 1959) ある日の大石内蔵助(1968 TV drama: Perf. 芦田伸介) 日本剣客伝「堀部安兵衛」 (1968 TV drama: Perf. 水原弘)

Year	Films	TV Shows		Main Titles
	Total	Total		
		D	O	
1970-1974	0	11	120	大忠臣蔵(1971 TV drama: Perf. 三船敏郎) 編笠十兵衛 (1974 TV drama: Perf. 高橋英樹)
1975-1979	1	8	132	赤穂城断絶 (1978 film: Dir. Fukasaku Kinji. Perf. 萬屋錦之介) NHK Taiga Drama「元禄太平記」(1975: Perf. 江守徹・石坂浩二) 女たちの忠臣蔵(1979 TV drama: Perf. 池内淳子. Recorded the viewer rating of 42.6%. This drama was rebroadcast several times, and also adapted into the stage.)
1980-1984	0	12	123	恋人たちの忠臣蔵(1981 TV drama: Perf. 中野良子・中村梅之助) NHK Taiga drama「峠の群像」(1982: Perf. 緒方拳) つか版「忠臣蔵」(1982 TV drama: Perf. 風間杜夫. Unorthodox <i>Chūshingura</i> .) くノ一忠臣蔵 (1983 TV drama: Perf. 中村敦夫. <i>Ninja-mono</i> .)
1985-1989	1	17	164	ベルリン忠臣蔵 (1985 film: Made in West Germany) 年末時代劇スペシャル「忠臣蔵」(1985 TV drama: Perf. 里見浩太朗. The first special year-end long-hour <i>Chūshingura</i> drama) 忠臣蔵・女たち・愛(1987 TV drama. Written by Hashida Sugako, the playwright of <i>女たちの忠臣蔵</i> . Perf. 勝新太郎・杉村春子) 12時間超ワイドドラマ「大忠臣蔵」(1989 TV drama of 12-hour long: Perf. 松本幸四郎)
(As explained in the Note for Tables 1-3, <i>Chūshingura Vol.5</i> include the data only until 1992. I could not find any other reference with the comprehensive record of TV programs other than dramas. For this reason, the following table shows only the number of TV dramas.				
1990-1994	2	10		四十七人の刺客 (1994 film. Dir. Ichikawa Kon. Perf. 高倉健) 忠臣蔵外伝四谷怪談 (1994 film: Dir. Fukasaku Kinji. Perf. 佐藤浩市. The first docking of <i>Chūshingura</i> and <i>Yotsuya Kaidan</i> in Japanese film history) 忠臣蔵(1990 TV drama: Perf. ビートたけし. Unorthodox <i>Chūshingura</i> .) 大石内蔵助・冬の決戦 (1991 TV drama: Perf. 平幹二郎. The first TV drama with the title "Ōishi Kuranosuke.") 年末時代劇スペシャル「忠臣蔵・風の巻雲の巻」(1991 TV drama: Perf. 仲代達也. Year-end special drama.) 忠臣蔵外伝・薄桜記 (1991 TV drama: Perf. 杉良太郎)
1995-1999	0	4		忠臣蔵(1996 orthodox TV drama: Perf. 北大路欣也) 1999 NHK Taiga drama「元禄繚乱」(Perf. 中村勘九郎) 12時間超ワイドドラマ「赤穂浪士」 (1999 12-hour long TV drama: Perf. 松方弘樹)
2000-2004	1	5		世にも奇妙な物語 映画の特別編「携帯忠臣蔵」(2000 film: One of the four episodes of an omnibus film. Ōishi was depicted as an indecisive man.) 忠臣蔵 1/47 (2001 TV drama: Perf. 木村拓哉) 忠臣蔵～決断の時(2003 orthodox TV drama. Perf. 中村吉衛門) 月曜時代劇「忠臣蔵」(2004 TV drama: Perf. 松平健) 徳川綱吉 イヌと呼ばれた男(2004 TV drama: Perf. 草薙剛. The protagonist is Shogun Tsunayoshi.) 最後の忠臣蔵(2004 TV drama: Perf. 上川 隆也・香川照之. The protagonists are two defectors.)
2005-2010	1	3		最後の忠臣蔵(2010 film: TV drama: Perf. 役所広司・佐藤浩市. The same story as the 2004 TV drama.) 忠臣蔵 瑤泉院の陰謀 (2007 TV drama: Perf. 稲森いずみ) 忠臣蔵～その男、大石内蔵助 (2010 orthodox TV drama: Perf. 田村正和・西田敏行)

### Appendix III: The Akō Incident in Textbooks after THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

**Table 4: The Inclusion of the Akō Incident in Textbooks: 1951-2010**

Years	Yamakawa Shuppansha		Jikkyō Shuppan		Shimizu Shoin		Sanseido	
	The inclusion of the Akō Incident		The inclusion of the Akō Incident		The inclusion of the Akō Incident		The inclusion of the Akō Incident	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1951-1955	2	1	N/A		0	2	N/A	
1956-1960	4	3	0	2	2	0	0	4
1961-1970	1	5	0	2	1	2	0	5
1971-1979	1	5	0	4	0	3	0	4
1980-1991	4	12	0	7	0	3	0	11
1992-2001	6	6	1	3	2	3	0	5
2002-2010	2	8	4	1	0	4	1	3

\*Textbooks are compiled in accordance with the curriculum guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

The guidelines are not updated every year. This means that the same guidelines are applied until the next update. So, the years between the updates are grouped as one period in this table. The number of textbooks published during these periods varies from publisher to publisher.

\*The guidelines have been updated in the following years:

1951; 1956; 1961; 1971; 1980; 1992; 2002; 2011

\*All the textbooks are housed in Japan Textbook Research Center in Tokyo.

Because of the time limitation, I could not make more comprehensive research; however, this table shows the general trend as all the four publishers in this table are major publishing companies in Japan, and many schools use their textbooks.