The Media and Politics of Japanese Popular History: The Case of the Akō Gishi

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All cultures, from ancient to contemporary, retell tales of heroes of the past, over and over again. Modern Japan seems especially inundated with this kind of popular history, as such stock characters as Yoshitsune, Hideyoshi, Musashi, and Ryōma are endlessly recycled in plays, films, TV specials, and historical novels. How did this pattern come to pass? Why have certain stories persisted and flourished so much longer than others? This essay examines the single case of the 47 Rōnin—known more widely in Japanese as the "Gishi" 義士 ('Righteous Samurai') and still more broadly as "Chūshingura" 忠臣蔵 (after the kabuki tradition)—in an effort to probe the historical dynamics of the way in which certain stories have thrived, while others have fallen by the way. The answers are not simple, and I wish here to pursue one particular theme, of the way in which the historical evolution of the changing media of communication has worked in concert with politics to enable certain types of stories to achieve special preeminence. "Historiography" by its very etymology privileges written texts, but a true historiography of popular history forces us to broaden our range to embrace the performing arts and particularly their modern perpetuation in film and television.

Satō Tadao's Concept of "*sakuhingun*"

The film critic Satō Tadao has provided a useful notion for looking at these peculiarly powerful constellations of stories, which he refers to as *sakuhingun* 作品群, a "collection of works" but perhaps better conceived of as a "story complex" constituted by many individual works in multiple genres and media that remain united under a core story with branching subplots. Most are unified by a main character or in some cases (notably that of Chūshingura) a group of characters. Satō enumerates ten representative *sakuhingun*:[1]

1) Minamoto Yoshitsune 源義経 (1159-89)
2) The Soga Brothers 曽我兄弟 (1172/74-93)
3) Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536-98)
4) Miyamoto Musashi 宮本武蔵 (1584-1645)
5) The "Ten Brave Heroes" (Jūyūshi 十勇士) of Sanada Yukimura 真田幸村 (1567-1615)
6) Mito Kōmon 水戸黄門 [Tokugawa Mitsukuni 徳川光圀] (1628-1700)
7) Akō Gishi 赤穂義士 ["Chūshingura"] (1701-03)
8) The Shinsengumi 新撰組 (1863-68)
9) Sakamoto Ryōma 坂本竜馬 (1835-67)
10) Shimizu Jirōchō 清水次郎長 (1820-93)

Many other candidates can be found, but these particular examples are distinguished by their staying power over a long period of time. Satō's list is probably biased to *sakuhingun* promi-

nent in film, his own area of expertise, but film has in fact been central to the perpetuation of most *sakuhingun* in the twentieth century.

Accepting the *sakuhingun* on Satō's list as the most celebrated and enduring, three elementary observations are in order. First, all are based on well-documented historical figures whose lives turned gradually into legend, a process that could take many years but that often began very soon after their deaths. This did not preclude the later creation of entirely fictional characters within the larger *sakuhingun*, a process that in fact became a standard pattern; it is exemplified by such figures in the "Gishiden" 義士伝 (Lives of the Gishi) storytelling tradition as Murakami Kiken 村上喜剣 (a Satsuma samurai who berated the league leader Ōishi Kuranosuke 大石内蔵助 for his dissipation and committed suicide out of remorse when he learned of the success of the revenge) or Tawaraboshi Genba 俵星玄蕃 (a swordsman who assisted the cause in Edo).[2] Second, all were samurai except for Shimizu Jirōchō, a local boss with samurai-like pretensions. Commoners appear prominently in all fully developed versions of each *sakuhingun*, as an obvious way of enhancing the popular appeal, but the originary protagonists were almost always professional warriors.

Third, the distribution by era of the historical figures reveals a striking clustering in the three great eras of political turmoil and transition in Japanese history: the Genpei War in the late twelfth century (and its political aftermath in the early thirteenth century under the Hōjō family), the period of warfare and subsequent unification from the late sixteenth into the early seventeenth century, and the age of the Meiji Restoration in the nineteenth century. These are the pivotal eras of transition between each of the four conventional epochs of Japanese history: ancient (*kodai* 古代), medieval (*chūsei* 中世), early-modern (*kinsei* 近世), and modern (*kindai* 近代). This is scarcely surprising, but it does serve to remind us that in the popular imagination, most of Japanese history is compressed into three eras of intense military and political conflict, with a cumulative span of scarcely more than one century. The two exceptions on Satō's list are Mito Kōmon and Chūshingura, both derived from events of the Genroku period (1688-1704).

But why, out of the countless samurai stories of the past, did only a small number evolve into an extensive and durable *sakuhingun*? Satō offers three broad observations. First, he notes that most *sakuhingun* have a strong potential for expansion into a large number of different characters, either because the protagonists were multiple to begin with, or because the protagonists themselves traveled widely, meeting many new and interesting people as they moved about the country. Some, like the Akō Gishi and the Shinsengumi, are of their essence stories about relatively large groups, and the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* in particular mushroomed within the *kōdan* 講談 storytelling tradition through the device of the *meimeiden* 銘々伝 (separate tales for each of the forty-seven avengers) and the *gaiden* 外伝 (stories about those who assisted the rōnin, mostly family members, servants, and sympathizers). Travel is a less conspicuous motif of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun*, although Satō observes that many of the rōnin were strangers to the city of Edo, which itself became the site of new adventures in unfamiliar territory. The classic example of a travel-based story-cycle is that of Mito Kōmon, a feudal lord who wanders about the country in disguise to observe conditions in the provinces.

Another revealing commonality of the greatest of the *sakuhingun*, according to Satō, is that they typically deal with historical figures who died *higō no shi* 非業の死, "deaths not in accord with karma," what might be called "angry" or "vengeful" deaths, subdued by their enemies with their hatreds and burning ambitions unquenched. Some fit the characterization of what Ivan Morris called "noble failures," losers who engender popular sympathy precisely for their valiant efforts, a mentality that has come to be known as *hōgan biiki* 判官贔屓, favor for the underdog, an explicit reference to the prototypical case of Yoshitsune (who held the post of *hōgan*).[3] Others explicitly sought revenge against an enemy, of which the classic example is the Soga Brothers, who took revenge on their father's killer but themselves perished in the process.[4]

The spirits of those who die such deaths become "angry ghosts" (*onryō* 怨霊, *arahito-gami* 現人神), with the power to bring on sickness or natural disaster unless placated by worship and offerings, which can also become a way of drawing on their special power to enhance one's personal fortune. This deep-rooted belief in angry ghosts (*onryō shinkō*) has promoted, according to Satō, the retelling of the stories of such vengeful heroes as an amuletic and auspicious performance, seen most clearly in the convention that was established in 1709 in all the Edo kabuki theaters of performing a Soga play as a celebration of the New Year.[5]

In looking at each separate case, Satō admits that some of the major *sakuhingun* fit the "angry spirit" pattern better than others. The cases of Miyamoto Musashi and Mito Kōmon, for example, do not fit at all, but he finds a way to make most of the others conform to the pattern. Here our interest is Chūshingura, for which the argument seems at least partly suited. I will return to this issue later, and here only note that the historical Akō avengers were driven by a perceived need to carry through on the unfulfilled wrath of their own master against Kira Yoshinaka 吉良義央, and that although they succeeded in their goal, they sacrificed their own lives in the process—and, especially in later legends, the lives of various family members as well. The Gishi also came to be worshipped incessantly at their graves at Sengakuji 泉岳寺 in Edo, surely as a way of taking on power and fortune by appeasing the spirits of those who died by an act of vengeance.[6]

The final characteristic that Satō saw as conducive to the formation of major *sakuhingun* was an "integration of politics with the lives of the people,"[7] by which he appears to mean that while the heroes mingle with the people in their day-to-day activities, their actions ultimately have wider political implications. In the pattern of the "noble failures," the protagonists are often those who challenge the dominant political powers and die in the process, as with Yoshitsune's defiance of his half-brother Yoritomo 頼朝, or Sanada Yukimura's support of Toyotomi Hideyori 秀頼 in opposition to the Tokugawa regime. Satō suggests that the underlying sentiment is less one of political opposition to established authority than the religious conviction of the need to appease the powerful spirits of the vanquished. Whatever the precise mix, it is revealing that the heroes of popular history include both those who played an important role on the national political stage, as well as those who in the end were crushed by those in power. In tracing the history of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun*, we will see that the broader political context has always been crucial to its evolution, in ways that apply to other *sakuhingun* as well.

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The "Media Complex" as a Complement of *Sakuhingun*

Satō Tadao's explanation of the common features of leading *sakuhingun* is suggestive, but fails to take into account the historical evolution of *sakuhingun* in general. To provide this essential historical dimension, I offer a parallel notion of "media complex" (in Japanese, *media-gun* メディア群), the distinctive mix of media by which people in any given historical era learn of things beyond their own immediate community. These "media complexes" have been structured both by available technologies of communication and by the political determinants of what kinds of stories are told, either through negative prohibition or positive promotion. As a broad working model, I would posit four successive historical media complexes that vary both by media technology and political environment.

1) ***Medieval***. The medieval *sakuhingun* was predominantly an oral and performance culture, centered primarily on theater (especially noh) and on itinerant storytellers, further supported by a small but growing cottage industry of manuscript reproduction. Barbara Ruch has argued that the stories which emerged in the Muromachi period came to constitute a "national literature" for Japan, including two that Satō classifies as *sakuhingun*, those of Yoshitsune and the Soga Brothers. These stories were transmitted primarily by itinerant minstrels ("jongleurs" in Ruch's terminology), whose mission was initially religious but whose performances came increasingly to take on the quality of secular entertainment. Some were blind, as many were women as men, and most performed to musical accompaniment, typically the lute (*biwa*). The worldview of these tales remained strongly Buddhist, despite the emerging demand of urban audiences for more secular stories, and storytelling itself was rooted in the power of the voice to invoke the magical efficacy of the gods. As Ruch emphasizes, this was not an oral tradition apart from written texts, but rather a "vocal literature" that often relied on the manuscript texts that came to be reproduced in quantity with hand-painted illustrations, so that even before the spread of print in the seventeenth century, "the book had become a familiar part of Japanese life."[8]

2) ***Tokugawa***. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the first century of Tokugawa rule, a radically new media complex emerged with the explosive growth of printed books and the emergence of a sophisticated urban commercial theater. The growing restrictions on print and stage by the regime, however, not only enabled but actually encouraged the further evolution of a robust oral story-telling tradition, expanding in mode from itinerant performers to increasing numbers of numerous small-theater (*yose* 寄席) performance spaces by the end of the Tokugawa period, and in content from religious to secular and especially historical tales. At the same time, a thriving market emerged in manuscript texts for rental reading through the *kashihon'ya* 貸本屋 book-lenders, a distinctive and crucial institution in perpetuating and promoting the *sakuhingun*. This dual structure of print and urban theater on the one hand, and oral storytelling and manuscript reading on the other, would be critical to the growth of Chūshingura in the two wholly different registers of the theatrical tradition of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* on the one hand, and the oral / manuscript lineage of Gishiden on the other.

3) **Meiji**. The new media complex of the Meiji period was of a transitional nature, enabled less by any change in the media technologies than by the radical change in the political environment of public expression, which remained rooted in the media of print, theater, and oral storytelling. After the Meiji Restoration, the liberation of Tokugawa political restrictions opened the possibility of the conversion of the oral *kōdan* tradition into print, a process that proceeded quickly after the introduction of shorthand as an easy way to get speech into text. At the same time, the conversion of printing from woodblock to moveable type with power presses greatly extended the range and affordability of printed books. The technological changes here were more gradual than radical, but they had a profound effect on the ways in which historical tales were communicated to ordinary Japanese.

4) **Modern**. The decisive leap in media technologies came from late Meiji into Taisho (1910s through 1920s), with the rapid spread of phonographs and movies, both of which would prove critical in the diffusion of the Gishiden. The appearance of the 47 Rōnin in television from the 1950s was simply a logical extension of the progressive evolution from *kōdan* to *naniwabushi* and on to film and television. The critical intervention into this linear progression was the emergence of the modern historical novel in the 1920s, which was both an evolution and a break from *kōdan*, and ultimately a decisive influence on the evolution of film and television from the late 1920s on until the present.

This succession of media complexes structured the development of all of the *sakuhingun*, each of which at the same time was affected by a variety of other circumstances as well, such as the inherent quality of the tale and of the way in which individual authors worked to develop it in innovative and expansive ways. The following analysis of the case of Chūshingura shows how this process worked for what became the greatest of all the *sakuhingun*.

The Formation of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* under Tokugawa Rule

During the century of Tokugawa rule that had elapsed by the time of the Akō incident of 1701-03, the environments of storytelling were transformed, both in the available media and in the political controls to which they were now subjected. First and foremost, woodblock printing became commercially viable by the 1620s, and over the following decades, all of the key texts of military tales that had previously circulated only in manuscript were now made widely available in print, in multiple editions.[9] The *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (12 vols., 11 editions 1621-1686) and *Gikeiki* 義経記 (8 vols., 8 editions 1633-1697) provided the basic data for the Yoshitsune tales, the *Soga monogatari* 曽我物語 (12 vols., 6 editions 1626-1692) for the revenge of the Soga Brothers, and the *Taikōki* 太閤記 (22 vols., 3 editions, 1630-1661) for stories about Hideyoshi and the Toyotomi clan. Also of great importance was the *Taiheiki* 太平記 (21 vols., 9 editions 1609-1688), which had existed as a stable written text from its origins in the 1370s and provided the material for the "readers" of the text (*Taiheiki-yomi* 太平記読み) who evolved into the *kōdan* storytellers that would be critical to perpetuating and embellishing on many of the *sakuhingun* from the eighteenth into the nineteenth century.

The wide circulation of these core texts in print also made their contents easily available to the new writers of emergent genres of printed fiction (*kanazōshi* 仮名草子, then *ukiyozōshi* 浮世草子) and for the puppet and kabuki theaters that became the most popular forms of urban entertainment in the Genroku period. This was the first crucial step in the cross-media proliferation of military tales, which had been first circulated to popular audiences by itinerant minstrels but now became major sources of inspiration for fiction in print and for the urban stage. Print and stage now joined oral storytelling and manuscript reproduction as the prime media for popular history in Japan, a revolutionary transformation that marked the shift from the medieval to the Tokugawa media complex.

The Tokugawa regime witnessed this process with mounting concern, and put into place in the later seventeenth century restrictions that would have a profound and lasting effect on the way in which historical tales were circulated. Earlier Tokugawa controls were concerned primarily with moral propriety, as seen in the successive prohibition of female and then young male actors on the kabuki stage, but the astonishing growth of the publishing industry in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, first in Kyoto-Osaka and then from the 1660s in Edo, led to mounting bakufu concern over the power of the press. The first decisive edict appeared in 1673, enjoining woodblock publishers from any mention of bakufu affairs (*go-kōgi no gi* 御公儀之義), and requiring them to seek permission to print anything that might "cause problems for people" (*shojin meiwaku tsukamatsurisōrō gi* 諸人 迷惑仕候儀), as well as things that are "strange" (*mezurashiki koto* 珍敷事). Similar edicts followed in 1684 and 1698, adding "suspicious things" (*utagawashiku zonjisōrō gi* うたがハ しく存候儀), "faddish things" (*hayarigoto* はやり事), and "unusual things of the moment" (*tōza no kawaritaru koto* 当座之替りたる事).[10] This utterly subjective language effectively stifled all public or printed talk of current affairs in Tokugawa Japan.

The prohibition of news was paralleled by the prohibition of any discussion of the activities not only of the ruling shogunal clan, but of all higher samurai families, lest their ancestral honor be sullied. This is a striking contrast with military regimes both in other cultures and in other periods of Japanese history, which were often eager to promote tales of the accomplishments of their dynastic line. But in a manner characteristic of all Tokugawa rule, the prohibition of reports in print about current events and elite history was never extreme or draconian, and left those affected with a wide margin of self-enforcement. The resulting compromise, worked out in ways that we can only guess at in the absence of any specifications in the surviving historical documents, was peculiar, and would have a profound and lasting impact on all later popular history in Japan, continuing on long after the collapse of the Edo bakufu.

The effects of this system can be most clearly understood by looking at the single case of the Akō incident, which occurred within a generation of the first edicts restricting news in print. This meant that no open public reporting of the actual incident in print, using the real names of the participants, was possible—at least not until the 1850s, well over a century later, when the ban was effectively relaxed.[11] In the meantime, the history of this dramatic incident was perpetuated by way of a curious dual structure. On the one hand, it was possible to recreate the incident both in print and on the urban stage, but only by disguising the names and transposing the historical era—in other words, by converting history into a

kind of fantasy, or sometimes parody. The death of the shogun Tsunayoshi 綱吉 in early 1709 led to an outpouring of stage recreations of the Akō incident in the Kyoto-Osaka area in 1710, unleashing a chain of influence that would culminate in the puppet play *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in 1747.

The names of the characters in such plays were so thinly disguised, as seen most clearly in the conversion of Ōishi Kuranosuke, the historical leader of the Akō revenge, into the stage role of "Ōboshi Yuranosuke" 大星由良之助, that no one was fooled. But this transparent gesture made all the difference, as did the transposition of the historical era back to that of the fourteenth-century Muromachi bakufu. The very power of the drama on both the puppet and kabuki stages, as for powerful theater in any era, was premised on its capacity to reach beyond the narrow constraints of historical chronology to present more universal truths. It was of its nature set apart from the wholly different premises of historical tales.

It is important, in this context, to acknowledge the immense success of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* as a dramatic work, wholly apart from the historical incident that directly inspired it. As the longest *jōruri* ever written for the puppet stage, *Kanadehon* effectively synthesized all the best stage devices and plot twists of over a dozen earlier plays, and within a generation had established itself as overwhelmingly the most popular play within the repertoire of both the puppet and kabuki theaters, a supremacy that has continued to the present day. This alone sets the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* apart from all others. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* was so successful on the stage that it became a cultural phenomenon in and of itself, penetrating into every genre of later Edo popular fiction and poetry. Far from history, it became an a-historical assortment of allusions that all aficionados of the theater instantly recognized, and that could therefore be endlessly mobilized for parodic amusement.

Meanwhile, in parallel with the fantasy life of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* but largely apart from it, the "real" story of the Akō revenge took on a life of its own, in the alternate world of oral story-telling and manuscript novels that remained largely beyond the reach—or at least the concern—of the regime. This is the domain of the "Gishi," the term that emerged from an early point as the standard epithet for the 47 Rōnin in the world of quasi-historical narration.[12] The oral storytellers emerged from the tradition of "*Taiheiki*-yomi," a practice of reading and commenting on the written text of the *Taiheiki* that had emerged among monk-specialists in the sixteenth century, and which by the time of the Akō incident was in a process of transition to a purely secular form of storytelling to popular audiences on street corners and in stalls of the great cities. This art came to be known as *kōshaku* 講釈 or *kōdan*, the latter term becoming predominant by the mid-nineteenth century. *Kōdan* storytelling, as we will see, would be the pivotal medium for the diffusion of the Gishiden into almost all of the subsequent modern media.

The oral tales of *kōdan* were rarely recorded as written texts until the technique of stenography was introduced from England and adapted for Japanese in the 1880s, but they did have an Edo-period textual analogue in the manuscript texts known today as *jitsuroku* 実録, "true accounts," by virtue of their pretension to recount actual historical events. Like *kōdan* performance itself, the *jitsuroku* manuscripts were at one level simply a way of skirting the formal prohibitions of the bakufu, which were enforced systematically only for printed publications.[13] Since *jitsuroku* were anonymous and distributed through *kashihon'ya* peddlers, the

regime could not easily patrol them. The end result was to establish a popular habit of rental reading that would continue far into the twentieth century.

Tokugawa Japan thus offers a remarkable example of a regime that evolved a passive and indirect mode of rule that negated all public politics as divisive. The result was to shunt historical narratives of the Tokugawa regime itself (including the decades of the late sixteenth century when it came to power) into the streets and small theaters, and into the hand-written historical romances circulated by book-lending peddlers, where they took on a special imaginative power precisely because they were officially discouraged. By the 1860s, the recounting of popular history in Japan had thus fallen into its dual structure as a result of the vacuum at the top. On the one hand, the most formal and powerful media of print and urban stage were forced to purvey a patently fictional form of historical narrative, while the telling of overtly historical tales was shunted into marginal realms where it thrived and grew, treating history as a didactic form of popular entertainment.

The Meiji Transition: From Voice to Print and Song

The collapse of the Tokugawa regime and the advent of the aggressively modernizing Meiji state after 1868 had surprisingly little immediate impact on the established modes of popular history in Japan. In the case of the Gishiden, as with all of the older *sakuhingun*, the sheer inertia of generations of repetition insured that at least for the current generation, all would continue as usual. This was particularly true for the deeply rooted theatrical tradition of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, which continued to be as vital as ever to the kabuki theater, as it continues to be today. The play is often referred to as the *dokujintō* 独参湯or "surefire remedy" for a theater in the doldrums—an expression of which the origin remains unclear, but which has been most frequently used in the modern period.

In Meiji as before, *Kanadehon Chūshingura* remained disconnected from the historical story of the Akō revenge, having taken on a theatrical life of its own that was impervious to interaction with the more avowedly historical lineage. The kabuki version remained tightly connected to its puppet origins and *jōruri* text, reaffirmed with each performance by the appearance of a puppet to announce the performers, and a mimicking of puppet actions in the opening tableau. The enduring place of this one play as paramount in the hierarchy of kabuki fame was clearly essential to the popularity of the broader phenomenon of "Chūshingura" to which it gave its name. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* has served as a continuing stage—both literally and figuratively—of the larger *sakuhingun*, a persistent background setting that continues even today, however few Japanese may actually see a kabuki or bunraku performance.

The most critical change in Meiji Japan came with the further growth of *kōdan* storytelling. As we have seen, *kōdan* survived and grew within a marginal gray zone under the Tokugawa regime, tolerated as it continued to spread within the small *yose* theaters in the early nineteenth century, but subject to occasional crackdowns on the theaters themselves (notably in the Tenpō Reforms of the early 1840s). This changed after 1868, although the police continued to watch these small theaters closely. The critical feature of *kōdan* was that the tales were presented as history, however embellished and fictionalized, and in almost every case they were derived from authentic historical figures. To be sure, wholly imaginary characters and new fictional episodes were freely created, but they were always projected as people

who actually lived and breathed in a particular historical era. No such pretensions were ever maintained on the kabuki stage, where both heroes and villains were larger than life.

Two crucial transformations occurred within *kōdan* in the Meiji period. Most important was the conversion of the oral tales to print, something that had been politically impossible under the Tokugawa bakufu. This was not as simple as one might imagine, since even though the origins of *kōdan* lay in the reading of written texts, it had evolved in the late Edo period into an art of memory and improvisation. Even though *kōdan* performers always told their tales seated on tatami with a lectern and manuscript text before them, they were true oral storytellers, using the text mostly as prop and prompt (as the few surviving *kōdan* performers continue to do today). But the introduction of stenography made it natural to turn first to *kōdan* and the closely related art of *rakugo* 落語, and in short order the best of the repertoire was phonetically transcribed and put into print, creating the "*kōdan* book" (*kōdanbon* 講談本, also known as *sokkibon* 速記本, "shorthand books") that would quickly become the single most popular form of reading matter in Meiji Japan. Thanks to *kōdanbon*, the Gishiden were available from the mid-1880s not only to urban audiences in the countless *yose* theaters in Tokyo and Osaka, but also in every bookstore in the nation.

The second change was the emergence of the wholly new form of popular entertainment known as *naniwabushi* 浪花節, which drew almost all of its content from *kōdan*. *Naniwabushi* grew out of a complex variety of street performance styles of the late Edo period that were much more oriented to ordinary people than *kōdan*, which continued to cling to the more ornate and literary style of its origins in *Taiheiki*-yomi. The forebears of *naniwabushi* performed originally from door to door, originally purveying religious incantations and charms rather than telling stories, but in the last decades of the Tokugawa period, they had come to incorporate the coherent narratives of both *kōdan* and the kabuki theater, while retaining elements of the religious and entertainment appeal that revealed their deeper connections with the itinerant religious performers of the medieval period. By the early nineteenth century, these performers, who bridged the two different genres of *chobokure* ちょぼくれ (also known as *chongare* ちょんがれ, and in the Osaka area, *ukarebushi* うかれ節) and *saimon* 祭文, had won over an expanding audience although they continued to be excluded from the small theaters, performing in the streets either unprotected or in makeshift stalls.[14]

The great strength of *naniwabushi* was song, something that the sober and prosaic art of *kōdan* had never countenanced. These lowly street arts had depended on song and dance from the very start, and as they matured and advanced in the hierarchy of urban performance in the nineteenth century, they shed the dance and took on the strong narrative tales of *kōdan*, but they retained the song, alternating song and narration to samisen accompaniment in a pattern that had long been established in *jōruri*. *Naniwabushi*, however, was free of any constraints of school lineages, and could adapt more easily to the free-wheeling environment of the Meiji market for popular performance. From the 1880s, *naniwabushi* singers began to advance into the *yose* theaters that had until then been the strongholds of *kōdan* and *rakugo*, and from the late 1890s, they began to overshadow and outnumber these older arts of songless narration.

Space does not permit a detailed account of the remarkable story by which *naniwabushi* emerged in the years during and immediately after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05,

but suffice it to say that it effected a transformation of the content of *kōdan* into a new and powerful form of mass entertainment that relied heavily on song and samisen. The Gishiden had always been a staple of *kōdan*, but they now achieved even greater prominence in *naniwabushi* thanks to their centrality to the repertoire of Tōchūken Kumoemon 桃中軒雲右衛門 (1873-1916), who in June 1907 was catapulted to national fame by performing at the Hongōza 本郷座 theater, one of the three prestigious large theaters of Meiji Tokyo. It was a remarkable achievement for a performer whose art had only recently emerged from the slums of Tokyo. Kumoemon's success triggered a "Gishi boom" in the final years of the Meiji period, assuring a deeper level of permeation of the tales throughout Japanese society than ever before. All this was done with no new technologies of performance, although the power of the periodical press (which had been non-existent in the Edo period) was critical in spreading word of Kumoemon's fame, thus fanning the flames of the Gishi boom.

How did the political freedom to tell the "true stories" of the Gishi in the Meiji period affect the political implications of the tales? We must recall that the Edo prohibition of recounting the historical event had no necessary connection with the implications of the Akō revenge for the bakufu polity, which were at any rate ambiguous. The Akō rōnin themselves had insisted that they had no complaint against the bakufu itself, only against Kira, although this was to a degree disingenuous. Presented with the dilemma of whether to praise the avengers as righteous retainers or criminal plotters, the bakufu settled on the ingenious solution of condemning the rōnin to honorable death by seppuku while praising them for their loyalty to their overlord. None of these issues ever came up in *kōdan* and *jitsuroku* Gishiden, which presented the entire story within the same black-and-white morality of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, rarely even mentioning the final fate of the avengers.

The Meiji state took early advantage of these underlying political ambiguities when the Meiji emperor on his first trip to Edo in the autumn of 1868 sent an emissary to make an offering at the grave of Ōishi Kuranosuke at Sengakuji, praising him for his loyalty—and assuming that no one would notice the problematic conflation of loyalty to a provincial daimyo with loyalty to the emperor of the new Meiji state. This ambiguity continued throughout the era of imperial Japan, and I have argued elsewhere that it helps to explain the ease with which Chūshingura survived the political reversal of defeat in World War II.[15] If one reads the actual Gishiden that became so popular in the late Meiji "Gishi boom," it is similarly difficult to detect a clear ideological message. To be sure, Tōchūken Kumoemon was directly promoted by the right-wing nationalists of the Gen'yōsha 玄洋社 and by some conservative bureaucrats, taking advantage of the mass chauvinism generated by the war with Russia in 1904-05 and providing Kumoemon's slogan of "*Bushidō kosui*" 武士道鼓吹 (Drumming up Bushidō). But as Yamamoto Tsuneo has noted in his analysis of the actual content of *kōdan* and *naniwabushi* tales, however much they may seem congruent with the official values of loyalty, filiality, and sacrifice, in fact most of the stories are about heroes who get ahead in the world in wholly materialistic ways. In short, they tend less to promote Meiji ideology than the much more individualistic Meiji myth of *risshin shusse* 立身出世, success in the world.[16] For all the patronage of the right wing, the Gishiden seem at heart to have been didactic tales about getting ahead by perseverance, cleverness, and good luck.

Tales of the Gishi in the Modern Media Complex

The Gishi boom of late Meiji came on the eve of the rapid deployment of new media technologies that would make a truly "mass" culture possible for the first time. These were film (followed a generation later by the far more powerful medium of television) and the phonograph (followed within a decade by the far more transformative medium of radio). This timing permitted these new media to draw directly on the flourishing *kōdan-naniwabushi* lineage of storytelling, assuring strong continuities with the past. The earliest Chūshingura films, beginning in 1907, were simply excerpts from kabuki versions of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*.[17] Gradually, however, the familiar *kōdan* anecdotes became the central subject matter, although the setting continued to be stagey and the acting in kabuki style. Only from the 1920s did the films gradually take on natural and outdoor settings, with more realistic sword-fighting, Western background music, and talkies from 1932. Throughout, however, the stories themselves were largely of *kōdan* extraction, particularly those of the *meimeiden* and *gaiden* lineages, the modest lengths of which (about a half-hour in a *kōdan* or *naniwabushi* performance) lent themselves to early film. The transposition to film was eased by the distinctive institution of the *benshi* 弁士, the live narrators of silent film who drew directly on *naniwabushi* as well as a variety of other oral traditions to forge their new art of *setsumei* 説明.[18]

This is not to say that film made no changes to the existing oral tradition except to expand its audience. On the contrary, the nature of film as a moving photographic image created a wholly novel set of demands for pictorial realism. Whereas the storyteller can paint a visual image with a series of telling details (a technique at which Tōchūken Kumoemon was especially skilled), in film there are many particulars that one cannot easily leave out, above all such items of daily life as hairstyle, costume, architecture, and customs. Where the textual field can pick and choose among such details selectively for the best effect, the visual field has difficulty in omitting any of them. This drove a great deal of research from the 1930s on until the present into the study of period authenticity (*jidai kōshō* 時代考証), which by good fortune coincided with a boom in *fūzokushi* 風俗史, the study of the history of traditional customs.

Perhaps the most striking example of the concern for period authenticity is Mizoguchi Kenji's film version of Mayama Seika's 真山青果 series of modern kabuki plays, *Genroku Chūshingura* 元禄忠臣蔵, released in two parts in December 1941 and January 1942. The opening credits list fully eight "*kōshōsha*" 考証者 who were all leading experts in their fields, including Ōkuma Yoshikuni 大熊喜邦for samurai architecture, Ebara Taizō 頴原退蔵 for language, and Ogawa Jihei 小川治兵衛 for gardens, with others for *minka* architecture, noh drama, and historical facts. All of this reflects Mayama's own obsession with historicity, evident in the long and detailed stage instructions of his original text, which was intended as much for the pleasures of readers of the printed text of the plays than as relevant materials for theatrical staging.[19]

In the other major realm of technological transformation, phonograph records emerged as a viable commercial medium just as the Gishi boom in *naniwabushi* was at its peak. The first record of a Gishi tale was issued in August, 1910, and many others followed within the next few years. Phonograph records were a restricted medium, however, since they were

relatively costly and could only record three minutes on one side, which made it impossible to convey an extended narrative, often limiting *naniwabushi* content to the song segments, assuming an audience already familiar with the story. The true revolution came only with radio when national public broadcasting began in 1928. The first national survey of radio listeners in 1932 revealed *naniwabushi* programs to be number one in popularity among 57 per cent of the listeners.[20] This suggests that orality, which had always been a central channel for the transmission of historical tales in Japan, continued strongly into the modern period in ways that are rarely recognized, bolstered by the new technologies of sound recording and radio transmission, and reaching far broader audiences than ever in the past.

Parallel to these momentous technological media revolutions, another crucial development was the emergence of the modern historical novel, which worked to transform the very content of the stories even as the new media enhanced their distribution. Already in the late Tokugawa period, the *jitsuroku* lineage had begun to influence new printed narratives, such as *Ehon Chūshingura* 絵本忠臣蔵 of 1800, an illustrated account of the Akō revenge that continued to disguise the names but otherwise drew on the content of a specific *jitsuroku* text. In a revealing study of this work, Yamamoto Takashi sees a shift from the fragmented and diffuse "proto-history" of *jitsuroku* to the coherent narrative continuity of true "history."[21] A further milestone in historical accounts of the Akō incident was passed in the 1850s when for the first time, detailed narratives appeared in print using the real names of all the historical participants, set clearly in its actual Genroku context.[22] First came *Akō shijūshichi-shi den* 赤穂四十七士伝 in 1851, written in *kanbun* by Aoyama Nobumitsu 青山延光, a Confucian scholar of the Mito domain, followed in 1854 by the more popular and influential *Akō gishiden issekiwa* 赤穂義士伝一夕話 in ten volumes, by the prolific Edo chōnin scholar Yamazaki Yoshishige 山崎美成, with attractive illustrations by Hashimoto Gyokuran (Sadahide) 橋本玉蘭貞秀. Written in Japanese in a lively narrative style, it served as a grand collation of much existing lore about the Akō vendetta, both history and legend.

Neither of these works could quite be described as "popular" history, but rather represent the beginnings of a tradition of scholarly inquiry in print into the history of the Akō incident. This type of scholarship subsided in early Meiji when the Gishi (or rather, revenges in general) were out of official political favor, but the story of the Akō revenge was reexamined from the late 1880s by a new generation of historical practitioners, inspired by German methods of document-based research. Shigeno Yasutsugu, considered the founder of the modern profession of academic historian in Japan, turned to the case of the Akō incident in his *Akō gishi jitsuwa* of 1889, listing and evaluating all the primary documents at the start of his work, and then debunking the stage fantasy of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in order to provide a detailed historical account.[23] Others would follow Shigeno over the succeeding decades, notably Fukumoto Nichinan, whose monumental *Genroku kaikyoroku* of 1909 remains even today the single most exhaustive study of the historical Akō incident.[24] Even more important for the historical record was a large collection of documents related to the Akō incident that had been amassed in the late Edo period by Nabeta Shōzan, and was finally published in three volumes in 1910-11 as *Akō gijin sansho*.[25]

This documentary collection, together with Nichinan's history, provided a treasure trove for a new generation of historical novelists that emerged in the Taishō period.[26] Miyazawa

Seiichi identifies Tsukahara Jūshien's 塚原渋柿園 *Ōishi Yoshio* 大石良雄, first serialized in the *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun* 東京朝日新聞 during the war with Russia in 1904-05, as "the first historical novel to take on the Akō incident seriously," but the real growth of the popular "period novel" (*jidai shōsetsu* 時代小説) came with a critical transition in *kōdanbon* from transcriptions of oral performances to texts written from scratch for publication, using the *kōdan* style and drawing on the content of many of the classic *kōdan* stories. The earliest of these were the "written *kōdan*" (*kaki-kōdan* 書き講談) of Tatsukawa (also read "Tachikawa") Bunko 立川文庫, a series of *kōdanbon* issued by the Osaka publisher Tatsukawa Bunmeidō 立川文明堂 from 1911.[27] Whereas the Tatsukawa Bunko novels were written by a *kōdan* storyteller and aimed primarily at younger readers, a different kind of "written *kōdan*" was begun in 1913 following a protest by *kōdan* performers over Kōdansha's publication of an issue of *Kōdan kurabu* featuring stories by *naniwabushi* singers, who were resented as low-class performers infringing on their turf. Kōdansha simply abandoned the publication of transcribed *kōdan* and turned rather to professional writers to create new works in the *kōdan* manner. The resulting "new *kōdan*" (*shin-kōdan* 新講談) are widely acknowledged to mark the true beginnings of "mass literature" (*taishū bungaku* 大衆文学) in Japan, and explain the heavy reliance of such literature on historical themes.

The new historical novelists of the Taisho period were thus direct heirs to the *kōdan* tradition, but they were much less bound by it, and turned with increasing frequency to the writings of modern historians of the Akō incident and to primary documents, creating a new style of popular historical novel that was more fastidious in its concern for period authenticity.[28] Particular important was Osaragi Jirō's *Akō rōshi*, which was serialized in the *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* 東京日々新聞 from May 1927 to November 1928, and published in three volumes by Kaizōsha in 1928-29.[29] Although a few earlier writers had criticized the conventional idealized image of the Gishi, Osaragi attacked it head-on, providing a radical re-reading and deconstruction of the entire story of the Akō revenge. His approach is capsulized in the rejection of the term "Gishi" in preference for the more neutral "*rōshi* 浪士" (a synonym of "rōnin" but less widely used), the term that would become standard in postwar historiography. Osaragi saw the old *kōdan* manner of storytelling as "feudal," preferring the new Western realism of the sort that was increasingly demanded in the parallel medium of film. The entire Akō incident was set within the complex web of Genroku politics, an approach that would be perpetuated in countless historical novels thereafter. The "*rōshi*" are seen not as loyal avengers but as protesters against the corrupt bureaucratism of Genroku politics.

Osaragi's novel not only appeared in the context of the rising popularity of film, but it clearly drew on the inspiration of film itself, both in the increasing demand for realism and in the related emphasis on the details of daily life that film had engendered. From this point on, all historical novelists could take advantage, consciously or otherwise, of the great variety of descriptive data available both in films and in *fūzokushi* texts in order to provide the "vivid" detail that is often alleged to be the chief characteristic of the historical novel. Since Osaragi's work, there have been many more long novels on the Akō incident, including such behemoths as Yoshikawa Eiji, *Shinpen Chūshingura* 新編忠臣蔵 (2 vols., 775 pages, 1936); Funabashi Seiichi 舟橋聖一, *Shin Chūshingura* 新忠臣蔵 (12 vols., 3571 pages,1956-61), Sakaiya Taichi 堺屋太一, *Tōge no gunzō* 峠の群像 (3 vols., 1357 pages, 1981-82); and

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Morimura Seiichi 森村誠一, *Chūshingura* (2 vols., ca 1300 pages, 1984-86)—four works that together come to some 7000 pages of the story of the Akō incident. The sheer length of these works, almost all of which were first serialized in newspapers, is a direct reflection of the long *kōdan* tradition of spinning out the Chūshingura story into a series of self-enclosed *meimeiden* and *gaiden*.

In the interwar years, when film and historical novels worked together to transform the story of the Akō Gishi in popular culture, the political valence of the tale remained central—but as ever, ambiguous. In conservative circles, the Gishi (in particular, their leader Ōishi) continued to be celebrated as paragons of loyalty, and hence appropriate models to citizens of the modern imperial state. And yet always lurking beneath the surface was the uncomfortable historical reality that the loyalty of the Gishi had been to a lesser feudal lord and not to the nation. This tension was seized upon in the war years by military officials who came to disparage Chūshingura as an example of "small righteousness" (*shōgi* 小義) and not of the "Great Righteousness" (*taigi* 大義) appropriate to the Japanese people under the modern emperor.[30]

The Akō Gishi in Postwar Japan: Television and the Ritualization of Chūshingura

The conception of the Akō incident as a protest against a capricious and bureaucratic regime was well suited for the revival of Chūshingura in the newly democratized Japan of the postwar era, symbolized by the choice in 1963 of Osaragi's *Akō rōshi* as the basis for the second year of the NHK Sunday evening historical series known as the Taiga Drama 大河ドラマ ("grand fleuve drama"). This year-long show marked a critical turning point in the modern history of Chūshingura from film to television as the dominant medium for perpetuating the tale. *Naniwabushi* (now know under its more genteel name of "*rōkyoku* 浪曲") had survived strong into the early postwar years, continuing to feature tales of the Gishi prominently, but its decline was rapid from the 1950s with the advent of television. Chūshingura films had also continued strong in the early postwar period, but finally crested in 1962 with the Tōhō 東宝 all-star version directed by Inagaki Hiroshi 稲垣浩, by no coincidence the year before the NHK television production.

Since *Akō rōshi* in 1963, the Chūshingura story has been repeated fully three more times as the theme of NHK's Taiga Drama, in *Genroku Taiheiki* 元禄太平記 (1975), *Tōge no gunzō* 峠の群像 (1982), and *Genroku ryōran* 元禄繚乱 (1999)—far more than any other of the *sakuhingun*. It seems that Chūshingura has become for television what *Kanadehon Chūshingura* had long been for the kabuki stage, a "surefire remedy" assured of instant popularity. Far beyond the many appeals of the story itself, in its numerous and complex forms, this confirms the proposal of Satō Tadao the that the Chūshingura *sakuhingun*, having grown to enormous size over many years, has taken on a *ritual* quality, seen clearly in the tradition that emerged in films from the prewar period to use the theme for commemorative "all-star" performances.[31] Isolde Standish has provided a revealing analysis of the peculiar function of Chūshingura, wholly apart from its particular content, in providing the framework for this special category of performance that works to perpetuate the star system in Japanese film.[32]

One particularly revealing indication of the ritualizing power of television is the way in which it has worked to concentrate Chūshingura programs in the most ritual season of the

Japanese year, that of the New Year. *Kanadehon Chūshingura* had long imposed a seasonal structure on the story itself, in which the two-year incident was compressed into a single seasonal year, commencing in springtime under the cherry blossoms and concluding in winter under the falling snow. As a result, no Japanese can think of Chūshingura in any other way than starting with blossoms and ending in snow, a happy symbolic structure for the New Year. Throughout most of the ensuing two hundred years after the first performance of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in 1747, however, it is hard to detect any particular disposition to perform Chūshingura, either on stage or in film, in any seasonally commemorative spirit. A close look at the months of performance reveals that on both the kabuki and puppet stages and in prewar film as well, Chūshingura seems to have been suitable for any month. If anything, the cold winter months were avoided.[33]

This random pattern changed, however, with the arrival of television in the 1950s. Apart from the periodic year-long NHK dramas—which always began at the start of a new year—dramatizations of the Akō incident have come to appear regularly on all the major commercial TV networks, and these programs turn out to be heavily concentrated in the month of December. The pattern began from the start in 1953, the first year of public television broadcasting, when both NHK and Tokyo TV showed special Chūshingura dramas on December 14 and 15, the days of the attack on Kira. The heavy concentration of Chūshingura themes in December has continued until this day, as clearly revealed in a detailed chronology of Chūshinura-related television programs.[34] It shows that in the four decades from 1953 to 1992, over one thousand programs related to Chūshingura have been shown, of which 52 per cent were in the month of December, for an average of 14.2 Chūshingura shows every December—versus an average of 1.2 shows for each of the eleven other months. It seems clear that it has been primarily the medium of television that has implanted Chūshingura into the year-end seasonal consciousness of the Japanese nation. As Miyazawa Seiichi notes, Chūshingura has become an "annual celebration" (*nenjū gyōji* 年中行事), as though reliving the story of the revenge of the Gishi at the end of the calendar year might provide a cleansing and cathartic effect that is appropriate to the season.[35] Many may think of this as long-established Japanese custom, but in fact it would appear to be largely a postwar innovation by the medium of television.

But what finally are the politics of Chūshingura in the early twenty-first century? Clearly, this particular *sakuhingun* can never completely shed the legacy of its active sponsorship by the political regime from Meiji on into the war years, whatever ambiguity it may have harbored about the absolute qualities of "loyalty." Nevertheless, the idea first established by Osaragi, of the "Rōshi" as reforming opponents of Genroku corruption rather than valiant defenders of loyalty to their lord, took quick root in postwar Japan, and remains the party line today. At the same time, the ritualization of Chūshingura productions as part of annual New Year celebrations suggests a certain de-politicization, by which the story has become little more than a national habit. This may possibly herald the obsolescence of Chūshingura, a possibility that is suggested by the inability of this greatest of all *sakuhingun* to make its way into the most notable addition to the modern media complex in Japan in recent decades, the two closely linked media of *manga* and *anime*. Like Yoshitsune and like the Soga Brothers, the Akō Gishi seem to have no appeal to the youngest generation in Japan, so they may in time become no more than hollow shells.[36]

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An Overview of Chūshingura as a "*Sakuhingun*"

Having traced the historical evolution of the structure of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* in the context of changing media complexes, it is time to stand back and recapitulate the ways in which the story of the Akō Gishi fits into Satō Tadao's *sakuhingun* scheme, and on what further light Chūshingura might shed on the nature of *sakuhingun* in general in the formation and perpetuation of popular history in Japan.

To begin with, the historical Akō incident itself was especially conducive to its expansion into a vast *sakuhingun*, most obviously because of the large number of individuals involved in the planning and execution of the revenge, thus conforming from the start to Satō's requirement of many diverse individuals as a key feature of a *sakuhingun*. The historical league of revenge began with over one hundred members before attrition gradually reduced its numbers to the final forty-seven, but this process itself yielded a group of defectors who would later provide a whole new variety of alternative stories to tell. The final league, although united under a single charismatic leader, was diverse in age, motivation, and personality, further enriching the pool of available tales by which to expand the *sakuhingun*. And although the historical revenge did not involve the sort of wandering throughout the country that Satō detected as a common feature of many *sakuhingun*, it did involve a diversity of appealing locales, from Edo to Akō to Kyoto and finally back to Edo, with much coming and going among these centers.

In addition, the two pivotal events in historical incident, the initial attack by Asano in Edo Castle, and the final attack of the rōnin on Kira's mansion, were inherently dramatic and prime material for storytellers and later film-makers. Both events were directly witnessed only by the participants and a handful of onlookers, but the attack on Kira was immediately followed by the early morning three-hour march of the rōnin to Sengakuji, a procession that immensely multiplied its impact. The prohibition of news in print did nothing to stem the flood of hearsay information that inundated Edo in the days and weeks following the night attack and march to Sengakuji, culminating in the execution of the rōnin over a month and a half later. Of course, all revenge stories had an inherent dramatic structure and point of culmination, but none in all Japanese history were so complex, far-reaching, and publicly witnessed as the Akō vendetta. This led in turn to the production of numerous manuscript narratives of the incident, most by amateur chroniclers who simply assembled their narratives out of rumors and liberated documents that spread throughout the city. These documents included letters and testimony of the rōnin themselves, who had a strong consciousness of their own historical importance from the start and left a rich archive. This was an uneven process, however, transmitted entirely in manuscript, so no common and universally accessible archive of the Akō incident was created until the twentieth century, given the continuing proscription of any public discussion or printed distribution.

The story of the Akō revenge requires some modification of Satō's conception of *sakuhingun* as rooted in tales of "noble failures" whose avenging ghosts provoke popular awe and worship. It is hard to see the Gishi as failures, although they did of course pay for their success with their lives.[37] But this was precisely what they expected, and the revenge itself was a magnificent success. It is revealing that the execution of the rōnin on orders from the bakufu has

often been omitted entirely from the overall story, most notably in *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (where the final scene suggests that they would die of their own will at Sengakuji rather than surrender to the authorities), but also in many modern versions of the story, particularly in film, where their ultimate fate is at best quickly alluded to as a kind of postscript.

In accord with another attribute of Satō's characterization of a *sakuhingun*, the entire history of the retelling of the Gishiden is rooted in its political import. The historical Akō incident involved all segments of the *bakuhan* 幕藩 system of Tokugawa rule: the ruling bakufu in its Edo headquarters, the reigning emperor in Kyoto, and various domains that were adjacent to Akō, related to the Asano clan, or involved in the disposition of the incident in Edo. In these respects, it is comparable to such Bakumatsu *sakuhingun* as Sakamoto Ryōma and the Shinsengumi, in which the very complexity of the politics worked to broaden its appeal. In the Chūshingura *sakuhingun*, the basic theme of loyalty, in particular, could be understood as either loyalty to one's local feudal lord, loyalty to the Tokugawa regime, loyalty to one's immediate group, or in the modern transposition, even loyalty to the emperor (seen most dramatically in Mayama Seika's *Genroku Chūshingura*).[38] The politics of the Akō incident set it clearly apart from the many others revenge tales that might also have been candidates for a sustained *sakuhingun*, since it involved the revenge not of a family member but of a political overlord. This unique distinction has always worked to give special power to the story of the Akō revenge.

The particular political qualities of the Akō incident, occurring at the height of shogunal power in the Genroku period and hence highly sensitive to the bakufu authorities, made it particularly susceptible to a bifurcation into the dual structure that we have seen, between a legally accepted public strand in which the era was changed and the names disguised (however transparently) on the puppet and kabuki stages and in printed fiction, and the legally marginal but tolerated lineage of the Gishiden tradition in *kōdan* oral storytelling and *jitsuroku* manuscript narratives. The ironic effect of this curious structure was to enhance the reach and durability of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* as a whole. A close parallel to this may be seen in the *Taikōki* tales about Hideyoshi and the tragic extinction of his line at Osaka Castle in 1615.

Another persistent feature of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* has been the way in which certain individual works of special creative genius have helped sustain the continued growth of the larger story-complex. The *jōruri* text of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* in 1747 is particularly striking in this respect, establishing itself as the preeminent play in both kabuki and bunraku in short order, and spreading widely then into the broader popular print culture. And in the modern period, Fukumoto Nichinan's *Genroku kaikyoroku*, Osaragi Jirō's *Akō rōshi*, and Mayama Seika's *Genroku Chūshingura* all infused new life into the entire Chūshingura phenomenon. Examples of works in other *sakuhingun* that triggered a quantum leap in the popularity of their heroes are *Sarutobi Sasuke* from the Tatsukawa Bunko (1914) for the Sanada Jūyūshi, Yoshikawa Eiji's *Miyamoto Musashi* (1935-39) for the title hero, and *Ryōma ga yuku* 竜馬がゆく (1962-66) by Shiba Ryōtarō 司馬遼太郎 for Sakamoto Ryōma.

The modern survival and further expansion of Chūshingura were the result of a conjunction of parallel forces in the late Meiji period: the boom in "Bushidō" from the 1890s, the wars with China and Russia, the inspiration of new historical documentation in *Genroku*

kaikyoroku and *Akō gijin sansho*, and the sudden emergence of Tōchūken Kumoemon as a *naniwabushi* sensation who specialized in the Gishiden. All of these coalesced into a multi-media "Gishi boom" in the last decade of Meiji that fed directly into the further growth of the *sakuhingun* in films and historical novels. Finally, in the postwar period, Chūshingura became ritualized as a seasonal performance for the New Year season as a result of conscious decisions by television producers.

So we can see that *sakuhingun* share certain broad patterns, but at the same time each successful *sakuhingun* has its own special features and its own distinctive pattern of growth and often decline. As a unified phenomenon, however, all have been carried on by fundamental continuities in the long and deeply rooted tradition of telling historical tales in Japan, by which each new media complex tends to add to the existing media forms without obliterating the old, so that even today we can detect in the most strongly surviving *sakuhingun* traces of all the successive historical stages of oral storytelling, printed narrative, stage performances, films, historical novels, and television. All have in common the urge to use history both for entertainment and for politics, a pattern that surely will continue on into the future as well.

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NOTES

[1] Satō 1976, pp. 113-38. The older *sakuhingun* have been studied by scholars of literature, and the modern ones by those in the separate fields of film and popular fiction, but rarely have these investigations focused on the linkages among different media. In English, McCullough 1966, pp. 30-61, offers a detailed account of the evolution of Yoshitsune from history to legend, but does not go beyond the medieval period. For the Soga Brothers, Kominz 1995 is an excellent study of the way in which that particular story developed within the kabuki tradition, where it survives today but in an attenuated form; see below for the Soga Brothers in film. For Sakamoto Ryōma, see Smith, forthcoming. For the modern development of the Chūshingura *sakuhingun* in multiple media, Miyazawa 2001 is an indispensable account, on which I have relied heavily. Ōsumi 2000 is a useful reference work that includes many of the heroes of *sakuhingun* and information on their evolution as legends in different genres and media.

[2] Brief biographies of these two imaginary characters may be found in Akō Gishi Kenshōkai 1983, pp. 405 and 433.

[3] Morris 1975. McCullough 1966, p. 30, notes that the term *hōgan biiki* emerged "during or shortly after the lifetime" of Yoshitsune.

[4] Note should here be made of the only one of the "Three Great Revenges" (*Sandai katakiuchi* 三大敵討) that does not appear among Satō's list of the leading *sakuhingun*, of which the first two are the Soga Brothers and Chūshingura. This is the Igagoe 伊賀越 revenge of 1634, known more widely by the name of the hired sword who was critical to the success of the final battle, Araki Mataemon 荒木又右衛門. The tale survived strong into prewar film (with a total of thirty-nine movies in the thirty-three-year period 1909-1941), but it did not survive beyond a brief postwar revival in the 1950s, and is generally unknown today.

[5] Kominz 1995, ch. 7, provides a detailed account of this tradition, which continued on into the first years of the twentieth century and then disappeared.

[6] The most extreme version linking the Gishi with vengeful spirits was the elaborate argument of Maruya Saiichi in his provocative and controversial book of 1985, *Chūshingura to wa nanika* ("What is Chūshingura?"), in which he offered an intricate elaboration of Satō Tadao's initial suggestion by arguing that the Akō revenge was literally a "dramatic" act, by which the Gishi were re-enacting in real life the stage revenge of the Soga Brothers that had become so popular in Edo kabuki of the Genroku era. See Maruya 1984. For the Soga tradition in kabuki, see Kominz 1995.

[7] "*Shomin seikatsu to seiji o musubitsukeru mono* 庶民生活と政治を結びつけるもの." Satō 1976, p. 133.

[8] Ruch 1977, pp. 286-94, 303-07. Note that the "books" described by Ruch were in the formats of both scrolls and codex (*sasshi* 冊子, what we today usually mean by the word "book"). Printed books in the Tokugawa period were almost entirely in the *sasshi* format.

[9] The following data for the editions of various texts are taken from the catalog of premodern Japanese books (*Wakosho mokuroku* 和古書目録) maintained by the Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan 国文学研究資料館 (National Institute of Japanese Literature), available online at http://base1.nijl.ac.jp/~wakosho/. There may be additional editions that are not represented in this catalog.

[10] *Ofuregaku Kanpō shūsei* 1934, edicts 2220 (1673), 2013-14 (1684), and 2015 (1698). For secondary accounts of this process, see Konta 1981, pp. 65-66, and Shively 1982, pp. 25-26.

[11] The one exception was Katashima 1719, which was quickly banned. For details, see Smith 2003, p. 23.

[12] In the text of *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, by contrast, the word "*gishi*" only occurs once—and the word "*rōnin*" fifteen times.

[13] This is by no means to say that *jitsuroku* were never suppressed; see Kornicki 1982 for a detailed ac-

count of one such case.

[14] Hyōdō 2000, pp. 17-74, describes the origins and rise of *naniwabushi*. In English, see Hyōdō and Smith, forthcoming.

[15] Smith 2003, p. 32. The complex issue of the relationship of feudal loyalty to both imperial loyalty and modern nationalism has been debated ever since it was raised in Craig 1961, pp. 145-55 and 365-71, and remains a matter of continuing debate.

[16] Yamamoto 1972, pp. 330-76.

[17] For Chūshingura in film, see Misono 1966, Satō 1976, pp. 138-61, and the chronology of films in Akō-shi 1987, vol. 5, pp. 791-807.

[18] Dym 2003, pp. 9-12, 84-5, 70-1.

[19] Powell 1984, p. 728.

[20] Hyōdō 2000, p. 8.

[21] Yamamoto 2002

[22] For more detail on these works, see Smith 2004, pp. 27-29, from which the material in this paragraph is taken.

[23] Shigeno 1889.

[24] Fukumoto 1909. This work was revised five years later as a result of the revelations of the documents in *Akō gijin sansho* (see next note); Fukumoto 1914.

[25] Nabeta 1910–1911. See Akō Gishi Kenshōkai 1983, pp. 503–507, for a history of the *Akō gijin sansho*.

[26] For details about the emergence of historical novels about the Akō incident, see Miyazawa 2001, pp. 84-6, 112-16, and 121-23.

[27] The Tatsukawa Bunko was printed in a diminutive format of 12.5 x 9 cm and totaled over 200 volumes by the time the series ended in 1924. It was these series that single-handedly created the new *sakuhingun* of the "Ten Brave Heroes" of Sanada Yukimura (particularly Sarutobi Sasuke 猿飛佐助 and Kirigakure Saizō 霧隠才蔵, the two of the ten who were wholly fictional creations of the series), with fully 18 volumes on that theme. Most were written by the *kōdan* storyteller Tamada Gyokushūsai 玉田玉秀斎. For the history of the Tatsukawa Bunko, see Himeji Bungakukan 2004.

[28] The same trend was seen in certain shorter works of "pure literature" (*jun-bungaku* 純文学) as well, notably "Aru hi no Ōishi Kuranosuke" by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (Akutagawa 1917), for which see Smith 2003, p. 31. Works of this sort are now often referred to as "*rekishi shōsetsu*" 歴史小説 to distinguish them from the more popular *jidai shōsetsu*.

[29] Osaragi 1928-29.

[30] Miyazawa 2001, p. 198.

[31] Satō 1976, p. 138.

[32] Standish 2005.

[33] Chronologies of all known historical performances of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* are provided in Akō-shi 1987, v. 5, pp. 1-694 for kabuki and pp. 695-790 for jōruri.

[34] Akō-shi 1987, vol. 5, pp. 809-888.

[35] Miyazawa 2001, p. 8.

[36] See Smith 1990 for a discussion of the changing popularity of Chūshingura in the 1980s and 1990s.

[37] It is important to remember that under the Tokugawa system of legal revenge, avengers were often rewarded rather than punished. The Akō revenge, however, did not conform to the dictates of legal revenge; the complex implications of this distinction are analyzed in Bitō 2003, pp. 160-62.

[38] Powell 1984.