

the kabuki, dramatized the same issue of samurai loyalty versus the claim to "public" authority questionably asserted by the shogunate. Both the scholarly debate and the popular dramatization reflect the uneasy coexistence of Neo-Confucian civil culture with many feudal values persisting not only in the samurai class but in the popular mind as well.

As the Way of the warrior became increasingly codified in literary form, other long-standing religious influences showed themselves. One of the most famous of these is found in *In the Shadow of Leaves* (*Hagakure*), which reflects the persistent influence of Zen in the Tokugawa period (see chap. 33), especially Zen in the cult of swordsmanship—the cult that Ruth Benedict referred to in her classic characterization of Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

THE DEBATE OVER THE AKŌ VENDETTA

Few events both fascinated and frightened the peaceful world of eighteenth-century Tokugawa Japan as much as the Akō vendetta of 1703. The vendetta had its beginnings in the spring of 1701, when a *tozama daimyō*, Asano Naganori (1667–1701), lord of the Akō domain, attacked and wounded Lord Kira Yoshinaka, a high-ranking master of shogunate court ritual. The reason for the attack remains unclear, but the usual explanation is that Lord Asano lost his temper because Lord Kira continually humiliated him. The attack occurred on the final day of an important state ceremony in which the shogunate hosted imperial emissaries sent from Kyoto to convey the emperor's New Year greetings to the shogun. Lord Asano, who had been serving as one of the shogunate's representatives during the ceremony, was detained, interrogated, and sentenced to die by committing *seppuku* on the very same day.

After learning of their master's death, the now masterless samurai (*rōnin*) of Akō disagreed about the appropriate response. Some advocated the peaceful surrender of Akō Castle. Others recommended defending the castle to the death. Still others called for immediate revenge on Lord Kira. The matter was resolved when most of them agreed to surrender Akō Castle in the hope that the Asano family would be allowed to continue as daimyō of Akō. After the shogunate decreed that Naganori's branch of the Asano family would be discontinued and the domain confiscated, the castle at Akō was surrendered and Asano's retainers became *rōnin*. A number of them had vowed in Akō to protest what was regarded as an unjust punishment by the *bakufu*, and after many months of debate on how to accomplish their goals, in the late summer of 1702 they resolved on revenge. A contingent of forty-seven of the Akō *rōnin*, led by Oishi Yoshio (Kuranosuke), took their revenge on Lord Kira one year and ten months after their master's suicide. The *rōnin* next marched to Sengaku Temple and presented Kira's severed head to the grave of their deceased master. They

then reported their deed to the shogunate and awaited its verdict. After long deliberations, the shogunate decided that the *rōnin* had broken the law and would have to be punished: each was sentenced to die by *seppuku*.

A lengthy debate over the revenge vendetta soon followed, centering on issues of the samurai code, duty, and ethics but also, implicitly, issues related to religious practice, such as the possibility of venerating figures otherwise sentenced to death as felons.

Much of the debate hinged on the interpretation and importance of Japanese concepts of loyalty (*J. chū, Ch. zhong*) and duty or righteousness (*J. gi, Ch. yi*). To Chinese Confucians, *zhong* had strong connotations of personal fidelity, or being true to oneself, and not necessarily blind loyalty to a ruler. To the Japanese, in keeping with earlier feudal traditions of the samurai class, *chū* had more emphasis on self-sacrificing loyalty to one's lord. Here the Chinese Confucian term *yi* is rendered as "rightness" because it has a contingent, contextual character (what is right or proper in a given situation), whereas Japanese writers tend to assign to *gi* an absolute value and religious intensity, translated here as "righteousness." Much of the Akō debate was spent assessing priorities among the universalistic values and particularistic duties affirmed in each case. We should also note the difference in the meaning of the term *chen* (*J. shin*), which Chinese Confucians generally understand as "minister" (usually civil) and Japanese regard as "retainer," harking back to the medieval, feudal traditions of the samurai. A certain asymmetry and incongruity was inevitable in the adaptation of Confucian concepts to the different Japanese scene.

Along with the debate, the Akō vendetta inspired numerous dramatic productions, including one of the most famous of the Japanese stage, *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (*Kanadehon chūshingura*), excerpts from which follow the passages presented here from some of the most important early statements in or related to the debate:

OKADO DENPACHIRŌ

Okado Denpachirō (1659–1723), a deputy inspector (*ometsuke*) serving the shogunate, was on duty overseeing the ceremony when Lord Asano attacked Lord Kira. Immediately after the attack, Denpachirō interrogated both men and reported his findings to the junior councillors (*wakadoshiyori*) serving the shogun. After interrogating the two men, Denpachirō and the other inspectors submitted their reports to their superiors. These ultimately reached Lord Matsudaira, the governor of Mino, who was also known as Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu and was the shogun's favorite and arguably one of the most powerful men in the shogunate. Later the same day, the shogunate's verdict was read by Nagakura Chin'ami, the chief of servants at Chiyoda Castle.

more civil context as "loyal ministers and dutiful officers" (Ch. *zhongchen yishi*) and was defined in *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained* (*Xingli zhiyi*) by Chen Beixi (1159–1223), a disciple of Zhu Xi. Beixi suggested that "loyal ministers and dutiful officers" were men who had sacrificed themselves, or had met some violent death, in fidelity to a dynasty. Beixi added that "loyal ministers and dutiful officers" could be legitimately venerated at shrines built to honor their spirits. Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) wrote a colloquial version of Beixi's work, which became a text widely read in Tokugawa Japan. Indeed, many scholars participating in the debate were familiar with it. Whether the common Japanese understanding of *chūshin gishi* as "loyal retainers and righteous warriors" (*samurai*) included this nuance is open to question, but if it did, the shogunate might face the prospect that men it had sentenced to die as criminals could later be apotheosized at shrines dedicated to them.

Razan quoted the *History of the Tang Dynasty*, which says that Xu Yuan and Zhang Xun defended the city of Suifang during the final year of the An Lushan (d. 757) rebellion. After they were killed by rebel troops, Xu and Zhang were enshrined as *zhongchen yishi* because of their heroic defense of the dynasty. Razan next presented an account from the *History of the Song Dynasty*, that Su Jian was enshrined after he burned himself to death following defeat by an invading barbarian force from areas south of China. Razan turned to the *History of the Tang Dynasty* and the *History of Fokien* for information about Chen Yuanguang, enshrined for his successful defense of the Tang dynasty against invaders from the north. None of these Chinese cases, however, involved revenge or a vendetta, and Razan's account of them was written well before the Akō incident. Japanese Confucians familiar with Razan's explications of Beixi's accounts interpreted the notion of *chūshin gishi* as signifying a loyalist martyr who could be legitimately venerated. In 1912 the Ōishi Shrine was built for Ōishi Kuranosuke and the other Akō *rōnin*. At the time of the Akō incident, the religious aspects of the case as it appears in the eighteenth-century version of the popular play *Chūshingura* were connected to a Buddhist temple celebrating the feudal values of revenge and honor redeemed.

In the following extract, because Razan is translating from Beixi's Chinese, the English rendering of the key terms first gives the Chinese meaning and then the way they might be understood in the Japanese samurai context.

"LOYAL RETAINERS AND RIGHTEOUS WARRIORS"

In later ages, loyal ministers [retainers (*chūshin*)] and dutiful officers [righteous warriors (*gishi*)] threw themselves against unsheathed blades to avert disaster. For example, both Zhang Xun (709–751) and Xu Yuan died in defending Suifang. Twin temples were erected for them there. Su Jian (d. 1076) died in Yongzhou, and so a temple was founded for him there. The King of the Manifest

Spirit of Zhangzhou sacrificed his life to defend his people. Therefore the people of Zhangzhou built a temple so that they could offer sacrifices. These temples for loyal ministers (retainers) and dutiful officers (righteous warriors) were, in each case, legitimate ones. These temples must be closely supervised so that they open and close at certain times. Vandals must not be allowed to desecrate them. To show their respect for the loyal ministers (retainers) and dutiful officers (righteous warriors) enshrined at these temples, commoners should be allowed only to burn incense at them. . . .

[Hayashi Razan, *Seiri jigi genkai*, vol. 7, pp. 273–292, JNT]

HAYASHI HŌKŌ

In 1691, the shogun Tsunayoshi appointed Hayashi Hōkō (Nobuatsu, 1644–1732), the son of Gabō (1618–1680) and the grandson of Razan, to a newly created post, *daigaku no kami*, head of the Confucian academy. The same year, the academy, known as the Hall of Sages (Seidō), was moved from Shinobu-gaoka to the top of Shōhei Hill, named after Confucius's birthplace and located in the Yushima district of Edo. The new site served primarily as the venue of semiannual *sekiten* ceremonies held in the spring and autumn to honor Confucian masters and their teachings. "On Revenge" (Fukushū ron) reveals Hōkō's admiration of the "forty-six men," as well as his ultimate respect for the integrity of the law.

"ON REVENGE" (FUKUSHŪ RON)



Forty-six men, including Ōishi Yoshio's² samurai retainers of a certain Kansai daimyō, united their hearts in forming a league to avenge the death of their deceased lord. On the fourteenth day of the twelfth lunar month in the winter of Genroku 15 [1703], they took revenge on his enemy and were arrested. The shogunate commissioned a thorough and official investigation of the crime and

2. Although forty-seven *rōnin* took part in the revenge attack, one of the group, Terasaka Kichimasa, apparently was ordered to leave before the *rōnin* reached the Sengaku Temple and thus neither surrendered himself to the bakufu nor was forced to commit suicide with the others, living instead for another forty-five years to the ripe old age of seventy-eight. Essayists have thus variously referred to the participants as being either forty-six or forty-seven in number, with those seeking to justify the bakufu verdict citing the number of those sentenced to die, forty-six, and more sympathetic writers referring to forty-seven. Also, the participants in the vendetta were variously described as "men," "*rōnin*," or "samurai," depending on the extent to which praise or condemnation was intended.

then handed down its verdict: the members of the league were asked to commit suicide.

Someone asked the following question:

The Three Bonds and the Five Constant Virtues³ are the great substance of ritual propriety and the foundations of our moral transformation by means of education and learning. Throughout history and the entire world, there has never been any deviation from these. Based on them, the early kings of antiquity established laws and formulated detailed regulations, promulgating them throughout the realm and transmitting them to posterity. Now the relationships between a ruler and his ministers and between a father and his sons are most essential and basic to the Three Bonds and the Five Constant Virtues. Those relationships represent the pinnacle of heaven's principles and human ethics. Nowhere between heaven and earth can one escape them. Therefore the *Book of Rites* states, "One should never live under the same sky with the enemy of one's ruler or one's father."⁴ This injunction issued from a natural and irresistible human feeling; in no respect is it the product of selfishness. Forbidding revenge contradicts the regulations established by the early kings and wounds the hearts and souls of loyal retainers and filial children (*chūshin kōshi*). Executing those who take revenge is an extreme example of destroying the ethical models of the early kings and violating the laws they formulated. Thus, how can forbidding revenge possibly help rectify human ethics or conform to the law?

I replied that the rightness [or duty (*gi*)] of revenge is evident in the *Record of Rites*, the *Institutes of the Zhou Dynasty*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Moreover, many Tang- and Song-dynasty Confucian scholars who discussed revenge came to the same conclusion. A Ming-dynasty scholar, Qiu Jun [1420–1495], also discussed revenge in considerable detail in his "Supplement" to the *Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (I. *Daigaku engi*, Ch. *Daxue yanyi*).

I, too, would like to analyze the matter, noting relevant insights from the ancient Confucian classics and commentaries on them. First, I will view their vendetta from the perspective of the hearts of the forty-six men. It was imperative that they "not share the same sky with their master's enemy" and that they "sleep on reeds, using their sword as a pillow" [*Record of Rites*]. To hang onto

3. The Three Bonds refer to the proper relations between ruler and minister, parent and child, and husband and wife. The Five Constant Virtues are humaneness, rightness, ritual decorum, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

4. The *Record of Rites* makes this remark only in reference to one's father. The *Rites of Zhou*, however, suggests that the same ethic can be legitimately applied to one's ruler.

life by enduring shame and humiliation is not the way of the samurai. We must also consider the vendetta from the perspective of the law. Anyone who sees the law as his enemy must be put to death. Although the forty-six men were carrying out the last wishes of their deceased lord, they could not do so without committing a capital crime in the process. Stubbornly rebellious, they blatantly defied the authorities. They were arrested and punished in order to clarify the laws of the nation for the realm and for posterity.

These two perspectives are hardly identical, but they might complement each other in operation, without contradiction. Above, there must be humane rulers and wise ministers who govern by clarifying law and promulgating decrees. Below, there must be loyal retainers and righteous samurai (*chūshin gishi*) who readily vent their anger in the determined pursuit of their cause. In doing so, if the forty-six men had to sacrifice their lives because they broke the law, what could they possibly regret? The vendetta let the world know that a lord can indeed trust his retainers and that retainers are loyal to their lord. . . .

[Hayashi Razan, *Kinsen buke shiso*, in NST, vol. 27, pp. 372–75; BS, JAT]

MURO KYŪSŌ

Muro Kyūsō (1658–1734) was born in Bitchū Province, the son of a *rōnin*. At fifteen, he entered the service of Maeda Tsumonori (1643–1724), daimyo of Kanaazawa domain. Soon thereafter, Kyūsō was sent to study in Kyoto under the Neo-Confucian scholar Kinoshita Jun'an (1621–1698). In 1711, with the recommendation of Arai Hakuseki, Kyūsō became a scholar serving the eighth shōgun, Yoshitsune. Kyūsō's *Records of the Righteous Men of Akō Domain* (*Akō gijin roku*), one of his longer works, was written in 1703, shortly after the suicide of the *rōnin*. It offers a detailed narrative of the incident from beginning to end and was one of the earliest writings to proclaim the righteousness (*gi*) of the *rōnin* vendetta. In the form of a dialogue with three of Kyūsō's students, the preface suggests that the vendetta of the Akō samurai was grounded in a Confucian tradition, dating back in ancient China to Bo Yi and Shu Qi, when ministers remonstrated against unwise policies adopted by their rulers.

PREFACE TO RECORDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS MEN OF AKŌ DOMAIN (AKŌ GIJIN ROKU)

Now that autumn is here, the rain has at last given way to clear skies. Outside my door I hear footsteps approaching. Looking out to welcome my visitors, I see that they are several of my students. I take out my *Records of Righteous Men* (*Gijin roku*), and we read it together. Once we stop reading, with tears we lament that loyalty and goodness are not rewarded and that no one seems to

seven men took revenge on their lord's enemy. Furthermore, it was because the lord of Akō had tried to kill Lord Kira that the Asano family lost their domain. Lord Kira did not destroy their domain. Therefore, again, the forty-seven men cannot be said to have exacted revenge for their lord's death.

Forgetting his ancestors and acting no more courageously than a common fellow, Lord Asano yielded to a moment of anger that morning and thus failed in his attempt to kill Lord Kira. Lord Asano's behavior must be deemed unrighteous (*fugit*). At best, the forty-seven men can be said to have deftly carried out their master's evil intentions. How can that be called right (*gi*)?

Lord Asano's samurai, unable to save their lord from his unrighteousness in life, chose to die in the process of completing his unrighteous intention. Circumstances led them to their fate. Even if we try to empathize with them, how can the whole matter not be deemed an enormous tragedy? Thus I judge the forty-seven men much as I do the five hundred followers of Tian Heng who killed themselves on an island in the sea.

Let us consider the loyal servant Ichibei,¹⁰ who was by far superior to Lord Asano's retainers. Diligently and intelligently, Ichibei applied his strength to the way of loyally serving his master, persistently doing what he should have done. Ichibei's sincere intentions eventually persuaded the shogunate to restore his master's family to their former position among the good people of the realm. How could such behavior not be deemed superior to the deeds of Lord Asano's retainers? Alas! Although Ichibei's circumstances were not the same as those of the forty-seven men, his intentions must be praised as righteous (*gi*).

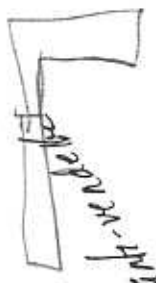
[Ogyū Sorai, *Kinsai baka shisō*, in NST, vol. 27, pp. 400-401; BS, JAT]

SATŌ NAOKATA

Unlike Hayashi Hakō and Ogyū Sorai, who were born in Edo, Satō Naokata (1650-1719) came from the castle town of Fukuyama, in southwestern Japan, between Okayama and Hiroshima. After studying Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism under Yamazaki Ansai, he served as a Neo-Confucian scholar to daimyo in Fukuyama, Maebashi, and Hikone domains. Unlike Ansai, who advocated a

10. In "On the Loyal Servant Ichibei," Sorai recounts that the peasant Ichibei, a native of the village of Anesaki in Kazusa, assumed responsibility for the family of his village headman, Jirōbei, after the latter was exiled to Ōshima because of his supposed complicity in a murder. Convinced of his master's innocence, Ichibei petitioned the shogunate for the return of his master's estate. In Hōei 2 (1795), Ichibei's petition was granted. Sorai notes that Ichibei abstained from sexual relations with his wife during the eleven years of petitioning for fear that her pregnancy might curtail his efforts on behalf of his lord. Noting that conjugal relations were among the few pleasures that Ichibei might otherwise have enjoyed, Sorai praises the loyalist for his sacrifice for his master.

blend of Neo-Confucianism and Shinto religiosity, Naokata strongly rejected mixing Shinto with Neo-Confucianism, instead defending the Zhu Xi orthodoxy against all other versions of the Confucian Way. Although Naokata and Asami Keisai were Ansai's most prominent disciples, they eventually formed opposite views of the vendetta. Naokata, one of their most severe critics, denounced the *rōnin* as utterly lacking righteousness.



NOTES ON THE FORTY-SIX MEN
(SHIJŪROKU NIN NO HIKKI)

At two o'clock in the morning on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of Genroku 15 [1703], the chief retainer of Lord Asano, Ōishi Kuranosuke, and his band of forty-six men entered the main residence of Lord Kira. The men wore helmets and armor and carried bows, arrows, and spears. They decapitated Lord Kira, wounded his son Sabei, and killed or wounded many of Lord Kira's retainers. Later that morning, the men retreated to Sengaku Temple in Shiba. Before the grave of their deceased lord, they offered up Lord Kira's severed head. There they remained.

On the way back from Lord Kira's residence, the men sent two members of their band, Yoshida Chūzaemon and Tomimori Suke'emon, to the residence of an inspector general, Sengoku Hisanao, the governor of Hōki Province. Chūzaemon and Suke'emon were supposed to report the incident to the inspector, deliver a letter to him, and await the shogunate's verdict regarding their fate. The shogunate decreed that the forty-six men be placed in the custody of four daimyo: (1) Hosokawa Tsunatoshi, governor of Etchū; (2) Matsudaira Sadanao, governor of Ōki; (3) Mizuno Tadamoto of Yamagata (Dewa); and (4) Mōri Tsunamoto, governor of Kai. On the fourth day of the second month of Genroku 16 [1703], the shogunate handed down its death sentence, which was promptly carried out. The verdict read as follows:

The shogunate asked Lord Asano to assist in entertaining imperial emissaries from Kyoto visiting Edo. Lord Asano, showing no regard for the occasion or the fact that he was inside the palace, acted in an outrageous (*futodoki*) manner, for which the appropriate punishment was ordered. Lord Kira committed no crime and so was not punished. Because of this, the forty-six men banded together to take revenge against their master's enemy; forced their way into Lord Kira's mansion armed with bows, arrows, and spears; and killed him. The shogunate deems this whole matter, from beginning to end, to be disrespectful to the authorities and most outrageous. Thus, it decrees that they commit *seppuku*.

The ethical principles of honorable behavior (*gi*) informing the shogunate's verdict are clear. The forty-six men were allowed to disembowel themselves

rather than be put to death by decapitation. The forty-six men should consider themselves fortunate that the shogunate decided to give them a compassionate sentence. Despite this, the common people chime in, praising the forty-six men as "loyal retainers and righteous samurai" (*chūshin gishi*).

It is understandable if uneducated people not familiar with the ethical principles of honorable behavior (*giri*) make mistakes like these. But even Master Hayashi Hōkō eulogized their passing, comparing them with Yu Rang and Tian Heng and praising them as "loyal and righteous retainers" (*chūgi no shin*). Hōkō further stated that the forty-six men "took revenge on their lord's enemy and thus promoted righteousness."¹¹ Many scholars have joined the refrain, similarly regretting the deaths of the forty-six men. Some, like Hōkō, even claim that the verdict was in accordance with ethical principles (*ri*) and that the intentions of the forty-six men were righteous (*gi*). But if the shogunate's verdict was in accordance with ethical principles, how could the forty-six men not have been unrighteous (*fugit*)? Such claims are groundless errors resulting from ignorance of righteous principles [of honorable behavior] (*giri*).

The common people regard as a teacher anyone who reads Confucian literature and then has something to say about ethical principles. But it is truly sad when mistakes are made and the minds of the people are misled. The forty-six men indeed made an egregious error when they deemed Lord Kira to be their deceased lord's enemy and invoked the *Record of Rites* statement that "one should not coexist under the same sky with the murderer of one's lord or father." Lord Kira was not their enemy, although he might have been if he had actually attacked Lord Asano. Lord Asano was sentenced to death because he was a criminal who violated the great law of the land and defied the authorities.

Moreover, if we consider the matter in terms of the dedicated spirit (*kokorozashi*) appropriate to a samurai, then if Lord Asano's rancor against Lord Kira was irrepressible, he should have waited until his ceremonial duties were completed and then found a more appropriate place to attack Lord Kira. To attack Lord Kira during the great ceremony hosting the imperial emissaries was a reckless, unmanly, and cowardly way of acting. Lord Kira was standing and chatting with Kajikawa Yōsobe when Asano approached him from behind, suddenly drew his short sword, and slashed him even as he attempted to flee. Lord Kira was not fatally wounded, and Kajikawa apprehended Lord Asano before he could finish his task. Lord Asano's lack of courage and skill were laughable in the extreme! That he was sentenced to death and his domain confiscated was indeed in accordance with the ethical principles proper to such matters.

11. This remark is in the preface to another version of the poem that Hōkō composed to conclude his essay "On Revenge." Both the preface and the other version of the poem are in Hōkō Hayashi *gakushi shū*. See NST, vol. 27, p. 375.

Lord Kira never even drew his short sword. He collapsed in surprise, and his face turned pale, making him the laughingstock of samurai throughout the realm. He behaved so shamefully that even death would have been a better fate. What could the shogunate have done to punish him any further? Clearly Lord Kira was not the mortal enemy of [the forty-six men's] master, Lord Asano.

Rather than regretting their master's crime, the forty-six men defied the shogunate's verdict, armed themselves, and used passwords, secret signals, and military strategy to murder Lord Kira. Thus they too committed a capital crime. Nevertheless, obsessed with their master's anger toward Lord Kira, their muddled minds became totally intent on taking revenge. If later they had reflected on the nature of their crime, a violation of the shogun's law, and committed suicide at Sengaku Temple, their intentions would have merited sympathy despite the wrongness of their deed.

Instead they reported their deed to the inspector general and waited for a verdict from the shogunate. In both the letter they presented explaining their deed and in their first remarks to the inspector general, the men declared that they respected the authorities. But was not such behavior part of a scheme meant to win them praise, help them escape the death penalty, and perhaps even be given a stipend? Having committed a capital crime and blatantly disobeyed the authorities, there was no need for them to report anything, nor was there any need to wait for a verdict. These were not the acts of men who had readied themselves for death.

The Asano family had long revered Yamaga Sokō's teachings on military science. Ōishi had thus studied these teachings from the start. [The forty-six men's] plot arose out of their virulent reaction to the prospect of being reduced to the status of masterless samurai. Their attack was the product of calculation and conspiracy; it did not arise from any real sense of loyalty (*chūgi*) to their lord or from any feelings of commiseration with their lord in his misfortune. Someone who presumes to be a samurai should instead analyze things in detail and make clear distinctions so that he can resolve the confusion clouding the common people.

Examining the matter further, there is a reason why people join in praising the forty-six men as loyal and righteous retainers (*chūgi no shin*): Lord Kira was by nature a very greedy man. The world hated his arrogance, deceitfulness, and perverseness. Thus people overlooked Lord Asano's crime and felt sad over his death and disgust that Lord Kira still lived. Upon hearing that the forty-six men had taken revenge, killing Lord Kira, they were overjoyed, praising the forty-six as loyal and righteous retainers. Alas! Because of the perverseness of this one person, so many others ended up being killed, all of Edo was put in an uproar, and people's minds were thrown into confusion. Lord Kira is indeed the one whom we all should despise.

[Satō Naokata, *Kinsai buke shiso*, in NST, vol. 27, pp. 378-80; BS, JAT]

ASAMI KEISAI

Asami Keisai (1652-1711) was born near Kyoto, in the castle town of Takashima, in Ōmi Province. In 1677 he became a disciple of Yamazaki Anzai. Unlike Satō Naokata, Keisai avoided serving daimyo, preferring instead to remain a private teacher of Neo-Confucianism in Kyoto. Naokata and Keisai were two of Anzai's most brilliant students, but they strongly disagreed on a number of important issues. In this case, whereas Naokata judged the forty-six "men" to have been unrighteous (*fugit*), Keisai praised them as loyal servants and righteous samurai. Keisai's argument is couched in terms of the "supreme duty (or righteousness)" (*taigi*), for which he became well known. In "Essay on the Forty-six Samurai" (*Shijūroku shi ron*), written around 1706, Keisai refers indirectly to Naokata's views and attempts to refute them.

"ESSAY ON THE FORTY-SIX SAMURAI"
(SHIJŪROKU SHI RON)

Everyone knows the story of the Akō vendetta carried out by men from Banshū [Hartma Province]. While it is hardly open to question whether the forty-six men acted for the sake of their master, some who have misgivings about them claim that their behavior was unrighteousness (*fugit*) toward the government of the realm (*terka*) because they took revenge on someone whom the government had deemed innocent.

Such reasoning has generated a great variety of rather tenuous arguments. Many people have written me from near and far asking about the truth or falsity, rightness or wrongness of such arguments. A cursory look at these arguments reveals that they all fail to make clear the fundamental issues involved. . . . Here I will try to clarify the main outlines of the matter to supplement what they have to say.

Kōzuke-no-suke (Lord Kira) was in charge of the shōgun's representatives during the great ceremonies welcoming imperial emissaries from Kyoto. Because of his selfish desires, Lord Kira did not care whether Takumi-no-kami (Lord Asano) blundered through the great ceremony. Nor was Lord Kira concerned whether Lord Asano was disgraced and humiliated before the illustrious representatives of the imperial court. Such behavior greatly infuriated Lord Asano. In not devoting himself first and foremost to the ritual ceremonies of his lord, the shōgun, and instead indulging his selfish desires, Lord Kira committed crimes of an extremely serious nature. Even if Lord Asano had not first attacked him, Lord Kira should not have escaped punishment for his offenses. Even if he had been spared the death penalty, he should at least have been forced to relinquish his titles and resign his office. At the very least, he should have been stripped of his rice stipend.

On Lord Asano's part, his inability to control his private anger on the occasion of a major court ceremony and his rash behavior in attacking Lord Kira at such a time also were very serious errors. Nevertheless, these acts were not in the slightest degree directed against the shōgunate. More than that, [Lord Asano] did not even intend to act without deference to the occasion. Whether it was because of repeated disgrace or the insult he endured on that day, his heart so burned with indignation that without taking time to consider the consequences, he struck out at Lord Kira. Lord Kira fled, and a person on the scene subdued Lord Asano, so before he knew it, Asano found himself unable to finish his attack. If he had been able to attack and kill Lord Kira as he wanted to, he should then have committed suicide immediately. Or if he had been subdued before he managed to commit suicide, he should of course have been prepared to receive the death sentence.

In that case, if we ask what established legal principle would have been applicable here, it would have been the law stipulating that both parties in an altercation are to be punished equally (*kenka ryōseibai*). If we grant that Lord Asano's offense was the disturbance he created during the great ceremony, it was not unprovoked. Rather, it resulted entirely from Lord Kira's selfish intent. If Lord Asano was held responsible as one party in the altercation, then Lord Kira should have been held responsible as the other party. But Lord Asano alone was sentenced to die for disrupting a state ceremony, while the other party, Lord Kira, was not punished at all. Thus there is no question that in the last analysis, Lord Asano died on account of Lord Kira. Accordingly, had Lord Asano's retainers not killed Lord Kira, completing the work begun by their master's sword, their supreme duty (*taigi*) would never have been fulfilled. This was simply a matter of a lord's retainers killing his adversary in fulfillment of their lord's intention to kill him himself, and it is clear that the forty-six men showed not an iota of enmity toward, nor any thought of rebellion against, the shōgunate. All they did was to carry out revenge against a person who had been pardoned by the shōgunate. There is no concept of supreme duty (*taigi*) that justifies refraining from taking revenge against the murderer of one's lord or father simply because the government has pardoned the murderer. . . .

The adage "merit and demerit do not cancel out each other" means that a person's earlier good deeds are not undone by later mistakes that he might commit. From beginning to end, Ōishi's actions showed not the slightest intention of rebelling against the shōgunate. On the contrary, one should say that the righteousness displayed by the forty-six in not committing suicide but instead holding their necks out and entrusting their fates to the shōgunate was something that they had learned from their lord's lifelong loyal service to the shōgunate.

Gradually the whole story of what had transpired came to light. Lord Kira's heir was later punished for his disloyalty in not defending his father to the death, while the heirs of the forty-six men were treated leniently and their relatives

were spared from punishment.¹² Moreover, the forty-six were allowed to choose their grave sites, next to their master's at Sengaku Temple. From these facts it appears that the loyalty and righteousness of the forty-six men have been recognized by the shogunate and that the shogunate's councillors have come to recognize them as well. But even if this were not the case, and the bones of the forty-six men's sons and grandsons had been crushed to dust, it would not have prompted hatred in their loyal and righteous hearts. It is just like the case of Fang Xiaoru.¹³ There is nothing particularly ambiguous or open to doubt in such things: it is simply a matter of the principles of honorable behavior (*giri*) that are clear to everyone in the realm, whether educated or not. Some scholars who like to espouse exceptional and high-sounding views have offered all sorts of half-baked ideas, and it is not surprising that heterodox theories also emerge from their midst. Such views are not worth taking seriously.

A certain person has argued that if Ōishi and the others had immediately committed suicide at Sengaku Temple, their deed would have been comparable to those included in the "Exemplary Behavior" chapter of the *Elementary Learning*, but because they did not kill themselves right then and there, they were unrighteous. This is also a case of reasoning that confuses what came after with what came before. Even if we allow that their failure to commit suicide at Sengaku Temple contradicted the principles of honorable behavior (*giri*), in taking revenge on their lord's adversary, they were surely loyal and righteous (*chūgi*).... How much truer this is of the forty-six men who, instead of committing suicide, discarded their swords, reported their deed to the inspector general, and left their fate to the authorities, doing all this gallantly and with perfect composure. This act of self-surrender was admirably and skillfully performed, and it is not the sort of thing for which one seeks posthumous fame and honor. Even an ignorant person would have known that they could not expect to be pardoned simply because they did not commit suicide. If they were so attached to life, how could they have set their minds so firmly on the supreme duty, which by its very nature entails giving up one's life?

12. Satō notes that East Asian law provided for the punishment of not only the criminal but family members as well. Collectively, the forty-six men had nineteen sons. Four of them, all fifteen years of age or older, were exiled but pardoned three years later. The remaining fifteen sons were to be exiled when they turned fifteen, but they all became Buddhist monks, which excused them from punishment. The rice income of Lord Kira's adopted son, Yoshichika (1686–1706), was confiscated because he had not fought to the death to protect his father. He also was placed under house arrest, in the custody of a daimyo, before his death four years later (*Legends of the Samurai*, p. 333).

13. Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402) was a Confucian tutor to the second Ming emperor. After the prince of Yan, the emperor's uncle, seized the throne, Fang was asked to compose the accession edict. For writing "The rebel Yan usurped the throne," he and his clan to ten degrees of relatedness were sentenced to death, resulting in the execution of several hundred relatives and disciples. Fang's case, however, in no way involved revenge or a vendetta.

A certain person has also argued that the forty-six men killed Lord Kira because their master, Lord Asano, had failed to do so, and not because Lord Kira attacked Lord Asano; therefore Lord Kira was not the enemy of their master. Such shallow reasoning is based on ignorance of the true meaning of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. If we claim that a person cannot be another person's enemy unless he attacks that person directly, then we would have to conclude that Confucius erred in compiling the *Spring and Autumn Annals* when he stated that in condoning his nephew's assassination of his ruler, Zhao Dun in effect assassinated his ruler himself. If your master attacked someone, and for that reason your master was put to death, then who, other than the person he had attacked, would be called your enemy? There are many more examples of this sort of thing than I can possibly cite.

A certain person has argued, "Lord Asano was a poor swordsman. His failure to complete his attack was disgraceful. Clearly he would have been no use to the shogunate." This criticism is also laughable. Indeed, it would have been good if Lord Asano had been such an excellent swordsman that he killed Lord Kira immediately. However, Lord Asano was flustered by the suddenness of the incident, and Kira immediately fled, unfortunately foiling Lord Asano's attempt to slay him. But Lord Asano showed not the slightest sign of trying to flee the scene. If for this he should be condemned as being of no use, then what is the use of a coward like Lord Kira, who did flee? In the last analysis, it seems that those who make this sort of argument, bringing in all sorts of principles that do not really apply to the case, are only trying to avoid casting aspersions on the judgment of the shogun's councillors....

Some foolish people are confused by the allegation that the vendetta was carried out in defiance of the shogun's pardon of Lord Kira. However, as I said before, there is no principle (*kotoshizari*) stating that a son should not take revenge on his father's murderer just because the murderer has been pardoned by the authorities. Such revenge does not amount to defying the authorities. Because the vengeance seeker thinks of nothing but the enemy of his father, it does seem in retrospect that he has acted in defiance of the authorities. But it is really the same as Mencius's statement that if Shun's blind father Gu Sou had killed a man, Shun would have fled the empire carrying his father on his back.¹⁴ He would not have done this with any intention of defying the authorities. Nor would a son be defying his father if he refused to participate in a rebellion that he started, trying unto death to dissuade him. For rulers and parents, the same principles apply. It is here that we find the pinnacle of loyalty and filial piety.

Another theory that this person has offered is particularly despicable. According to this argument, the forty-six men, having nowhere to turn and no master to serve, staged the vendetta as a subterfuge to obtain a stipend from

14. Mencius 7A35.

some admiring lord. This must be the most slanderous allegation of all. From beginning to end, the forty-six men, without exception and without regrets, chose to discard their lives, having already written their last testaments. This libelous speculation, the sort that might come from a scrap iron collector, seems intent on eradicating even the memory of the forty-six men. How much more apparent is its slanderous nature if one considers that the forty-six men could carry out their attack only by breaking secretly into the residence of a prominent and well-connected individual guarded by a large number of retainers. How could even one of them have hoped to return alive? To allege that they did this in the hope of obtaining a stipend makes no sense whatsoever. What is more, Oishi and his band also possessed a considerable quantity of gold and silver. If they were unhappy that they had lost their source of income, they still would not have had to go to such lengths to seek employment at the risk of their lives. For samurai, such speculation amounts to gross slander.

A certain person asked, "How would it have been if Lord Asano's private grudge against Lord Kira had not reached the breaking point at this important ceremony, but in some other circumstances? Would that not have been more acceptable?" In the last analysis, I answer, it would still be the same thing. When one disregards one's public responsibilities because of a private grudge, one cannot escape punishment for the crime. But as long as the act is committed with no trace of disrespect toward the authorities, then it is the same, no matter what the occasion. Even the letters and last testaments of the forty-six men had no hint of ill will toward the shogunate. On the contrary, their attitude was moderate and reasonable in the extreme, demonstrating an acute awareness of the rules of ritual decorum. . . . Samurai in the service of a lord generally do not feel a deep sense of personal commitment to their master's feuds, because once the occasion has passed, the matter of revenge becomes a collective responsibility. After all, the house retainers are not usually related by blood to their lord, and the custom is for retainers to change masters quite readily. This is all because in the normal course of their lives, no one pays enough attention to the principle of righteousness between lord and retainer. Ever since the *Chronicle of Great Peace* (*Taiheiki*), in all quarters of our land, in times of disorder, there have been many heroic deeds and many courageous men. Yet if we examine how many of them truly merited the name "loyal retainer and righteous samurai" (*chūshin gishi*), we will find few indeed. . . .

Someone asked, "The forty-six men formed themselves into a vigilante band, armed to the hilt [and] using passwords, secret signals, and techniques of military strategy to carry out their deed. That itself is a capital offense. What do you think about this?" As you have described their actions, I answer it appears as if they were indeed an armed band acting in defiance of the shogunate. But they were only a small band formed with the intent of entering the mansion of an important person in order to take revenge on their lord's adversary in some way or other, without fail. Thus they had no choice but to make such preparations.

They never tried to defy the shogunate or to create a civil disturbance. Even in the case of a vendetta against the killer of one's father, depending on the nature of the adversary and the situation, sometimes a major civil disturbance is created, although this is certainly not intended. To think only of the need to avoid making such a disturbance in deference to the authorities and act in such a way that one's enemy escapes is to put one's lord or father in second place. What is more, the forty-six planned their vendetta in such a way that the neighboring residences were not disturbed in the slightest, and even inside Lord Kira's residence, they avoided killing those who remained out of the fray. After accomplishing their task, they even took care not to start any accidental fires as they left Kira's mansion.

In consideration of all this, to say that what they did amounts to surreptitiously raising an army [and] deceiving the authorities is to fail to recognize their fundamental objective. Generally speaking, when analyzing a major incident like this one, it is best to deemphasize the minor infractions while trying to comprehend sympathetically the basic intention underlying them, in order to avoid impugning the loyalty and righteousness of the parties involved. . . .

A certain person has contended, "The forty-six men revered the military strategies taught by Yamaga Sokō's school. Their conspiracy to take revenge thus arose not from sentiments of loyalty, righteousness, and compassion but, rather, from exasperation over becoming vagrant *rōnin*." This is a most laughable theory! The military strategies of Kusumoki Masashige, the Han-dynasty scholar Zhang Liang, and Zhu Gelang often involved stratagems and deception. Yet the deeds of these men shine brilliantly even today, and no one questions the fact that they possessed a Confucian nobility of character and were true exemplars of loyalty and righteousness. This is because their lives clearly manifested the original mind-and-heart and sense of supreme duty. Even apart from the original mind, if only the supreme duty is established, there inevitably will be loyal armies and righteous wars fought in its name. This fact is shown in the way Zhu Xi wrote the *Digest of the Comprehensive Mirror* (*Tongjian gangmu*), as well as, in our own country, in the accounts of the loyalists of the Southern Court recorded in the *Chronicle of Great Peace*. In the writings left behind by the forty-six men, their unswerving dedication to the memory of their lord is clear beyond a shadow of doubt, and no amount of effort to find fault with their motivation can stand up to scrutiny. This is what people in ancient times meant by the saying "If you are determined to accuse a person of a crime, you can always drum up a charge."¹⁵

A certain person has also remarked, "If one person says that the forty-six men were loyal and righteous, then all the other scholars will chime in" (*taidō*). The

15. Zuo zhuan, "Duke Xi, 10th Year," in Legge, trans., *The Chün ts'ew, with the Tso chuen*, p. 157.

expression "chime in" refers to a situation in which, regardless of the number of people, people fawn on and conform to the words and ideas of those in a position of authority or those with power and influence. In that case, if a person's words arise from a mind that is given to flattery, even one person can be said to "chime in." When it comes to things like praising the filial piety of Shun or revering the loyalty of King Wen, even if the whole realm has agreed on the same thing for ten thousand generations, it cannot be said to be "chiming in." It is necessary only to understand the true principles of honorable behavior; whether or not one speaks the same way as others do is not something about which one should be concerned.

Ultimately, my thesis is neither circuitous nor ambiguous: if one's ruler or father attacks someone but fails to kill him and, for that reason, loses his life while his adversary continues to live as if nothing had happened, what purpose would be served if his retainers or sons simply looked on from the side, just because of some blunder made by their lord or father? And what purpose would be served if such retainers or sons were regarded as loyal vassals and righteous samurai (*chūshin gishi*) and, on that basis, were given stipends and employment by the lords of the land? These are questions that do not arise in ordinary examinations of the master-retainer relationship. Other matters are relevant here as well, but it is not possible to mention them all. Actually, their essential outlines can be inferred from what I have already said.

[Asami Keisai, *Kinsai hake shishō*, in NST, vol. 27, pp. 390-96; BS, JAT]

DAZAI SHUNDAI

Dazai Shundai (1680-1747) was born in the castle town of Iida, in Shinano Province (modern Nagano Prefecture). After briefly serving as a samurai retainer to Matsudaira Tadanori, Shundai moved to Edo and began studying under Ogyū Sorai in 1711, two years after the death of the fifth shōgun, Tsunayoshi. While Shundai's views are consistent with Sorai's insofar as they condemn the *rōnin*, they also resemble Satō Naokata's conclusions. Especially significant is that Shundai, like Naokata, blamed Yamaga Sokō's teachings for the vendetta. Shundai's bold "Essay on the Forty-six Samurai of Akō Domain" (*Akō shijūroku shi ron*, ca. 1731-1733), condemning the *rōnin* and their vendetta, sparked a second round of debate over the incident. A number of essays that ensued refuted Shundai's views, much as Asami Keisai and others had written to rebut Naokata's earlier claims. From the mid-eighteenth century, the debate over the Akō vendetta continued through the remainder of the Tokugawa period.

Given Shundai's Sinological orientation, it is significant that after citing Chinese precedents, he acknowledged a different Japanese Way: "For samurai of this Eastern country there is an indigenous Way: if a samurai sees his lord

murdered, he will immediately lose all self-control and become crazed for revenge. Without thought about what is right or wrong, he will ~~run~~ into the fray believing that it is only through death that he can demonstrate his righteousness."

THE FORTY-SIX SAMURAI OF AKŌ DOMAIN
(AKŌ SHIJŪROKU SHI RON)

In the third month of Genroku 14 [1701], the emperor at Yamashiro dispatched a procession of emissaries to Edo. The shōgun Tsunayoshi placed Asano Nagamori, the lord of Akō domain, and Date Muneharu [1682-1737], the lord of the southern Yoshida domain, in charge of their reception and entertainment and named Lord Kira Yoshinaka the master of ceremonies. Among the retainers of the Eastern Court [i.e., the shōgunate], few understood the proper etiquette for receiving and entertaining imperial emissaries. Only the master of ceremonies, Lord Kira, was well versed in such rituals. For this reason, all daimyo who were asked to receive and entertain the imperial emissaries had to humble themselves to the master of ceremonies in speech and shower him with gifts so that he might deign to instruct them in the fine points of ceremonial behavior.

The lord of Yoshida was young and inept at ceremonies; thus he repeatedly instructed his retainers to secretly take gifts of gold and silk to Lord Kira. While proceeding to the ceremonies, Lord Kira especially praised the lord of Yoshida, complimenting his excellence as a host. Lord Asano resented this. On the fifteenth day¹⁶ of the third month, as the imperial emissaries were going to the ceremonies, Lord Asano unsheathed his sword and struck Lord Kira, wounding him on the forehead. People on the scene immediately stopped the attack, so Lord Kira was not killed.

The shōgun, Tsunayoshi, was furious. He ordered that Lord Asano be confined at the residence of the lord of Ichi-no-seki and sentenced him to die that very day. Ultimately, he sent a contingent of officials to confiscate Akō Castle. However, the master of ceremonies, Lord Kira, was exempted from punishment and allowed to remain living with his family in Edo. The following year, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, the former chief retainer of Akō domain, Ōishi Yoshio, and a band totaling forty-six men carried out a night attack on Kira's residence, killed Lord Kira and decapitated him, and then departed. Finally they went to the grave of their deceased master, Lord Asano, at Sengaku Temple, where they offered up their victory to his spirit. Their vendetta completed, they personally reported their deed to the authorities and waited to be sentenced to death. After hearing of the incident, Tsunayoshi ordered his offi-

¹⁶ Actually, it was the fourteenth day.

cials to split up the forty-six men and confine them at the residences of four daimyo. Seventeen were interned at the mansion of the lord of Kumamoto in Higo Province; ten more were at the mansion of the lord of Matsuyama in Iyo; ten were at the lord of Chōfu's castle in Nagato; and nine were at the residence of the lord of Okazaki in Mikawa. The following year, Genroku 16 [1703], on the fourth day of the second month, the sentence of death was carried out, each committing *seppuku* at the residence where he had been held.

A visitor asked Master Dazai, "The whole world praises the righteousness of the forty-six men, but you alone condemn them. Can you explain your views?" I replied, "I can indeed.

"From the time that Lord Asano attacked and wounded Lord Kira inside the shogun's castle to the time that the Akō samurai murdered Lord Kira and were sentenced to death, I was in Edo, and on the basis of what I saw and heard, I have been able to ascertain all the facts of the matter. When it occurred, I was in my twenties and had some understanding of the principles of honorable behavior (*giri*). At first, I simply followed public opinion, thinking that what Yoshio and the others had done was righteous and mourning their deaths. But soon I began to have second thoughts about the matter. There is a saying that in human life, 'it is not easy in the morning to plan for the evening.'¹⁷ After all, who would have known that they could wait until the winter of the following year without Lord Kira's dying in the meantime? And if Lord Kira had died before that winter, how would the Akō samurai have been able to accomplish their mission? In such a situation, what could they have done? Taken the tonsure, shaved their heads, and become Buddhist monks? Fled to some remote island, as Tian Heng and his men did? Exhumed Lord Kira's corpse and flogged it as Wu Zixu in ancient China did to the man who killed his father? None of these would have been proper courses of action. Had the forty-six men chosen one of these alternatives, would they not have become the laughingstock of the world? As it turned out, Lord Kira did not die of illness before the vendetta, so he ended up dying at the hands of the men of Akō. Although this has been called 'the punishment of Heaven' (*tenchū*), it was really due to nothing more than the good fortune of the men of Akō. It is on account of this that I have doubts about the actions of Yoshio and his band.

"Moreover, for several years I have read and studied the Six Classics so that I have a rough understanding of what the supreme duty (*taigi*) is all about. Accordingly, I feel that I can make a retrospective judgment regarding the men of Akō on the basis of the laws of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. The *Record of Rites* states, 'One should not remain alive under the same sky as the murderer of one's father.' Although there is no clear statement regarding the murderer of

one's lord, the *Classic of Filial Piety* states that one's lord should be respected the same as one's father. Accordingly, the murderer of one's lord is analogous to the murderer of one's father. This is a principle that has remained unchanged since ancient times and that all people understand. It is only for this reason that praise has been heaped on Yoshio and his band.

"However, because Lord Asano's death did not result from Lord Kira's murdering him, Lord Kira cannot be deemed his enemy. Why, then, did Yoshio and his band kill him? They did so because they did not understand where their resentment should be directed. For this reason, I judge the actions of Yoshio and his band to have been wrong. Ultimately, I came to hold this view and have debated with many people about it. But my view has displeased many. Therefore, for years I kept my thoughts to myself, considering them idiosyncratic, personal views.

"When I began studying under Master Sorai, I asked him about his views, and it seemed that they tallied perfectly with my own conclusions. Master Sorai said, 'The Akō samurai did not understand righteousness. Their killing of Lord Kira represented nothing but their study of Yamaga Sokō's military strategies.' I have heard that according to the laws established by our divine founder, Ieyasu, anyone who commits murder in the shogun's palace must die. But Lord Asano only wounded Lord Kira. That is not a crime punishable by death. Nevertheless, the government (*kōke*) sentenced him to die. Thus, the punishment exceeded what was proper. The retainers of Lord Asano should have felt resentment about *that*. However, Yoshio and his band did not resent what they should have resented but instead resented Lord Kira. What an insignificant target for their resentment! When the shogunate treats the lord of a domain with respect, the retainers serving that lord should obey him and stand in awe of the shogunate. If the shogunate does not treat their lord with respect, however, his retainers should feel resentment against the shogunate. Retainers of the lords of the various domains are aware only of their particular lords. What do they know about the shogunate?

"Moreover, for samurai of this Eastern country there is an indigenous Way; if a samurai sees his lord murdered, he will immediately lose all self-control and become crazed for revenge. Without thought about what is right or wrong, he will leap into the fray believing that it is only through death that he can demonstrate his righteousness. Humane men inevitably see such self-sacrifice as a vain waste of life, but they also realize that the state depends on this Way, and thus they strive to preserve it. They also know that this Way is effective in maintaining morale among the samurai. Therefore, it cannot be abandoned. Now Yoshio and his band did not resent what they should have resented but instead resented Lord Kira. Because they stood in awe of the shogunate, they refused to act against it. Not only did they not realize the righteousness expected of retainers; they also abandoned what the samurai of this Eastern country consider as their Way. Is that not pathetic?"

17. Zuo zhuan, "Duke Shan, 31 Year," in Legge, trans., *The Tao chuan*, in *The Ch'ün ch'iu*, with the *Tao chuan*, p. 578.

The visitor then asked, "Well then, what should the Akō samurai have done for their lord?"

I replied, "Nothing would have been better than for them to have died at Akō Castle. I have heard that Akō is a wealthy domain and that for generations the people there have been happy with their lord. If Yoshio and his band had put their lord first on the basis of righteousness, who would have dared to oppose them? Would he have had only forty-six soldiers? With such support to rely on, Yoshio and his band could have stood before Akō Castle and put up a good fight against the shogun's troops. Then they could have climbed inside the castle, set it afire, and committed suicide one by one, letting their corpses go up in flames with the castle. Then the men of Akō would have done all that could be done. But Yoshio and his band did not know how to make such an honorable showing of themselves. Instead, they just folded their arms and turned over the castle to emissaries of the shogun. They surely lost their great opportunity!"

"But even if they were unable to die at Akō Castle, they still could have gone right away to Edo and attacked Lord Kira. If they had succeeded in killing him, they should have immediately killed themselves. If they did not succeed, they should have died in the effort. Whatever the outcome of the attack, they would have had no choice but to die. With death, their duties to their lord would have been fulfilled completely."

Yet Yoshio and his band were not capable of such behavior. They bided their time leisurely, waiting for the right moment, vainly plotting and conspiring how they might best murder Lord Kira. Their goal was to succeed in their plot and, by doing so, to achieve fame and profit (*myōri*). How despicable! The fact that Lord Kira did not die before they attacked him was due only to the good fortune of the Akō samurai. Once Yoshio and his band had killed Lord Kira and offered up their victory before their master's grave, they had completed their task and fulfilled their duty. For commoners it is a capital crime to murder a retainer of the shogun. Thus the forty-six samurai should have committed suicide. What need was there to wait for an official verdict from the shogunate?

The fact that they were unable to bring themselves to commit suicide [and so] turned themselves over to the authorities could only be because they thought that having completed a task of the greatest difficulty, they would win the highest merit. If they were fortunate enough to avoid death, they thought, then to obtain a position would be as easy as bending down to pick up dust from the ground. If they were unfortunate and did die, then they would be dying according to the law, and they would not be criticized for not dying earlier. So why, they thought, should it be necessary to commit suicide?

Is this not what I have called seeking fame and profit (*myōri*)? How ignominious! Are people like Yoshio who feign devotion to their supreme righteous duty (*taigi*) when in fact they are driven by a desire for profit in any way worthy of being deemed righteous? If the shogunate had mistakenly pardoned Yoshio

and his band and allowed them to be offered an official position, they would have ended up eating the shogun's grain. This was all because they did not know the proper object for their resentment. It all began with Master Yamaga Sokō serving the lord of Akō domain as an instructor in military strategy. Yoshio studied under Master Yamaga. He and his band used Yamaga's teachings on strategy in every detail of their plot to murder Lord Kira. For this reason they made no tactical errors and were able to accomplish their mission. But because they did not understand the proper object for their resentment, they fell short of fulfilling the supreme duty they owed their master. Master Yamaga's teachings are indeed like that.

"All retainers pray for the security of their lord's domain, but still crises arise. Can it be that there are no retainers who know what righteousness is? Or is it that what they consider as righteousness is actually a false righteousness? There are, after all, many examples of what Mencius referred to as 'righteousness that is not righteousness.' No one wishes for incidents like the Akō vendetta, but no one can guarantee that they will never happen. Why, then, do retainers not make sure of their supreme duty in times of peace and quiet? If they do not, they very likely will be at a loss when something does happen. Once one has lost control of the situation, then trying to put things right again is like trying to bite one's navel. Rulers should therefore strive to clarify righteousness and hold decisiveness in the highest regard. Alas! How many are there in the world who do not understand righteousness!"

[Dazai Shundai, *Kinsai huke shisō*, in NST, vol. 27, pp. 404-11; BS, JAT]

GOI RANSHŪ

A native of Osaka, Goi Ranshū (1695-1762) was educated from youth as a Neo-Confucian scholar and eventually became a lecturer at the Kaitokudō merchant academy in Osaka. Later he traveled to Edo and briefly served the daimyo of Tsugaru domain. In 1739 he returned to the Kaitokudō and remained an influential force there, especially in regard to the academy's philosophical curriculum, until his death in 1762. Ranshū is often credited with leading the Kaitokudō toward a more orthodox, Zhu Xi-based version of Neo-Confucian teachings than had been evident in its earlier eclecticism. His rebuttal (ca. 1731-1733) of Dazai Shundai's view of the Akō incident was among the more important and influential pieces to emerge in the "second round" of the debate. It is especially significant insofar as it represents one expression of *chōnin* (townsfolk) thought regarding an incident involving samurai, *rōnin*, and the shogunate. Ranshū concludes by opining that the samurai's death-defying commitment is "something that Confucian scholars and men of letters can never really understand," in other words, that a great gulf remains between the code of the Japanese samurai and that of the Confucian scholar.

REFUTATION OF DAZAI SHUNDAI'S "ESSAY ON THE
FORTY-SIX SAMURAI OF AKŌ DOMAIN"
(HAKU DAZAI JUN AKŌ SHIJŪROKU SHI RON)

Even from a cursory examination of vendettas launched by loyal retainers and men of high principle (*chūshin sesshi*) since antiquity, we see that success can never be hurried. Rather, those who carried out vendettas had to keep their blades hidden from view, patiently gauging their strength before moving, and waiting for the right moment before striking. The essential thing was always that their mission be accomplished. This was true in every case, not just the case of the Akō men. If they had acted rashly because they could not be sure how long their adversary would live, without regard for their chances of success or failure, they would have truly been acting like petty-minded, fretful men. Moreover, one can never be sure how long one's own life will last, let alone the life of one's adversary. It is just a matter of fate, not something that one can debate. How can we treat it lightly? All we can do is live out to the best of our ability our destined span of life. How can the matter of length of life be taken as the basis for judging the righteousness of Yoshio and his band? If, unfortunately, Lord Kira had died in his sleep, Yoshio and his band would have had to report that fact to the spirit of their late master and then commit suicide, bemoaning their misfortune. In this way they would have cleared themselves of blame. Why would they consider becoming monks and abandoning the world or exhuming Lord Kira's corpse and flogging it? . . .

Lord Asano committed a crime legally punishable by death. Can the law be considered his enemy? Lord Kira, of course, did not kill Lord Asano; therefore he cannot be called his enemy, either. Yoshio and his band did not claim that they were avenging their lord's death; they simply said that they were fulfilling the last wishes of their lord. When their late master faced death, how would he have dared to hold a grudge against the shogunate? It was just that Lord Kira escaped from his sword, leaving Lord Asano unable to kill him. Nothing, they thought, could be a greater cause of regret for a samurai at the moment of death! Therefore his retainers killed him on behalf of their lord only in order to console their late master's anger in the underworld. This is not what we call revenge. But if we trace the crime to its origin, it is true that it all began with Lord Kira. For this reason, the fact that people regard it as a case of revenge can also not be said to be mistaken.

Yoshio led a band of former retainers of the confiscated domain of Akō in an armed attack in the shogun's capital and there killed a high-placed person as if he were an orphan swine. This was a major crime. If they were judged according to the laws of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Yoshio and his band would certainly be guilty of a capital crime, murder of a government official. This crime merited severe punishment, such as the public exposure of their severed heads or their banishment from society along with common criminals.

The shogunate did not place them in the custody of penal officials, however, but entrusted them to the care of daimyo. These daimyo did not begrudge the trouble; instead, they treated the men with utmost hospitality. After some time had passed, the shogunate granted them the honor of dying by their own hands and allowing them a proper burial.

Despite losing their domain and the possibility of continuing their lord's house, Yoshio and his band roused themselves to action without looking back and endured countless difficulties in order to fulfill their single-minded loyalty to their master. Accordingly, the shogunate must have considered their deed to have been righteous and empathized with their feelings, and so granted them lenient treatment. This is also the reason that scholars writing about the matter have taken their side. Then there also are scholars like Satō Naokata who like strange ideas and take pleasure in disagreeing with others and who have offered arguments condemning Yoshio and his band. Others agreed with them and stole their ideas. Now this Mr. Dazai has picked up their argument, declaring that if he does not write an essay on the matter, this principle of righteousness will never be clarified. This is laughable in the extreme.

Lord Asano intended to kill a man. By chance, the person he attacked did not die. The attack, moreover, occurred inside the shogun's castle during a major state ceremony, and Lord Asano was in the position of receiving instruction from Lord Kira. Suddenly, Lord Asano tried to slay Lord Kira on account of a personal grudge. This was extremely disrespectful, and the crime committed was serious. Even so, whether the punishment was right or wrong is not something that subjects like us should dare to judge! It is best to let it be without discussing it.

The death of Lord Asano was a result of his crime. How would he have dared to hold a grudge against the shogunate? If that was true of the lord, it was true of his retainers as well. If they held a grudge against the shogunate, that would have betrayed a selfish mind. "When one loses one's temper at home but vents this anger in the marketplace,"¹⁸ one's crime will be punished by death. That is, it was because of Lord Kira's perverseness that Lord Asano viewed him as his enemy, and so it was proper for Yoshio and his band to bear a grudge against Lord Kira. What should they have done about that grudge? They would have no peace until they killed Lord Kira and offered up his head at their late master's grave. I have no idea why Yoshio and his band should have held a grudge against anything greater. Suggesting so is preposterous!

When enemy domains are at war, it is appropriate for each person to be devoted only to his own master. But when the realm is well governed, one

¹⁸ Zuo zhuan, "Duke Shao, 10th Year," in Legge, trans., *The Chun t'ien, or The Chun t'ien, with the Tso chuen*, p. 675.

deems unity to be the highest value. In such times, is there anyone who eats the produce of the land who is not also a subject of the realm?¹⁹ Can anyone be ignorant of the shogunate's existence? If retainers who serve various domains were to band together in resentment against the shogunate whenever the shogunate happened to treat their lord with a little disrespect, great calamities would follow. Guan Gao and Zhao Wu, both ministers of the state of Zhao, thought that Han Gaozu, the first emperor of the Han dynasty, had treated their king, Zhang Ao, with disrespect. Incensed at Han Gaozu, Guan Gao and Zhao Wu secretly plotted rebellion. When the plot was discovered, Zhang Ao was disenfeoffed, and the two conspirators were executed. This should be taken as a warning. Moreover, anyone who abandons his lord and colludes with the ruler of the realm is also a rebel. That was how Jiang Chong brought disorder to the state of Zhao; according to the laws of a king, that crime is punishable by death. Mr. Dazai favored Caozi's claim that righteousness is outside human nature.²⁰ Indeed, his righteousness is the righteousness of Guan Gao and Zhao Wu, not the righteousness of the sage!

Righteousness is the same thing anywhere in the world. If people's actions accord with righteousness, how can one claim they follow a way unique to our country alone? If people's deeds do not accord with righteousness, how are they worthy of being regarded as according with the Way? This all is the talk of military men and common officials and far from the words of a scholar of noble principle.

Regarding the shogun with respect is the basis of regarding one's lord with respect. If one does not regard the shogun with respect, calamities will befall one's lord. This is what is called not regarding one's lord with respect. In arguing that Yoshio and his band should have shown disrespect for their lord by practicing a righteousness that is not righteousness, Mr. Dazai is inciting people to evil. Is that not wrong?

If a lord commits a crime and his domain is confiscated and then his chief retainer rounds up all his lord's subjects to defend his castle to the death, refusing the orders of the authorities and murdering its officials, they are committing an extreme act of insurrection. Even if they all gave their bodies to the flames and perished with the castle, their grudge would not be dissolved, and they would only have added in vain to the mistake of their late master. In the

end, misfortune would visit their entire lineage. Is this not also an evil course? Certainly this is a righteousness that is not righteousness, yet it is what Mr. Dazai takes as righteousness!

Mr. Dazai states that the Akō samurai should not have held a grudge against Lord Kira, but he also says that they should have gone promptly to Edo and attacked Lord Kira. The first is because they should have held a grudge against the shogun, and the second is because they should have held a grudge against Lord Kira. But just why should there have been so many grudges? It appears that Mr. Dazai has no definite interpretation of the matter.

Yoshio was determined to kill Lord Kira, and he believed that his duty to his master would be fulfilled by doing so. He believed that he could not fulfill his duty by dying in vain. Therefore, in order to ensure victory, it was absolutely necessary for him to plan meticulously and consider every possible contingency. How could he afford to attack recklessly? Here Mr. Dazai's argument is completely out of touch with the actual circumstances of the incident. The statement regarding samurai who consider themselves righteous only if they die, not stopping to consider right and wrong, does not apply to Yoshio's actions at all. Alas! When Yoshio attacked Lord Kira's mansion, how could he have known that he would not be slain by enemy swords? How could he have known that he would even be able to find Lord Kira? If he had failed to find him, where would he have retreated after the attack? In that case, he and his band would have had no choice but to commit suicide together in Lord Kira's residence. This is something even a child can understand! In beholding Lord Kira and leaving the decapitated corpse with no final resting place, Yoshio and his band succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. They were indeed recipients of Heaven's good fortune.

When warriors go into battle, their hearts must be ready for death, free of any attachment to life. Otherwise, how could they charge into the unknown and submit their bodies to the blades of the enemy's swords? This is something that Confucian scholars and men of letters can never really understand. Throughout the attack, Yoshio's only concern was to take revenge against the enemy; he gave no thought to his possible death. How could he have had any room in his mind for thoughts of fame and profit? Allegations like these are what we call "a petty man using his belly to gauge a great man's mind."²¹ Such allegations also exemplify how small-minded men love to argue but do not enjoy "helping others complete what is good in them."²²

19. Zuo zhuan, "Duke Shao, 7th Year," in Legge, trans., *The Tso chuan*, in *The Ch'un ts'ew*, with the *Tso chuan*, p. 616.

20. In *Questions and Answers Concerning the Sage's Learning* (*Saigaku mondō*), Shundai states that Caozi's view that righteousness is external to humanity is consistent with the ideas of the sage Confucius.

21. Zuo zhuan, "Duke Shao, 24th Year," in Legge, trans., *The Ch'un ts'ew*, with the *Tso chuan*, p. 675.

22. *Analekts* 12.16.

Using such a strategy, [the samurai] would have truly proved themselves to be righteous. But they did not understand the ethical principle behind such a strategy. While they were citizens of the state, they chose to ignore the importance of the laws of the land. Instead, they madly murdered Lord Kira. In doing so, they misunderstood their responsibilities as citizens, violated the rights of the government, and privately tried to pass judgment on people's crimes. Fortunately, the Tokugawa government sentenced these rebellious men to death, thus settling the matter. If the government had forgiven the Akō samurai, however, then the retainers of the Kira family would have taken revenge. One vendetta would have followed another until all family and friends on both sides had been annihilated. Such a process would have reduced society to a state of lawless anarchy. Such is the harm of private vigilante justice to the state. Such lack of respect must not be allowed.

[Fukuzawa Yukichi *zenshū*, vol. 3, pp. 65–66; trans. adapted from Dilworth and Hirano, trans., *Fukuzawa Yukichi*, pp. 57–58]

THE AKO VENDETTA DRAMATIZED

In the background of the debate about the Akō vendetta is what might be called a strong popular undertow of sympathy for the *min*, as dramatized in the theater: the legend of *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (*Chūshingura*), the title of which evokes the feudal traditions of medieval samurai rather than the ethics of a Zhu Xi or even the popular Japanese Neo-Confucianism observed in chapters 25 and 26. At issue in the more formal debate is the question of legitimate authority, in which feudal traditions of individual honor and duty are at odds with the civil values and public order upheld by Neo-Confucianism.

Although the "loyal" samurai who appear in the following excerpts are commonly referred to as exemplars of Confucian values, the concepts of honor, duty, revenge, vendetta, and ritual suicide (*seppuku*) derive from medieval Japanese traditions, with Buddhism as their religious accompaniment, whereas references to proper decorum are merely a bow to the Tokugawa's fictive claim to ritual legitimacy or a mere cosmetic conformity to Confucian "propriety."

In this puppet play, attributed to Takeda Izumo (1691–1756) as the principal author, Lord Kira is identified as Kō no Moronao; Lord Asano is represented as Enya Hangan; and the senior retainer Ōishi Kuranosuke is thinly disguised as Ōboshi Yuranosuke. Enya Hangan's climactic ritual suicide is introduced here by reading the sentence from the shogunate.

THE TREASURY OF LOYAL RETAINERS (*CHŪSHINGURA*)

LORD ISHIDŌ, REPRESENTING THE SHOGUNATE (*naide*): Whereas
Lord Hangan Takasada, for reasons of long-standing private quarrel,

did attack and wound the chief councillor Kō no Moronao and disturb the peace in the palace, his lands are confiscated and he is ordered to commit *seppuku* . . .

HANGAN: I submit myself in all particulars to His Excellency's command. But now please relax and take a cup of wine, to refresh yourselves after your arduous duties.

YAKUSHIJŌ: Hold your tongue, Hangan. You should by all rights be strangled and then beheaded for the crime you've committed. You should be grateful that, thanks to His Excellency's clemency, you'll be allowed to commit *seppuku*. I should think you'd start making preparations at once, particularly since there are fixed precedents to be observed when committing *seppuku*. What do you mean by dressing yourself up in a long *haori*,²⁶ the latest in fashion? Are you drunk? Or are you out of your mind? This is a breach of courtesy toward Lord Ishidō and myself, who've come here by order of the shogun. . . .

HANGAN: I deeply appreciate your kindness. Ever since I wounded him, I have been prepared for this. My only regret is that Kakogawa Honzō held me back and kept me from killing Moronao. It rankles in my bones, and I can never forget it. Like Kusunoki Masashige,²⁷ who declared at Minatogawa that he would prolong his life by the strength of his resolve in his final hours, I vow that I shall be born and die, again and again, until at last I am avenged.

NARRATOR: His voice vibrates with wrath. . . . Rikiya, acting on his master's orders, takes the dagger which has been readied for this purpose and places it before him. Hangan calmly slips his hempen jacket from his shoulders and sits more at ease.

HANGAN: The official witnesses are to observe that the sentence has been carried out. . . .

NARRATOR: He takes up the dagger with the point toward him. Plunging it into his left side, he starts to pull it across his abdomen. His wife, too horrified to look, murmurs the invocation to the Buddha, tears in her eyes. . . . With both hands on the dagger, he pulls it across, piercing deep. He grasps with pain.

HANGAN: Yuranosuke, I leave you this dagger as a memento of me. Avenge me!

NARRATOR: He thrusts the point into his windpipe; then, throwing down the bloodstained weapon, he falls forward and breathes his last. His

²⁶ The *haori* is a kind of cloak worn with a kimono. The length of the *haori* was subject to shifts in fashion.

²⁷ The great hero of the forces loyal to Emperor Go-Daigo, Kusunoki Masashige died in 1336. The passage in *Taishōki* alluded to here is in the chapter "The Deaths of Masashige and His Brother."

wife and the assembled retainers stand for a moment, transfixed, their eyes shut, their breaths bated, their teeth clenched; but Yuranosuke crawls up to his lord and, taking up the dagger, lifts it reverently to his forehead. . . . At this moment there takes root within Oboshi that noble purpose which will give him a name for loyalty and rectitude to resound through all the ages. . . . [pp. 68-72]

After long preparation by Yuranosuke, he carries out the revenge vendetta at the mansion of Kô no Moronao.

YURANOSUKE: When I blow the signal whistle, it will mean the time has come to scale the walls. Remember, we need take only one head.

NARRATOR: In response to these commands from Yuranosuke, as one man they direct looks of fierce hatred at the distant mansion, then separate into parties bound for the front and back gates. . . .

(Though few in number, these are courageous men, deadly determined to succeed this night and employing every secret tactic.)

YURANOSUKE: Kill Moronao! Pay no attention to anyone else. . . . I am Oboshi Yuranosuke, and this is Hara Gôemon. We have no quarrel with Takauji or his brother. Nor do we bear any grudge against either Lord Nikki or Lord Ishidô, so we promise to do nothing irresponsible. I have ordered our men to take the strictest precautions against fire, so you need have no worries on that account. We ask only that you peaceably refrain from interfering. . . .

NARRATOR: The samurai next door, hearing this bold proclamation, shout back.

SAMURAI: What superb courage! Every man who serves a master should behave as you are doing. Call if you have any need of us. . . .

NARRATOR: All at once the neighborhood becomes still. During the fighting, which has lasted about two hours, barely two or three of the attackers have been slightly wounded, but the enemy casualties are beyond numbering. Nevertheless, the enemy general Moronao eludes detection. The foot soldier Tetaoka Heimon runs around the mansion, searching the rooms . . . but no one can tell where Moronao has gone. . . . He rushes outside, afraid Moronao has somehow escaped the house, when a voice calls.

JÛTARÔ: Heimon, wait!

NARRATOR: Yazama Jûtarô Shigezuki drags out Moronao, all but carrying him in his arms.

JÛTARÔ: Hear me everyone. I found him hiding in the woods and took him alive.

NARRATOR: The others all rush up, bolstered in spirits like a flower touched with dew.

YURANOSUKE: Nobly done, a tremendous feat. But we mustn't kill him hastily. After all, he served for a time as a high officer of the government. The proper decorum must be observed even when killing him.

NARRATOR: Taking him from Jûtarô, he makes Moronao sit in the place of honor.

YURANOSUKE: We, who are merely retainers of a retainer, have broken into your mansion and performed acts of violence because we wished to avenge our master's death. I beg you to forgive this gross discourtesy and to give us your head without offering resistance.

NARRATOR: Moronao, master of deceit that he is, betrays no fear.

MORONAO: I understand. I have long been expecting this. Take my head.

NARRATOR: He puts Yuranosuke off guard with these words, only suddenly to draw his sword and strike at him. Yuranosuke wards off the blow and twists Moronao's arm.

YURANOSUKE: Ha—what a touching display of resistance! All of you, now is the moment to satisfy our long-accumulated hatred!

NARRATOR: Yuranosuke strikes the first blow, and the forty and more men raise shouts of joy and celebrate. . . . They jump and leap in exuberance, and using the dagger their lord left behind as a remembrance of him, they cut off Moronao's head. In their high spirits they even dance. . . . Yuranosuke takes from his breast the memorial tablet of his late master and places it on a table in the alcove. He cleanses Moronao's head of the bloodstains and offers it before the tablet, then burns the incense he has carried inside his helmet. He steps back respectfully and bows three times, then nine times, before the table.

YURANOSUKE: I humbly report to the sacred spirit of my late master, Renshôn Kenri Daikôji,²⁸ I have, using the dagger you bestowed on me after you committed *seppuku* and obeying your command to appease your spirit, cut off Moronao's head and offered it before your memorial tablet. Please accept it from your resting place under the sod.

NARRATOR: In tears he offers his prayers. . . . [pp. 173-78]

[*Chûshingura*, trans. Keene, pp. 68-72, 173-78]

HAGAKURE AND THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI

Hagakure (*In the Shadow of Leaves*), also known as *Hagakure kikigaki*, the *Hagakure Analects*, and the *Analects of Nabeshima*, became one of the most famous works of *bushidô* thought in the 1930s, although in the Tokugawa period

²⁸ Kaya Hangan's posthumous Buddhist name.

it did not circulate beyond the remote southern province in northwestern Kyushu where it was written. The core parts of the narratives and reflections that compose the work were dictated by a retired samurai of Saga domain in Hizen Province, Yamamoto Tsunetomo (1659–1739), to a fellow samurai, Tashiro Matzaemon Tsuramoto (1678–1748), between 1709 and 1716. Tsunetomo, the scion of a family that had long served the Nabeshima house, had, from the age of nine, been a close attendant and confidant of his lord, Nabeshima Mitsushige, serving him in the capacity of secretary and document writer. When his master died, Tsunetomo wanted to follow him in death to fulfill his loyalty, but this custom of *junshi* had been forbidden by Mitsushige in 1661, four years after he became daimyo. Consequently, Tsunetomo chose to shave his head and take up the secluded life of a Buddhist teacher (this he is referred to in contemporary documents as Zen master Yamamoto Tsunetomo). *Hagakure* was a testament of spirit to the samurai of his domain that grew out of his "determined mindset of *seppuku*," a cry of protest against the bureaucratization of Saga samurai life that was proceeding rapidly under the leadership of Mitsushige and his successor. Yamamoto's critique of the Akō vendetta for its delayed response, instead of taking immediate, direct action, echoed the thought of Dazai Shundai.

The teachings of the *Hagakure* have long been epitomized by the following passage: "I have found that the Way of the samurai is death. This means that when you have to choose between life and death, you must quickly choose death." In fact, this passage was used as a slogan in the militarist period during the twentieth century in order to encourage soldiers to throw themselves fearlessly and resolutely into battle, and the book as a whole was understandably revered by right-wing ultranationalists. Nonetheless, the original "logic" of always being prepared to die in a fight with another should be understood in the context of the samurai code of honor. Tokugawa law decreed that both parties to a fight would be punished equally (*kenka ryōsaihai*), usually with death, without any investigation of either party's claims of who was right and who was wrong.

Becoming one with death in one's thoughts even in life, moreover, was regarded as the highest demonstration of a person's subjective purity and singleness of heart (*makoto*, *magokoro*). In one's readiness to die honorably for one's lord, "loyalty and filial piety are naturally present in their fullness," requiring no reflection on abstract moral principles. In Tsunetomo's view, seeking excuses to stay alive when one is faced with death arises from the mind of discrimination (*funbetsu*) and discretion or caution (*shūryo*), which leads to hesitation and second thoughts and only obstructs the enactment of true loyalty. The Way of the *bushi* is to throw oneself into loyal action without reserve, oblivious of personal danger, like a person fought into a corner by his enemy who, with no way out but death, fights with total self-abandonment (*shinigurui*). The connections with Zen teachings here are quite clear: both "discrimination" and "discretion" are Zen terms for the irresolute, attached state of mind that is to be overcome by Zen practice, a practice that needs to be fueled by contem-

plation of the reality of death and the transitoriness of life. For death is an absolute reality, whereas concepts of right and wrong, as objects of discriminating consciousness, are only relative.

Such a focus on death may seem morbid or negative to those used to the modern conception of death as the fearsome enemy of life, as indeed it did to Tokugawa-period spokesmen for Confucian ethical norms like Yamaga Sokō. However, Tsunetomo does not mean that men are to throw themselves away carelessly to a meaningless death just for the glory of dying. For one thing, the glorification of the resolution is rooted in the knowledge that a person who has resolved to die and has lost all fear of death is very difficult to defeat in battle. In all the martial arts, the highest level of mastery demands a complete abandonment of attachment to life and the desire to be a winner, not to mention a leap beyond the principles of logic and the dichotomy between means and ends. Thus the resolution to die may give rise to a higher state of life, a life infused with beauty and grace that is beyond the reach of the man concerned with self-preservation. For this reason, Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) held great reverence for this book, finding it an inexhaustible inspiration for the creative life. It is also this conception of the Way of the samurai that gave rise to Tsunetomo's views on the crucial matter of revenge.

In addition, Tsunetomo taught that the fundamental concern of the dedicated samurai is to strengthen the spiritual foundations of the realm—that is, of his domain—for which reason he must diligently study the history of the daimyo house that he serves. His fierce, almost fanatical (*kurui*) dedication to excellence in the pursuit of this goal merely reflects the fact that one cannot accomplish feats of greatness in an unaroused state of mind. Such a philosophy of action is naturally impatient with the conventional, rational norms of conduct by which a man restrains his impulses to act. Tsunetomo would agree with Laozi that the highest form of art seems like artlessness, the highest form of virtue knows nothing of goodness, and the highest form of wisdom resembles foolishness.

IN THE SHADOW OF LEAVES (HAGAKURE)

Prologue: "Carefree Talks in the Shadows of the Night"

I suppose it does not become me now that I have shaved my head and taken up a reclusive life, but I have never thought of attaining enlightenment or achieving buddhahood and all that stuff. The resolution to devote myself to this domain has penetrated so deeply into my viscera that even if I were to die and be reborn seven times, I still would want nothing other than to be born as a samurai of Nabeshima and to be of service in the government of my domain (*kuni*). This does not require some special sort of strength or talent. To put it



simply; it is just a matter of becoming resolved to take upon one's shoulders the entire destiny of one's domain. I have been born as a human being just like anyone else. Why should I be inferior to anyone? If I do not practice with the attitude that there is no one better than myself, then all my practice will come to naught. Yet while the kettle of determination can get very hot, it also tends to cool down very quickly. There is a way to keep it from cooling down. Let me tell you my own version of the Four Vows:

1. Do not fall behind in *bushidō*!
2. Be of use to my lord!
3. Be filial toward my parents!
4. Arouse great compassion, and be of use to other people!

If you recite these four vows every morning to the buddhas and the gods, you will obtain the strength of two people, and you will not backslide. Like an inchworm, you will move forward bit by bit. Even the buddhas and the gods became what they are through the power of vows. [part 1, pp. 218–19]

I have found that the Way of the samurai is death. This means that when you are compelled to choose between life and death, you must quickly choose death. There is nothing more to it than that. You just make up your mind and go forward. The idea that to die without accomplishing your purpose is undignified and meaningless, just dying like a dog, is the pretentious *bushidō* of the city slickers of Kyoto and Osaka. In a situation when you have to choose between life and death, there is no way to make sure that your purpose will be accomplished. All of us prefer life over death, and you can always find more reasons for choosing what you like over what you dislike. If you fail and you survive, you are a coward. This is a perilous situation to be in. If you fail and you die, people may say your death was meaningless or that you were crazy, but there will be no shame. Such is the power of the martial way. When every morning and every evening you die anew, constantly making yourself one with death, you will obtain freedom in the martial way, and you will be able to fulfill your calling throughout your life without falling into error.

A man of service (*hōkōnin*) is a person who thinks fervently and intently of his lord from the bottom of his heart and regards his lord as more important than anything else. This is to be a retainer of the highest type. You should be grateful to be born in a clan that has established a glorious name for many generations and for the boundless favor received from the ancestors of the clan, [and you should] just throw away your body and mind in a single-minded devotion to the service of your lord. On top of this, if you also have wisdom, arts, and skills and make yourself useful in such ways as these permit, that is even better. However, even if a humble bloke who cannot make himself useful at all, who is clumsy and unskilled at everything, is determined to cherish his lord fervently and exclusively, he can be a reliable retainer. The retainer who

tries to make himself useful only in accordance with his wisdom and skills is of a lower order. [part 1, nos. 2–3]

A certain man was regarded as shameful because he did not take revenge after being involved in a fight (*kenka*). In taking revenge, you should just jump in and charge full speed ahead until you are cut down. If you do so, you will not incur any shame. . . . The reason we listen to people's stories and read books is to be constantly prepared. Especially in the case of *bushidō*, remember that one never knows what might happen even today, so it is imperative to consider things carefully and systematically day and night. Victory or defeat is decided by the momentum of events and is different from the actions by which we avoid incurring shame. It is enough just to resolve to die. If one is not successful on the spot, then one quickly takes revenge. In this there is no need for some special wisdom or technique. The real master never considers victory or defeat but just charges forward intently unto death (*shinigurai suru bakari*) without a second thought. [part 1, no. 55]

Until fifty or sixty years ago, samurai would take a bath every morning, put scent onto the shaven part of their head and into their hair, cut their nails, file them with a pumice stone and polish them with oxalis, and pay very careful attention to their personal appearance. They would be especially careful to see that all their weapons and armor were free of rust, wiping away all dust and dirt and polishing them so they always were ready for use. To take great pains with their appearance may seem to be merely decoration, but it is not just some kind of affection of elegance. It was because they were always in a state of preparedness, thinking, "Today I might die in battle. If I were to be killed in battle with a sloppy appearance, my lack of preparedness in ordinary times would be revealed, and I would be regarded contemptuously by the enemy as a slovenly fellow." Thus, whether a samurai was young or old, he would always give careful attention to his physical appearance. Certainly it is troublesome and takes time, but this is what the work of the samurai is. Other than this, there is nothing that one needs to be particularly busy about or that needs to take a lot of time. If one's mind is always totally prepared to die in battle, already having become one with death, and one devotes oneself to one's work of service and to the martial arts, then a situation in which one incurs shame is not likely. Yet today people give not the slightest thought to this sort of thing, passing their days pursuing self-gratification, so that when the time arrives, they bring shame on themselves without even realizing that it is shame. They think only that if they themselves are feeling good, nothing else matters, so they end up performing all sorts of audacious and improper things. What an incredible shame! . . . [part 1, no. 63]

It is difficult to dislike unrighteousness (*fūgi*) and hold steadily to what is right (*gi*). However, if you believe that holding to rightness is the highest thing and try to hold just to that exclusively, you will only end up making a lot of mistakes. There is a Way that is higher than rightness. It is very difficult to find,

but he who does so possesses an unsurpassed wisdom. From its vantage point, rightness itself is something small and narrow. You can know it only when you have become aware of it in yourself. But even if you cannot find it on your own, there is still a way to reach it: "The onlooker gets the best view of the game." People also say, "Remain aware of your wrongs at every moment," and the best way of doing so is by talking with people. The reason that we remember the old stories we hear and what we read in books is so that we may discard our own personal discriminations and align ourselves with the discriminations of the ancients. [part 1, no. 44]

Bushidō is nothing but charging forward, without hesitation, unto death (*shinigurui*). A *bushi* in this state of mind is difficult to kill even if he is attacked by twenty or thirty people. This is what Lord Naoshige²⁹ used to say, too. In a normal state of mind, you cannot accomplish a great task. You must become like a person crazed (*fiehigai*) and throw yourself into it as if there were no turning back (*shinigurui*). Moreover, in the Way of the martial arts, as soon as discriminating thoughts (*turbetsu*) arise, you will already have fallen behind. There is no need to think of loyalty and filial piety. In *bushidō* there is nothing but *shinigurui*. Loyalty and filial piety are already fully present on their own accord in the state of *shinigurui*. [part 1, no. 113]

When Ōki Tetsuzan³⁰ was in his old age, he had the following to say: "I used to think that *jūjutsu* was different from *sumō* in that in a match, even if you found yourself on the bottom, it would not be a problem as long as you won in the end. But in recent years it has occurred to me that if someone came along to arbitrate while you were on the bottom, you would be judged to have lost. To win in the beginning is to win all the way through." [part 1, no. 84]

There is really nothing other than the thought that is right before you at this very moment. Life is just a concatenation of one thought-moment after another. If one truly realizes this, then there is nothing else to be in a hurry about, nothing else that one must seek. Living is just a matter of holding on to this thought-moment right here and now and getting on with it. But everyone seems to forget this, seeking and grasping for this and that as if there were something somewhere else but missing what is right there in front of their eyes. Actually, it takes many years of practice and experience before one becomes able to stay with this present moment without drifting away. However, if you attain that state of mind just once, even if you cannot hold onto it for very long, you will find that you have a different attitude toward life. For once you really understand that everything comes down to this one thought-moment right here and now,

29. Nabeshima Naoshige (1538–1618). Mitsushige's grandfather, was a famous general and the founder of the daimyo house of Saga domain. He won great merit in Hideyoshi's Korean campaigns in the 1590s and was enfeoffed by Ieyasu with the domain of Saga in 1601.

30. Ōki Tetsuzan (d. 1665) was a *bushi* who distinguished himself in the Shimabara revolt of 1637/1638.

you will know that there are not many things you need to be concerned about. All that we know of as loyalty and integrity are present completely in this one thought-moment. [part 2, no. 17]

There is nothing that is impossible. If one thought is aroused, Heaven and earth will move in response. It is not that something is impossible but that people are too timid to make up their minds to do it. "To move Heaven and earth without expending any energy" is also just a matter of the One Mind.³¹ [part 1, no. 143]

Yamazaki Kurando's admonition that "it is not a good thing for a man of service to be too discriminating" is truly a wise saying. It is awful if a samurai's mind gets stuck on judgments of right and wrong (*riti jusei*), whether something is "loyal" or "disloyal," "righteous" or "unrighteous," "proper" or "improper," and so on. If one just devotes oneself totally and single-mindedly to the service of one's lord, forgetting all other considerations, and cherishes one's lord without second or third thoughts, that is enough. This is what it is to be a good retainer. If you devote yourself totally to your service and worry only about your lord, even though you may sometimes make mistakes, that is all part of fulfilling your original aspiration. It is said that in all things it is not good to go to excess but that only in the way of service is it actually better if you make mistakes owing to an excess of devotion. A person who is always looking for reasons and principles often just gets hung up on the small things and spends his whole life in vain. What a shame! Truly, you have just this one short life. There is nothing better than to just give yourself to only one thing, without any seconds and thirds. It is no good to split yourself into two. Drop all other things and just throw yourself into the *samurai* of service — there is nothing higher. All those pretentious arguments about "loyalty" and "righteousness" and so on are really nauseating. [part 1, no. 195]

The highest form of self-absorption in love is secret love (*shinobukoi*). There is a song that says it well: "Only in the smoke that lingers after love-death can one really know that's what it was, that agony of longing that was never revealed to anyone." If one confesses one's love while one is alive, that is not deep love. A love that pines and burns within the heart until one dies with longing — only that is the supreme form of love. Even if you are asked by the object of your affections, "Are you not by chance in love with me?" you answer, "I never dreamed of such a thing." For there is nothing higher than going to one's grave with one's love still held inside as a secret. Love has to take the long way around; it is not something that you just come out and say. Some time back, when I spoke about this, a few [people] agreed with me, and I called them "my comrades of the smoke." I guess this is something that only people who have gone

31. The quotation, which in its original context refers metaphorically to the power of poetry to move the heart, is from the *kana* preface to the *Kokin wakashū* (ca. 913 C.E.).

through quite a lot of things in this world come to understand. In things like the lord-vassal relationship as well, one should serve with this attitude of mind. By the same token, to keep watch over yourself when no one is watching you is the same as doing so in a public place. If you do not try to avoid unseemly actions when you are all alone and keep unseemly thoughts out of your mind even when no one is watching you, then you will not be able to present a pretty sight in public. As they say, a sudden attempt to fix yourself up will not get rid of the dirt. [part 2, no. 34]

[Hagakure, in NST, vol. 26, part 1, pp. 218-19, nos. 2, 3, 44, 55, 63, 84, 113, 143, 195; part 2, nos. 17, 34, BS]

THE NATIONAL LEARNING SCHOOLS

Chapter 32

The earliest extant writings in Japan are about Japan, so it is no exaggeration to say that the Japanese interest in Japan — its mythology, heritage, culture, and traditions — is as old as Japanese history itself. During the seventeenth century, however, there was an eruption of interest in things Japanese to a degree not previously witnessed in that country, and during the eighteenth century this interest developed into a preoccupation with concepts of identity and character.

We have already seen how the domestication of the Neo-Confucian interest in history resulted in an unprecedented outburst of historical writing throughout Japan, especially in the Mito domain, and how leading seventeenth-century scholars like Hayashi Razan and Yamazaki Anzai sought to reconcile the "truths" of Confucian teaching with the traditional native belief in *kami*, or Shinto deities. In literary studies, too, there was a newly invigorated interest in the composition of verse and the study of Japan's prose and poetic classics as the spread of printing liberated them from the limitations of traditional modes of dissemination and opened them up to an enthusiastic audience of "townspeople" (*chōnin*) in Japan's burgeoning metropolises.

In this scholarly and intellectual activity in the seventeenth century, as in that in most earlier periods in Japanese history, the study of things Japanese went hand in hand with the study of things Chinese. Indeed, the two seemed to be seamless components of a singular "learning" whose fundamental purpose was enriching the human person through the pursuit of knowledge. In the