

Sakura Sōgorō between Kabuki and *Kōdan*: A Cross-Genre Genealogy

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Introduction

The playbill for the Zenshin-za 前進座 Company’s annual performance at the National Theater in May 2019 features the actor Arashi Yoshisaburō 嵐芳三郎 VII (b. 1965) against a snowy background, dressed in travel attire and a snow-covered *sandogasa* 三度笠 sedge hat.¹ His portrait here alludes to an iconic scene in the kabuki play being staged, *Sakura giminden* 佐倉義民伝 (Tale of the Peasant Martyr of Sakura). In the scene in question, the protagonist, Kiuchi Sōgorō 木内宗五郎,² having resolved to appeal directly to the shogun on behalf of his fellow peasants—an act regarded as insubordination and punishable by death—is making his way back from Edo to his village in the Narita 成田 area (modern Chiba Prefecture) to bid a final farewell to his family. The *sandogasa* hat, which conceals the wearer’s face, betokens the covert nature of the hero’s return. Pursued on the one hand by the authorities of the local Sakura 佐倉 domain, who wish to prevent him from such a direct shogunal appeal, Sōgorō also intends to divorce his wife and disown his children, in the hope that at least their lives will be spared the fate that awaits him—a hope that will be dashed at the end of the play.

As the image selected for the playbill confirms, the scenes depicting the hero’s homecoming—which unfold over the second and third acts—are considered especially representative of the play and are featured also in other performance genres, such as *jōruri* 浄瑠璃, *kōdan* 講談, and *rōkyōku* 浪曲.³ While the storyline is

¹ The playbill can be accessed through the Zenshin-za website at the following address: http://www.zenshinza.com/stage_guide4/2019kokuritu/index.html (accessed 2.22.2022).

² The name Sōgorō is sometimes written 惣五郎.

³ *Jōruri*, also known as *bunraku* 文楽, is a form of puppet theater in which the narrative and dialogic sections are interpreted by reciters (*gidayu* 義太夫) to the accompaniment of a shamisen, a stringed musical instrument. I introduce the genre of *kōdan* below, which involves the recitation of war chronicles, heroic episodes, and revenge tales by storytellers. *Rōkyōku*, also known as *nanivabushi* 浪花節, is another genre of storytelling that developed at the end of the Edo period and which capitalized on the *kōdan* repertoire; its performers not only recite stories but also perform sung sections of the narratives, again to shamisen accompaniment.

based on the account of a seventeenth-century “peasant martyr” (*gimin* 義民)⁴—as passed down in the chronicle genre known as “veritable records” (*jitsuroku* 実録)—the homecoming subplot is not actually part of the source material. It could therefore represent a later addition for which the kabuki play is the first textual evidence. The influence of this subplot on later retellings of the Sōgorō story has been substantial, however, to the point that it was not only included in later “veritable records,” but even came to serve as the main theme of the performance, as it also did in the *rōkyōku* narratives.

In this article, I survey dramatizations of the *Sakura giminden* story across performance genres, focusing in particular on kabuki and *kōdan* storytelling, in whose repertoires the story appeared around the middle of the eighteenth century. By examining the relationship between those genres and the *jitsuroku* narratives, I establish a genealogy for these texts. Given their significance as innovations with respect to the original chronicles, I focus my analysis on two episodes in particular—the scene at the ferry crossing (*watashiba* 渡し場) and the scene of the hero’s farewell to his family (*konakare* 子別れ, literally “farewell to children”), both of which featured in kabuki drama and *kōdan*. Together, these episodes represent a watershed moment in the transmission of the tale of Sakura Sōgorō.

1. The Story of Kiuchi Sōgorō in the *Jitsuroku* Narratives

Transmitted in several *jitsuroku* texts, whose lineages I consider below, the folkloric tale of “Sakura Sōgorō” is set in the seventeenth century and centers on a peasant uprising led by the eponymous character. Sōgorō is the headman, or *nanushi* 名主, of the village Kōzu 公津 in Inba 印旛 County, a region of Shimōsa 下総 Province then within the Sakura domain. The peasants are rebelling against the rule of the domain lord, Hotta Masanobu 堀田正信 (1631–1680), who is often referred to by his court title, Kōzuke no suke 上野介. The main story, which has some variations, is as follows.

Burdened by the heavy taxes levied within the domain, and after several failed attempts to negotiate with administrators, more than three hundred *nanushi* have gathered in Edo to petition Hotta at his residence, but to no avail. Sōgorō—who originally was unable to accompany his fellow village leaders because of illness—later joins them, and they resolve to petition Lord Kuze Yamato no kami 久世大和守, a member of the shogunal council, which they do by tossing a document into his palanquin as he passes by on his way to Edo Castle.⁵ Yamato

⁴ For a critical discussion of the cultural significance of the *gimin* image, see Walthall, “Japanese Gimin.”

⁵ This practice, known as “petition to the palanquin” (*kagoso* 駕籠訴), was a last-chance means of placing a matter before high-ranking government officials or domain lords, access to whom was tightly restricted.

seems to accept the petition, and the headmen, pleased with the result, return to their villages, leaving Sōgorō and five other representatives in Edo. However, when Yamato summons them to his residence sometime later, he returns the petition, leaving their complaints unacknowledged.

Left now with abandoning his effort to help the peasants as his only other real option, Sōgorō resolves to appeal directly to the shogun, Tokugawa Ietsuna 徳川家綱 (1641–1680, in office 1651–1680), even though doing so will cost him his life. And indeed the decision is a grave one: such an act of “direct appeal” (*jikiso* 直訴) to the highest authority—i.e., without following the prescribed administrative procedures—was treated as insurrection, and was punishable with crucifixion. Knowing that the shogun is planning to visit Kan’ei-ji 寛永寺 Temple (his ancestral funeral temple in the Ueno 上野 area) on a specific day, Sōgorō hides himself under a bridge at the temple’s front gate on the night before Ietsuna arrives. The next day, as the shogun crosses the bridge, Sōgorō emerges and, using a long bamboo pole, manages to deliver the petition to Ietsuna’s palanquin. The shogun’s entourage receives the document, and Sōgorō withdraws. Returning to the other five delegates, he tells them that the petition has apparently reached the shogun, and they drink together in celebration.

The shogun, in fact, refuses to read the petition, but he has another vassal, Inoue Kawachi no kami 井上河内守, deliver it to Hotta. Having thus lost face before the other daimyo as a result, Hotta is furious but compelled by the shogun’s action to lower the peasants’ taxes. As feared, he commands that Sōgorō and his wife be crucified and their four male children beheaded. The execution takes place on the eleventh day of the second month of the first year of the Meireki 明暦 era (1655). Tied to the crosses on which they will die, Sōgorō and his wife watch in horror and anger as their children are killed, and they swear vengeance. Soon they make good on their threat, returning as evil spirits (*tatari* 祟り) to terrify and bring about the deaths of Lord Hotta and his pregnant wife.

While most of the veritable records present this basic story, the dates, details, subplots, ending, and, in particular, the narrative structure differ to some extent across the various versions.⁶ Kodama Kōta 児玉幸多, in a seminal essay, provides evidence that *Sakura giminden* was not entirely fictional. He demonstrates that a wealthy peasant named Sōgorō was, indeed, executed together with his children, albeit in the eighth month of the second year of the Jōō 承応 era (1653).

Kodama also distinguishes three different categories among the texts that narrate the tale of Sōgorō.⁷ The first includes *Jizōdō tsuya monogatari* 地藏堂通夜物語

⁶The two existing English translations—one by A. B. Mitford in his *Tales of Old Japan* (1871) and another by Anne Walthall in her *Peasant Uprisings in Japan* (University of Chicago Press, 1991)—are clearly based on two different chronicles. Mitford did not specify his source text, but Walthall’s translation is based on a text discovered in Aizu-Wakamatsu by the scholar Hosaka Satoru 保坂智.

⁷Kodama, *Sakura Sōgorō*.

(The Story of a Vigil at the Jizō Hall, mid-eighteenth century) and various similar texts. These texts all use the literary technique of a frame-story. In some versions, the keeper of the Jizō Hall at Shōin-ji 勝胤寺 Temple, located at Ōzakura 大佐倉 in Inba County, narrates the tale of Sōgorō to an itinerant monk who has stopped there for the night. In other versions, a pair of visitors, a husband and wife, take the place of the keeper, sometimes revealing themselves to be the spirits of Sōgorō and his wife. The second of Kodama's categories includes texts based on *Hotta sōdōki* 堀田騒動記 (Chronicles of the Hotta Strife, second half of the eighteenth century), and similar manuscripts that diverge from the *Jizōdō tsuya* narratives both in their lack of a frame-story device and in their focus on the Hotta family after Sōgorō's death. Kodama notes that the texts in this group are quite inconsistent in terms of dating. The third and final category includes texts with titles referring, more or less explicitly, to *Sakura giminden*, most of them printed after the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912).

Japanese scholars have long debated the genealogical relationship between the *Jizōdō* and *Hotta sōdōki* texts without reaching any consensus. Despite the difficulty of establishing the origins of the extant manuscripts, Kodama affirmed, through correlations with historical records, that both texts emerged after the Hōreki 宝曆 era (1751–1764).⁸ Furthermore, he proposed that the subplot of the vengeful ghosts, since it appears in both sets of texts, had taken shape earlier, being propagated as a folk tale before its incorporation into the *jitsuroku* narratives.⁹ On the other hand, Aoyagi Yoshitada 青柳嘉忠 has proposed that *Jizōdō* represents a dramatization of *Hotta sōdōki*, with the latter being thus the original narrative.¹⁰ More recently, Ogihara Daichi 荻原大地 has introduced into the discussion a previously unconsidered text called *Sakura kajitsu monogatari* 佐倉花実物語 (Tale of Glory in Sakura, mid-nineteenth century) and proposed a textual genealogy of Sakura Sōgorō tales, one essentially confirming the parallel lineages proposed earlier by Kodama.¹¹

A detailed discussion of these genealogies is beyond the scope of the present article, but it is noteworthy that most of the texts in Kodama's third category are similar in narrative structure to the *Hotta sōdōki*. Kodama's third category

⁸ According to *Kokusbo sōmoku-roku* 国書総目録 (General Catalog of Japanese Books, 1989) published by Iwanami Shoten, the earliest *Jizōdō tsuya monogatari* narrative dates to the tenth year of the Bunsei 文政 era (1829) and the earliest *Hotta sōdōki* narrative to the third year of the Kōka 弘化 era (1846). The manuscript titled *Sakura sōdōki* (Chronicles of the Sakura Strife), housed in the Chiba Prefectural Library 千葉県立図書館, is dated in *Kokusbo sōmoku-roku*, to the Keian 慶安 era (1648–1652), making it, apparently, the earliest among extant manuscripts. However, as an example of the interchangeable nature of titles, the title on the manuscript's original cover, according to the library's catalog, is *Jizōdō miyagomori monogatari* 地藏堂宮籠物語 (The Story of a Fervent Prayer at the Jizō Hall), while the title given inside the book is *Hotta sōdōki*.

⁹ Kodama, *Sakura Sōgorō*, pp. 58–66.

¹⁰ Aoyagi, *Kenkyūshi Sakura Sōgorō*.

¹¹ Ogihara, “‘Sakura Sōgorō mono’ jitsuroku no keifu.”

also includes the subplot with Sōgorō returning to his village and saying farewell to his family before his petition to the shogun; this does not feature in either the *Hotta sōdōki* or the *Jizōdō* text. This subplot represents an innovation that seems to have passed from the kabuki play into other narratives of Sōgorō's story.

2. Kabuki and *Jōruri* Dramatizations

Sōgorō's story was first staged as a kabuki drama in the eighth month of 1851 at the Nakamura-za 中村座 Theater in Edo, and featured the famous kabuki actor Ichikawa Kodanji 市川小団次 IV (1812–1866) in the leading role. The playwright, Segawa Jokō 瀬川如臯 III (1806–1881), gave his work the ambiguous title of *Higashiyama sakura Sōshi* 東山桜莊子 (Zhuangzi and the Cherry Trees in Higashiyama).¹² While in fact basing his play on the Sōgorō story, to avoid censorship from the shogunal authorities, Segawa had changed the setting to the second half of the fifteenth century, placing it in the Higashiyama 東山 period of the Muromachi era (1336–1573). To further weaken the connection with the original tale, he also renamed the main character Asakura Tōgo 朝倉当吾 and added elements taken from Ryūtei Tanehiko's 柳亭種彦 (1783–1842) work of parodic fiction *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* 倭紫田舎源氏 (The False Murasaki and the Rustic Genji, 1829–1842).¹³ The result was a play in seven acts and twenty-eight scenes that—despite its uncommon peasant hero and the misgivings of the theater owners, who had scorned the work as a “rustic drama” (*momen shibai* 木綿芝居)—enjoyed enormous success, running for three months.¹⁴

Success followed in Osaka as well. Having heard of the play's long run in Edo and of its particularly effective scenes—those showing the hero's farewell to his family (*kowakare* 子別れ), his torture (*semeba* 責め場), and the appearance of the ghosts—the actor Arashi Rikaku 嵐璃瑠 II (1812–1864) had it rewritten and staged at a small local theater called Kado no Shibai 角の芝居 in the third month of 1852.¹⁵ Titled *Hana no kumo Sakura no akebono* 花雲佐倉曙 (Clouds of Cherry-Tree Flowers: Dawn in Sakura) and featuring Rikaku in the leading role of

¹²The title plays on the fact that the word *sakura* 桜 (cherry tree) is a homophone for Sakura, the domain in which the original story is set. Similarly, Sōshi 莊子—the name of a Chinese philosopher of the fourth century BCE with no connection with the play—is a homophone for both 壯士 (“brave and heroic man”) and 草子 or 草紙 (a type of story written in the *kana* syllabary). Segawa's title therefore has the sense of “The Story of the Brave Man of Sakura in Higashiyama,” which is descriptive of the Sōgorō's story.

¹³*Inaka Genji* was a literary parody of Murasaki Shikibu's 紫式部 (late tenth–early eleventh century) *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, early eleventh century). Ryūtei transposed the original story, set in the Heian period (794–1185), to the Muromachi period. This work, spanning thirty-eight chapters (152 vols.), remained incomplete at the author's death in 1842, but it became a bestseller and was still popular ten years later when Segawa wrote his play.

¹⁴Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu, *Kokuritsu gekijō jōen daibonshū*, p. 120.

¹⁵Atsumi, *Isbin kyōgenshū*, p. 300.

Sakura “Tōgo” 佐倉藤五, the play proved successful yet again, as shown by the fact that it was restaged three times in the following eight years.¹⁶

Furthermore, some months after *Hana no kumo Sakura no akebono* was staged as a kabuki play, a *jōruri* version was produced under the same title. This work was the combined effort of the playwrights Sakuma Shōchōken 佐久間松長軒 (1800–1864)—who also performed as a reciter (*gidayū* 義太夫) under the name of Takemoto Nagatodayū 竹本長門太夫 III—and Toyoshima Gyokuwaken 登与島玉和軒 (dates unknown). Shōchōken staged it himself in the ninth month of 1852 at the Takeda Shibai 竹田芝居 Theater, and once again, the production enjoyed great success.

The following year, in the ninth month of 1853, a printed libretto (*shōbon* 正本) was issued by publishers in Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka under the title *Hana no kumo Sakura no akebono: shinrei kaidan* 花雲佐倉曙：神靈怪談 (Clouds of Cherry-Tree Flowers, Dawn in Sakura: A Ghost Story about the Soul of the Deceased), and featured images by the ukiyo-e artist Hasegawa Sadanobu 長谷川貞信 I (1809–1879). In addition, a number of color woodcuts featuring Ichikawa Kodanji IV, Arashi Rikaku II, and other actors in the role of Sōgorō/Tōgo were produced between 1851 and 1880, proof that the play continued to enjoy popularity in the three decades after its debut. Even later still, the celebrated artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi 月岡芳年 (1839–1892) would choose the scene of Sōgorō’s farewell to his family as the subject of a woodcut in the series *Shinsen azuma nishiki-e* 新撰東錦絵 (A New Selection of Eastern Brocade Pictures) printed in 1885.¹⁷

After Segawa’s *Higashiyama sakura Sōshi* premiered, ten years passed before the story was again staged in Edo. This time, the actor Kodanji relied on the playwright Kawatake Shinshichi 河竹新七 II (later known as Mokuami 黙阿弥, 1816–1893) to revise the original play. The resulting narrative eliminated the parts related to *Inaka Genji* and added new scenes, giving a greater consistency to the peasant hero’s story.¹⁸ Titled *Sakura Sōshi gonichi no bundan* 桜莊子後日文談 (A Literary Discussion of the Aftermath of the Brave Man of Sakura Incident) and staged at the Morita-za 守田座 Theater from the eighth through to the tenth

¹⁶The three restagings occurred in the fifth month of 1853 at the Takeda Shibai 竹田芝居 Theater, in the ninth month of 1856 at the Chikugo Shibai 筑後芝居 Theater, and in the sixth month of 1860 at the Minami Shibai 南芝居 Theater in nearby Sakai 堺. See Kokuritsu Gekijō Geinō Chōsashitsu, *Tōshi kyōgen Sakura giminden*, p. 3.

¹⁷Some of these woodcuts can be viewed on the websites of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

¹⁸In particular, Kawatake wrote a subplot about Kōzen 光然, Tōgo’s uncle and abbot of Bukkō-ji 仏光寺 Temple. After praying for leniency for thirty-seven days and receiving news of the merciless execution of his nephew and the latter’s family, Kōzen drowns himself in the Inba Marsh and becomes a vengeful ghost who haunts the Hotta family along with the spirits of Tōgo and his wife. Despite the prominence of its author, this scene has only rarely been included in contemporary stagings of the play.

month of 1861, this play, also in seven acts and twenty-eight scenes, would form the basis for stagings of the Sōgorō story from the Meiji period onwards.¹⁹

3. The Hero's Encounter with the Ferryman and His Farewell to His Family

While the structure and staging of these plays about Sōgorō varied over time, performances almost always included a core set of scenes: the petitioning of Lord Hotta at the gate of his Edo mansion (*monso no ba* 門訴の場), the hero's return to his village across Inba Marsh with the help of the ferryman (*watashimori* 渡し守) Jinbei 甚兵衛 (*watashi no ba* 渡しの場), the hero's visit to his home and farewell to his children (*kowakare no ba* 子別れの場), the hero's petitioning of the shogun (*jikiso no ba* 直訴の場), and, less frequently, the haunting of the Hotta mansion (*kaii no ba* 怪異の場). Since these scenes mark the turning points in Sōgorō's story, their continual inclusion in performances of the play was only natural.²⁰ Among these, the ferry scene and the scene with the hero's family have been, by far, the play's most popular, as reflected in surviving woodblock prints, which depict them more than any of the other episodes in the story.

In the first of these two scenes, Sōgorō (or "Tōgo"),²¹ having resolved to appeal directly to the shogun, and aware that doing so will bring about his own death, is worried that this punishment will extend to his family, as we have seen. On the advice of his comrades, he returns in disguise to his village, bringing some money and a divorce letter (*rienjō* 離縁状) for his wife, Osan おさん. On the snowy night represented in the 2019 playbill cited at the beginning of this article, he reaches the ferryman's hut and calls for him, asking to be taken across the marsh. From within the hut, the ferryman refuses, citing recent orders from the domain authorities that say crossing is not to be permitted between dusk and dawn. Sōgorō recognizes the voice as that of Jinbei, an old peasant, and the two finally meet face to face. Sōgorō enters the hut, and in the secrecy that it affords, Jinbei brings him up-to-date about the situation then in the village: most of his fellows have been arrested, and the authorities are watching his family closely so that they can arrest him too when he returns. Indeed it is precisely to prevent Sōgorō from crossing the marsh unnoticed that they have ordered the ferry to remain idle during the night.

Sōgorō seems to have no choice but to return to Edo without achieving his purpose. Nevertheless, he reveals to Jinbei his plan to make a direct appeal to the

¹⁹ Part of the play has been translated into English by Anne Phillips as "The Tale of the Martyr of Sakura."

²⁰ The number of acts varied over the years from two to ten. Occasionally, the story has been staged in its entirety, in which case the performance is described as a "full-play" performance (*toshi kyōgen* 通し狂言), one recent example being the 2019 Zenshin-za production.

²¹ In the plot summaries, I have referred to the characters as they are named in the play. Here, however, for the sake of clarity, I use Sōgorō instead of the actual Tōgo. The names of the supporting characters also vary to some extent across the various plays.

shogun and asks him to deliver the divorce letter and money to his wife. The old man is deeply moved by Sōgorō's selflessness and declares that he cannot deny him a final farewell with his family, especially since he is sacrificing his life for the peasants of the domain. Although Sōgorō protests, fearing for the ferryman's own safety, Jinbei takes a hatchet (*nata* 鉞) and breaks the chains shackling the ferry to its berth, and then conveys the hero across the marsh.

The following scene is set in Sōgorō's house, where the hero's wife welcomes his return, as do his sons, Hikoshichi 彦七 and Tokumatsu 徳松, and his daughter, Otō おとう. Osan also presents to Sōgorō their infant boy, to whom she has given birth during his absence. She also has him don a cotton kimono that she has sewn for him. While talking to his family, Sōgorō realizes how destitute the village has become, his own household included. He calls for a cup of *sake*, pretending that he intends to celebrate his homecoming, while knowing that this will in fact be his parting toast. There is, however, no *sake* in the house to be had—the nearby seller having moved away because of the village's difficulties—so they instead share cups of tea.

Then, while the other characters are otherwise occupied, Sōgorō furtively tucks the money, the divorce letter, and a parting message to his wife into the newborn's bedclothes. But Osan finds and reads the message before Sōgorō can depart and angrily confronts him. Eventually she grasps the purpose of the divorce but refuses to accept it, declaring that her duty as wife is to follow him even to the underworld. She implores him to tear up the letter, which he does.²² Their children then surround Sōgorō and cling to him in an effort to prevent him from leaving. When the bell for the hour of the ox (1 to 3 a.m.) tolls, however, he reluctantly leaves the house—as Osan watches from a window, holding the newborn in her arms.

From a narrative point of view, the homecoming subplot is particularly effective, emphasizing as it does the themes of abnegation and loyalty to show precisely what Sōgorō is losing by continuing to advance the peasants' interests. Moreover, since the story—at least after the play's first staging—was widely known, audiences, when taking in the familial scenes, were already aware of the fates of Sōgorō and his family, and therefore able to empathize with the defeated hero.

4. The Kabuki Play and “Veritable Records”

The *Fujiokaya nikki* 藤岡屋日記 (Fujiokaya Diaries, 1804–1868), a major source for Edo history and culture of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, relates that, when Ichikawa Kodanji and Segawa Jokō were planning to stage a play about Sōgorō at the Nakamura-za Theater, they went to Sakura to visit various temples and ruins there and to inquire into the origins of Sōgorō's story.²³ In the

²² In *Sakura no akebono*, it is Osan who tears up the letter.

²³ The *Fujiokaya nikki* is a massive diary kept from 1804 to 1868 by a merchant and bookseller named Sudō Yoshizō 須藤由蔵 (b. 1793) under the pseudonym Fujiokaya. It is a major source of information about life in Edo at the time, covering topics as varied as crime, scandals, cultural events, and even military affairs. See *Fujiokaya nikki*, pp. 437–439.

opinion of scholar Ōno Masaharu 大野政治, when Kodanji visited the Mt. Narita area three years before the play was staged, he managed to locate a copy of *Jizōdō*, which he brought back to Edo.²⁴ It is, therefore, likely that *Higashiyama sakura Sōshi* derives from the *jitsuroku* narratives.

Nonetheless, as Ogihara has shown, the episodes of the hero's encounter with the ferryman and his farewell to his family do not appear in any text from either the *Jizōdō* or the *Hotta sōdōki* lineages prior to the kabuki play. To be sure, some *jitsuroku* contain a farewell scene between Sōgorō and his family, but only as an interlude and, crucially, at a different point in the narrative—before he departs to join the other headmen in Edo. In these brief scenes, the hero reads his will, shares a cup of *sake*, and departs. The parting drink is the only detail shared with the kabuki play. In the *jitsuroku*, however, the scene is a restrained one, while in the kabuki play the emotions are overwhelming. Moreover, in the former, there is no divorce letter since Sōgorō leaves his family before making the petition even to Hotta, and thus before he has any inkling that he will later feel compelled to sacrifice his life to ensure that the petition is read by the shogun.

Segawa appears to have reworked the parting scene, moving it to the center of the play and adding elements and dialogue to increase its dramatic force. The addition of the ferryman scene highlights this subplot's liminal nature. This reworking of the original storyline seems to have been at least partly responsible for the play's remarkable success. My analysis has already touched on the staging of a similar play in Osaka and the story's dramatization in a *jōruri* play. The *Fujiokaya nikki* makes it clear that Segawa's achievement in this respect was such that even the *koishaku* 講釈 [*kōdan*] storytellers in Edo were moved to include the Sakura Sōgorō story in their performances.²⁵

Before I analyze Sōgorō's story in the *kōdan* genre, it is worth noting that only *jitsuroku* texts published after the staging of the *Higashiyama sakura Sōshi* kabuki play include the homecoming subplot. This inflection point is especially evident in “reading books” (*yomihon* 読本) derived from *jitsuroku*, which included illustrations (*sashi-e* 挿し絵) that, along with their storytelling, had become the preferred medium for the popular consumption of historical narratives. Ogihara has contrasted the *Jizōdō* and *Hotta sōdōki* texts with *Chūyū Asakura nikki* 忠勇阿佐倉日記 (The Diary of the Brave and Loyal Asakura), a *yomihon* in three parts published between 1852 and 1855, which includes both the ferry and the farewell episodes.²⁶ The *Asakura nikki* is also by no means an isolated case. Thus, for instance, the entire homecoming subplot is included in *Asakura Tōgo ichidaiki* 朝倉当吾一代記 (The Life of Asakura Tōgo, 1855), a book by the renowned popular fiction (*gesaku* 戯作) writer Donteï Robun 鈍亭魯文 (also Kanagaki Robun

²⁴ Arashi, Koike, and Takahashi, *Teidan Sakura giminden no sekai*, p. 27.

²⁵ *Fujiokaya nikki*, p. 438.

²⁶ Ogihara, “‘Sakura Sōgorō mono’ jitsuroku no keifu,” pp. 36–39.



Figure 1. Scene of Sōgorō's meeting with his family, from *Asakura Tōgo ichidaiki* 朝倉当吾一代記. Through the window, the reader catches a glimpse of the ferryman Jinbei. National Institute of Japanese Literature.

<https://doi.org/10.20730/200014718> (image 15).

仮名垣魯文, 1829–1894).²⁷ The episodes were also illustrated by Ochiai (or Utagawa 歌川) Yoshiiku 落合芳幾 (1833–1904), who not only skillfully merged the two scenes (**fig. 1**) but also alluded to the kabuki play in their visual composition. Furthermore, upon close examination, the illustration of the parting scene in *Tōgo ichidaiki* (**fig. 2**) closely resembles a woodblock print by Ichiyūsai (or Utagawa) Kuniyoshi 一勇齋国芳 (1798–1861), in which he represents the same scene enacted by Kodanji in *Higashiyama sakura Sōshi*.²⁸

²⁷ The National Institute of Japanese Literature's copy of this work is available in its "Database of Pre-Modern Japanese Works."

²⁸ The print can be viewed in the database of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/463408/actors-ichikawa-kodanji-iv-as-asakura-murashoya-to-go-foregr> (accession no. 11.38079).

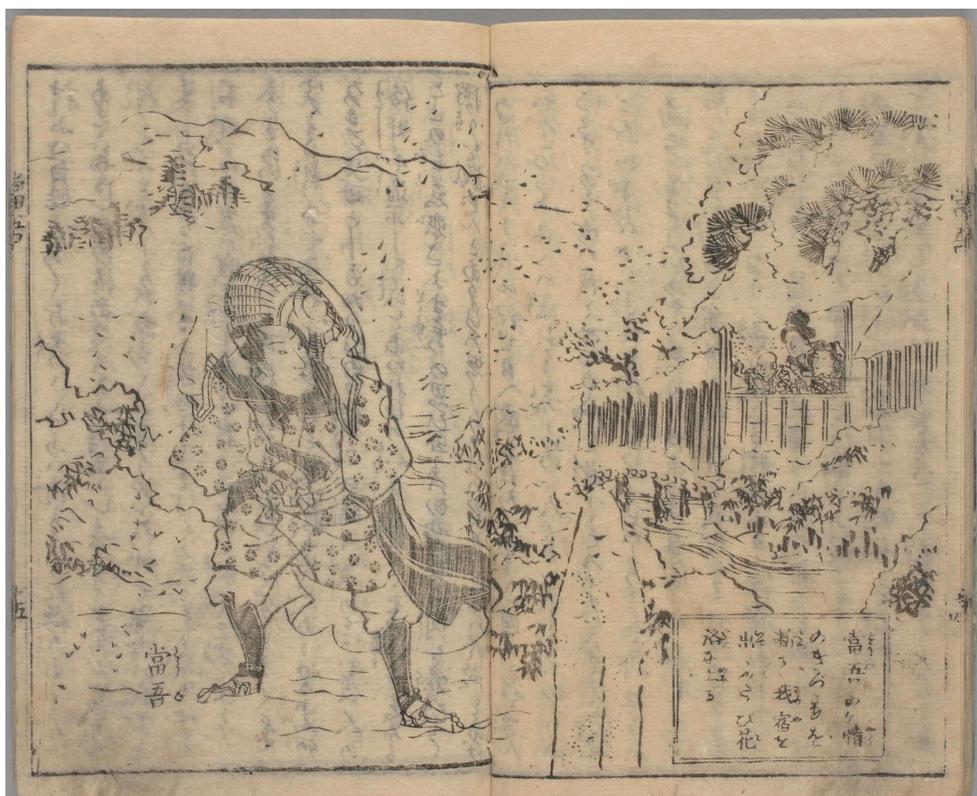


Figure 2. Scene of Sōgorō's farewell to his family, from *Asakura Togo ichidaiki*. National Institute of Japanese Literature.

<https://doi.org/10.20730/200014718> (image 17).

Yomibon printed from the Meiji era onward incorporate into the Sōgorō narrative either the ferry, the farewell scenes, or both.²⁹ The same can be said of *jitsuroku*-like works, which contain fewer images and more detailed narrative text (usually printed using a non-cursive script). One example is the fifth title in the series

²⁹ Specifically, the following works include only the farewell scene: *Sakura Sōgorō ichidaiki* 佐倉宗五郎一代記 (The Life of Sakura Sōgorō, 1877) by Ōnishi Shōnosuke 大西庄之助 (dates unknown), *Sakura Sōgo ichidaiki* 佐倉宗五郎一代記 (The Life of Sakura Sōgo, 1879) by Takeshita Rokutarō 竹下六太郎 (dates unknown), and *Sōgo jikki* 宗吾実紀 (The Veritable Records of Sōgo, 1882) by Iida Kōtarō 飯田孝太郎 (dates unknown). Both scenes are included in *Sakura Sōgo den* 佐倉宗吾伝 (The Legend of Sakura Sōgo, 1878) by Shōmonsha Fukurai 笑門舎福来 (dates unknown), *Sakura Sōgo jitsuroku* 佐倉宗吾実説録 (The Veritable Records of Sakura Sōgo, 1879) by Takeuchi Eikyū 竹内栄久 (1848–1920), *Sakura Sōgorō ichidaiki* 佐倉宗吾朗一代記 (1881) by Miyata Kōsuke 宮田孝助 (dates unknown), and *Sakura Sōgorō ichidaiki* 佐倉宗五郎一代記 (1882) by Yamamura Seisuke 山村清助 (1847–1899). All these texts are available in the online digital collections of the National Diet Library.

Kinko jitsuroku 今古実録 (Veritable Records of Past and Present Times)—*Sakura giminden* 佐倉義民伝 (The Tale of the Peasant Martyr of Sakura, 1882), which was reprinted in the following years under various titles.³⁰ There is, however, a slight difference between the *yomibon*-style and the *jitsuroku*-style texts: in the latter, the ferryman is called Tahei 太平; in the former, he has the same name as in the kabuki play, Jinbei. Arguably, then, two different lines of publications developed after the staging of the kabuki play. On the one hand, the *yomibon*-style books recast Sōgorō's story for a broader audience, usually in the form of a booklet consisting of a few pages of text and numerous images. With few exceptions, such books presented the story in a manner similar to that of the kabuki play, narrating only the key episodes. *Jitsuroku*-style books, on the other hand, emphasized the text rather than the images, with the narratives following the tradition of the chronicles predating the kabuki play; they included numerous well-known episodes and subplots as well as the new scenes that the play had introduced. Books derived from *kōdan* oral performances follow the latter pattern in terms of presenting detailed descriptions, but differ in the greater emphasis they place on the dialogue.

5. *Sakura giminden* in *Kōdan* Storytelling

Tracing the emergence of the Sōgorō story in the context of *kōdan* storytelling—which until the Meiji period was known by the name *kōshaku*—is problematic because of the medium's intrinsically oral nature. Originating in spoken comments about, and interpretations of, canonical Buddhist texts as a kind of public performance, *kōshaku* (literally “lectures”) depended on both oral and written texts. Thus, as Matilde Mastrangelo has observed, while *kōshaku* developed as a form of public recitation rather than as a form of storytelling,³¹ in its evolution as a performance genre, the source narrative came to be hidden from the audience's view. A script (*daibon* 台本) remained, but it was kept private for the exclusive use of the performer. Even the transmission of stories (*hanashi* 噺) from masters to disciples was accomplished orally, with written notes being employed merely as an aide-mémoire.

This tradition was partially—but drastically—altered in the Meiji period with the introduction of phonetic shorthand, which made it possible to transcribe

³⁰The kabuki play has been staged repeatedly under various titles up to recent times. The first known occurrence of the term *gimin* was in 1887, when the play *Giminden Sakura kikiigaki* 義民伝 佐倉聞書 (Things Heard and Written about the Story of the Peasant Martyr of Sakura) was staged at the Kado no Shibai Theater in Osaka. As discussed below, this was at a time when the term *gimin* had been appropriated by the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. In 1891, the play was staged in Tokyo under the title *Sakura gimin bimei no homare* 佐倉義民美名誉 (Honor to the Good Name of the Peasant Martyr of Sakura), which was often used for subsequent productions.

³¹Mastrangelo, “Japanese Storytelling,” pp. 207–208.

such performances on paper and, consequently, to disseminate in printed form stories which had previously been accessible only orally.³² The popularity in the 1890s of books with edited phonetic transcriptions of actual performances (*sokkibon* 速記本) prepared the way, beginning at the end of the Meiji era, for the print production and circulation of *kōdan* that were not derived from existing performances (*kaki-kōdan* 書き講談). Drawing on the *kōdan* repertoire of historical narratives, the publisher Tatsukawa Kumajirō 立川熊次郎 (1878–1932) launched the Tatsukawa Library (Tatsukawa Bunko 立川文庫), a series of 197 *kakikōdan* volumes published from 1911 to 1924. Likewise, the publisher Kōdansha 講談社 launched the magazine *Kōdan kurabu* 講談倶楽部 in 1911 to present *kōdan* transcriptions and, soon thereafter, also *kakikōdan*. Together the magazine and the library series catalyzed the emergence of the new historical novel (*jidai shōsetsu* 時代小説) genre and the establishment of the so-called popular literature (*taishū bungaku* 大衆文学) genre.

The foregoing discussion has provided necessary context for tracing the evolution of the Sōgorō story within the *kōdan* genre. Several scholars, beginning with Kodama, have suggested that it was indeed *kōdan* performances, and not only *jitsuroku*, that helped to spread such narratives. However, the earliest extant text of a *kōdan* performance dates to 1896, when the magazine *Meika dansō* 名家談叢 (Compelling Stories by Accomplished Masters) began to serialize transcriptions of Momokawa Joen's 桃川如燕 (1832–1898) version of the story under the title *Sakura gimindan* 佐倉義民談 (The Story of the Peasant Martyr of Sakura).

According to Nakamura Yukihiro 中村幸彦, *kōdan* performers might well have contributed to the development of *Sakura giminden* during the Bunsei 文政 (1818–1830) and Tenpō 天保 (1830–1844) eras.³³ In his informative essay on *kōdan* history, Sano Takashi 佐野孝 observes that *Sakura giminden* was the specialty of Ishikawa Ichimu 石川一夢 (1804–1854), whose narration was so popular that, reportedly, at one point when he was experiencing financial difficulties, he pawned his brief (twenty-page) original script for a hundred *ryō* 両, a significant amount of money demonstrating the marketability of his performances.³⁴ The only extant text of Ichimu's *Sakura Sōgorō* is a woodblock-printed book (*banpon* 版本) titled *Sakura giminden*, the preface to which bears a date of 1858. However, not only is this date four years after Ichimu's death—with his name in fact being preceded by the term *kojin* 故人, i.e., “the deceased”—but moreover its text, in terms of content, resembles rather a *jitsuroku* narrative than a *kōdan* script. Nobuhiro Shinji 延広真治 has suggested, accordingly, that *Sakura giminden*

³²This practice began in 1884 with the publication of the ghost story *Botan dorō* 牡丹灯籠 (The Peony Lantern), based on the performances of the *rakugo* 落語 master San'yūtei Enchō 三遊亭円朝 (1839–1900). For an innovative discussion of the introduction of phonetic shorthand in Japan and its application to storytelling, see Jacobowitz, *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan*.

³³Nakamura, “Sakura giminden,” p. 49.

³⁴Sano, *Kōdan gohyakumen*, pp. 66–67.



Figure 3. Scene of Sōgorō's parting from his family in *Sakura giminden* 佐倉義民伝 (woodblock edition) by Ishikawa Ichimu 石川一夢. Author's personal collection.

was not actually authored by Ichimu.³⁵ While the scene of the hero's farewell to his family is included in the narrative and represented in an illustration (fig. 3), the fact of the book being dated to seven years after the kabuki play's premiere renders the connection between the two opaque. Furthermore, the book's *sashi-e* is similar to many other illustrations and prints based on kabuki staging, and therefore hints at the latter's influence on the former rather than vice-versa.

However, an episode reported by the performing arts critic Nomura Mumeian 野村無名庵 (1888–1945) helps to clarify this point. In the miscellany titled *Honchō wajinden* 本朝話人伝 (Lives of Storytellers of Our Country, 1944), Nomura mentions that three *kōdan* masters—Ishikawa Ichimu and two contemporaries, Shōrin Hakuen 松林白円 (1812–1855) and Shōryūsai Nangyoku 正流齋南玉 (1770–1846)—engaged in a casual competition at the end of a performance by

³⁵ Nobuhiro, "Ishikawa Ichimu," p. 128.

Takarai Bakin 宝井馬琴 II (dates unknown) at a theater near Kyōbashi 京橋 Bridge. Asked to narrate a scene of parents and children parting to determine which of the three could generate the most emotion, Hakuen chose the parting between Sanada Nobuyuki 真田信之 and Yukimura 幸村 from their father Masayuki 昌幸, from the *kōdan* titled *Sanada sandaiki* 真田三代記 (The Lives of the Three Sanada). Ichimu chose the parting of Sōgorō from his children from his *Sakura giminden*. According to Nomura, that scene

... moves [audiences] to tears irrespective of who performs [it], but the performance by Ichimu was unrivaled; it was just like seeing the scene before one's eyes, except that there was no one whose eyes were not full of tears. He descended from the stage to thunderous applause.³⁶

Nangyoku, however, won the contest by narrating the parting of Kusunoki Masashige 楠木正成 and his son Masatsura 正行 at Sakurai 桜井 Station from the *Taiheiki* 太平記 (Chronicle of Great Peace, fourteenth century).

Nomura provides no date for the contest, which he could not have witnessed since it took place before his birth. If we take him at his word, however, the event must have occurred before Nangyoku died (thus making 1847 a *terminus ante quem*), which is at least five years before the premiere of the kabuki play. There is, therefore, reason to conclude that the *kōdan* narratives were well established before 1851 and could indeed have influenced the kabuki play, at least with respect to the scene of Sōgorō's farewell to his family. The ferryman episode, on the other hand, might be an original addition by the playwright.

To be sure, the *kōdan* transcriptions published in the mid-Meiji period present both scenes. There are at least four transcriptions of performances by Meiji-era storytellers: the aforementioned *Sakura giminden* (1896) serialized in *Meika dansō* and a different version published as a standalone book under the title *Sakura Sōgorō* (1897), both by Momokawa Joen; *Sakura giminroku* 佐倉義民録 (Records of the Peasant Martyr of Sakura, 1896) by Murai Hajime 邑井一 (1841–1910); and *Kōdan Sakura Sōgorō* (1902) by Kyokudō Nanryō 旭堂南陵 (1858–1911). These books testify to the popularity of Sōgorō in both the Tokyo area and in Kansai.³⁷

Among the story's three versions, Joen's is probably the earliest since he was older than Hajime and Nanryō. Furthermore, Joen trained in the Itō 伊東 school under Itō Enshin 伊東燕晋 II (1801–1855) before a quarrel with Itō Chōka 伊東潮花 (1810–1880) prompted him to found his own Momokawa school. The Itō school was renowned for warrior tales (*gundan* 軍談), under which *Sakura giminden* was included. Nomura quotes from a rankings billboard (*banzuke* 番付) of *gundan* stories printed in the summer of the fifth year of the Ansei 安政 era (1858) in which *Sakura giminden* is linked to the narrator Itō Enryō 伊東燕凌 (dates

³⁶ Nomura, *Honchō wajinden*, p. 87. The English translation is my own.

³⁷ The Kyokudō school was based in Osaka and performed *kamigata* 上方-style *kōdan*.

unknown).³⁸ Joen's version of that *kōdan* could, therefore, have been derived from the Itō school, though there exists no definitive proof that this was indeed the case.³⁹

In 1894, Momokawa Enrin 桃川燕林 (1846–1905), who in 1899 took the name Momokawa Minoru 桃川実, published a book titled *Tōyō gimin Sakura Sōgorō* 東洋義民佐倉宗五郎 (Sakura Sōgorō the Peasant Martyr of the East). Enrin's version of the story is not a transcription but rather bears the label of “notes” (*shuki* 手記). As a matter of fact, it is closer to *jitsuroku*-style books than to *kōdan*, with its text recalling the style and wording of the aforementioned *Sakura gimin* as included in the *Kinko jitsuroku* series, though its dialogic portion is conspicuous. In this respect, *Tōyō gimin Sakura Sōgorō* seems to resemble the book attributed to Ichimu, inasmuch as either or both could have provided the plot outline on which later storytellers would build their narratives.

Interestingly, the inclusion of the words *Tōyō gimin* in Enrin's title alludes to the appropriation of the Sōgorō character by the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (Jiyū Minken Undō 自由民権運動) in the 1880s. A comprehensive discussion of this appropriation is beyond the scope of the present study, but, in short, at a time when many disenfranchised Japanese were demanding recognition of their civil rights, Sōgorō came to be seen as an archetypal self-sacrificing righteous man (*gimin*), a development that shed new light on the hero and gave new meaning to his abnegation.⁴⁰ Thus, the Meiji intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901) praised Sōgorō in his *An Encouragement of Learning* (*Gakumon no susume* 学問のすすめ, 1872–1876),⁴¹ and the activist Komuro Shinsuke 小室信介 (1852–1885) described him in the introduction to *Tōyō minken hyakkaden* 東洋民権百家伝 (One Hundred Biographies of Eastern Advocates of People's Rights, 1883–1884) as follows:

Those are people who, for the sake of their society, or their country, or for others, or for a principle, considering their life less than dust, do not bend, and do not break in the face of oppression; they are firm as a rock, careless of their glory, profit, wealth, or offspring. . . . Perhaps the number of persons who sacrifice themselves for the sake of the people and who have been hidden from history is not very large. Maybe Sakura Sōgorō was the only one. However, I

³⁸ A *banzuke* is a billboard-size document listing rankings, such as of artists or sumo wrestlers; see Nomura, *Honchō wajinden*, p. 89.

³⁹ The identity of the Enryō mentioned by Nomura is unclear since the latter did not specify his source materials. The first Itō Enryō passed away in 1830, while Enryō II (a disciple of the former who took his name after his master's death) died in 1856. The *banzuke* could, therefore, refer to an Enryō III, records of whom have been otherwise lost.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the transformation of the Sōgorō story within the context of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, see Ōkubo, “Gimin denshō to Meiji-ki.” For an insightful account of nationalism and political issues in the context of performance during the Meiji period, see Hyōdō, *Enjirareta kindai*.

⁴¹ Walthall, “Japanese Gimin,” pp. 1088–1089.

have searched the traces and the names of those hidden persons, which I make public. . . . These are people who will not be inferior to the Sakura Sōgorō of the plays.⁴²

In the conclusion to his own book, Momokawa Enrin mentions the temple in Narita dedicated to the hero, there deified as Sakura Sōgo Daimyōjin 佐倉宗五大明神:

Being an advocate for the people's rights in the east, when members of the party or, needless to say, people like Count Itagaki 板垣, come to stay, they hold big celebrations and, probably, Sōgo himself jumps for joy under the ground.⁴³

These narratives are more or less consistent, except when it comes to the ferryman and farewell scenes, in which some striking differences are apparent. To begin with, most *kōdan* provide an account of the ferryman Jinbei's death: as Sōgorō proceeds from his house back to the ferry, he is assaulted by a gangster (usually but not always named Maboroshi no Chōkichi 幻の長吉), who has recognized him and wants to claim a reward by turning him in to the domain authorities. The gangster succeeds in tying up Sōgorō and asks Jinbei to help, but the latter kills him (fittingly, with an oar). Aware that he faces prosecution for violating the ban on operating the ferry—and for murder—Jinbei proceeds to kill himself once Sōgorō leaves. In the *jitsuroku*-style texts, such as *Kinko jitsuroku*, the ferryman hangs himself, while in all of the *kōdan* that include the scene, he drowns himself. In the Nanryō *kōdan*, the suicide is alluded to but not dramatized. In two of the texts (the *Meika dansō* text by Joen and the one by Murai), however, the scene concludes with the parting between Sōgorō and Jinbei, offering no hint that the latter will commit suicide.

Another interesting detail relates to the divorce letter that Sōgorō delivers to his wife. As mentioned, in the kabuki play, Osan tears up the letter, refusing to accept the divorce. Such is the fate of the letter in most *kōdan* texts, but there are some exceptions, beginning with Enrin's *Tōyō gimin Sakura Sōgorō*: there his Osan accepts the divorce gratefully, reassuring Sōgorō that their bond will bring them together in the next life. Similarly, in Murai's text, Osan accepts the letter and reassures Sōgorō that she will take care of their family.

The *kōdan* by Nanryō, on the other hand, has two unique distinguishing details. First, it makes no mention of the snow that visually characterizes the ferryman and the farewell scenes. Moreover, in his text, Sōgorō's farewell to his family is much reduced, while a prominent role is given to his mother-in-law: waking to find him in the house, she berates and drives him out with a broomstick because

⁴² Komuro, *Tōyō minken hyakkaden*, pp. 3–4. The English translation is my own.

⁴³ Momokawa, *Tōyō Gimin Sakura Sōgorō*, p. 241. Itagaki Taisuke 板垣退助 (1837–1919) was a statesman who led the Freedom and People's Rights Movement and the Liberal Party. He received the title of count in 1884, making that year the *terminus post quem* for Enrin's composition of this text.

his return to the village, where the domain authorities are waiting for him, is too risky. Since the fate of a great number of people depends on his delivering the petition, she insists, he is foolish to risk his life only for the few members of his family. After she chases Sōgorō from the house, she confesses to her daughter that she acted out of concern for him, and in order to encourage him to act as he, in fact, does, and she expresses regret for her harsh manner toward him.

Conclusions

The passage of *kōdan* from an intangible medium (performance) to a tangible medium (books), then, marked their evolution into a textual genre that eventually merged with the novel. Sakura Sōgorō's story was part of this trend: in 1912, it was published as the twenty-seventh volume in the Tatsukawa Library under the title *Gimin Sakura Sōgorō*.⁴⁴ Further *kōdan*-style texts appeared in the 1910s and 1920s, such as *Chōben kōdan Sakura Sōgorō* 長編講談佐倉宗五郎 (Sakura Sōgorō: A Full-Length *Kōdan*, 1916) by Momokawa Minoru, and *Sakura Sōgorō* by Takarai Kinsō 宝井琴窓 (1898–1972), which was included in the sixth volume of the *Kōdan zenshū* 講談全集 (*Kōdan* Collection) published in 1929 by Kōdansha.⁴⁵ A parallel evolution took place in *rokyoku*, with performance scripts (or similar texts) being published as books in the 1910s and actual performances recorded and marketed as record albums as well.

I have limited the scope of my analysis here to the relationships between the kabuki and *kōdan* versions of Sōgorō's story and the preexisting *jitsuroku* narratives. In particular, my focus has been on the episodes of the hero's ferry-crossing of Inba Marsh and his farewell to his family, which have become hallmarks of the story. The inclusion of these two episodes marked a watershed moment, in that the texts produced after the kabuki play almost invariably featured either or both of them. As a consequence, scholars have regarded this storyline as an innovation introduced by the kabuki playwright, whose success led to its incorporation in *kōdan* narratives, as *Fujiokaya nikkei* reports.

Extant *kōdan* texts related to Sakura Sōgorō's story prior to 1896 are absent because of the oral nature of the medium. Thus no direct evidence is available that might either support or disprove the scholarly consensus in this regard. However, the episode reported by Nomura Mumeian suggests that at least the farewell scene was already being narrated by *kōdan* performers before the kabuki play was staged. While far from constituting definitive proof, this finding nevertheless sheds some light on a matter that is complicated by the absence of primary

⁴⁴ A certain Sekka Sanjin 雪花散人 is credited with composing most of the titles in the series, but this is probably a pseudonym representing several different authors.

⁴⁵ The latter text became the standard edition and was included in the 1954 reprint, the 1971 revised edition *Teihon kōdan meisaku zenshū* 定本講談名作全集 (Masterpieces of *Kōdan*, the Standard Edition)—albeit erroneously there attributed to Momokawa En'yū 桃川燕友—and the 1976 pocket edition of the latter, *Kōdan meisaku bunko* 講談名作文庫.

sources (i.e., *kōdan* texts) prior to the mid-Meiji period. As the cases of *kōdan* and kabuki make clear, the evolution of the transmission of Sōgorō's story occurred through a combination of different media. Further research is needed to unravel the relationships among the various genres, including their political nuances and social implications. The tale of Sakura Sōgorō, I suggest, constitutes a starting point for the exploration of these issues. It is, therefore, my hope that this article will contribute to our understanding of how these complex and intertwined textual and performance traditions developed.

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