

Singing Tales of the Gishi

Naniwabushi and the Forty-seven Rōnin
in Late Meiji Japan

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So swift has been the demise of *naniwabushi* 浪花節, the most popular form of mass entertainment in Japan throughout the first half of the twentieth century, that few Japanese under the age of fifty can even describe it, much less recall an actual performance, either live or recorded. Even by its current name of *rōkyoku* 浪曲, a more elegant term introduced in the Taishō period but established in ordinary speech only after World War II, the story-singing tradition of *naniwabushi* is today largely unknown and its history poorly documented.¹ It hangs on today by a thread as a performance tradition, coming to life at a handful of seasonal concerts for graying audiences and at daily performances on the first ten days of every month at the small and dilapidated Mokubatei 木馬亭 theater in the Asakusa 浅草 district of Tokyo.

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¹ According to Shiba 1989, p. 288, the word *rōkyoku* first appeared in print in the 20 December 1917 issue of *Miyako shinbun* 都新聞. The term was intended to dissociate *naniwabushi* from its origins as a street performance and to lend it the dignity of such terms as *yōkyoku* 謡曲 (instead of *utai* 謡) for noh singing or *jōkyoku* 浄曲 for jōruri. Chichibu 1972 writes that it was only in the Shōwa 30s (1955–1965) that NHK agreed to stop using the term *naniwabushi*, in response to a request from the Rōkyoku Kyōkai 浪曲協会, which claimed that the word was old-fashioned and often used as a term of contempt. The only compilation of primary materials on *naniwabushi* history is Shiba 1997, which covers mainly newspaper articles plus some journals. It is useful but also spotty, particularly for the metropolitan press before late Meiji. The collection includes some key newspaper and article reports on *naniwabushi* history (Bonchō 1906, Tankasei 1906, Mikazuki-an 1907). Little is available after the late Meiji boom, until two important articles in the early 1930s, Ishitani 1932 and Hirabayashi 1933 (both reproduced in Masaoka 1968). Masaoka 1968 is the posthumous compilation of an historical account begun in 1941 by a leading writer of *naniwabushi* texts and promoter of the art, but it is largely anecdotal. Most recently, Uemura 1987, vol. 2, provides a sound scholarly account of Miyazaki Tōten 宮崎滔天 and his relationship to Tōchūken Kumoemon 桃中軒雲右衛門, key figures in the developments discussed below.

We wish here first to offer a general account of the astonishing rise of *naniwabushi* from the rowdy streets of Tokyo in the early Meiji period, culminating in its emergence on the big-theater stage as a phenomenally popular form of entertainment in the final years of Meiji, appealing to all classes as a truly national form of expression. The basic form of the art remained much the same throughout: a single storyteller alternating between song (known in *naniwabushi* as *fushi* 節) and ordinary speech (*kotoba* 詞, with both dialogue and narration), accompanied by a shamisen player who offers periodic verbal interjections for timing and encouragement. Although it resembles the *gidayū* 義太夫 narration of the puppet theater in these respects, *naniwabushi* is far more accessible to a modern audience, with more clearly defined melodic lines and easily comprehensible language. Cross-culturally, it bears similarities to Korean *p'ansori*, which also features a single singer, alternating song and speech, and an accompanist (a drum in the Korean case) who interjects words of encouragement.²

Within this basic form, *naniwabushi* steadily evolved in the Meiji period in its venue (from open street performance to small-stage variety halls and on to the big city theaters), in its stage appearance, and in its repertory. The most decisive changes in all these respects were the work of a single performer, Tōchūken Kumoemon 桃中軒雲右衛門 (1873–1916; see figure 1), in a single run in June 1907 at the Hongōza 本郷座 theater in Tokyo. Our particular interest in this, the last in the “Three Hundred Years of Chūshingura” series, lies in Kumoemon’s repertory, which at the height of his career was dominated by tales of the Forty-seven Righteous Samurai of Akō (Akō Gishi 赤穂義士, most often simply “Gishi”). The popularity of these tales of the Gishi (generically known as Gishiden 義士伝) both fed on and gave new shape to the national enthusiasm for military tales in the wake of the victory over Russia, appealing to a widespread if inchoate enthusiasm for “Bushido” 武士道, the presumptive belief system of the traditional samurai warrior. The result was a “Gishi boom” in the final years of Meiji, promoted by both *naniwabushi* singers and conservative ideologues—each, as we will see, with different and often conflicting agendas. In this way, the Chūshingura phenomenon progressed to a new plane, now far more widely known throughout Japan than ever before and deeply embedded in all of the leading modern media technologies, especially phonograph records and, in time, radio and television.

² For *p'ansori*, see Pihl 1994 and Park 2003. The comparison of *naniwabushi* and *p'ansori* is revealing but complicated. Despite the performative similarities, the historical trajectories were very different. *P'ansori* evolved as a fully developed form of “story singing” (Park’s term) in the nineteenth century, before any substantial modernization of Korea, as a form of performance for both popular and aristocratic salon audiences (although the performers remained underclass), and was preserved in the later twentieth century as a national cultural treasure. *Naniwabushi*, by contrast, emerged as a popular and largely lower-class form of storytelling in response to modernization and the social and technological opportunities that it brought; rarely has it been considered as a part of Japan’s traditional cultural heritage, or particularly worthy of preservation.



Figure 1. Tōchūken Kumoemon in his prime, ca. 1907, in performance dress of *hakama*, crested *haori*, and long hair. From Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 180.

The Hierarchy of Performance from Edo to Meiji

Naniwabushi emerged as an organized performance art in Tokyo in the 1870s in tandem with a similar and closely related type of performance in Osaka known as *ukarebushi* 浮かれ節. The evolution of this form of story singing involved the interaction of several types of performers (known broadly as *geinin* 芸人) in the late Edo period, each belonging to a specialized and legally segregated social group. These types of performance are only spottily documented, since the groups themselves were socially marginalized, today grouped by historians together with the outcaste *eta-hinin* 穢多非人 as *senmin* 賤民, or “lowborn people.”³ Often illiterate, they left few records in print or manuscript, so most evidence comes only indirectly from the authorities who sought to control them. In the case of the more respectable and hierarchically organized forms of singing and storytelling such as *nagauta* 長唄 and *gidayū*, it seems safe to assume that the first modern recordings, made shortly after 1900, were not that different from what might have been heard a century earlier. The same cannot be said of the humbler forms of performance, which tended to be more fluid and unstable, particularly during the Meiji period when the old feudal class restrictions were

³ Ishii 1988.

abolished and performers had new freedom to interact and compete in the marketplace of popular entertainment.

By the late Edo period, that marketplace had already evolved into a hierarchy of performance in terms of respectability and profitability. Lowest were the *kadozukegei* 門付け芸, arts performed door-to-door in the centuries-old mode of religious mendicants, offering a chant or a song in return for alms. Next up the ladder were the more strictly secular “street arts” (*daidōgei* 大道芸), performed in a fixed outdoor location in shrine and temple precincts or in the various urban plazas where public street entertainment was concentrated.⁴ Still a further step up was street performance within a temporary structure of reed screens known as *yoshizubari* 葦簀張り or, in the slang of Meiji Tokyo, *hiraki* 開き (pictured in figure 2). The casual and open structure of the *hiraki* did not allow the control necessary to charge a set fee, and those who entered were dunned for contributions by an assistant of the sort seen in figure 2.⁵ The final leap of legitimacy and profit was to a fixed theater with set entrance fees. These, too, ranged widely in quality and price. Lowest ranking were the *yose* 寄席 (from *yoseba* 寄せ場, “place of gathering”), small variety halls, usually with a capacity of under one hundred, in typically spare—but permanent—structures.⁶ From this the hierarchy progressed upwards, in the case of Tokyo all the way to the grand theaters like the Hongōza, where Tōchūken Kumoemon would perform in 1907, and the Kabukiza, grandest of the traditional theater venues. As we will see, the Meiji history of *naniwabushi* began in the early 1870s, with the performers’ ambition to enter the *yose*, and climaxed in Kumoemon’s triumph of 1907, capped by his Kabukiza performance of 1912.

For a fine sense of the raucous cheek-by-jowl mixing of different performers in the streets of late Edo and early Meiji Tokyo, we have the following graphic reminiscence by the journalist Tajima Ninten’ō 田島任天王 (1852–1909) of the scene at the Kanda Sujikai 神田筋違 plaza in his youth:

These open spaces of Tokyo were the amusement parks for the lower classes, where *tsuji-kōdan* 辻講談 storytellers, *deroren saimon* デロレン祭文 performers, and singers of *chobokure-chongare* ちよぼくれ・ちよんがれ and *ahodara-kyō* 阿呆陀羅經 would set up reed-screen shelters and draw in crowds without any admission fee. The noisy bustle of the plucking of the shamisen, the cries of the

⁴ The classic open performing space in Edo was Ryōgoku Hirokōji 両国広小路 at the east end of Ryōgoku bridge, but in the Meiji period, the performers concentrated in open areas known as *hara* 原, many of which were first created as firebreaks; leading examples were Kanda Sujikai 神田筋違 (until recently the site of the Transportation Museum), Shitaya Akiba no hara 下谷秋葉の原 (today “Akihabara”), and Shiba Kubomachi no hara 芝久保町の原 (an area northwest of the present Shinbashi 新橋 JR station); see Shiba 1980, p. 413. Others are listed in Tankasei 1906, p. 159.

⁵ Yui 1999, p. 9, notes that the *hiraki* in Tokyo of the 1880s were also referred to as *hakomise* 箱店, which seems to have indicated specifically a sturdier structure, protected on three sides, with seating inside on mats or benches, a place to store shoes, and the charging of set fees for those who chose to sit.

⁶ For the history of *yose*, see Groemer 1996, pp. 172–75.



Figure 2. A *deroren saimon* performance in a reed-mat *hiraki* hut in the Ryōgoku Hirokōji plaza of Tokyo, ca. 1883–1884. The singer is seated on a platform behind a lectern, blowing a *horagai* horn and shaking a *shakujō*, while his assistant gathers contributions from the all-male audience. From Yui 1999, p. 9 (original source unknown).

conch-shell trumpets, the rapping of the storyteller’s fan on his lectern—it was just as boisterous as the scene today at Asakusa Rokku 浅草六区. And just as a performer was getting to the climax of his story, an assistant would poke the listeners in the chest with a fan or basket and demand a donation. Some people gave, and some didn’t, while the shameless types would leave for a bit and then slip back in to listen some more. Even those who gave money didn’t throw in more than four or five coppers . . .⁷

Of the four specific types of performance that Tajima mentions, the first three were all critical components of the story of Meiji *naniwabushi*. (The fourth on the list, *ahodara-kyō*, was a largely parodic singsong chanting of Buddhist sutras that was of less importance since it was not primarily a storytelling art).⁸ In the next section, we trace the roots of the first two, which are historically the oldest, before looking in more detail at *chobokure-chongare*, the direct ancestor of *naniwabushi* and one of the various arts associated with the class of performers known as *gannin* 願人 (who also performed *ahodara-kyō*).

⁷ Tajima 1927, pp. 194–95.

⁸ For details on *ahodara-kyō*, see Groemer 2000, pp. 304–308.



Figure 3. Door-to-door *saimon* chanter, in yamabushi dress and holding a *shakujō*. From *Jinrin kinmō zui* (1690), vol. 7.

Saimon and Tsuji-kōshaku: The Sister Street Arts of Naniwabushi

Both the *saimon* and the *tsuji-kōshaku* 辻講釈 (*tsuji-kōdan*) performances that Tajima described as competing in the streets of Tokyo in the 1860s and 1870s had roots in the seventeenth century, and by the nineteenth century both were arts of narrative storytelling. At the same time, they were separated by an essential difference: *saimon*, although it also used speech narration and dialogue in the time-honored style of *gidayū* or in the manner of European opera, was essentially a kind of story singing, while *tsuji-kōshaku* rejected song in favor of pure prose narration. The secret of the success of *naniwabushi* was to draw on the strengths of each of these older sister arts.

Like many of the popular street arts of Edo, *saimon* had religious origins. The word *saimon*, “ritual words,” referred originally to prayers performed by wandering yamabushi priests, who by the seventeenth century traveled widely through Japan, soliciting door-to-door in the cities as well (see figure 3). Yamabushi-style *saimon* led in the early eighteenth-century Kamigata (Kyoto-Osaka) region to a type of popular song known as *utazaimon* 歌祭文, complete with printed texts, that appears to have already adopted narratives from writers such as Saikaku

西鶴 and Chikamatsu 近松. This particular *utazaimon* practice did not survive (although the word itself did live on and was often used as a synonym for the urban *saimon* of the Meiji period), but various other offshoots of *saimon*, still carried by yamabushi priests (or, more precisely, pseudo-priests), continued to evolve and spread. The form that had by far the most immediate and enduring influence on *naniwabushi* emerged only late in the Tokugawa period, from the late eighteenth into the early nineteenth century, in Jōshū 上州 (the province of Kōzuke 上野, corresponding generally to the modern Gunma prefecture) in the north Kantō plain.⁹ This area, focused on Takasaki 高崎 and Maebashi 前橋 in the upper Tone 利根 river basin, was emerging as a prosperous center of silk production, which brought both new wealth and the social disruption that would make the region a notorious breeding ground of gamblers and gangsters. A miscellany of 1830 that would provide the first known textual reference to *naniwabushi*, as we will see below, described the parallel art of *saimon* in the preceding sentence: “And in Edo today, types that look like yamabushi come and sing *utazaimon*, and since they come from Jōshū, they are known as ‘Jōshū *saimon*.’”¹⁰

The Jōshū form of *saimon* relied on two *yamabushi* instruments. To modulate the voice, *saimon* singers used the *horagai* ホラ貝, a traditional yamabushi instrument made of a conch shell fitted with a metal mouthpiece, while accompaniment was provided by the *shakujō* 錫杖, a shortened version of a yamabushi priest’s staff with metal rings on the top, which came to be used as a specialized percussion instrument, shaken with a jangling sound to punctuate the songs.¹¹ This performance style came to be known as *deroren saimon*, an onomatopoeic reference to the *den-deren-dereren* sounds of the conch-shell horn. Figure 2 shows a *deroren saimon* singer performing with a *shakujō* and *horagai* at the *hiraki* shacks of Ryōgoku Hirokōji in about 1883–1884. These *saimon* singers must have performed continuously in the city of Edo through the bakumatsu period, but it was not until early Meiji that their art began to grow in popularity.

It was not only in the streets of Edo-Tokyo that *deroren saimon* spread, for by the early twentieth century it rapidly diffused from its initial base in Jōshū on into the further reaches of Japan. In this way, *saimon* singing put down deep roots in local communities, creating new types of *bon’odori* 盆踊 songs (*ondo* 音頭, a popular genre of folk music in the nineteenth century) in distinctive provincial styles. In this way, the voice of traveling performers became a powerful medium of communication at the national level, diffusing a unified oral style of the Japanese language that drew on classical forms and obviated local dialects. Amino Yoshihiko 網野善彦 has argued that *writing* was the key unifying force in overcoming local differences in the Japanese language, by way of documents

⁹ Although *saimon* seems to have first developed in the city of Edo in the eighteenth century, it began to decline there in the late Tokugawa period, with the center moving north to Jōshū, from which it then diffused nationally, including a return to early Meiji Tokyo as a “reverse import.” See Hyōdō 1993, pp. 329–32.

¹⁰ *Kiyū shōran*, vol. 2, p. 749.

¹¹ See Hyōdō 1993, p. 330, for a discussion of the evolution of the *shakujō* as an instrument.

that were issued from the central state and that worked to inculcate a sense of national identity.¹² The spread of *saimon* from Tokugawa into modern times, however, shows that difference of dialect was not in fact an obstacle and suggests a quite different type of cultural unification, from the bottom up rather than top down, relying on the *voice* of performers that could be even more powerful and persuasive than the written word.

The pattern of *saimon* diffusion also challenges the disposition of folklore investigators who follow the lead of Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 and search back in time for medieval origins of local storytelling arts, when in fact they need to look no further back than the nineteenth century. Yanagita and his followers assumed that the timeless “common folk” (*jōmin* 常民) had sustained these arts in rural Japan over centuries, but in actuality they had spread out from a Kantō center in a relatively short period of time within recent generations. If Yanagita had simply turned to professional *saimon* singers of provincial Japan in the 1920s and 1930s, he would have found ample proof of this, but his narrow conception of “oral literature” (*kōshō bungei* 口承文芸) as limited to folklore (transmitted purely by voice with no mediation of literate media) prevented him and his followers from doing so.¹³

Saimon storytellers survived in various parts of local Japan into the 1960s, and these regional survivals provide precious evidence of what the singers of Jōshū *saimon* might have been narrating in the mid-nineteenth century, for which surviving written records are few. One such source is to be found in Yamagata prefecture, in the performance diary of the *deroren saimon* performer Keimi Ippū III 三代目計見一風 (1912–1992), which is particularly detailed for the years 1940–1955. The diary records a total of 937 stories told, an average of 60 per year. The single most striking feature is the dominance of revenge stories, which account for 76 percent of the total if Gishiden (8 percent) are included. Next most numerous were tales of warrior heroes (*buyūden* 武勇伝) at 7.5 percent, but no single group begins to compare to that of revenge.¹⁴ Although Keimi Ippū’s list may be idiosyncratic, revenge tales predominated with other *saimon* tellers as well. In this way, *saimon* helped establish a basic familiarity with revenge tales, and with the Gishiden in particular, throughout provincial Japan. In this way, a nationwide repertoire of what can be called “stories that all Japanese know” had been built up by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

¹² Amino 1988.

¹³ Hyōdō 2000, pp. 9–11. For *naniwabushi* and related arts such as *gidayū*, *kōdan*, and *rakugo*, the concept of “vocal literature” (*onsei bungaku* 音声文学) proposed by Barbara Ruch in a seminal article of 1977 offers a far more persuasive model than “oral literature.” Ruch argued that whereas “oral literature” implies an environment of illiteracy, the forms of vocal performance that were already thriving in Muromachi Japan could not have existed without written texts (Ruch 1977, pp. 286–87). This was clearly the case with *saimon* and *naniwabushi*, which relied heavily on material transmitted in printed works of the Meiji period, notably the shorthand transcriptions of *kōdan* tales known as *sokkibon* 速記本.

¹⁴ Hyōdō 1993.

¹⁵ Hyōdō 2000, p. 76. In the article referred to in note 13, Barbara Ruch described the forma-

Quite distinct from *saimon* was the art of *tsuji-kōshaku*, which had a revealingly different historical trajectory. Whereas *saimon* evolved from late medieval itinerant monks offering blessings and song in return for alms, *tsuji-kōshaku* was rather, as the literal meaning of “street lecture” indicates, a debased form of what began as an elite style of the narration of military tales. (The word *kōshaku* was displaced over the course of the Edo period by the synonym *kōdan*; Meiji *naniwabushi* singers similarly often referred to their performances as *kōen* 講演, a still more recent term for “lecture.”) Whereas the lineage of *saimon* was one of song (and sometimes dance) as well as religious solace, relying on musical rhythm and poetic nuance, *tsuji-kōshaku* was purely a form of dramatic storytelling, focused on narrative.

Kōshaku began as a way of reading texts, performed in the late medieval period by “sermon monks” (*dangisō* 談義僧). In the early Edo period, it became a way for unemployed *rōnin* to make a living. The original idea was to educate and enlighten through instruction in history and the Chinese classics, but for such *rōnin* the text most appropriate to their status was *Taiheiki* 太平記.¹⁶ With time, however, this practice of “*Taiheiki* reading” (*Taiheiki-yomi* 太平記読み) for elite samurai audiences devolved into public street performances.¹⁷ So also the repertory of these *kōshaku* storytellers broadened to a wider variety of military tales, including stories of daimyo succession struggles (*oie sōdō* 御家騒動) and tales of revenge. The tales of the Akō Gishi straddled both genres and by the end of the Edo period had become one of the most common categories in the *kōshaku* repertory. This legacy flowered in Meiji *kōdan*, liberated by the end of the ban on public discussion of the Akō incident as an “actual event.”

This elite tradition of *kōshaku*, typically performed first in parlors and by the early nineteenth century in the small *yose* theaters, began from an early point to spawn a popular street form of storytelling that would come to be known as *tsuji-kōshaku*. At least in the city of Edo, this devolution was the accomplishment of an unusual class of performers known as *gōmune* 乞胸.¹⁸ Tradition relates that the Edo *gōmune*, who performed in shrine and temple precincts, were first organized in the mid-seventeenth century under a *rōnin* boss, who worked out a deal to share turf with *hinin* beggars by submitting to control of the *hinin* leader Kuruma Zenshichi 車善七. The *gōmune* themselves, however, remained of a distinctively mixed status, appearing in *chōnin* registers as town residents, but under *hinin* status for their occupation. By 1768, according to a document of that

tion by Muromachi-period itinerant storytellers of a “national literature.” The developments on which she focused may be said to be the first stage in a continuing process that reached its fullest form in the nineteenth century. Ruch 1977, pp. 291–94.

¹⁶ See Hyōdō 1995.

¹⁷ For an example of such a storyteller in early eighteenth-century Osaka, see Marcon and Smith 2003, pp. 445–47.

¹⁸ Takayanagi 1981 is the chief secondary account of the *gōmune* and street arts. For the complex matter of the social status of *gōmune*, see Ishii 1988, chs. 1 and 3.

year, the *gōmune* were under the control of a hereditary boss named Nidayū 仁太夫 and settled in a base in Shitaya Yamazaki-chō 下谷山崎町—which as Mannen-chō 万年町 would continue in Meiji to be a slum settlement of street entertainers.¹⁹ According to Nidayū tradition, the term *gōmune*—literally “beg-breast”—means “begging for the goodness of the heart,” and many of the various *gōmune* arts involved precisely that, moving from house to house and asking for handouts in return for their performance, although others based themselves in fixed stalls in the major entertainment areas.²⁰ The *gōmune* performers wore plain samurai dress with a single short sword (prohibited in 1773) and a deep-brimmed hat of woven straw (*amigasa* 編笠).

Only a certain number of the several hundred *gōmune* active in the late Edo period would have performed *tsuji-kōshaku*, but several would have been found at each of the major street performance areas of Edo. We have no real evidence of exactly what stories were told by these street-level performers, but we may imagine that they were very much like that of the *kōdan* elite, probably with a greater preference for stories of revenge and military heroes that would become the staple of *saimon* storytellers as well. Some of the *tsuji-kōshaku* tales were probably also derived from stage plays, less from those of the large, officially recognized kabuki theaters than from the “little theaters” (*ko-shibai* 小芝居), also known from their typical location as “shrine theaters” (*miyachi shibai* 宮地芝居). Dozens of such small theaters were scattered throughout Edo, often in makeshift and temporary structures, and tended to be controlled precisely by the *gōmune* class.

The initial exposure of *naniwabushi* singers to sustained dramatic storytelling techniques surely occurred in the streets of Edo-Tokyo and Osaka in the middle decades of the nineteenth century as they observed and learned from the appeal of their neighboring *tsuji-kōshaku* performers. The process of absorbing these tales more fully, and of advancing their narrative art to a higher level, however, awaited the wholesale transmission of the entire higher *kōdan* tradition to print from mid-Meiji, a revolution to which we will turn below.

From Chobokure-Chongare to Naniwabushi

The direct ancestor of *naniwabushi* was the form of street-level story singing known in the Edo area by the synonymous terms of *chobokure* and *chongare*. This was one of the many arts practiced by the distinctive class of performers and underclass entrepreneurs known as *gannin*. Originally, *gannin* (short for *gannin bōzu* 願人坊主) were mendicant monks licensed by the Tendai 天台 temple of Kuramadera 鞍馬寺 in Kyoto who spread throughout Japan under a sys-

¹⁹ A Tenpō 天保 reform edict of 1843 imposed heavy new constrictions on the *gōmune*, forcibly moving those in Yamazaki-chō (said to be home of about two-thirds of the 749 *gōmune* at the time) to another neighborhood nearby and limiting the number of licenses to 500. See Ishii 1988, pp. 39–41, 107–12.

²⁰ An alternate theory is that *gōmune* meant “joined ridgepole” (合棟), a reference to the row-house shanties in which they lived. See Harada 1971, p. 485.



Figure 4. Two different images of *chobokure-chongare* performers, on the left from *Kyōkun sashideguchi* (1762), and on the right from *Ukiyo kurabe* (1774).

tem of control that was in place by the end of the seventeenth century.²¹ Within the city of Edo, control of the *gannin* was eventually delegated to the temple of Kan'eiji 寛永寺, and an administrative system was set up to govern their activities. The religious services they offered were a diverse assortment of Buddhist forms of supplication for worldly benefits.

Chobokure-chongare emerged most likely in Edo in the 1730s. Both words, Nakamura Yukihiro 中村幸彦 has suggested, are the imperative forms of verbs that mean to speak very rapidly, often nonsensically, apparently the chief characteristics of the art in its early form. *Chobokure-chongare* became a fad in Edo of the 1750s and quickly spread to the Kamigata region. It is described in some detail in various literary texts, and Edo sources from 1762 and 1774 (figure 4) show the basic appearance of early *chobokure-chongare* performers, traveling door-to-door as a pair, holding their two essential implements, a fan and a *shakujō* (the same instrument used by *saimon* performers). The half-naked guise of the righthand figure in the 1762 illustration provides graphic evidence for textual complaints of the lascivious appeal of the art. Eventually, like the *gōmune*, *gannin* who specialized in *chobokure-chongare* also came to perform in fixed locations or stalls, a practice that would be followed by *naniwabushi* singers as well.

Nakamura Yukihiro hypothesized that *chobokure-chongare* was probably inspired by the *saimon* singing that had been popular in the earlier Genroku period and that, as we have seen, survived on into the later Edo period as *deroren saimon*. The *gannin* “priests” were broadly similar to the *yamabushi* mendicants who sang *saimon* and competed with them for begging turf in Edo, so they turned

²¹ Gerald Groemer has provided thorough descriptions of both the emergence of the *gannin* and their organization in Edo (Groemer 2000, pp. 44–49 and passim) and of the many different religious services and arts that they performed (Groemer 1999).

quite naturally to their rivals for new inspiration. Among other things, Nakamura proposed, this older *saimon* style of incantation gave *naniwabushi* an enduring preference for a hoarse and throaty voice known as *shiwagare-goe* 嘎れ声.²² Even today, some of the older male (and female) *naniwabushi* performers affect such a style, although over time it has mostly given way to the softer and smoother style that developed in west Japan. From the start, however, *chobokure-chongare* appears to have been less openly religious and more geared to pure entertainment than *saimon*, with greater flexibility to innovate. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century *chobokure-chongare* saw a broad evolution toward sustained narrative. This was evident in the incorporation of stories from kabuki and jōruri and in the appearance in both Kamigata and Edo of simple printed *chobokure-chongare* chapbooks offering abbreviated story outlines (figure 5).²³ Gerald Groemer has argued that these chapbooks were probably not the actual texts performed, but were rather sold by the performers as light reading matter.²⁴

Another aspect of the heightened interest in narrative was the increasing incorporation of the direct dialogue that was such a key feature of late Tokugawa popular literature. The result, Nakamura suggested, was the separation of the sung passages from those of narrative or dialogue that were crucial to developing the stories. The other landmark change was the replacement of the accompanying instrument from the *shakujō*, a mark of *gannin* religious authority, to the shamisen, a wholly secular instrument. These changes were crucial to the emergence of *naniwabushi*, for which extended narrative and shamisen accompaniment were defining features.

Nakamura has further theorized, although with slim evidence, that these fundamental developments in *chobokure-chongare* took place not in Edo where the form originated, but in the Kamigata region of Kyoto-Osaka. The premise that *chobokure-chongare* moved from Edo to Kamigata and then back to Edo provides a possible explanation of the single most baffling textual issue in the early history of *naniwabushi*, namely the first documented appearance of the word itself in a well-known miscellany of 1830 entitled *Kiyū shōran* 嬉遊笑覧, by Kitamura Nobuyo 喜多村信節 (1784–1856).²⁵ Kitamura writes,

What is now called *chobokure-chongare* is different from previous music in that few of the words are sung, and most of it is in plain speech (*kotoba*). It is much like the speech of the theater (*shibaibanashi* 芝居咄し). It is perhaps called “Naniwabushi” 難波ぶし because it comes from that region.

²² Nakamura 1983, p. 292.

²³ Nakamura 1983, p. 310, has been able to date a *chongare* (the preferred Kamigata term) pamphlet to shortly after 1801 by its reference to a documented jōruri performance of that year.

²⁴ Groemer 1999, p. 304.

²⁵ *Kiyū shōran*, vol. 2, p. 749. Note that 1830 is the date of the preface, not the date of publication. The mention of *naniwabushi* occurs in an “appendix” (*furoku* 付録), so it is possible that this reference dates from after 1830. There seems to have been no careful investigation of the actual date of publication of this work.

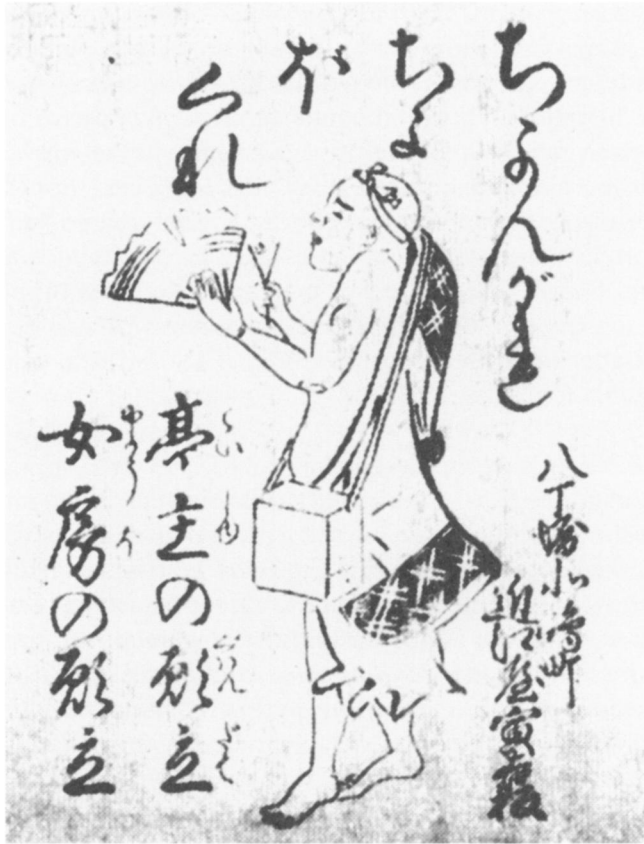


Figure 5. Chapbook *Chongare, chobokure: Teishu no gandate, nyōbō no gandate* ちよんがれ、ちよぼくれ: 亭主の願立、女房の願立. Published in Edo, ca. 1810s–1820s. From Nakamura 1983, p. 290.

Naniwabushi throughout its history has been characterized by a basic division between Edo and Osaka lineages, but also by a persistent pattern of mutual influences between the two, and Nakamura argued that the word *naniwabushi* reflected the “reverse import” of the form back to Edo from Osaka (Naniwa is an ancient name for the area around Osaka), now complete with shamisen and spoken dialogue—the “speech of the theater” in Kitamura’s description. The one great problem with this explanation is that the word *naniwabushi* does not appear in any other known text for the next four decades, until the early Meiji period, when we find it written with the characters 浪花節.²⁶

²⁶ The earliest printed documented appearance of the word was in 1878; see Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 11, from the *Tōkyō akebono shinbun* 東京曙新聞 of 25 December 1878. The word itself was already in use from the period of the founding of the *naniwabushi* union in the early 1870s; see below, pp. 472–74.

In the Kamigata region, meanwhile, *chobokure-chongare* continued to develop with its own regional inflections, one of which seems to have been a preference for the term *chongare*. In origin, the words *chobokure* and *chongare* were used with little or no distinction, but by the nineteenth century an east-west split does seem to have emerged. Furthermore, the Kamigata *chongare* evolved further with the use of the phonetic characters *chō-ukare* 蝶浮かれ, or “butterfly floating,” not inappropriate for the light and liling Kansai *ukarebushi*, in distinction to the more weighty and solemn qualities that Tokyo *naniwabushi* borrowed from *gidayū* and *kōdan*. *Chō-ukare* was then abbreviated by dropping the initial *chō* to become *ukarebushi*, the standard term for *naniwabushi* throughout western Japan until after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, when it became a united national art.

From Hiraki to Yose in Meiji Tokyo

Street performers in the Edo period lived mostly in segregated areas of the city. The *gōmune* performers of *tsuji-kōshaku* had their own districts, as we have seen, while the *gannin* singers of *chobokure-chongare* who were the direct predecessors of *naniwabushi* performers had their headquarters in Hashimoto-chō 橋本町 in the Kanda area, although large concentrations were also to be found in other confined settlements. Formal *gannin* status was abolished in 1873, but these settlements survived well into the Meiji period as *geinin* residential areas and pockets of poverty, particularly the three that came to be called the “three great slums” (*sandai hinminkutsu* 三大貧民窟) of Meiji Tokyo: Shitaya Yamazaki-chō (renamed Mannen-chō in 1870), Yotsuya Samegahashi-machi 四谷鮫ヶ橋町, and Shiba Shin’ami-chō 芝新網町.²⁷ The old *gannin* base of Hashimoto-chō was destroyed by fire in 1881, but the “three great slums” continued as major concentrations of low-class performers and day laborers, becoming the focus of a series of journalistic exposes of urban poverty in the 1890s.²⁸

Of the three slums, Shin’ami-chō in particular was known for its *geinin* population, and it is here that the first formal organization of *naniwabushi* performers emerged in the early 1870s and succeeded in obtaining clear recognition through official licensing by the Tokyo police authorities. No contemporary records of these events have yet been found, and the first detailed secondary account was recorded over three decades later, at the height of the *naniwabushi* boom after the war with Russia, by a reporter writing under the pseudonym Mikazuki-an 三日月庵. According to this story, a group of three performers living

²⁷ See Groemer 2000, pp. 51–56, especially table 2: “Edo *Gannin* Domicile Locations,” p. 55. For an account of these slum areas in the Meiji period, see Taira 1969, which includes a map on p. 158 showing the location of the “three great slums.”

²⁸ Popular reportage describing these areas began in a series in the magazine *Nihon* 日本 from August to November 1890, which led in turn to the famous *Kokumin shinbun* 国民新聞 series of November 1892 ff by Matsubara Iwagorō 松原岩五郎 (under the pen name Kenkon Ippui 乾坤一布衣), published in 1893 by Min’yūsha 民友社 as *Saiankoku no Tōkyō* 最暗黒の東京. Matsubara listed the professions of those in the *hinminkutsu* as including day laborers, *saimon* and *naniwabushi* performers, *tsuji-kōshaku* storytellers, and other types of street entertainers.

in Shin'ami-chō felt that it was unfair that they should be excluded from the official system of licensing by the city of Tokyo, and hence from performance in the *yose*. After all, they argued, “we are human beings, too”—clear evidence of the way in which the new language of rights was taking hold in the lower fringes of society. Their cause was taken up by Ikedaya Yasuzō 池田屋康三, a low-level police official who operated a rooming house for *geinin* in Shin'ami-chō and was a “real Edokko type who liked to help out others” (*tonda sewazuki no Edokko hada* 飛んだ世話好の江戸っ子肌). Yasuzō dunned the authorities into permitting the union, of which one of the three *geinin*, Kasugai Matsunosuke 春日井松之助, became the head.²⁹ Whatever the exact details, the Mikazuki-an account, with its emphasis on equal rights and the help of a petty boss-like Edokko official, rings true to the spirit of *naniwabushi* as it later evolved. Mikazuki-an also confirms the persistence until late Meiji of widespread disdain for the lowly origins of *naniwabushi* singers in his observation that the residents of Shin'ami-chō constituted an “extremely inferior race (*rettō jinshu* 劣等人種), shunned by ordinary people,” and were for this reason disqualified from performing proper “parlor arts” (*zashiki-gei* 座敷芸) for a seated audience.

No contemporary evidence has yet been found to suggest the provenance of the term *naniwabushi*. As we have seen, the one textual reference to *naniwabushi* prior to early Meiji, in *Kiyū shōran* of 1830, speculated that the word indicated a Naniwa (Osaka) origin, while Nakamura Yukihiro has suggested that *naniwabushi* may have been a “reverse import” back to Edo from that region. The sudden reappearance of the term over forty years after the reference in *Kiyū shōran*, however, indicates that it may well have been a new coinage, with no direct connection to the earlier usage. The early twentieth-century writers who tried to trace the historical roots of the art conceded that the original meaning of the term was not known, although they did not hesitate to record various explanations that all appear to be later legend. One related, for example, that Ikeda Yasuzō, the patron of the Tokyo *naniwabushi* union in the 1870s, devised the word from the meaning of the characters 浪花 for Naniwa, saying that *nami* 浪 (wave) represented the saying that “For performers, it is neither skill nor its absence, but just moving with the flow in the places they travel” (*Geinin ni jōzu mo heta mo nakarikeri, yuku sakizaki no mizu ni makasete* 芸人に上手も下手もなかりけり、行く先々の水に任せて), while *hana* 花 (flower) was used because flowers were famed in Japan and loved by all.³⁰ Another claimed that the Meiji performer Naniwatei Komakichi 浪花亭駒吉 (1842–1906) had christened the art after his own name—

²⁹ Mikazuki-an 1907, p. 93. Hirabayashi 1933, p. 396, gives another account that is roughly congruent with that of Mikazuki-an although some names are different (Ikedaya Yasuzō, for example, is Ikeda Yasugorō 池田安五郎). The exact timing of these events remains unclear; Mikazuki-an gives no exact date earlier than 1875, while Bonchō 1906, pp. 92–93, gives 1870, and Shiba 1989, p. 282, cites the third month of 1872. Hirabayashi's date of 1879 is clearly too late and is contradicted by a contemporary newspaper mention of licensed *naniwabushi* performers in 1878 (Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 11).

³⁰ Bonchō 1906, pp. 92–93.

although the reality is clearly just the opposite.³¹ A still later legend, and one that remains durable today, is the tale of Naniwa Isuke 浪花伊助, the alleged founder of *naniwabushi*, whose historicity has never been confirmed.³²

The evolution of *naniwabushi* from the 1870s into the 1880s involved an intimate interaction with *saimon*, which was a far more widespread form of street entertainment in Meiji Tokyo. The two arts, as we have seen, had quite different historical trajectories. *Saimon* continued to bear the marks of its yamabushi heritage, above all in the use of the *horagai* and the *shakujō* as its primary instruments of accompaniment. *Saimon* singers seemed content to limit their ambitions to performance in the *hiraki* street stalls, rather than aspiring, as did *naniwabushi* performers from the very start, to climbing up the performance hierarchy into the *yose*. As a more provincial art, *saimon* probably appealed strongly to the tens of thousands of immigrants to Tokyo from neighboring prefectures in the early decades of Meiji, as the capital gradually recovered its population after the heavy blow of the loss of the *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代 system. *Naniwabushi*, meanwhile, had evolved into the two-person form of a single singer (usually male, but with no discrimination against women) and a shamisen accompanist (usually female, but sometimes male). In this sense, it aspired to the pattern and prestige of the many other forms of shamisen-based Edo singing arts.

Revealingly, however, *deroren saimon* was far more popular than *naniwabushi* from the later 1870s through the 1880s, as clearly demonstrated by the official figures issued by the Tokyo police authorities on the basis of their licensing system, shown in table 1. The statistics do not distinguish between those who performed in the street *hiraki* and those whose normal venue was the more permanent *yose*, but in general *kōdan* and *rakugo* were exclusively *yose* arts, while *saimon* was purely a street art—and *naniwabushi* was constantly working to move from street to *yose*. The overall pattern for the 1880s shows a doubling in the numbers of those in the classical *yose* arts of *kōdan* and *rakugo*, but a far more rapid growth in *saimon* and to a lesser extent *naniwabushi*, which shows overall numbers far lower than *saimon*. The gender breakdown of the four arts is also revealing of their differences, with no women at all in *kōdan*, less than 5 percent in *rakugo*, under 10 percent in *saimon*, but fully 22 percent in *naniwa-*

³¹ Mikazuki-an 1907, pp. 94–95. A variant of the Komakichi story appeared in Bonchō 1906, p. 92, relating that when Komakichi was called in by the police for tax reasons, he was pressed to give a name to his art, and on the spur of the moment devised *naniwabushi*.

³² The earliest and most elaborate version of the Naniwa Isuke legend appeared in Hirabayashi 1933, p. 391, relating a story that Hirabayashi heard from the priest of Kasuga 春日 shrine in Nara. According to this story, Naniwa Isuke appeared in the era of the shogun Yoshimune 吉宗 (r. 1716–1745), performing to raise money for rebuilding Kōfukuji 興福寺 temple in Nara. Masaoka 1968 elaborated further, and the story even appears as fact (but with Isuke's period of activity now moved a century later, to Bunka-Bunsei 文化文政) in an encyclopedia article (Chichibu 1972). Shiba Kiyoshi 芝清之 in his chronology of *naniwabushi* history gives an exact date of the sixth month of 1819, at Nipponbashi 日本橋 in Osaka, as the occasion when Naniwa Isuke created the word *naniwabushi*, but offers no source; Shiba 1989, p. 282. Nakamura 1983, p. 297, notes that the historicity of Naniwa Isuke and his various alleged followers remains unproven.

Table 1: Licensed performers in the major storytelling arts of Meiji Tokyo

	<i>Kōdan</i>	<i>Rakugo</i>	<i>Saimon</i>	<i>Naniwabushi</i>	TOTAL
1878	208	328	16	13	565
1882	331	399	40	26	796
1887	429 (429M, 0F)	780 (738M, 42F)	440 (402M, 38F)	121 (93M, 28F)	1770
1889	399 (399M, 0F)	689 (659M, 30F)	628 (572M, 56F)	115 (90M, 25F)	1831
1906 (Jan.)	101 (100M, 1F)	163 (143M, 20F)	—	212 (163M, 49F)	476
1906 (Nov.)	ca. 200	ca. 150	—	over 400	ca. 750

NOTE: All statistics except the November 1906 estimates are official figures for Tokyo prefecture from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (Keishichō 警視庁). *Saimon* is listed in the sources as *utazaimon*. Sources: For 1878, *Yomiuri shinbun* 読売新聞, 16 November 1878, p. 3. For the remainder: *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* 郵便報知新聞, 14 February 1882; *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞, 15 May 1887; *Yūbin hōchi shinbun*, 6 January 1889; *Denpō shinbun* 電報新聞, 10 January 1906; and *Bungei kurabu* 文芸倶楽部, November 1906. All sources except for 1878 are as reprinted in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 12–13, 16, 18, 83, 160.

bushi. This reflects an openness to female performers that has been characteristic of *naniwabushi* from the start and would grow even more pronounced in the twentieth century.

The *saimon* impact also worked to enhance the regional Kantō character of *naniwabushi*, which came in the course of the 1890s to be known as *Kantō-bushi* 関東節, in distinction to Osaka *ukarebushi*, referred to as *Kansai-bushi* 関西節. The sense of two distinct styles was further strengthened by the appearance in Tokyo of a series of gifted *ukarebushi* performers from Kansai, in particular Bekkōsai Toramaru 鼈甲斎虎丸, who first performed in Tokyo in November 1886. After an initially unenthusiastic reception and hostility from his local rivals, Toramaru had built a fan base by the spring of 1887, and he rose to great popularity over the next several years until his premature death at age forty in 1893. By the turn of the century, a clear perception had emerged of the difference between the Kantō and Kansai styles, although in practice the two styles inevitably worked to influence each other and smooth out the contrast. The difference, beyond that of the geographical origin of the performers, conformed broadly to the regional stereotypes that were established as early as the Genroku 元禄 period in the contrast of the sentimental and romantic “soft” *wagoto* 和事 style of Kamigata kabuki, versus the Edo preference for the more blustering and masculine “rough” style of *aragoto* 荒事. *Kansai-bushi* is routinely described as more soft and emotional, and *Kantō-bushi* as more quick and lively, with a sharper sound and higher pitch.³³

³³ For a discussion of *Kantō-bushi* versus *Kansai-bushi*, see Bonchō 1907, which includes a technical description of some of the musical differences between the two (pp. 93–95), a chart of the performers in the two groups (pp. 95–99), and an account of Toramaru in Tokyo (pp. 115–19). See also Ishitani 1932, pp. 406–407, and Hirabayashi 1933, p. 398.

In the autumn of 1891 action by the Tokyo police abruptly and radically transformed the relationship between *saimon* and *naniwabushi*. An edict issued on 3 October dictated the closing of all the *hiraki* stalls and the formal removal of the street performers who had used the stalls as their base to the single official entertainment area of Asakusa Rokku that had been established in 1886. The edict claimed that the measure reflected concern for the “corruption of public morals” (*fūki no binran* 風紀の紊乱), but the true motive appears to have been a desire to crack down on political partisans who, in the era of the new Diet, had been speaking in the streets in the guise of *kōdan* performers.³⁴ The real victims, however, were the *geinin* from the slums, and it was a devastating blow to *deroren saimon* in particular. The loss to *saimon* proved, on the other hand, to be an immediate gain for *naniwabushi*, as a considerable number of *saimon* performers obtained licenses for *naniwabushi* and began performing in the *yose*. There had already been examples of *saimon* performers moving to *naniwabushi*, but now far greater numbers made the shift. This infusion of talent from *saimon* helps explain the steady growth of *naniwabushi* in the *yose* theaters in the 1890s, and it also led to an even stronger influence of the *saimon* repertory and singing style on Tokyo *naniwabushi*. The *saimon* impact was such that by the time of the *naniwabushi* boom of 1906–1907, it was widely accepted that *saimon* itself was the origin of *naniwabushi*.³⁵

Meanwhile, *naniwabushi* also profited immensely from new developments in the accessibility of *kōdan* stories, a vast and rich repository of historical legends as they had been told to urban audiences in Japan for well over a century. In particular, from the mid-1880s transcriptions of *kōdan* stories were published in increasing numbers. These were known as *kōdanbon* 講談本 (*kōdan* books) or *sokkibon* 速記本 (“shorthand” books—indicating that they were shorthand transcriptions of live performances). Even in the Edo period, written counterparts of *kōdan* tales had circulated through rental book lenders in the form of handwritten manuscripts known generically as *jitsuroku* 実録, or “true accounts,” in reference to the ostensibly historical truth of the stories. It was precisely the historical specificity of the tales, most of which were set in the Edo period, that made their publication in printed form illegal, but the manuscript subterfuge allowed wide circulation. For the tales of the historical Akō rōnin in particular, which did not appear in print until the 1850s, both *jitsuroku* manuscripts and *kōdan* tales were the prime modes of circulation.³⁶ The publication of transcriptions of *kōdan* stories in the Meiji period contributed further to the currency of Gishiden. It also provided *naniwabushi* performers with a plentiful store of readily available narratives that they could adapt to their own use.

Kōdan also proved to be the crucial channel by which *naniwabushi* tapped into another major development in popular communication in the Meiji period,

³⁴ Hyōdō 2000, p. 68.

³⁵ This assertion is made by Bonchō 1906 and Tankasei 1906.

³⁶ See Kornicki 1982; Smith 2002, pp. 22–23; Marcon and Smith 2003, pp. 447–49; Smith 2004, pp. 7–8, 44–45; and Kornicki 2005.



Figure 6. *Kōdan* storyteller Shōrin Hakuen II (1834–1905) performing in *enzetsu* style in a *yose* theater. From Miyatake 1926, p. 19.

the emergence of a new tradition of political oratory from within the Freedom and People's Rights (*Jiyū Minken* 自由民権) movement, which was entering its golden age in the late 1870s. The story is often told of Fukuzawa Yukichi's 福沢諭吉 coinage of *enzetsu* 演説 to translate the English "speech" and his eager promotion of the art of oratory. The actual political "speeches" in the streets, in fact, owed as much to traditional street performers as to Western inspiration, freely incorporating popular songs and drawing on *kōdan* styles of presentation. At the same time, there was much innovation, particularly in the on-stage appearance of the speakers. Some *kōdan* storytellers were key participants in this innovation, in particular Shōrin Hakuen 松林伯円 (1832–1905), whom we see in figure 6 delivering a charity *enzetsu*. Rather than sitting on the floor behind a traditional *shakudai* 釈台 lectern (in the form that *naniwabushi* singers themselves initially adopted in the *yose*, as seen in figure 8), Hakuen is seated in a conspicuous chair behind a western table that is covered with an ornate tablecloth. Although he continues to dress in Japanese style and holds a fan in the usual *kōdan* manner, the familiar brazier and teapot have been moved from the floor to a separate raised table, further enhancing the westernized appearance.

The police statistics presented in table 1 give us a preview of the further evolution of *naniwabushi* after the turn of the century. In addition to the sudden disappearance of *saimon* following the abolition of the *hiraki* in 1891, the most striking change is the abrupt drop in the overall number of licensed performers as a result of the Russo-Japanese War. This was compensated by a rapid recovery

in the course of the year 1906, which turned out to be a major boom year for *naniwabushi* in particular. These circumstances provide the essential context for the phenomenal success of Tōchūken Kumoemon, to whose story we must now turn.

Tōchūken Kumoemon's Rise to Fame

The future Tōchūken Kumoemon was born on 25 October 1873, as Yamamoto Kōzō 山本幸蔵 in the city of Takasaki, province of Kōzuke (now Gunma prefecture).³⁷ This was the heartland of the Jōshū *saimon* storytelling tradition, and Kōzō's father, Shigekichi 繁吉, was a *deroren saimon* singer who seems to have involved both his wife, Tsuru ツル, and various of his five children in his itinerant profession.³⁸ In 1876, when Kumoemon was three, the family moved to nearby Maebashi, living in a two-room apartment, and by the age of about seven he was performing professionally with his father. The family further moved in 1887 to Tokyo, to a rooming house for performers in the slum area of Shin'ami-chō. The father died two years later, leaving the sixteen-year-old Kōzō as the family breadwinner. He is recorded as first performing in a *yose* theater in February 1890, under the name of Yoshikawa Koshige 吉川小繁.³⁹ By 1892, Koshige was doing two or three *yose* performances a day, and he began to attract the attention of the leading *naniwabushi* singers in Tokyo, becoming a follower of Mikawaya Baisha 三河屋梅車, who had moved from Nagoya to Tokyo in 1889.⁴⁰ He continued to grow in experience and reputation in the early 1890s, taking the name "Shigekichi II" in October 1896 from his late father in a performance that represented his full maturity, at age twenty-three, in the world of *naniwabushi*.

The young Kumoemon-to-be thus grew up in a time of rapid and dramatic change in the world of the popular Tokyo performance arts, absorbing all the techniques and traditions of *saimon* both from his father and from the streets of the capital, and at the same time taking in the new styles of political oratory that assumed such a large role in the years leading up to the constitution of 1889 and in the early years under the new Diet. Only scattered fragments of information survive for the young performer in the later 1890s until he earned sudden and lasting notoriety by eloping with Ohama おはま, the wife of his erstwhile sponsor Baisha. Stealing another man's wife was common enough among these free-wheeling underclass performers, no more blameworthy than the chronic gambling

³⁷ The facts of Kumoemon's origins were long obscured by widely conflicting stories; they were finally established by Shiba Kiyoshi, who unearthed a copy of the household register and published the details in the journal *Gekkan rōkyoku* 月刊浪曲 110 (June 1991); see Uemura 1987, vol. 2, pp. 46–47. The basic data is also included in Shiba 1989, p. 288.

³⁸ Kumoemon's mother and older brother Sentarō 仙太郎 both provided shamisen accompaniment, while his younger brother Minekichi 峰吉 later performed *naniwabushi* under the name Tōchūken Kazaemon 桃中軒風右衛門. Uemura 1987, vol. 1, p. 47.

³⁹ The theater was the Yamazaki-tei 山崎亭 in Shinagawa. Shiba 1989, p. 283.

⁴⁰ Uemura 1987, vol. 2, p. 48. The reference to Kumoemon's first encounter with Baisha in Hyōdō 2000, p. 159, should be revised from "early Meiji 30s" to "early Meiji 20s" (that is, late 1880s).

in which most of them indulged, and Kumoemon seems already to have acquired a reputation as a womanizer.⁴¹ His far greater transgression lay in the fact that Ohama was also Baisha's shamisen player—in fact, one of the most gifted shamisen artists of her generation.⁴² As *naniwabushi* aficionados often emphasize, the shamisen accompaniment is a critical and integral part of the performance, maintaining the pace and rhythm of the singer and providing crucial interjections of encouragement. So stealing a man's wife was one thing, but stealing his shamisen player was a wholly different matter, and Shigeyoshi and Ohama (whom he had already known for six years, and who was six years older) were forced to leave Tokyo.⁴³

In February 1898, the errant couple headed west for the Kansai region, where they performed in *yose* theaters in both Kyoto and Osaka.⁴⁴ Few details survive from this period, although it would appear to be in this interval that Shigeyoshi took the new name of Tōchūken Kumoemon, the former from a well-known *kōdan* performer and the latter after a sumo wrestler.⁴⁵ Learning that Baisha had died in the meantime (some say because of grief over being abandoned by Ohama), the couple quietly returned to Tokyo in October 1900, after an absence of over two years. Kumoemon began performing under his new name, but was not particularly successful, partly because many in the *naniwabushi* community still harbored resentment over the fate of Baisha, and also because he faced new competition from such talented performers as Naniwatei Komako 浪花亭駒子 (1881–1974, the future Isshinteī Tatsuo 一心亭辰雄), who had become a top star in 1897 at the age of eighteen, and Naniwatei Aizō 浪花亭愛造 (1871–1906), the handsome and erotic star who in 1901 became the first *naniwabushi* singer to be recorded.⁴⁶

Kumoemon had spent a year and a half in second-tier engagements when, in the spring of 1902, his career took a new turn following an encounter that over the course of the next several years would change both his own life and the history of *naniwabushi*. On March 23, while performing at the *yose* Happōtei 八方亭 in Shiba, he received an unannounced backstage visit from Miyazaki Torazō 宮崎寅藏 (1870–1922, known usually by his pen name Tōten 滔天). Although the significance of his activities was yet to be recognized, Tōten had already earned

⁴¹ Tōchūken Kumoemon kept a number of women throughout his life, and it is difficult to sort out the rumors and legends from the truth. For a discussion of the matter, see Kurata 1973 (96), pp. 6–7; Uemura 1987, vol. 2, p. 49; and Hyōdō 2000, p. 175.

⁴² See Matsuzaki 1927, p. 110, who claims that Kumoemon's success owed much to Ohama.

⁴³ Hirabayashi 1933, p. 399, alleges that Baisha abused Ohama, thus justifying Kumoemon's actions, but Hanada 1963, p. 24, claims that the depiction of Baisha as a sadistic drunk is an unwarranted caricature.

⁴⁴ Uemura 1987, vol. 2, pp. 51–52.

⁴⁵ Uemura 1987, vol. 2, p. 52, who claims that alternate stories told in Ishitani 1932, p. 408 (that "Tōchūken" came from a box-lunch maker in Nagoya and "Kumoemon" from a view of Fuji capped with a cloud) are apocryphal.

⁴⁶ The recording was made by British Gramophone at the Metropole Hotel in Tokyo; Shiba 1980, p. 427. Aizō may also be heard among the recordings made in 1903 by Frederick Gaisberg, which have recently been released on CD-ROM (Gaisberg 2001, disc 8).

a place on the stage of world history as the primary Japanese supporter of Sun Yat-sen and the latter's early efforts at revolution in China. Tōten had first met Sun in 1897, and four years of frenetic clandestine activity throughout Asia had finally met with failure in the ignominious collapse of a plot in south China in the summer of 1900. Returning to Tokyo, he proceeded to write a serialized account of his life for the newspaper *Niroku shinpō* 二六新報. The series, entitled "My Thirty-Three Years' Dream" (*Sanjūsannen no yume* 三十三年の夢), was published in book form in late 1902 and has since come to be recognized as one of the classic works of autobiography in modern Japan.⁴⁷

As he would confess in detail in the preface and final installments of his autobiography, following the failure of revolution in China, Tōten had resolved to embark on a wholly new career as a *naniwabushi* singer. His preface opened with the words, "By nature I take pleasure in Japanese singing, whether of the east or west, high or low."⁴⁸ The choice of *naniwabushi* was both political and sentimental. He felt that this emerging style of popular performance was the voice of the people, and specifically the voice of the Edokko, the "child of Edo" whose carefree and defiant spirit he particularly admired. Although himself of samurai stock, Tōten came from a Kumamoto family of rural samurai (*gōshi* 郷士) whose values nurtured a kind of anarchic sympathy for the underclass. Widespread in Kyushu, this attitude formed the basis of the distinctive radically tinged nationalism of the region. Tōten was vocal in his contempt for orthodox samurai values and in his affection for the outlaw spirit of the *kyōkaku* 侠客, prototypically the knight-errant rōnin and rōnin-like town gangster *machi-yakko* 町奴 of mid-seventeenth century Edo, such as Banzuiin Chōbei 幡随院長兵衛.⁴⁹ This north Kyushu mentality, a perplexing mix of left and right (particularly in the case of Tōten), would be the forcing-ground in which Kumoemon's art matured in the years before his triumphant return to Tokyo in 1907.

We know of the initial confrontation of Kumoemon and Tōten only from Tōten's account, which hints at the mystification of the low-class performer on encountering this apparition of part samurai intellectual (showing copies of the latest newspaper installments of his autobiography) and part long-haired radical. (Figure 7 shows the two men together, probably not long after they met in 1902.) They somehow reached an agreement, after various negotiations, that Tōten would become the formal disciple of Kumoemon—an arrangement that was always uneasy as best, and not only because Tōten was three years senior in age and almost one foot higher in stature—in return for providing a more

⁴⁷ Miyazaki 1902, and English translation as Miyazaki 1982. The introduction to the latter has a useful account of Miyazaki's life until 1902. For more detail in English on Miyazaki's association with Sun, see Jansen 1954.

⁴⁸ Miyazaki 1902, p. 6 (*Miyazaki Tōten zenshū*, vol. 1, p. 11). The English translation (Miyazaki 1982, p. 283) renders the word *seikyoku* 声曲 simply as "music," but the Japanese word refers specifically to singing, in particular the vocal arts accompanied by the shamisen. So "east and west" refers to distinctions within Japan.

⁴⁹ Miyazaki 1911.



Figure 7. Tōchūken Kumoemon (right) with Miyazaki Tōten, ca. 1902. Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 45.

literary quality to Kumoemon's performances.⁵⁰ The efficacy of this bargain remains difficult to assess. No evidence survives that Tōten actually worked on Kumoemon's texts, and in the end the two men were worlds apart in temperament and intellect, as subsequent events would sadly demonstrate. But in the uncertain circumstances of their first encounter, each unsure of where to turn next, they fabricated an uneasy alliance that would have profound consequences for both.

Within two weeks of their first meeting, Tōten had moved into Kumoemon's household, where he was treated as anything but an apprentice, working mostly on his continuing autobiography and indulging his "teacher" by drinking with him by night. Kumoemon had meanwhile decided that he could no longer survive in Tokyo, and in July 1902 he set off with Ohama and Tōten on a tour of western Japan. Tōten soon returned to Tokyo, but Kumoemon continued on with Ohama to the Kansai region, where they had contacts from their earlier exile. Over the next year, master and teacher were apart, as Kumoemon struggled to

⁵⁰ Tōten's earliest account, in the final section of *Sanjūsannen no yume* (Miyazaki 1902, p. 277; Miyazaki 1971–1976, vol. 1, p. 219), says that Kumoemon declared that in exchange for teaching Tōten his art, he would be able to "broaden his knowledge" (*chiken o hiromuru* 知見を拓むる). (The translation "learn wisdom" in Miyazaki 1982, p. 278, is misleading.) But in his later and more detailed account of 1914, Tōten wrote that his function was to "improve the texts" (*yomimono no kairyō* 読物の改良) of Kumoemon (Miyazaki 1914, p. 489).

survive in the world of Kansai *naniwabushi*, and Tōten made an awkward debut in Tokyo in early October 1902, under the name of Tōchūken Ushiemon 桃中軒牛右衛門, revealingly replacing the “cloud” (*kumo* 雲) of Kumoemon’s name with “ox” (*ushi* 牛). By the following summer, Tōten himself had reached an impasse and decided to head for his native Kyushu in search of a friendlier milieu.⁵¹

The crucial reencounter of the two men occurred in Osaka in early June 1903, and the dynamics remain unclear. Kumoemon in one account claimed that Tōten positively urged him to go to Kyushu, while Tōten himself later related that Kumoemon insisted that he be taken along, and in the end Tōten acceded to the singer’s demands. Tōten returned to his home in Kumamoto prefecture to beg his wife for some money, which he then sent to Kumoemon in Osaka. Tōten and Kumoemon’s entourage thus set out for an assault by Tokyo *naniwabushi* in a territory where the very word was unknown (although the form of performance was familiar as *ukarebushi*). Tōten’s own reports, as well as articles by reporters in the Kyushu press, provide a chronicle of the subsequent Kyushu campaign, but suffice it to say that the ultimate triumph of Kumoemon owed much to Tōten’s native Kyushu connections, in particular with the local members of the Gen’yōsha 玄洋社, the powerful right-wing nationalist organization that had begun as a Jiyū Minken group but gradually shifted to the right in its aggressive foreign policy.

Kumoemon’s success in Kyushu over the next three years owed much to local factors, although the resulting formula would ultimately prove useful at the national level as well.⁵² Tōten’s extensive connections were critical, both in the press that provided the essential publicity and in the Gen’yōsha manpower that directly mobilized the working-class audiences and set up charity concerts at orphanages and for returning war veterans. After fits and starts in the first weeks, Kumoemon’s fame grew steadily as he traveled with Tōten and their entourage in north Kyushu in the summer of 1903. The tour was beset with constant financial difficulties and personal frictions, finally coming to a head in Sasebo in July, when Tōten decided he could no longer put up with the behavior of his teacher, and they parted.⁵³ Despite the falling out of the two men, however, Kumoemon’s career in Kyushu had been successfully launched by Tōten and his many local supporters, and over the next three and a half years, Tōchūken Kumoemon’s

⁵¹ Tōten specifically aimed at becoming a follower of Bitō Itchō 美当一調 (1847–1928), a fellow native of Kumamoto who had developed his own distinctive style of *naniwabushi*, telling tales of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 with a combination of singing and flowery narration. See Uemura 1987, vol. 2, pp. 40–45.

⁵² Tōten’s most detailed account of the summer 1903 Kyushu tour is Miyazaki 1914; the best secondary accounts are Kurata 1973, who draws on a numbers of newspaper sources, and Uemura 1987, vol. 2, pp. 198–216.

⁵³ The particular issue over which the two men parted involved Kumoemon’s allegedly rude treatment of one of Tōten’s newspaperman friends, but this was apparently just the straw that broke the camel’s back. For Tōten’s account, see Miyazaki 1914, pp. 503–505. The two men appeared only once again on the same stage, in December 1903 in a benefit performance for Tōten’s brother Tamizō 民藏 in Ōmuta 大牟田. On returning to Tokyo the next year, Tōten switched to Isshinteī Tatsuo as his teacher of *naniwabushi*.

reputation began to expand beyond the borders of the southern island. The war with Russia that broke out in February 1904 and lasted for over a year and a half was a windfall both for north Kyushu, which became the major staging area for the war, and for Kumoemon, who styled himself the “Promoter of Bushidō” (*bushidō kōsuisha* 武士道鼓吹者, an image derived from a military flute and drum band) and built up his popularity by doling out kegs of free sake to groups of returning soldiers.

Having conquered Kyushu, Kumoemon decided in early 1907 that it was time to conquer all Japan, and from February he set out on a five-month triumphal return to Tokyo, with runs in Kobe in March, Osaka in April, Kyoto in May, and finally beginning his historic twenty-day run at the Hongōza in Tokyo on 7 June. The regional and national press covered his journey every step of the way, serving to build up a mood of intense anticipation as the singer and his entourage approached the capital. Along the way, his greatest publicity boost came in Kobe, where a navy admiral who had heard his public performance recommended Kumoemon to Princess Arisugawa 有栖川, the widow of Prince Taruhito 熾仁 (1835–1895, a leading Meiji army general from the imperial line), who was then at her seaside retreat in the Maiko 舞子 section of Kobe. On 20 March, the *naniwabushi* singer who had risen from the slums of Edo visited the home of one of the best-known names of the Meiji imperial family, performing three tales of the Gishi. When Kumoemon left, Princess Arisugawa presented him with a poem, “His spirit is without parallel, Kumoemon, whose heart pierces the clouds.”⁵⁴ The story spread instantly in the press, reported in the *Ōsaka asahi shinbun* 大阪朝日新聞 on 22 March and reaching Tokyo the next day. *Naniwabushi* was clearly now in a new league of national fame.

The Secrets of Kumoemon’s Success

One author has described Tōchūken Kumoemon’s performances at the Hongōza in June 1907 as one of the greatest entertainment coups of not only the Meiji period, but of all modern Japan.⁵⁵ Kumoemon’s success served to revitalize popular entertainment in Japan: as the ads put it, if you haven’t heard *naniwabushi*, you’re out of it. But why was Kumoemon so effective? A compilation by Shiba Kiyoshi 芝清之 of press coverage of *naniwabushi* in the Meiji and Taishō periods provides revealing contemporary evidence of the reasons for Kumoemon’s triumph at the Hongōza and subsequent national popularity.

From the start, Kumoemon faced several basic obstacles in his bid for national fame. Most fundamental was a continuing prejudice against *naniwabushi* performers in general as low-class street minstrels, a stigma that they had struggled from the start to overcome but that often surfaced in the press. They were widely perceived to be outcasts in their social origins, and the content of their stories

⁵⁴ *Kokorozashi / yo ni narabi naki / Kumoemon / kumo o tsuranuku / kokochi koso sure* ころろざし世にならびなき雲右衛門雲をつらぬく心地こそすれ. *Ōsaka asahi shinbun*, 22 March 1907, in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 180–81.

⁵⁵ Kurata 1973, part 3, pp. 13–14.

was seen as vulgar. It was precisely this perception, in fact, that drove Kumoe-mon and others of the era to be so assiduous in calling for the “elevation” (*kōjō* 向上) and “improvement” (*kairyō* 改良) of *naniwabushi* and to seek out tales that would be considered of good taste (*shumi* 趣味). An article in the *Kokumin shinbun* 国民新聞 declared that “Kumoemon leads a life of gambling and drink. His appeal for good character is absurd. This new-commoner [*shin-heimin* 新平民, the Meiji euphemism for former outcaste groups] from Jōshū is now being touted in the capital as the rising star of performers. What a dreadful sight!”⁵⁶ Another article in the *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* 大阪毎日新聞 described at length the lower-class origins of *naniwabushi* and its audience of “day laborers and coolies,” declaring that it may be of some help in providing such lowly citizens a dose of proper morality, but concluding that it is vulgar in its essence, with no possibility of “improvement.” “Good taste will be surely corrupted if proper gentlemen and ladies (*shinshi shukujo* 紳士淑女) come to favor it.”⁵⁷

Kumoemon also faced opprobrium among those of his own profession for having stolen his wife, Ohama, from his teacher Baisha, an affront that was never really forgiven in Tokyo. Old anger was fueled in spring 1907 by a newspaper interview in which Kumoemon speculated that he expected little “improvement” among Tokyo *naniwabushi* singers who, “if they’re not borrowing money from the *yose* owners to gamble, they’re wasting their time with whores.” For those who remembered him as a notorious philanderer and inveterate gambler—habits that his newfound respectability among the middle and upper classes seems not to have cured—this was particularly galling, and it helped trigger an opposition movement that apparently forced Kumoemon to put an advertisement of apology into the newspapers before he would be permitted back into the capital.⁵⁸

The social and cultural prejudices against *naniwabushi*, meanwhile, were being rapidly eroded by its tremendous surge in popularity among all classes in the period during and immediately after the war with Russia. Part of the explanation may possibly lie in the war itself, as Miyazaki Tōten argued in a six-part critical review of contemporary *naniwabushi* in the spring of 1907, in which he claimed that the boom was to be explained not by the talents of the performers but by the “trend of the times” (*jisei* 時勢). The war had aroused the spirit of the people, he wrote, leaving them dissatisfied with the sentimental and feminine tales of *gidayū* and hungry for the more masculine art of *naniwabushi*, encouraging the possibility that the nation as a whole might be moving in the direction of a more valorous Edokko spirit.⁵⁹

Far more plausible, however, was an analysis of the *naniwabushi* boom in the November 1906 issue of the theater journal *Engei kurabu* 演芸倶楽部. The

⁵⁶ *Kokumin shinbun*, 21 March 1907, from Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 179–80.

⁵⁷ *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun*, 1 April 1907, in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 183–84.

⁵⁸ Kumoemon’s comments appeared in the *Kokumin shinbun* of 18 March 1907 (Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 176), while the demand for a public apology (yet to be located) is described in an article of 28 May in the same newspaper (Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 188–89).

⁵⁹ Miyazaki 1907, pp. 85–86.

pseudonymous author Tankasei 痰呵生 provided statistical evidence of the displacement of *kōdan* and *rakugo* from the *yose* theaters, noting that this upstart art now accounted for over half of *yose* performers in Tokyo. His description of the system of training and apprenticeship in *naniwabushi*—or rather the lack of it—offered clues for the reasons for this situation. An apprentice system existed, to be sure, he observed, but it was loose and flexible: students did not have to engage in rote mimicry of their masters as in all the traditional arts, but could simply pick up the basic song patterns plus the plots of a few stories and be launched within months as paid performers.⁶⁰ These details confirm that the key distinction of *naniwabushi* was its freedom from the rigid formulas and formats of the traditional arts, and from the strict hierarchical structure of an *iemoto* 家元 system. This adaptability made *naniwabushi* the first of the modern popular arts, accounting both for its rapid rise and ultimately for its equally rapid decline in the early post-Second World War years, when it could not fall back onto carefully cultivated networks of amateur performer-aficionados of the sort that have continued to sustain so many of the older arts until the present day. Tankasei's concluding explanation for the boom, however, is surely the best: “in short, it is understood by everyone (*zokuwakari ga shite* 俗解かりがして) and very easy to listen to.”⁶¹ So the basic secret of *naniwabushi* was simple: the words were easy to follow (an important advantage in what remained basically a storytelling art), and the element of song gave it a musical appeal that was completely missing from its storytelling rivals in *kōdan* and *rakugo*.

Beyond the contemporary relevance and inherent popular appeal of *naniwabushi*, however, Kumoemon was able to take the art a decisive step further in three areas: publicity, staging, and singing. His skill at publicity—or rather, the skill of his publicity team, which was clearly large but remains unidentified—was evident from the start of the carefully orchestrated return to Tokyo, starting from the Kansai area and continuing up the Tōkaidō. The sell-out crowds along the way led to national press coverage, which played up the “Promotion of Bushidō” and the “Imperial Audience” with Princess Arisugawa and spurred a sense of anticipation. The detailed press reports of 1907 reveal that by this time *naniwabushi* had attracted a corps of theater journalists who, even before Kumoemon's assault on the capital, produced finely honed critiques of contemporary singers that were of an impressive level of sophistication and detail. The advertising campaign that preceded Kumoemon's concerts at the Hongōza, however, focused less on newspapers and magazines than on posters in places where ordinary Tokyo citizens (of whom only a minority yet read the daily press) would be most likely to see them, in public bathhouses and in trains and electric trolleys (the city's newest mode of transport). Press reports indicate that over five thousand yen (or \$2,500, a huge amount of money in that era) was spent on

⁶⁰ Tankasei 1906, pp. 233–35. The number of theaters is broken down more fully in a detailed list that distinguishes between those in Tokyo that stage *naniwabushi* exclusively (41), and those that share the space with other performers (26).

⁶¹ Tankasei 1906, p. 238.



Figure 8. *Naniwabushi* performance in the traditional *yose* manner, seated behind a lectern on the stage, with the shamisen player visible to the right. From *Fūzoku gahō*, 10 October 1907, frontispiece.

advance publicity and arrangements—but recouped within the first five days of performance.⁶²

The most lasting contribution of Tōchūken Kumoemon, however, lay in the staging of his performances, which stirred an admiration among fellow performers in Tokyo that more than overcame his past disgrace. At this time, *naniwabushi* was typically still performed in the traditional *kōdan* format, as seen in figure 8, from an October 1907 issue of *Fūzoku gahō* 風俗画報. Both singer and shamisen player sat on *zabuton* cushions on a wooden stage, each in full view, with the singer behind a lectern holding a fan—the standard prop of *kōdan* performers for well over a century. During his years in Kyushu, however, Kumoemon had devised an entirely different type of staging, drawing on the *enzetsu* style of Meiji oratory, where the performer stood before a Western-style table and in front of a chair that was almost entirely symbolic. Kumoemon's innovations were basically exaggerations of the *enzetsu* pattern, transforming the oriental-patterned tablecloth of Meiji into a baroquely embroidered advertisement from a fan group or, later, commercial sponsor. The role of the tablecloths, which were presented in sets to cover all the furniture, was comparable

⁶² *Niroku shinpō*, 16 June 1907, in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 201.

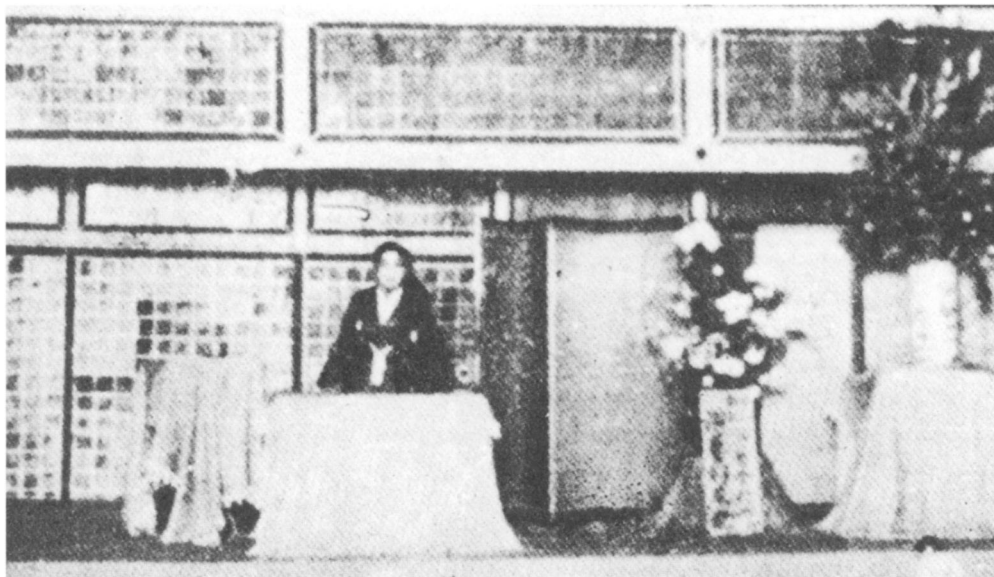


Figure 9. Tōchūken Kumoemon on stage at the Hongōza, July 1907. From *Nihon Kindaishi Kenkyūkai* 1979, p. 154 (original source unknown).

to (and perhaps inspired by) the decorative aprons (*keshōmawashi* 化粧回し) of sumo wrestlers. The table itself was divided into a main table and a smaller, slightly higher side table, with its own tablecloth, for the teapot, to the speaker's right.

The large-stage display at the Hongōza had already been developed in prototype in Kyushu where Kumoemon had managed to win venues in large modern theaters, in which side tables were placed on each side of the stage, with matching table covers and typically immense Meiji-style floral displays. The actual Hongōza stage (seen in fuzzy detail in figure 9, the only photograph surviving) was more magnificent still, with gold-leaf screens lined up against the back of the stage, and to the right (not visible in the photo) a display of portraits of the Forty-seven Rōnin with offerings of sake and fruit placed in front. As impressive as the stage was the appearance of the star performer, in formal samurai dress of *hakama* pants of the finest *sendai-hira* 仙台平 silk and a *haori* jacket dyed with the *futatsu-domoe* 二つ巴 crest of the Ōishi house. He sported a full head of long hair in the manner of a Restoration *shishi* 志士 (a style perpetuated by members of the Gen'yōsha),⁶³ tied back into a ponytail with a purple cord (as seen in a studio photograph in figure 10). The audience, it is said, would gasp when he walked onto the stage.⁶⁴

⁶³ Hirabayashi 1933, p. 400.

⁶⁴ Details of the stage and Kumoemon's appearance at the Hongōza may be found in the press reports included in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 191–95. See also Hirabayashi 1933, p. 400.

This dramatization of the star singer was further enhanced by the visual suppression of his shamisen accompanist, who, in a total reversal of existing practice (as seen in figure 8), was now hidden behind a folding screen to stage left. Kumoemon's rival Naniwatei Aizō (who had died young in 1906) is reported to have experimented with screening off the shamisen, but it was Kumoemon who made this standard practice, one that eventually became a feature of all *naniwabushi* performance and survives today with very few exceptions. The primary motivation was certainly to focus all attention on the singer himself, without losing the essential musical accompaniment of the shamisen. In the case of Kumoemon, however, some speculated that he may have wished to protect Ohama from those who came simply to ogle the woman with whom he had eloped, the wife of his own teacher. Whether it was vanity or compassion that motivated Kumoemon, the result was a curious practice that has worked continually to play down the presence of the shamisen players who have always been crucial to the art of *naniwabushi*. When asked today why the shamisen is hidden, most *rōkyoku* performers appear bemused and tend to speculate vaguely about an older prejudice against the accompanists as often blind and disabled. Historically, however, this seems clearly not to have been the case, and the particular circumstances of Kumoemon's innovation have been forgotten.

Kumoemon's singing and delivery were in general praised by the newspaper critics, although some had specific complaints. Kurata Yoshihiro 倉田喜弘, who has written widely on the history of the performing arts in modern Japan, listened to surviving phonograph records of Kumoemon's stories and concluded that he had a fine voice, strong and well-trained, with no touch of the husky quality (*shiwagare-goe*) often favored by *naniwabushi* singers. He had a striking breathing capacity, having developed the technique of taking air through the nose, enabling him to sing for more than twenty seconds without taking a breath.⁶⁵

For all the talk by Kumoemon and others of "improving" *naniwabushi*, however, he seems to have introduced relatively few changes in the content of the stories that came to make up his repertoire. The basic outlines of most of Kumoemon's tales, and some of the language, seem to have come directly from other storytellers, whether of *kōdan*, *saimon*, or *naniwabushi*, or from consulting the many published transcriptions of *kōdan* stories that appeared in increasing numbers from the mid-1880s. It seems likely that Kumoemon internalized these within the capacious memory required of all storytellers, adding his own variations according to the occasion. Comparison of his published texts (some of the later versions of which are indicated to be shorthand transcriptions of actual performances) with the content of his phonograph recordings suggests that while the sung portions (*fushi*) tended to remain the same, the spoken *kotoba* were often varied.

Kumoemon's most notable innovation in content and format seems to have been the elimination of the long-winded polite introduction with which *naniwa-*

⁶⁵ Kurata 1973 (99), p. 15.



Figure 10. Tōchūken Kumoemon in *hakama*, with hair tied back and fan in sash, at the time of the Hongō-za performances in July 1907. From *Engei gahō*, July 1907, frontispiece.

bushi singers invariably began, “As for the title that I propose to explicate to all of you who have so kindly come . . .” (*Gonyūrai naru izure mo sama ni benjinobemasu hyōdai no gi wa* 御入来なる何れも様に弁じ述べます表題の義は).⁶⁶ Kumoemon abandoned such formal introductions, plunging directly into the story with the first lines of song, as can be seen in the opening of his best-known Gishi tale, “Parting in the Snow at Nanbuzaka” (*Nanbuzaka yuki no wakare* 南部坂雪の別れ):

*Onando-rasha no naga-gappa,
tsumagake nashita taka-ashida,
nidan-hajiki no shibu-janome,
ato ni tsuzuku wa Ōishi no,
futokoro-gatana Teranishi Yadayū.
Kitaru wa nadai no Nanbuzaka.*

御納戸羅紗の長合羽、
爪掛なした高足駄、

⁶⁶ Tankasei 1906, p. 237; Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 162, which also discusses other ways of reforming the introduction.

二段弾金の洪蛇の目。
 後に続くは大石の、
 懷裏刀寺西弥太夫。
 来るは名代の南部坂。

In a long wool rain cape, navy blue,
 on high clogs with a toe cover,
 holding a two-stop oilpaper bull's-eye umbrella,
 Ōishi is followed by
 his trusted sidekick, Teranishi Yadayū.
 They arrive at the celebrated Nanbuzaka.⁶⁷

If indeed Kumoemon began his actual performances of “Parting in the Snow at Nanbuzaka” in this sudden way (as it appears in both the print and phonograph versions), the effect on audiences accustomed to polite introductions must have been riveting. Most of the audience were already familiar with the story as it had developed in the *kōdan* tradition, and thus knew that it tells how, on the snowy eve of the night attack on the enemy, Kira Yoshinaka Kōzuke no suke 吉良義央上野介, Ōishi Kuranosuke 大石内蔵助, the leader of the former Akō retainers, visited the mansion of Yōsen'in 瑤泉院, the widow of his late lord, with the intention of reporting to her that the revenge would be consummated that night. Kumoemon's opening lines do not even mention the snow, but, describing how Ōishi is dressed and what he holds in his hands, focus attention on the physical presence of the protagonist as he approaches the mansion at Nanbuzaka. To this is added the servant who follows and, finally, the location in the city of Edo. The language is concrete and descriptive, with no literary frills or polite language, and the intensely material and visual opening serves to draw the listener *physically* into the story. This was a core aspect of Kumoemon's art.

Kumoemon's Right-wing Patrons and the “Promotion of Bushidō”

Kumoemon's triumph at the Hongōza in June 1907 reflected more than just his considerable skills as an entertainer in an era when *naniwabushi* was rapidly growing in popularity. He also offered a particular political appeal, drawing support from right-wing nationalists and conservative bureaucrats. The connections between Kumoemon and such supporters coalesced around two central motifs of his performances, his focus on tales of the Gishi and his self-proclaimed title as “Promoter of Bushidō,” with the latter becoming a perennial tag in his promotional materials after 1907. Late Meiji was an era of intensive ideological activism in conservative circles, and both the Forty-seven Rōnin and Bushidō were used as themes for mobilizing mass sentiment.⁶⁸ The years of Kumoemon's

⁶⁷ The text here follows the published text in Tōchūken Kumoemon 1912. In the phonograph recording of the same year, the order of the second and third lines is reversed. A complete translation of *Nanbuzaka yuki no wakare* is included as an appendix to this article. The 1912 recording of Tōchūken Kumoemon's performance of this piece and a transcription of it may be found at the MN website: <http://monumenta.cc.sophia.ac.jp>.

⁶⁸ For late Meiji ideology, see Gluck 1985.

rise to fame saw a proliferation of writing among elite ideologues on these topics. In the end, a popular entertainer from the underclass like Tōchūken Kumoemon had little in common either socially or ideologically with his elite patrons, but their marriage of convenience does much to explain the dynamics of the late Meiji “Gishi boom.”

Until he met Miyazaki Tōten, Kumoemon was a complete unknown within any higher political circles, but that quickly changed. The most valuable of Tōten’s introductions, as we have seen, were to the northern Kyushu right-wing nationalists centered in the Gen’yōsha. Still more powerful and renowned among Kumoemon’s right-wing sponsors was Tōyama Mitsuru 頭山満 (1855–1944), who, born into a Fukuoka-domain samurai family, became the kingpin of the far right throughout prewar Japan, most notoriously as leader of the Kokuryūkai 黑竜会 (Amur River Society), the expansionist league he founded in 1901. When Tōten decided to become a *naniwabushi* singer in 1902, Tōyama alone among his friends warmly supported his decision and thereafter became a patron of Kumoemon as well.⁶⁹

Another major Kyushu supporter of Kumoemon was Fukumoto Nichinan 福本日南 (1857–1921). Like Tōyama of Fukuoka samurai stock, Nichinan, after a career as Gen’yōsha member and overseas adventurer, had become editor of the Gen’yōsha-affiliated Fukuoka daily *Kyūshū nippō* 九州日報 in 1905, during the peak of Kumoemon’s fame in the region. In 1906 Nichinan helped promote the initial print compilation of Kumoemon’s Gishi tales as *Yuki no akebono* 雪の曙 (A Snowy Dawn), and he is said to have been one of the Kyushu journalists who helped the singer improve his texts.⁷⁰ Nichinan would assume a stature equal to that of Kumoemon as a promoter of the Forty-seven Rōnin after he began serializing *Genroku kaikyōroku* 元禄快拳録, his exhaustive history of the Akō incident, in August 1908 in *Kyūshū nippō*. Published in book form the following year, this became a national bestseller.⁷¹ A world of difference, however, lay

⁶⁹ Miyazaki 1902, p. 13 (Miyazaki 1982, p. 288 in translation). Other intimates of Tōten who promoted Kumoemon in Kyushu were Suenaga Misao 末永節 (1869–1960), who had been a co-conspirator with Tōten in China, and Suzuki Tengan 鈴木天眼 (1867–1926), a Nagasaki newspaper editor who sponsored Kumoemon in that city.

⁷⁰ Tōchūken Kumoemon 1906–1910. An *Ōsaka asahi shinbun* article of February 1907 (Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, pp. 168–69) provides an account of the publication of this work (of which no copy of the original 1906 Fukuoka edition has yet been located), noting that Nichinan contributed a dedicatory image (*daiga* 題画). Assertions have been made that Kumoemon’s tales were substantially refashioned along more literary lines by various Kyushu journalists who supported him; see Matsuzaki 1927, p. 109; Hanada 1963, p. 20; and Shiba 1980, p. 425. Little direct evidence for this exists, however, and the texts themselves (as published in Tōchūken Kumoemon 1906–1910) do not reveal extensive literary embellishment. Those listed as involved in the published texts (notably Kobayashi Tōu 小林陶雨, whom Matsuzaki describes as Kumoemon’s manager in Kyushu, and Watanabe Teishū 渡辺停舟) were probably simply editors of texts taken from transcriptions of actual performances.

⁷¹ Fukumoto 1909. Five years later, after digesting an important new collection of historical documents about the Akō incident that had been published in the meantime, Nichinan produced a revised version as *Genroku kaikyō shinsōroku* 元禄快拳真相録 (Fukumoto 1914). See Smith 2004, pp. 31–32.

between Kumoemon's oral Gishi tales and Nichinan's assiduously textual histories, in both content and audience. We will consider the content of Kumoemon's stories below, but suffice it to note that they came directly from the *kōdan* repertory, with only tenuous links to the documented historical events of 1701–1703. Nichinan, by contrast, insisted on the historicity and accuracy of his account, as well as on its ideological importance for contemporary Japan. Nichinan gave this commitment institutional form in 1916 when he founded the Chūō Gishikai 中央義士会, a nationwide network of local chapters dedicated to promoting the memory and alleged values of the Forty-seven Rōnin, values that Nichinan and the Gishikai held to be wholly consonant with official state ideology. Through local lectures and a national journal, the Chūō Gishikai fostered Gishi worship in conservative circles and perpetuated on into the early Shōwa period the ideological wing of the Gishi boom that Nichinan had launched.

The second pillar of Kumoemon's political appeal was "Bushidō," another important component of late Meiji ideology. This "way of the warrior" became a matter of extended debate and ideological pronouncement only from the late 1880s, when the hereditary samurai estate was well on the way to extinction even as ex-samurai continued to run the country. Recent research suggests that several competing lineages emerged, each laying claim to the authority of "Bushidō" (now deserving of an upper-case designation as a formal ideology, although rarely described with any precision).⁷² The three critical lineages were 1) surviving practitioners of the martial arts who wished to modernize and perpetuate those arts as modern spectator sports; 2) Christians, first Uemura Masahisa 植村正久, and only later Nitobe Inazō 新渡戸稲造 (author of the celebrated volume in English of 1899, *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan*), who turned to samurai values and their apparent congruence with Christian chivalry to defend themselves from charges of being unpatriotic in the wake of a celebrated incident in 1891 when the Christian schoolteacher Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 refused to pay ritual homage to the Imperial Rescript on Education; and 3) official ideologues of the Meiji state who, following the promulgation of the 1889 Meiji Constitution and the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, sought to firm up the ideological foundations of those documents. The real turning point, however, was the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, which fanned the flames of both intellectual and mass enthusiasm for "traditional" Japanese martial virtues and values, resulting in a spate of publications about Bushidō in the late 1890s.

Within Japan, the most influential formulator of modern Bushidō came from among the official ideologues in the person of Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944), beginning with his *Bushidō* of 1901, the transcription of a lecture in March of that year to officers at an army academy.⁷³ A professor of philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, Inoue was already widely known as a nationalistic promoter

⁷² A comprehensive history of the modern idea of Bushidō remains to be written, but Ōta 1986, Hurst 1900, Unoda 1997, and Seinsch 2000 provide useful starting points.

⁷³ Inoue 1901.

of the official ideology of the Meiji state, particularly through his commentaries on the Imperial Rescript on Education.⁷⁴ His *Bushidō* put forth an argument that served as the starting point for a vigorous mainstream lineage of thinking about the subject that would continue on through the 1930s.⁷⁵ Inoue claimed that Bushidō, an esteem for military virtues (*bu* 武) above all others, was an essential and abiding quality of the Japanese race, but that it had no articulate creed until the appearance of the mid-Tokugawa Confucian thinker Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685) as the “personification” (*gonge* 権化) of Bushidō; Sokō’s writings finally provided the “sacred texts” (*kyōten* 經典) of this innate value system.⁷⁶ Inoue further argued that Sokō’s teachings had been transmitted to the Forty-seven Rōnin as a result of his connections with the Akō domain. Their revenge, an act of valor and loyalty “unparalleled in world history,” was, Inoue declared, the direct result of the teachings of Yamaga Sokō and, as such, constituted the “perfect flower of Bushidō” (*bushidō no seika* 武士道の精華).⁷⁷

In a further elaboration of Bushidō in the following year of 1902, Inoue declared that “Sokō’s greatest accomplishment was the promotion of Bushidō (*bushidō no kosui* 武士道の鼓吹).”⁷⁸ It is probably no coincidence that this latter phrase was exactly the one that Kumoemon came to use to define his own mission. From this point on, Inoue’s ideas about “Bushidō” coursed through conservative intellectual and journalistic circles in the late Meiji period, making it a widely used if vaguely defined catchphrase, particularly during and after the war with Russia in 1904–1905, which further fed the passion for the notion. The transmission of Inoue’s terminology to Kumoemon cannot be documented, but a likely agent was the singer’s most powerful promoter in the Meiji bureaucracy, Koga Renzō 古賀廉造 (1858–1942). Of Saga samurai origin, Koga was a leading Meiji specialist in criminal law who in the period 1906–1912 served for almost four years as head of the Police Bureau in the Home Ministry—in effect, Japan’s “top cop.” In 1902, when Tōten introduced him to Kumoemon, Koga was already an ardent fan of *naniwabushi*, an unusual taste for an elite government official, and had embarked upon a campaign, which he would pursue for years after, of

⁷⁴ Gluck 1985, pp. 128–29.

⁷⁵ Unoda 1997, pp. 41–43, argues that Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 replaced Inoue as the mainstream formulator of Bushidō from the 1940s.

⁷⁶ Inoue knew of Nitobe’s book in English and attacked it specifically both in *Bushidō* (Inoue 1901, p. 36) and in further elaboration in his 1902 *Nihon kogakuha no tetsugaku* 日本古学派之哲学, where he argued that Nitobe mistakenly identified Wang Yangming 王陽明 thought as the source of Bushidō, where in fact Sokō was the true formulator (Inoue 1902, pp. 124–27). Inoue further argued that although Sokō’s own school did not last long, his ideas were transmitted many years later by the Chōshū loyalist Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰 (1830–1859), a great admirer of the Forty-seven Rōnin, and then rediscovered and newly articulated by Inoue himself.

⁷⁷ Inoue 1901, p. 50. Sokō served the Akō Asano house from 1652 to 1660 and spent nine years in exile in Akō from the mid-1660s to the mid-1670s. See Tucker 2002 for a detailed consideration of Inoue’s celebration of Sokō and a debunking of his claims for Sokō’s connection with the Forty-seven Rōnin.

⁷⁸ Inoue 1902, p. 124. The phrase *bushidō no kosui* is emphasized in the original by small triangles placed next to each character.

trying to “improve” *naniwabushi* so that it could serve as a vehicle for the propagation of such “healthy” official values as filiality, loyalty to the emperor, and patriotism. Distressed by the infatuation of Tokyo male students with women’s *gidayū* in the 1890s,⁷⁹ Koga saw *naniwabushi* as a good replacement, particularly if the performers could be encouraged to “promote Bushidō, the highest philosophy of our national tradition, and provide texts about loyal retainers, chaste women, and filial children (*chūshin resshi seppu kōshi* 忠臣烈士節婦孝子).”⁸⁰ To test the educational value of *naniwabushi*, Koga invited Kumoemon in the spring of 1902 to perform monthly at the Tokyo Kankain 東京感化院, a private reformatory for delinquent youth, and reported that he was pleased with the potential of the art to change the attitudes of wayward young Japanese.⁸¹

The Gishi and Bushidō in Kumoemon’s Tales

Before Miyazaki Tōten introduced him in 1902 to Koga Renzō and other elite promoters of Meiji state ideology, Tōchūken Kumoemon seems to have had no particular interest in tales of the Gishi. On the contrary, he was disposed to stories of *kyōkaku* gangsters and gamblers from his native Jōshū, local heroes who had fiercely opposed bakufu authority, an attitude at odds with the docile submission of the Akō avengers to the judgment of the shogunate. In particular, he first made his name in Tokyo of the 1890s by singing the tale of one such hero, Annaka Sōzaburō 安中草三郎 (also Sōzō 草三, 1786–1821), a gambling boss whose home base was just up the highway from Kumoemon’s birthplace of Takasaki.⁸² Kumoemon was also known for narrating the saga of Sakura Sōgorō 佐倉惣五郎, a legendary Kantō peasant hero of the seventeenth century whose sacrifice on behalf of justice for his village established him as the prototypical *gimin* 義民, or righteous defender of peasant rights.⁸³

But it is clear that from the time he arrived in Kyushu in the summer of 1903, Kumoemon had already been converted to a near single-minded focus on Gishi tales. Newspaper accounts of his performances reveal that over three-quarters of his stories were standard Gishi fare, supplemented by an idiosyncratic assort-

⁷⁹ For the Meiji boom in women’s *gidayū*, see Coaldrake 1997 and Yamamoto 1972, pp. 132–34.

⁸⁰ As quoted in Hirabayashi 1933, p. 398, as the founding spirit of the “study group” (*kenkyūkai* 研究会) that Koga created. The “study group” is presumably the Naniwabushi Shōreikai 浪花節奨励会, which Koga founded in April 1906. The exact source and date of the quote are not indicated.

⁸¹ Miyazaki 1914, p. 490. Miyazaki 1907, p. 86, further described Koga as one who agreed with Tōten that a “masculine” art like *naniwabushi* suited the need of the Japanese people to maintain their “spirit” (*ki* 気) in the wake of the victory over Russia. Koga is mentioned numerous times in Miyazaki 1918–1921. He later met with disgrace when convicted in 1923 for his involvement in the Opium Incident of 1921, a scheme to resell confiscated opium in Kwangtung, and even after this he continued to figure in various counterfeiting and trading scandals in China.

⁸² The story of Annaka Sōzaburō was based on *Okurezaki Haruna no umegaka Annaka Sōzō den* 後開榛名梅香安中草三伝, a long tale by San’yūtei Enchō 三遊亭円朝, published as a *sokkibon* in 1885–1886. Matsuzaki 1927, p. 107, says that Kumoemon was a hit when he performed the tale in Yokohama in the mid-1890s under the name Shigekichi.

⁸³ For an analysis and translation of one version of the tale of Sakura Sōgorō, see Walthall 1991, pp. 169–231. Kumoemon continued to tell stories about Sōgorō even after turning mainly to Gishi tales.

ment of personal favorites that fell into no obvious pattern. In published transcripts of his performances that began to appear from 1906, Gishi tales dominated, supplemented by a single collection of non-Gishi stories in 1910 entitled *Giretsu hyakketsu* 義烈百傑 (One Hundred Valorous Heroes), which included his extended version of the Sakura Sōgorō story.⁸⁴ The same volume opened with a three-episode version of his single most popular non-Gishi tale, *Masamune kōshi den* 正宗孝子伝 (The Tale of Masamune as a Filial Son), a *kōdan* favorite that drew on one of the many Edo legends of the Kamakura-era swordsmith Masamune, telling of his discovery that his swordsmith teacher was also his real father and focusing on his charitable behavior towards his difficult stepmother. In the end, Kumoemon cast his lot with the Gishi and used non-Gishi tales only for a change of pace in an evening's program. From Kyushu on to the end of his life, his reputation hinged on tales of the Gishi.

As we have seen, Kumoemon adjusted to his newfound role as a singer of Gishi tales by an elaborate reworking of his stage presence and advertisements. His stage sets and ads were saturated with two stock Chūshingura images, the *futatsu-domoe* Ōishi crest and the zigzag *yamagata* 山形 pattern that had become the standard costume for the jackets of the Gishi in kabuki. His own stage costume, as seen in figure 10, mimicked (rather tamely) the rebellious style of Bakumatsu *shishi*. His assumption of samurai markings extended to claims of warrior ancestry that he began to make after 1907. He had already proclaimed his real name to be Okamoto Minekichi 岡本峰吉 (leaving no trace in contemporary reports of his given name of Yamamoto Kōzō), using it as his legal name as author of published collections of Gishi tales. In a newspaper article of 1909, he further claimed his father to be Okamoto Motojirō 岡本元次郎, a former samurai retainer of the lord Yūki Mikawa no kami 結城三河守 (a fictitious daimyo name) who had become a rōnin and moved to Tokyo, where Minekichi was born in 1875 (two years later than his actual birth date). The article also reports that as a boy, Kumoemon read popular histories and was moved to tears by tales of Bushidō and of sacrifice in the name of loyalty and filiality, above all by *naniwabushi* tales of the Gishi that he first heard at age fourteen.⁸⁵

By presenting himself as a samurai of sorts, Kumoemon doubtless sought to overcome or at least disguise his humble social origins, suggesting that his emphasis on Bushidō reflected as much a quest for respectability (and hence wider popularity) as dedication to martial values. He took great pride in performing for the military and political elite, and anecdotes relate his insistence that he be treated as a friend rather than a paid entertainer, as when the government leader Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 invited him to sing some Gishi tales at an inn in Shimonoseki in April 1906.⁸⁶ His greatest coup in this regard, his performance before Princess

⁸⁴ Tōchūken Kumoemon 1910, pp. 114–67.

⁸⁵ *Hokkai taimusu* 北海タイムス, 17 September 1909, in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 265.

⁸⁶ Byōbyō-an Tenchō 1907, pp. 66–67, which adds two further anecdotes of Kumoemon's refusal to be treated as a *geinin* when performing for distinguished military officials.

Arisugawa in Kobe the following spring, received even more prominent emphasis in his advertising than his claim to be the “Promoter of Bushidō.”

In line with this image of intimacy with aristocracy, Kumoemon also issued public statements that adhered closely to the ideological rhetoric promoted by Koga Renzō and other senior bureaucrats who called for the “reform” of *naniwabushi* along moralistic lines, as a way of nurturing values appropriate to obedient citizens of the state. Such statements came chiefly in interviews that Kumoemon granted to newspaper reporters, of which one particularly revealing example appeared in the July 1907 issue of *Engei gahō* 演芸画報. Here Kumoemon is quoted as declaring his life mission to be the elevation of *naniwabushi*, insisting that he wholly opposed the telling of tales about valorous gangsters (*kyōkaku*), preposterous heroes, and lascivious romance. Using language that he surely picked up from ideologues like Koga, he further explains:

These may just be performances, but you can’t just neglect public morality (*fūkyō* 風教). (Laughter.) It may sound like I’m just being grouchy, but don’t you think this is the case? First of all, I think that these sorts of stories will utterly fail to stimulate the interest of those whose intelligence is to any degree advanced. This may sound like self-promotion, but for my part, I have selected stories about loyal retainers (*chūshin resshi*) and intend to deliver them with all my spirit and passion as a form of popular education (*tsūzoku kyōiku* 通俗教育).⁸⁷

It is difficult, however, to take such high-flown talk at face value. Kumoemon’s lofty dismissal of *kyōkaku* tales belies his own early taste for precisely these stories. And while some in the press were content to accept and even praise his pious promotion of high-minded morality, others—including some of his *naniwabushi* rivals—were quick to remark on his own notoriety as a wife stealer and gambler.⁸⁸ The disjunction between Kumoemon’s public persona and his private life was also noted by none other than Miyazaki Tōten, who was powerfully attracted to *naniwabushi* for its potential to stir the masses to political action, but who in the end found it impossible to accommodate the itinerant *geinin* lifestyle of the sort he had to endure when traveling with Kumoemon’s entourage in Kyushu. In an article in a Tokyo literary journal of August 1906, the year before Kumoemon’s triumphal progress from Kyushu to Tokyo, Tōten gave this blunt assessment of *naniwabushi* singers in general and Kumoemon in particular:

Backstage, they are constantly gambling. And they play around with underage girls, the wives of others, and widows, making off with their money. They may put on a fancy silk kimono with seven crests, surrounded by gold screens of Edo castle, appearing on stage all solemn and proper-looking, but inside, they’re incorrigible; a certain stench always accompanies them. We may try to become

⁸⁷ Byōbyō-an Tenchō 1907, pp. 65–66.

⁸⁸ For a particularly harsh attack on Kumoemon’s hypocrisy in condemning the morals of Tokyo *naniwabushi* performers, see the statement by Naniwatei Minekichi 浪花亭峰吉 in *Kokumin shinbun*, 15 June 1907 (Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 200).

one with them, but there's just no way. Even when it comes to drink, there are differences of degree. I'm no saint myself, but I'm still stunned by the vulgarity of their behavior. This is why I cut off my ties with Kumoemon.⁸⁹

The vehemence of Tōten's language may have been enhanced by Usuda Zan'un 薄田斬雲, the writer who transcribed the interview, but Tōten himself later reiterated in his own words the striking contrast between the virtuous on-stage characters depicted by *naniwabushi* singers and their own decadent life offstage, "starting to gamble and fornicate even before breakfast."⁹⁰ It is deeply revealing that a person of genuine samurai stock such as Tōten—however rough and rustic his Kumamoto roots, and however much a renegade he himself had proved in his appearance, behavior, and political beliefs—had real difficulty in bridging the social and cultural chasm between himself and Kumoemon.

None of his disillusionment with the performers discouraged Tōten from his commitment to the art, as he continued to sing *naniwabushi* tales in public performance for several years after parting with Kumoemon in Kyushu.⁹¹ Tōten, however, seems to have appreciated the limits of using a popular storytelling medium as a political vehicle, as revealed in his perceptive criticisms of the efforts of those in the Meiji government, like Koga Renzō, who continued to believe that *naniwabushi* could serve as a didactic instrument for the mass inculcation of official morality. Writing in 1919 in an obscure column that he contributed to a Japanese newspaper in Shanghai, at the height of a renewed campaign to promote *naniwabushi* as an instrument for "the unification of national thought" under the conservative Home Minister Tokonami Takejirō 床次竹二郎, Tōten offered this insightful critique of the campaign:

There may be a certain logic for Tokonami and Koga to use *naniwabushi* for social education in these times, but they are making a big mistake. Art has great power to move the people, but it is not necessarily able to enter into their inner thought (*shisō* 思想) and effect any change. In other words, although *naniwabushi* is powerful in stimulating emotion, it is weak in having any control over reality. Let us just imagine that a terrorist (*inbōshugisha* 陰謀主義者) listens to a tale of the Gishi. He will pay no attention to Ōishi's loyalty, but will feel deep sympathy for his twenty-two months of perseverance. He will then rejoice on hearing of the success of the night attack and imagine that he himself can also succeed. All the more, we must remember that the real strength of *naniwabushi* is to be

⁸⁹ Miyazaki 1906, p. 131.

⁹⁰ The interview, told entirely in the first person, was solicited and written down by Usuda. For Tōten's later comments, see Miyazaki 1918–1921, pp. 158–59 (11 June 1919) and 163 (17 June 1919).

⁹¹ Uemura 1987, vol. 3, p. 314, provides a useful map of all known public *naniwabushi* performances by Miyazaki Tōten. He performed regularly in Tokyo from October 1904 to April 1905 and then in early 1906. Thereafter, his performances were limited almost entirely to two long provincial tours with other singers, one to Kansai and Kyushu in the second half of 1907, and one to the Chūbu and Tōhoku regions from July 1909 until February 1910. Tōten performed primarily for economic reasons, to support his family and to raise funds for promoting revolution in China, although he also had some hopes of broadening his regional network of political supporters as well.

the ally of the weak. Those who sing the tales have no thoughts on the matter, while their audience will interpret it as they please.⁹²

Miyazaki's insights are corroborated by Yamamoto Tsuneo's 山本恒夫 detailed study of the campaign by bureaucrats like Koga and Tokonami during the decade after the war with Russia to use such popular *yose* entertainments as *kōdan* and *naniwabushi* as instruments of popular "edification" (*kyōka* 教化). The "people" in the eyes of the state were typically referred to as *kokumin* 国民 (national people), suggesting the focus on national values, but Yamamoto in his own analysis prefers the term *shomin* 庶民, or "common people," whom he sees as the true audience of the *yose* arts.⁹³ Yamamoto notes that on the surface, the moralism of *kōdan* (which was passed on to *naniwabushi* in a less didactic form), with its emphasis on "rewarding good and chastising evil" (*kanzen chōaku* 勸善懲惡) and its priority for maintaining social stability, would seem to be highly congruent with the state's emphasis on familism, sacrifice, loyalty, and filiality. In analyzing specific *kōdan* and *naniwabushi* tales (including five stories of the Gishi), however, Yamamoto discovered a strong countervailing tendency to preoccupation with the "worldly profit" (*sezokuteki riyaku* 世俗的利益) of the individual, bringing many stories much closer to the alternate Meiji ideal of *risshin shusse* 立身出世, success and advancement in the world.⁹⁴ The primary stress in the tales, rooted in the values of the Edo townsman class, was on the reciprocity of obligations, which could actually work to undercut the emphasis of official ideology on unilateral sacrifice for state and emperor. While these stories certainly included praise for Confucian-style familism, he argues, this sentiment was not expanded and channeled to the national level.

Yamamoto also detects another strain of opposition to national values in the prevalence of *kyōkaku* tales, which however much they may have alluded to an older ideal of warrior valor, tended to echo Miyazaki Tōten's own contempt for the arrogance of stipended samurai bureaucrats in an era of peace. Yamamoto argues that the notion of defending the weak against the strong that was basic to the *kyōkaku* mentality had its source in a sense of Edo townsman solidarity. In contrast to the demand by the Meiji state that loyalty and sacrifice be expanded upward to the nation, the Robin Hood ethic of the *kyōkaku* took the form, rather, of a commitment downward, an offering of protection to the weakest members of society.⁹⁵ And tales of *kyōkaku* who were openly defiant of the state, becoming outright outlaws as many of them did (notably such folk heroes from Jōshū as Annaka Sōzaburō and Kunisada Chūji 国定忠治), could easily backfire and encourage contempt of public authority.

Yamamoto's arguments help us when we turn to the actual content of Kumoe-mon's Gishi tales. Kumoe-mon's published Gishi texts make clear his funda-

⁹² Miyazaki 1918–1921, column in *Shanghai nichinichi shinbun* 上海日日新聞 for 28 June 1919, p. 173.

⁹³ Yamamoto 1972, p. 12.

⁹⁴ See Yamamoto 1972, pp. 342–44, for the Gishi tales.

⁹⁵ Yamamoto 1972, pp. 362–63.

mental debt to *kōdan* versions of the Gishiden, which they closely follow in plot and in the basic values conveyed. He probably learned these stories by listening to actual performances of *kōdan* storytellers and *naniwabushi* singers, but he was certainly literate enough to read the printed *sokkibon* versions of *kōdan* stories. We must also remember that he lived within a culture within which *all* Japanese knew the basic plots of these tales, through myriad channels. Comparison of Kumoemon's actual texts with published *kōdan* versions of the same stories, however, shows notable contrasts. Despite a remarkable similarity of plots and values, the *kōdan* versions are garrulous and didactic, while Kumoemon's stories are more immediate and less intellectual, as we have already seen in the opening lines of his "Parting in the Snow at Nanbuzaka." The *kōdan* stories meander, introducing incidental episodes and extraneous detail along the way, using more polite speech and sermonizing interjections, while Kumoemon's versions offer a more direct form of narration, with a single-minded focus on the mentality of the protagonist, Kuranosuke.⁹⁶ Whereas the *kōdan* tellers stood apart and observed, Kumoemon's gift enabled him to break down the distance between teller and audience, drawing his listeners directly into the world of his voice.

This direct and dramatic approach allowed Kumoemon to bypass the self-conscious didacticism of *kōdan*, while perpetuating a similar system of values. The themes figuring in his texts are strikingly distant from any concern with nation, state, or emperor. The world of Meiji *kōdan* and *naniwabushi* alike is that of the Edo commoner, especially artisans, day laborers, and small merchants for whom higher political authority was remote from everyday life. Particularly notable in the Gishi tales is the almost total absence of the theme of loyalty that is so often vaunted as the central theme of the Akō vendetta. In "Parting in the Snow at Nanbuzaka," for example, Ōishi Kuranosuke's mission is to inform his lord's widow of the impending attack on Kira and to return certain key documents (in most versions, an accounting of the funds she had provided).⁹⁷ Shortly after entering the female chambers, however, Ōishi spots a maid whose suspicious behavior convinces him she must be a spy for the enemy. Suddenly forced to change his strategy from honest confession to painful deception, Kuranosuke swallows all pride by pretending to have no intention of seeking revenge, planning only to return to Osaka and become a common shopkeeper. Yōsen'in weeps tears of resentful disappointment, and Kuranosuke is forced to bid farewell in shame, unable to do anything more than pass on to the lady-in-waiting Toda no Tsubone 戸田の局 the documents—not to be opened until the following day—that will prove his true intentions.

⁹⁶ For a comparison of Kumoemon's "Nanbuzaka" with an example from the dominant *kōdan* lineage, see Hyōdō 2000, pp. 204–208.

⁹⁷ The historical basis for this story is a report that Ōishi did in fact return the account book not long before the attack, not in person but most likely by way of Yōsen'in's chamberlain Ochiai Yozaemon 落合与左衛門. A separate legend records that Terasaka Kichiemon 寺坂吉右衛門, the only one of the forty-seven who did not surrender to the bakufu, returned the ledger to Yōsen'in the morning after the attack. See Smith 2004, pp. 31, 40.

Once the success of the mission is reported early the next morning (recounted in dramatic detail in Kumoemon's version), Kuranosuke's inner motives are revealed and his name cleared, while the spy is apprehended and has a sad story of her own to tell. This is the general structure of all the most famous Gishi tales told by Kumoemon, a prototype of which appears in Act 7 of *Kanadehon Chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵, where Ōboshi Yuranosuke 大星由良助 (the stage version of Ōishi) is forced to eat octopus in disrespect of his master's death memorial in order to convince the enemy that he has no interest in taking revenge. We see the same pattern in the story of Kanzaki Yogorō 神崎与五郎, who is obliged to endure the insults of a lowly groom on the Tōkaidō, or of Murakami Kiken 村上喜劔, a Satsuma samurai who sees Ōishi lying drunk on the street in Kyoto and kicks him while shouting curses at him for failing to take revenge—only to commit seppuku before Ōishi's grave out of remorse after learning of the success of the vendetta. The moral of all these stories, if indeed there is one beyond the powerful catharsis that they inspire after the final success of the revenge, is that if only one perseveres with inner sincerity of heart, one will achieve success in life, even though it may be necessary to dissemble and endure humiliation along the way. *Naniwabushi* tales in these respects share something with fairy tales, which teach children to meet the forces of the world “with cunning and high spirits,” and which tend to be dominated by a “naïve sense of justice” and “tenacious materialism.”⁹⁸

To be sure, Kumoemon's Gishi tales, like most *kōdan* stories, celebrate filiality to one's parents and loyalty to one's immediate superiors, general Confucian virtues that became part of the broader “Bushidō” promoted by official ideologues of the Meiji state. But in the end, the loyalty promoted by Kumoemon was of the sort endemic to his own social context and to that of his working-class and artisan audience, essentially a milieu of bosses and their followers. Such loyalty may have had a generic resemblance to the abstract loyalty promoted by the Meiji state, particularly in its reliance on the bonds of fictive kin. Just as the Meiji state posited the emperor as the head of a national “family-state” (*kazoku kokka* 家族国家), so the communities of performers, as well as the petty gangs that arranged their venues, were constructed along fictive family lines, by which bosses were “parents” (*oyabun* 親分) and their henchmen “children” (*kobun* 子分) who considered each other “brothers” (*kyōdai* 兄弟). But these values remained embedded in daily life and practical ethics.

In the end, of course, Kumoemon would never have achieved his spectacular success nor would he have been led to tales of the Gishi without the encouragement of official ideologues like Koga Renzō and the logistical support of right-wing nationalist groups like the Gen'yōsha—organizations whose mentality was in fact not so distant from the more ordinary gangs that Kumoemon grew up with as a lower-class performer in the streets and *yose*. And yet the national political causes of these patrons seem in the long run to have had remarkably little direct

⁹⁸ Tatar 2002, p. xiv; the first phrase is quoted from Walter Benjamin (no source provided).

impact on the content of *naniwabushi* tales. The stories themselves remained largely apolitical and not easily manipulated either by those in official bureaucratic positions who sought to “improve” popular morality or by socialists like Miyazaki Tōten who would have preferred to use them to stir sentiments against the state.

Epilogue

Both Kumoemon’s style and his emphasis on tales of the Gishi had a lasting effect on *naniwabushi*. Eventually, even small *yose* would adopt the *enzetsu* staging that he established, with the singer standing behind a table draped with a gorgeous tablecloth provided by fans. Other leading singers of late Meiji immediately took up tales of the Gishi. Notable among them was Yoshida Naramaru II 吉田奈良丸 (1883–1967), who came to Tokyo from Osaka in 1909 and who quickly made the Gishiden his own specialty, soon rivaling Kumoemon in popularity with his more mellow style. Meanwhile, as we have seen, Fukumoto Nichinan enthusiastically promoted the more ideological wing of Gishi fandom in his *Genroku kaikyōroku* of 1909 and through the activities of the Chūō Gishikai.

Naniwabushi tales of the Gishi enjoyed a new boost from 1910 when excerpts were first released on phonograph recordings by Yoshida Naramaru, followed by Tōchūken Kumoemon himself in 1912. Kumoemon’s career reached a peak in that year, with performances as far away as Taiwan and culminating in a run at the Kabukiza in Tokyo from 15 July—the first time that a *naniwabushi* singer had ever performed at this bastion of traditional theater. The same year also saw the publication of ten of his most famous Gishi tales as separate volumes by Tōkyō Meirinsha 東京明倫社.⁹⁹ Kumoemon had cut his long flowing locks in June 1910, apparently peeved by the number of imitators who had adopted his look, and from that point on he appended the title of “Nyūdō” 入道, or lay monk, to his name, publicizing his act as a taking of the tonsure.¹⁰⁰ After the death of the Meiji emperor in August 1912, however, and the beginning of the Taishō era, Kumoemon’s fortunes began to decline with the successive deaths from tuberculosis of his wife, Ohama, in 1914 and his mistress Otama お玉 not long after.¹⁰¹ Kumoemon succumbed to the disease himself on 7 November 1916 at the age of forty-three. The great performer, who earned 83,000 yen in the year 1913 (a vast sum for that era), left nothing but some huge debts, two furs, thirteen five-yen notes, and a silver watch.¹⁰² The elaborate monument for his grave, for which

⁹⁹ These are available in the Kindai Digital Library 近代デジタルライブラリー of the National Diet Library (<http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/>).

¹⁰⁰ For Kumoemon’s cutting his hair, see the report in *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, 23 June 1910, in Shiba 1997, *Meiji hen*, p. 281, which includes a photo in his new guise (including a prominent mustache).

¹⁰¹ Kumoemon appears to have had more than one mistress, possibly two of them named “Otama”; see Matsuzaki 1927, pp. 111, 118. The newspaper report of his June 1910 haircut mentions his mistress as “Otoku” おとく.

¹⁰² See Hyōdō 2000, pp. 18–19 and 222–23, for slight conflicts in accounts of what Kumoemon left at his death.

he paid in advance, may still be seen at the Nichiren 日蓮 temple of Myōkokuji 妙国寺 in the Shinagawa district of Tokyo.

Naniwabushi, along with all of the traditional performing arts, was severely challenged with the gradual spread of movies from the 1910s as the newest form of popular entertainment in Japan—although many of the episodes of early film were taken from *kōdan* and *naniwabushi*. The delay of talkies until 1931 may have softened the impact, and the *benshi* 弁士 who provided the “explanations” of films until then were themselves influenced by *naniwabushi* performers in their style and content. The salvation of *naniwabushi* at this juncture was radio, for which a national network had been established by the late 1920s. The first national survey of radio listeners in 1932 by NHK, the state broadcasting system, showed *naniwabushi* to be by a wide margin the single most popular form of radio entertainment in all the regions of Japan.¹⁰³ During the war years, the state attempted to inculcate patriotic and martial values in *naniwabushi*, although with little success, and the art survived strong into the postwar period until it finally succumbed in the late 1950s to the increasing appeal of television, and to the shrinking attention span of radio listeners.

In the end, the relationship between *naniwabushi* and the Forty-seven Rōnin was symbiotic. The combination of song with easy-to-follow narration of “tales that all Japanese know” made *naniwabushi* a natural media success in late Meiji, but the particular emphasis of Tōchūken Kumoemon on Gishi tales served after 1907 to fuel a pervasive “Gishi boom” that was received enthusiastically by all classes of Japanese, albeit for different reasons. Ordinary people loved the song and the style, while elite politicians saw *naniwabushi* as an opportunity to forge a national voice. Even as the boom subsided from the late 1910s, the enthusiasm and familiarity that it had generated worked to make stories of the Forty-seven Rōnin a staple of film, then radio, and later television, turning it into a ritual national habit.¹⁰⁴ In the process, the element of song that was so central to the appeal of *naniwabushi* fell by the way. But those who wish to hear an echo from the Gishi boom of late Meiji can still pick it up at the Mokubatei theater in Asakusa in the first ten days of December, when one or two stories of the Forty-seven Rōnin are sure to appear on the program. The audience will be small and aging, but the legacy of Kumoemon still lives on, a century later.

¹⁰³ Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai 1934. For a summary, see Hyōdō 2000, pp. 229–30. *Naniwabushi* was chosen the favorite program by over 47 percent of the respondents in all the most populous regions of Japan (Kantō, Kansai, Chūbu, and Kyushu).

¹⁰⁴ See Smith 2006.

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