

Law and Society: The Story of the 47 Rônin

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Glossary

ASANO Naganori (1665-1701): Lord of the Akô domain in western Honshû, Asano Takumi no kami Naganori is also known in several of the primary documents as Asano Takumi, an abbreviation of his court rank. Asano's samurai took vengeance on KIRA Yoshinaka after the Tokugawa bakufu directed Asano to commit ritual suicide.

Bakufu: early modern Japan's central government, headed by the Shogun and based in Edo (present-day Tokyo). Also known as the "shogunate". See also Tokugawa.

Chûshingura ("Treasury of Loyal Retainers"): the title of a popular puppet play written by TAKEDA Izumo, MIYOSHI Shôroku, and NAMIKI Sôsuke in 1748. *Kanadehon Chûshingura* dramatizes the actions of the 47 *rônin*. Versions of the story have also been told in theatre, literature, and the visual arts as well as carried on as oral tradition. The term "Chûshingura" is also used more generally to refer to story of the 47 *rônin*.

Daimyo: local lords during the Tokugawa period. The daimyo were elite members of the samurai class, distinguished by heredity and the size of their agricultural holdings. Daimyo maintained a fair degree of autonomy in the rule of their personal domains and their retainers so long as they abided by certain rules established by the Tokugawa bakufu. Among these were attendance at the Shogun's court in Edo, careful management of foreign contacts, and the maintenance of order. The Tokugawa authorities maintained the right to confiscate a daimyo's domain in the event of serious unrest or malfeasance. In such cases, and as occurred in the case of Asano, the lord's retainers were set adrift without a lord or stipend and the domain was transferred to a candidate deemed more worthy.

Diplomatic Rituals: Diplomatic exchanges with the imperial house were important to the Tokugawa bakufu, allowing the government to symbolically reinforce the idea of Shogunal preeminence over the imperial institution in distant Kyoto. Imperial envoys made the journey to Edo to pay their respects to the Shogun; the Shogun did *not* travel to Kyoto to pay his respects to the emperor, who was maintained as a largely powerless figurehead throughout most of Japan's early modern period.

KIRA Yoshinaka (1641-1703): Kira Kôzuke no suke Yoshinaka was a direct retainer of the Shogun and senior bakufu protocol official. Kira was killed in his Edo mansion by forty-six former retainers of ASANO Naganori in 1703, twenty-two months after Asano was ordered to commit seppuku in punishment for attacking Kira in the shogun's castle.

Neo-Confucianism: philosophical system based on the writings of Chinese thinker ZHU Xi (1130-1200), whose ideas constituted a major revival and reinterpretation of older Confucian ideas. Neo-Confucianism was introduced to Japan by Buddhist monks during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) and became the basis of the Tokugawa bakufu's official ideology. Neo-Confucianism emphasized rationality, agrarianism, and the hierarchical ordering of interpersonal relationships. Neo-Confucians buttressed their theories through appeals to the natural world, arguing that hierarchy permeated not only the human realm but that of nature as well.

Rônin: masterless samurai.

Samurai: members of the feudal warrior class that emerged around the 10th century, bound to their lords by a strict martial code. During the Tokugawa period, the samurai were forced to live in cities and towns, away from their traditional agricultural power bases. As a result, the class became increasingly dependent on stipends given to them by their lords rather than on earnings taken directly from personal agricultural holdings. This trend parallels the increasing bureaucratization of the samurai over the same period. As economic and legal structures changed, more and more samurai became concerned with intellectual and administrative issues rather than with military affairs.

Seppuku: ritual suicide by disembowelment. Reserved for samurai, seppuku was seen as honorable in part because it allowed an individual to take his own life rather than be executed like a common criminal.

Shogun: a truncation of the longer term Sei Taishôgun, or "Barbarian Suppressing General". The title was first granted in 1192 during the Kamakura period. The shogun nominally ruled at the pleasure of the emperor, who was based in the old capital of Kyoto. The shogun was recognized as the sovereign of the country for most of the Tokugawa period.

Tokugawa: the name of a powerful military clan whose members ruled Japan from 1603 to 1867. This period is often referred to as the Tokugawa period of Japanese history. The Tokugawa shogun presided over a complex state composed of various types of domains which were ruled with varying degrees of autonomy by some 200 local lords, also known as daimyo. ASANO Naganori was one such lord.