Spring 1-1-2010

Takadachi : The Last Stand of Yoshitsune and His Loyal Retainers

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Takadachi

The Last Stand of Yoshitsune and His Loyal Retainers

by

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B.A., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts
Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations
2010
Signature Page

This thesis entitled:
*Takadachi*: The Last Stand of Yoshitsune and His Loyal Retainers
Written by Daniel Topal
has been approved for the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract

*Takadachi* 高館, a *kôwakamai* ballad-drama published in the early Edo Period focuses upon the final episode in the life of Minamoto no Yoshitsune: his last stand and death at Takadachi castle. Although this *kôwakamai* focuses on an extremely popular figure, there has been little research done on the piece and it remains untranslated. This thesis provides a translation of the opening passages of *Takadachi* as well as a discussion of the ways in which it builds on the character of Yoshitsune as depicted in previous texts such as the *Gikeiki* and the *Heike monogatari*. I argue that *Takadachi* shows Yoshitsune acting contrary to his previous depictions in ways that shift the focus of the narrative to his retainers who present the ideal example of the loyal *bushi* dying in defense of his lord. It is this ideal form of loyalty, which exists primarily in literature, which was popular with audiences in the Edo Period and connects *Takadachi* to the idea that there was a concrete code of conduct for all *bushi* that became popular during the Edo Period.
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Introduction

Minamoto no Yoshitsune 源の義経 (1159-1189) is perhaps Japan’s most popular literary character.¹ The kōwakamai 幸若舞, or ballad-dance drama, Takadachi 高館² represents an un-translated and barely studied depiction of the final episode of Yoshitsune’s life. A translation of the opening passage of Takadachi 高館 will be provided along with background information crucial to understanding the importance of this little-studied text. This paper will also demonstrate how Takadachi takes advantage of Yoshitsune’s image in order to use his retainers as the poster children for the bushi ideal of loyalty.

This paper contributes to the discourse on Yoshitsune and his exploits by providing a translation of the opening passages of Takadachi as well as a discussion of the text’s themes. The paper will also compare the kōwakamai text with a contemporary kojóruri by the same title and covering the same subject matter as the kōwakamai. By examining the differences between the two different texts from two different performance traditions we can gain insight into the structure of Takadachi.

No examination of Yoshitsune can overlook the thorough study of Yoshitsune’s life by Kuroita Katsumi, Yoshitsune–den (A Biography of Yoshitsune, 1936), which has served as a comprehensive look at the life of Yoshitsune and as the source of a great deal of background information for this work as well as many of the studies of Yoshitsune. While Kuroita’s work was followed by an overwhelming number of studies of the

¹ Elizabeth Oyler, Swords, Oaths and Prophetic Visions: Authoring Warrior Rule in Medieval Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 86.

historical and literary Yoshitsune, his early study remains a useful and detailed resource. Helen McCullough’s translation of the Gikeiki, *Yoshitsune: A Fifteenth-Century Japanese Chronicle* (1966)\(^3\) also provides biographical and historical information regarding Yoshitsune’s life, and as the only English language translation of the Gikeiki was an invaluable resource for not only this study but also all studies of Yoshitsune in English. McCullough has also published a translation of the *Heike monogatari* (The Tale of the Heike, 1988), in which Yoshitsune figures in a relatively minor but pivotal role. Joining his elder brother, Minamoto no Yoritomo, Yoshitsune serves as one of Yoritomo’s lieutenants in their struggle to overthrow the Taira. Although he leads his forces to victories in battle Yoshitsune is not the primary character the *Heike*, though it does provide a great deal of information about characters and events that are central to Yoshitsune and the literature that describes his life. In addition to McCullough’s translation, there are two more relatively recent translations of the *Heike*, one translated by Burton Watson and Haruo Shirane (The Tales of the Heike, 2006)\(^4\) and another by Hiroshi Kitagawa and Bruce T. Tsuchida (The Tale of the Heike, 1975).\(^5\)

English studies by Paul Varley\(^6\) and Ivan Morris\(^7\) speak of Yoshitsune’s role as a tragic hero, the ill-fated hero who can do nothing to escape his tragic downfall but never

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surrenders his ideals. Both Varley and Morris briefly discuss how this image is turned upside down by the Koshigoe Letter, which is found in both the *Heike monogatari* and the *Gikeiki*, in which Yoshitsune pledges his allegiance to Yoritomo and begs for his forgiveness. In the letter Yoshitsune uses self-pity and self-degradation to try to arouse Yoritomo’s sympathy, but he only succeeds in damaging his own warrior image.\(^7\)

More recently, Elizabeth Oyler discusses the Koshigoe Letter in *Swords, Oaths and Prophetic Visions: Authoring Warrior Rule in Medieval Japan.*\(^8\) Instead of focusing on the Koshigoe Letter’s effect on Yoshitsune’s reputation, Oyler uses the letter to examine the relationship between Yoshitsune and Yoritomo. She pays particular attention to the oath of loyalty that Yoshitsune extends to his elder half-brother even though they are already well on the way to becoming enemies, an action which helps build Yoshitsune’s image as the ideal warrior.

Tazawa Ayako’s recent study of Yoshitsune focuses on his representation in the *Gikeiki*. In *Gikeiki ni okeru Yoshitsune zô no ikkansei: Maki dairoku no motsu imi* she notes that the *Gikeiki* provides the image of a fearsome and vicious military commander.\(^10\)

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8 Varley, *Warriors of Japan: As Portrayed in the War Tales*, 153.

9 Oyler, *Swords, Oaths and Prophetic Visions*, 91.

Still, Yoshitsune has been the subject of a myriad number of works of literature and drama which do not always portray him in the same manner as the Gikeiki. The Yoshitsune of Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees (Yoshitsune senbon zakura, 1747) does not appear as the fearless military leader depicted in the Heike monogatari or as the aggressive and skilled warrior of the Gikeiki. Instead Yoshitsune has a much more subdued and passive role in this play as Stanleigh H. Jones points out in the introduction to his translation of the text.\textsuperscript{11}

Sources that deal with Takadachi are few. In English the only studies that treat Takadachi are works by James Araki and C.J. Dunn. Araki’s survey of kôwakamai in The Ballad-Drama of Medieval Japan mentions Takadachi as an example of kôwakamai tales that involve Yoshitsune and depict episodes from his life. Takadachi is presented as an example of a story that, as Araki says, depicts “a glorified account of Yoshitsune’s last battle.”\textsuperscript{12}

Takadachi also briefly appears in Dunn’s study of kojôruri: The Early Puppet Drama. Dunn’s discussion briefly highlights differences between the kôwakamai and kojôruri versions of Takadachi as part of a discussion as to how they differ stylistically. Dunn points out the absence of Suzuki’s michiyuki from the kojôruri version of the tale.


\textsuperscript{12} James Araki, The Ballad-Drama of Medieval Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 132.
He claims that this difference makes the story easier to follow for the audience because of the faster pace of the kojōruri versus its kōwakamai counterpart.\(^\text{13}\)

**Bushidō: The Warrior’s Code of Ethics**

A central theme of *Takadachi* is the loyalty of Yoshitsune’s men. The extraordinary nature of their feelings for their lord would be interpreted in modern times to stem from bushidō, the code of conduct for the bushi. Much like chivalry for the knight of medieval Europe, bushidō provided a clear set of rules that governed a warrior’s life. However, this popularized set of ideals actually sprouts from the Tokugawa period, hundreds of years after the exploits of Yoshitsune and his men.

By the middle of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) a concrete code of conduct and values for the Japanese warrior had been organized by Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933) in his 1899 English language work *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan* (武士道).\(^\text{14}\) Nitobe was born at a time when the samurai were losing their official position in Japanese society. By the turn of the twentieth century the samurai status as the Japanese warrior class had been abolished as the new Meiji government considered their existence to be unnecessary as well as dangerous. Nitobe’s treatise on what it meant to be a samurai was born not out of personal experience but as a result of a debate that had raged since the beginning of the Tokugawa period.

\(^{13}\) C.J. Dunn, *The Early Japanese Puppet Drama* (Caxton Hill, Hertford, UK: Stephen Austin and Sons Ltd., 1966), 44.

The Tokugawa period not only heralded a new period of relative peace but a period of literacy for the majority of the warrior class. Both of these combined to foster a discussion of the characteristics of a samurai.\textsuperscript{15} As the last large battle involving the samurai had occurred before the beginning of the Tokugawa period, these treatises relied upon speculation, as well as heavily incorporating Neo-Confucianism values. The heavy emphasis that Neo-Confucianism placed upon loyalty to one’s ruler was appealing to those trying to codify the bushi’s life. This occurred during a time when the bushi were faced with the challenge of a society that no longer needed their particular skill sets as the Tokugawa period marked a period of peace with no wars to occupy the bushi. As they were faced with the challenges to their identity as a warrior class some reacted by trying to create a code of conduct that could act as concrete definition of their identity in society.\textsuperscript{16}

Loyalty as an ideal aspect of the Japanese warrior’s conduct had been emphasized much earlier than the Tokugawa period. The Seventeen-Article Constitution written by Prince Shôtoku in 720 emphasizes the importance of loyalty of all imperial subjects to the emperor.\textsuperscript{17} However, encouraging loyalty to the emperor is not the same as producing a concrete code of conduct for an entire class.

Until the Tokugawa period there was no distinct set of rules by which the bushi lived. Various clans had house rules and regulations that governed their own members,

\textsuperscript{15} Hurst, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushidô Ideal,” 514.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 514-515.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 516.
but they did not extend any further.\textsuperscript{18} Even loyalty, the much touted ideal aspect remained a somewhat fluid concept. During the Battle of Sekigahara (1600) Tokugawa Ieyasu convinced, by using the promise of land, several major commanders in Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s army to switch sides during the battle. To do this flies in the face of the strict codes of conduct introduced during the peace of the Tokugawa period. However these codes of conduct, like Nitobe’s bushidô, were only ideals and were never rooted in the actual actions of the bushi class.

Still these ideals found an audience in the Tokugawa period when the bushi were no longer in constant warfare and were using their newfound literacy to speculate about their status as the warrior class. Takadachi’s theme of loyalty to one’s lord would have been extremely appealing to audiences of the Tokugawa period, especially to the bushi who were the primary audience of kôwakamai productions. The story of Yoshitsune’s retainers sacrificing themselves in the face of unbeatable odds goes hand in hand with the samurai ideal of loyalty. Just as the exploits of the forty-seven ronin appealed to Tokugawa period audiences because of the characters’ adherence to a code of conduct that was more appealing than the reality of how bushi acted historically, Takadachi struck a chord with audiences of the early Tokugawa period.\textsuperscript{19} Takadachi resonates with the ideal concept of how the warrior class should act and reinforces it by using well-known and popular characters as an example of this ideal.

\textsuperscript{18} Hurst, “Death, Honor and Loyalty,” 515.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 523-524.
The *kôwakamai Takadachi* focuses on the final episode in Yoshitsune’s life. It begins with Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199) procuring an Imperial edict to kill Yoshitsune. He then orders Nagasaki Shirô to lead a force of several thousand to Ôshu. Takadachi then lists warriors who were assembled to hunt down Yoshitsune. Only those who have an active role in the fighting later in the text are specifically named. In total there are said to have been over eight thousand warriors sent to the northeast to bring back Yoshitsune’s head.

In the castle of Takadachi, Yoshitsune and his men hear the news that they will be soon facing the enemy. Yoshitsune requests that his men take his head to Kamakura so that they may escape their fate. Although his order could be interpreted as demonstrating his loyalty to his own men, the order damages the honor of his retainers. In order for them to follow his order to leave him they would have to not only abandon him but give up their loyalty for him as well. In being disloyal they would have been acting in opposition with what was considered the ideal actions of a retainer. His loyal retainers shrug off this request and begin to plan for the next day’s battle. They then proceed to drink and dance before their inevitable deaths. Calling out from the dark, Suzuki Saburô Shigeie announces himself after having traveled from his home in Kishû.

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23 While Suzuki is said to have accompanied Yoshitsune to Takadachi and is said to have died at the Battle of Koromo River, his dates of birth and death are unknown according to the editors of *Mai no hon*. See *ibid.*, 441.
Reunited with both his lord and his brother, Kamei Rokurô, Suzuki goes before Yoshitsune to reiterate his loyalty and his intention to join in the next day’s fighting.

As Nagasaki’s forces attack the castle, Yoshitsune’s nine loyal warriors engage them to keep them from reaching their lord. Within the castle Yoshitsune calmly recites the *Lotus Sutra*. By the time he finishes, only the monk-warrior Benkei remains alive. While Benkei holds off the enemy, Yoshitsune commits *seppuku* to keep from being captured or killed by his brother’s forces.

**Kôwakamai: The Ballad-Drama**

The *kôwakamai* libretto of *Takadachi* used for this project comes from the type-set edition of the *kôwakamai* in the collection *Mai no hon* 舞の本 found in volume 59 of the Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei series. *Mai no hon* is an illustrated collection of *kôwakamai* libretti that were part of the popular repertoire of performances from the early Tokugawa period. The version of *Takadachi* in the Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei series is based on the *Kaneiseihanbon* variant edition of *Mai no hon*, which was originally published in 1632 as a woodblock printed, bound and illustrated edition. The identities of the author and illustrator are unknown.

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24 Like his older brother, Kamei’s birth and death dates are unknown.


25 *Ibid.*, 441


This original edition of Takadachi is a tanroku bon, a bound, illustrated, woodblock printed text. The illustrations are generally full page and are sparsely hand-colored with just two or three colors used to suggest the vivid colors and gold coloring of nara-ehon 奈良繪本. Nara-ehon, or Nara picture books, are woodblock printed manuscripts that were produced from the end of the Muromachi period to the Tokugawa period with colorful but simple illustrations. The tanroku bon derived from the nara-ehon tradition, but they were meant for a much broader market. Reflecting the relative mass production of the tanroku bon, these bound texts were produced in a much cheaper fashion than the nara-ehon they sought to emulate; they contained popular stories that were meant to appeal to a wide audience.

Derived from kusemai, kôwakamai began as a popular school of the kusemai dance drama. Though not much is know about kusemai’s original form it is known to have been an established method of performing narrative stories, which included a rhythmic dance accompanied by a drum. Developing into a genre in its own right, kôwakamai performance focused on traditional bushi ideals, such as loyalty and filial piety. By the sixteenth century kôwakamai had high esteem among the bushi, who particularly enjoyed tales revolving around their own class. Some performers of

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kōwakamai were able to escape the traditional low rank of their profession and were even granted land.³⁰

_Kōwakamai_ is a kind of ballad-dance drama comprised of gliding movements. The subdued movements of the performance demonstrate abstract and restrained emotions through the actor’s performance. These are accompanied by a recitation of the story being performed. The script of _kōwakamai_ is written in prose and is delivered by a single reciter. Individual characters can be given specific passages to recite, but the vast majority of the story is the responsibility of the reciter.³¹

Instead of the live actors who perform _kōwakamai_ and dance along with the chanted narration, _kojóruri_ used puppets to act out the action.³² To keep the audience’s focus on the puppets the men who control the puppets dress all in black so that they blend into the background. The _kojóruri_ performance also includes musical accompaniment by a _shamisen_, a three stringed instrument that originated in the Ryūkyū Islands and was adapted for the Japanese stage in the 16th century. During the performance the _shamisen_ is used not to provide background music, but to underscore and emphasize important portions of the story.³³

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³² Leiter, _Historical Dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre_, 190.

Two Versions of the Same Story

It would be difficult to discuss kōwakamai in this paper while ignoring kojōruri, considering that the other extant example of Takadachi is a kojōruri also dating from the early Edo period and published as a tanroku bon in 1625. The most readily apparent difference between the kōwakamai version and the kojōruri version of the Takadachi libretto is the structure of the narratives. Like other examples of the genre, the kōwakamai version of Takadachi maintains a single unbroken narrative. In contrast, the kojōruri, also in keeping with the standard format of the genre, is divided into five acts: the opening, or sambasō, followed by three kyōgen, and capped by the ending or shūgen. The sambasō and the shūgen generally act to provide an auspicious opening and ending. The kyōgen are the middle of the performance and contain the majority of the action. In the kojōruri of 1625 each chapter is marked with a chapter heading: ichi danme, ni danme, san danme, yon danme, and go danme. The chapters of the kojōruri each begin with the same phrase: sate mo sono nochi (well then, after that). This set phrase was a standard way of starting acts of all kojōruri.

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34 Dunn, The Early Japanese Puppet Drama, 44.
36 Dunn, The Early Japanese Puppet Drama, 44.
37 Ibid., 44.
Differences Between Versions of *Takadachi*

Both versions of *Takadachi* tell a familiar story and use themes that were popular in the *kojóruri* and *kôwakamai* genres. Stories of the *bushi* were popular subjects of both genres, and no subject was more popular than Yoshitsune. The plays dealt with themes such as loyalty, courage, and filial piety. These themes underlie both the *kojóruri* and the *kôwakamai* versions of *Takadachi*.

It is no surprise that the *kojóruri* and *kôwakamai* versions of *Takadachi* use similar language, since both were likely written and performed during the same time period. There are minor differences in verb tenses, particles, and word choice in the two texts, but these do not change the overall meaning or plot of either text.

It is possible to see how similar the two texts are by comparing their opening sentences. The *kôwakamai* opens: “Saruhodoni, Kamakura dono, Kajiwara wo mesare, ‘Ikani Kajiwara, uketamahare” 然程に、鎌倉殿、梶原を召され、「いかに梶原、承はれ (Presently, the Lord of Kamakura summoned Kajiwara) and commanded:

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38 Yoshitsune appears as the subject of a great many works from genres such as *nô*, *kôwakamai*, *kojóruri*, *kabuki* and *monogatari*. The story of his life is extremely popular even today and the stages of his life provide the subject matter of many short narratives such as the *kôwakamai* and *kojóruri* versions of *Takadachi*. See Oyler, *Swords, Oaths and Prophetic Visions*, 87.

39 Oyler, *Swords, Oaths and Prophetic Visions*, 86.

40 It is important to note that the punctuation is not original to either text and is due to the editing for the benefit of the reader.

41 Kajiwara Kagetoki 梶原景時 (–1200), a retainer of Minamoto no Yoritomo, joined the Gempei War against the Taira and fought under Minamoto no Yoshitsune against Minamoto no Yoshinaka. He reported back to Yoritomo and helped to solidify Yoritomo’s suspicions about Yoshitsune. See McCullough, *Yoshitsune*, 319.
“Somehow, listen and do this!)  

In contrast the *kojōruri* omits a particle and has some other changes in wording: Satemo sononochi, Yoritomo niwa, Kajiwara mesare, ikani kajiwara uketamaware さてもそののち、よりともには、かじばらめされ、いかにかじはらうけたまはれ (Well then, after that, Yoritomo summoned Kajiwara and commanded: “Somehow, listen and do this!)  

Both passages use a phrase that always comes at the beginning of a theatrical production of the genre: the *kōwakamai* uses *saruhodoni* while the *kojōruri* uses *satemo sononochi*. Yoritomo is the subject of both sentences, but the *kōwakamai* refers to him as the Lord of Kamakura, or *Kamakuradono*. The *kōwakamai* also uses the particle *wo* を to indicate that Kajiwara is the object of Yoritomo’s summons. The *kojōruri* omits the particle, perhaps making the sentence more colloquial, though it is still clear which word is the verb’s object. These opening sentences demonstrate that the minor differences in the language of the two versions of *Takadachi* do not cause any major differences in the overall plotline.

In addition to minor grammatical differences, the two versions of the story differ in some cases in how they refer to characters. As mentioned above the *kōwakamai* refers to Yoritomo respectfully as the Lord of Kamakura (Kamakuradono 鎌倉殿) while the *kojōruri* uses his name without his title and rank. This approach extends to other characters throughout the two texts. Throughout the *kōwakamai* version of the text Benkei is consistently referred to as Musashi 武蔵, Musashibō 武蔵坊, or Lord Musashi (Musashi-dono 武蔵殿). In the *kojōruri*, unless another character is respectfully addressing Benkei, the narrative refers to him as Benkei. For example, upon being

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summoned by Yoshitsune, Benkei leads the retainers as they come to hear the news from
Yoshitsune. The kōwakamai version of the line reads:

_Saburaitachi wo mesaruruni, itsumo kawaranu Musashibô wo saki toshite, ijô hachinin, kimi no omae ni kashikomaru._44

The line in the kojôruri is identical except for the name change:

_Saburaitachi wo mesaruruni, itsumo kawaranu, Benkei wo saki toshite, ijô hachinin, kimi no omae ni kashikomaru._45

The difference in the choice for character’s names between the two versions of
Takadachi suggests that the author of the kōwakamai is making a conscious effort to be
more respectful regarding the characters. This is understandable considering that
kōwakamai during the Edo Period were enjoyed primarily by the bushi and the
performance’s author and reciter would have been conscious of the importance of paying
them proper respect.

The primary differences between the two libretti of Takadachi are likely due to
the differences in genres. The kōwakamai version includes a _michiyuki_ 道行き, a “road
going” passage that describes a character’s journey.46 _Michiyuki_ use symbolic language
to make references to the story’s theme along with familiar place-names in order to
reinforce and evoke emotions in the audience. For Takadachi the _michiyuki_ is used to

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44 侍達を召さるに、いつも変わらぬ武蔵坊を先として、以上八人、君の御前に畏まる。See Asahara and Kitahara, _Mai no hon_, 440.

45 さふらいたちをめさるに、いつもかはらぬ、弁慶をさきとして、い上八人、きみのおまへにかしこまる。See Yokoyama, _Kojûrû shôhonshû_, 16.

46 Leiter, _Historical Dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre_, 234.
reinforce the difficulty of the journey undertaken by Yoshitsune’s retainer Suzuki as he attempts to clandestinely make his way north to join his lord.47

This slowing of the narrative pace by the michiyuki passage explains why the michiyuki is not included in the kojōruri, as it would not fit with the kojōruri’s faster pacing. In contrast, the kojōruri includes an emotional scene between the departing Suzuki and his wife instead of the michiyuki depicting Suzuki’s journey. This emotionally charged scene is shorter than the kowakamai’s michiyuki and thus in accord with the faster pacing and emotionally charged nature of the kojōruri genre.48 Still, the michiyuki and the parting scene serve the same purpose in their respective texts. The michiyuki in the kōwakamai and the emotional exchange between Suzuki and his wife in the kojōruri both serve to underscore the hardship endured by Suzuki because of his loyalty to Yoshitsune. It is this aspect of Suzuki’s character that is key to putting forward Takdachi’s theme of loyalty as the ideal aspect of a warrior’s character.


48 Dunn, The Early Japanese Puppet Drama, 44.
Yoshitsune’s Image

Seen as the archetype of the Japanese warrior, Minamoto no Yoshitsune is generally depicted as courageous, fierce, and loyal, as well as exceptionally skilled with a sword. This image of Yoshitsune began to be formed with his depiction in works such as the Heike monogatari and the Gikeiki. As his story was repeated and reinforced over the centuries, it has become impossible to separate the facts about Yoshitsune’s life from those that come from fiction as the truth has become irreparably intertwined with literary embellishment. Still, these texts depict Yoshitsune as a man who refuses to retreat or back down from any conflict. It is this aspect of Yoshitsune’s character that Takadachi uses to help shift the focus to his retainers.

The Life of Yoshitsune

Not much factual information is known about Yoshitsune. The son of Minamoto no Yoshitomo (1123-1160) and the Lady Tokiwa (1123-1180), a lady-in-waiting at court, Yoshitsune was not a particularly high-ranking member of the Minamoto clan. Born in 1159 during the Heiji Disturbance (1159-1160) that caused the initial downfall of the Minamoto at the hands of the Taira, Yoshitsune was a very young child when he was exiled to Mount Kurama. Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181), the head of the Taira clan, thought that by sending the child to train as a monk he would prevent him becoming an enemy of the Taira. The young Yoshitsune showed very little interest in his Buddhist

studies, however.50 When he was supposed to be training in the ways of a monk he was instead roaming the forests around Mount Hiei training in the arts of warfare.51

Refusing to take the tonsure and become a monk, Yoshitsune fled Kurama in 1174 for the far northeast territory of Ôshu. There, Fujiwara Hidehira (1122-1187) shielded him from the Taira in his castle, Takadachi. Yoshitsune remained there until he heard that his older half-brother Yoritomo was raising forces to challenge the Taira. Leaving the castle of Takadachi, Yoshitsune made his way from Ôshu to his half-brother’s camp ready to join in the fight against the Taira.52

While Yoshitsune did not share his older half-brother’s political savvy, he proved himself to be a highly competent military commander. Serving as one of Yoritomo’s two field commanders, he helped lead the Minamoto in many battles against the Taira. It is during this period that Yoshitsune gained a reputation for being well liked by his troops, primarily because he led his forces from the front line while other commanders preferred to remain safely in the rear.53

After the war, Yoritomo assumed power as the first Kamakura Shogun, but the relationship between the new Shogun and his young half-brother was very tenuous. Yoritomo may have even felt threatened by the younger Yoshitsune, fresh from his

50 McCullough, Yoshitsune, 13.
51 Ibid., 13.
53 Morris, The Nobility of Failure, 75.
victory over the Taira at Dan-no-ura. To make matters worse one of Yoritomo’s retainers, Kajiwara Kagetoki was working to alienate Yoshitsune from Yoritomo. Kajiwara felt that Yoshitsune was arrogant and impudent because during the Gempei War the younger warrior had ignored Kajiwara’s advice and even lectured the older more experienced commander. Back in Kamakura, Kajiwara worked to cast doubts about Yoshitsune in Yoritomo’s mind.

Yoshitsune’s downfall was ultimately caused by the conflict between Yoritomo and Yukiie. Yoritomo accused Yukiie of rebelling against him and ordered Yukiie killed. Yukiie turned to Yoshitsune for protection, and Yoshitsune obliged. Yoshitsune was then ordered to move against Yukiie, but he feigned sickness to avoid carrying out the order. Yoritomo took these actions as confirmation of Yoshitsune’s betrayal and decided to be rid of him.

When Yoritomo moved against his younger half-brother, Yoshitsune was not able to put together enough support to challenge him. Yoritomo was already Shogun and many lords had already pledged allegiance to him. Furthermore, as a lower ranking

54 Dan-no-ura was the concluding battle of the Gempei War, during which the young Emperor Antoku was drowned by his grandmother to prevent his capture by the Minamoto. See Kuroita Katsumi 黒板勝美, Yoshitsune-den 義経伝 (Tokyo: Chûô Kôronsha 中央公論社, 1939), 159-160.

55 McCullough, Yoshitsune, 22.

56 McCullough, Yoshitsune, 22.

57 Minamoto no Yukiie 源の行家 (d. 1186) was the one who had conveyed Prince Mochihito’s summons to the rest of the Minamoto. Yukiie was the brother of Minamoto no Yoshitomo and thus Yoritomo and Yoshitsune’s uncle. See ibid., 24.

58 Ibid., 24-25.
Minamoto, Yoshitsune did not have many retainers to rally to him. As a result, when he was forced to flee, he only had a few men who stood by him. One of these was Musashibō Benkei (1155-1189), who had pledged himself to Yoshitsune after being bested by the young warrior.  

After Yoshitsune fled to Ōshu, Yoritomo had the Emperor declare an edict calling for Yoshitsune’s head. Once he had official justification to seek his half-brother’s death, Yoritomo sent his retainer Nagasaki Shirō to lead an army of thousands against Yoshitsune’s handful of warriors. These few men fought fiercely to prevent Yoritomo’s warriors from taking Yoshitsune’s head. His loyal retainers’ delaying action allowed Yoshitsune to recite the Lotus sutra and commit seppuku.

Yoshitsune in the Heike monogatari

The Heike monogatari is the Kamakura period (1185-1333) chronicle of the Gempei War (1180-1185) and is one of the classic examples of gunki monogatari, or war tales. The textual background of this epic war chronicle is amazingly complex. With a multitude of variant textual lines there is no precise date of authorship, nor is there one author, as the various versions of the Heike monogatari were probably compiled from several different sources. The variants of the Heike monogatari fit into one of two traditions: the read texts (yomihon 読本) or the recited texts (kataribon 言り本). The

59 The first encounter between Benkei and Yoshitsune is described in the Gikeiki. Benkei was known for forcibly taking swords from warriors in the capital. After demanding that Yoshitsune turn over his ornate sword, the great Benkei lost the ensuing duel. See Ibid., 122-123.

60 McCullough, Yoshitsune, 30.
yomihon texts were recorded for reading, while the kataribon texts were memorized and recited by biwa hōshi 琵琶法師, blind mendicant monks.

The most commonly studied variant of the *Heike monogatari* is the Kakuichi-bon 覚一本, or Kakuichi variant, and it is considered the primary example of the kataribon textual lineage. Dictated by Akashi no Kakuichi 明石の覚一 (1299-1371) in 1371 to a disciple, the *Kakuichi-bon* emphasizes the themes that Kakuichi felt the most strongly about, such as the Buddhist theme of karma. However, the first translation of the *Heike* into English was based on the *rufu-bon* 流布本, which is a little studied variant edition. 61 Except for that first translation by A.L. Sadler, all other translations of the *Heike* into English are based on the *Kakuichi-bon*. Unless otherwise noted, the *Kakuichi-bon* is the textual variant referred to in this paper as the *Heike monogatari*.

Despite his contributions to the Minamotos’ ultimate victory over the Taira, Yoshitsune plays a relatively minor role in the *Heike monogatari*. Apart from a brief description of his crossing of the Uji River, the image of Yoshitsune in the *Heike monogatari* is found primarily in the descriptions of him leading his troops at the battles of Ichinotani, Yashima, and Dan-no-ura. In these episodes the *Heike monogatari* creates the image of a ferocious warrior who prefers to lead his men from the front line instead of directing them from the rear. His ferociousness in battle inspires intense loyalty in his men but verges on recklessness.

Although the depiction of Yoshitsune in the *Heike monogatari* is relatively consistent, Yoshitsune receives an unflattering treatment in a variant in the yomihon

lineage. The Gempei seisuki (The Rise and Fall of the Minamoto and the Taira), a Kamakura period history of the fighting between the Taira and the Minamoto, describes the young Yoshitsune at the time when he joined his older half-brother for battle as “a small, pale youth with crooked teeth and bulging eyes.” This image of a small awkward youth would appear to run counter to Yoshitsune’s depiction in other variants of the Heike monogatari as well as in the rest of the Gempei seisuki. Helen McCullough states that “this unflattering description was either ignored or explained away as the Yoshitsune legend developed.” Whatever his physical appearance, Yoshitsune’s impressive reputation stems from his conduct on the battlefield.

The battles that illustrate Yoshitsune’s qualities are some of the most exciting episodes in the Heike monogatari. For example, at Ichi-no-tani Yoshitsune splits his forces in order to take the Taira by surprise. He sends the majority of his men against the front of the Taira stronghold while he leads a smaller body of men charging down a steep cliff in order to attack the Taira’s unprotected rear. This propensity for leading from the front later caused a quarrel between Yoshitsune and Kajiwara no Kagetoki, another of Yoritomo’s lieutenants, before Dan-no-ura. Kajiwara wanted to lead the attack himself and argued that it would be improper for Yoshitsune, who was the commander of the Minamoto forces taking part in the battle, to lead the attack. Yoshitsune in turn claimed

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62 Morris, The Nobility of Failure, 74.

63 McCullough, Yoshitsune, 5.

64 Morris, The Nobility of Failure, 73-74.
that the only true commander was Yoritomo. The argument escalated, with Yoshitsune calling Kajiwara the biggest fool in Japan, and the two had to be physically separated.65

This refusal to back down is another of Yoshitsune’s qualities that is evident in the Heike monogatari. Just as in his argument with Kajiwara, retreat is not an option. Yoshitsune is prepared to accept. For example, while preparing for the Battle at Yashima, the Minamoto discuss how to prepare for the battle. Unlike the Taira who come from the Ise Peninsula and excel at naval warfare, the Minamoto were only used to fighting on land. As they prepare their boats for the battle, Kajiwara suggests they fit the boats with “reverse oars” that will allow them to easily move in any direction. The suggestion is immediately rejected by Yoshitsune who declares that even considering moving backward and retreating from battle is a thought unbecoming of a warrior.66

The Yoshitsune portrayed in the Heike monogatari is a stalwart and ferocious commander who simply refuses to back down. Whether it is an argumentative ally or a Taira enemy, Yoshitsune does not back away from confrontation. Yoshitsune forge ahead, the symbol of a relentless warrior who does not retreats.

Yet, there is one incident in the Heike monogatari that is at odds with the Yoshitsune depicted leading his troops during the Gempei War. After the war is over, Yoshitsune triumphantly returns to Kamakura, Yoritomo’s seat of power, bringing with him captives of war to be presented to Yoritomo. Upon arriving he discovers that his relationship with Yoritomo has soured and that he has been forbidden from entering the


66 Oyler, Swords, Oaths and Prophetic Visions, 93.
city. Making camp outside Kamakura at nearby Koshigoe, he sends a message through Ōe no Hiromoto trying to communicate his loyalty to Yoritomo.67

Having been appointed a deputy [of His Lordship, Yoritomo] and having received an imperial edict, I, Minamoto no Yoshitsune, defeated the enemies of the court and avenged the shame of my dead father. Although deserving of reward, instead I vainly shed crimson tears because of a wicked person’s slander. The slanderer’s charges have not been examined for their truth or falsity; yet still I am barred from entering Kamakura. Unable to express my true feelings, I languish in idleness here at Koshigoe. How long it had been since I gazed upon my brother’s beloved countenance! Yet our fraternal tie is already rent. Is it because the fate that bound us is exhausted? Or is it the result of a bad karma from a previous existence? How very sad. Unless my dead father’s revered spirit is born again, who else is there to tell of my anguish? Who is there to take pity on me? To discuss such matters again may sound like grumbling, but no sooner did I receive life from my parents than my father died and I became an orphan. . . .I was given the opportunity to go up to the capital to track down the Taira. After first killing Kiso no Yoshinaka, I set out to destroy the Taira. At times I whipped my fine steed over rugged peaks, with no thought that my life might be crushed by the enemy… using my armor and helmet as a pillow and pursing the way of the bow and arrow, I aimed only to assuage the anger of the spirit of my dead father and fulfill the long-cherished wish of the Minamoto. My appointment to lieutenant with fifth rank is an assignment of significance for our house of Minamoto. What higher honor could there be [than to serve the court]? Nevertheless, my grief now is profound, my sorrow great. Without the divine assistance of the buddhas and Shinto gods, how will my supplications be heard? I have sent a number of pledges, using the backs of Ox King amulets, proclaiming to all the gods and buddhas of Japan that I harbor no ambitions. But still I have received no pardon from Yoritomo.68

Calling upon his past service in the name of their clan, Yoshitsune tries in vain to gain sympathy from Yoritomo. Paul Varley points out that the Koshigoe Letter depicts Yoshitsune as a “humble supplicant, pleading, almost groveling for forgiveness from the


68 Ibid., 153.
intransigent Yoritomo." The Yoshitsune who sought Yoritomo’s forgiveness by sending this message is at odds with the earlier depiction of Yoshitsune leading his men in battle. Instead of displaying the same traits as the fearless general who charged headlong at his enemy the Yoshitsune depicted through the Koshigoe Letter tries to use sympathy and self-pity to manipulate his brother’s pity to gain his objective. Though this episode depicts him as having a weaker side, overall the Yoshitsune of the Heike monogatari is a stalwart warrior who refuses to do anything less than fearlessly fight his enemies.

**Gikeiki’s Yoshitsune**

While Yoshitsune is a minor character in the Heike monogatari, he is the central focus of the Gikeiki. As a chronicle of his life, the Gikeiki focuses upon parts of his life that occur outside of the Gempei War. The author and known date of publication are unknown, although the chronicles are thought to date from the Nanboku-chô Period (1336-1392). According to Helen McCullough the extant texts of Gikeiki do not have any substantial variations among them.70

While the Gikeiki does not focus upon Yoshitsune’s exploits while fighting against the Taira, it still depicts him in a similar manner as the Heike monogatari: he is depicted as a relentless warrior who refuses to retreat or surrender. An excellent example of this is found in the depiction of Yoshitsune’s first encounter with the warrior monk Musashibô Benkei 武蔵坊弁慶 (1159-1189). Benkei has been forcibly taking swords

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70 McCullough, *Yoshitsune*, v.
from warriors in order to amass a collection of one thousand blades, and when he sees Yoshitsune’s beautifully ornate sword, he decides that he has to have it. Refusing to give up his sword, the young Yoshitsune meets the much larger, older, and more experienced Benkei blow for blow:

Unsheathing his own weapon, Yoshitsune ran toward his adversary’s position near the wall. Benkei sprang back with a tremendous blow in Yoshitsune’s direction. . . . Yoshitsune, darting under Benkei’s left arm like a streak of lightning. Benkei had put such a thrust into his sword that the tip became embedded in the wall. As he sought to release it, Yoshitsune kicked him in the chest with his left foot, lashing out so vigorously that the weapon flew from Benkei’s hands. Yoshitsune snatched it up and sprang with a shout to the top of the nine-foot wall, while Benkei stood motionless, half-believing in his astonishment and pain that he had met a devil.

Benkei is an experienced warrior known for his strength and savagery. Yoshitsune, on the other hand, is described previously in the text as a small young man, not the sort who would easily be able to stand up to the ferocious warrior monk. Benkei thought that he could scare Yoshitsune into giving up his sword by his intimidating presence, but instead Yoshitsune, a warrior of even greater skill, bested him. The fight scene serves to establish Yoshitsune’s fighting prowess, but it also demonstrates his character. This young man will not even back down from the ferocious Benkei, a quality that extends to his actions on the battlefield. The image is further enhanced when the two encounter each other again the following day. Upon finding the young boy, Benkei challenges Yoshitsune once again. When Yoshitsune takes off his outer cloak in order to free himself of any physical encumbrances for his fight with Benkei “the awed spectators

71 McCullough, *Yoshitsune*, 123.

72 Ibid., 123.
knew that he was no ordinary person.”  

Although this is not a description of Yoshitsune’s physical prowess, these words create the image of an awe-inspiring warrior who not only does not shrink away from a fight but relishes it.

This depiction of Yoshitsune is consistent throughout the Giikeiki. Tazawa Ayako argues in her “Giikeiki ni okeru Yoshitsune zô no ikkansei: Maki dairoku no motsu imi” that throughout the Giikeiki Yoshitsune is depicted as a fierce warrior who meets all of his opponents with the same skill and ferocity that allowed him to defeat Benkei.  

While Yoshitsune’s overall image in the Giikeiki does fit this trend, there is a brief point of inconsistency. Just as in the Heike monogatari, Yoshitsune finds himself forbidden from entering Kamakura after the end of the Gempei War. Again he makes his camp at Koshigoe and sends a message to Yoritomo seeking Yoritomo’s forgiveness. The Koshigoe Letter once again briefly shows Yoshitsune seeking pity trying to gain Yoritomo’s forgiveness. Still, this message is only a single brief episode among many in the Giikeiki and the Heike monogatari. Even though it does show Yoshitsune in a manner that is at odds with his image from the rest of the Giikeiki, the rest of the text consistently depicts Yoshitsune as a fierce and skillful warrior and commander, the image of the ideal warrior.

**Yoshitsune and Takadachi**

In contrast to depictions of Yoshitsune in the Heike monogatari and the Giikeiki, the Yoshitsune in Takadachi seems to be closer to the one that appears in the Koshigoe

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73 McCullough, Yoshitsune, 126.

Letter episode. After hearing that Yoritomo’s forces are moving against him,
Yoshitsune’s resolve seems to crumble. His inevitable death is approaching fast and
instead of standing fearlessly in the face of this future, he decides to just let the end come.
Instead of standing up in the face of his brother’s army he chooses to give Yoritomo what
he wants without a fight.

Hearing news of the advancing enemy, the samurai were summoned, and
with Benkei leading them as always, the above-mentioned eight, appeared
before their lord Yoshitsune. Seeing this he said, “My luck has run out.
Tomorrow will be my last. Take my head and take it to Kanto, and when
you have received the reward for your service, do your duty and pray for
me in the next life.”

Wanting to take his own life to avoid being killed by one of Yoritomo’s warriors is an
appropriate response, but in taking these actions Yoshitsune is moving away from the
way he has been depicted previously. In other depictions, such as in the Gikeiki and the
Heike monogatari, Yoshitsune has consistently refused to back away from conflict, even
when the odds are against him. Here he chooses to kill himself rather than fight.

While seppuku is the proper, honorable action to take in such a situation,
Yoshitsune should, to be consistent with how he has been depicted in other works, want
to fight his brother’s forces. The change in his character in Takadachi causes the
narratives focus to shift to his retainers as they reaffirm their loyalty and refuse to
abandon him to his brother’s forces. This is similar to an episode in the Heike
monogatari that takes place during the period of time between the routing of the Taira at
Ichi-no-Tani and their complete defeat at Dan-no-Ura. As a result of Minamoto no
Yoshinaka trying to wrest control of the clan away from Yoritomo, the Minamoto are

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75 Asahara and Kitahara, Mai no hon, 440. Unless otherwise noted translations from Takadachi are my own.
plunged into a period of fighting amongst themselves. Yoritomo emerges victorious, and Yoshinaka is hunted down and beheaded.\footnote{McCullough, \textit{Yoshitsune} 15-16.} Pursued by Yoritomo’s men, Yoshinaka’s forces were eventually whittled down until he is left with just his most loyal retainer, Imai no Shirô Kanehira. Thinking to die fighting, Yoshinaka tries to turn and fight but is restrained by Imai who reminds him that he could be killed by a lower ranking warrior, thus dying ignobly and besmirching his honor.\footnote{Burton Watson, trans. and Haruo Shirane, ed., \textit{The Tales of the Heike} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 87.} Instead, Imai argues, Yoshinaka should kill himself while Imai holds off the oncoming enemy.

Imai leaped to the ground, seized the bit of Lord Kiso’s horse, and declared, “No matter how fine a name a warrior may make for himself at most times, if he should slip up at the last, it could mean an everlasting blot on his honor. . . .Suppose we become separated in combat and you are surrounded and cut down by a mere retainer, a person of no worth at all! How terrible if people were to say, ‘Lord Kiso, famous throughout the whole of Japan – done in by so-and-so’s retainer!’ You must hurry to that grove of pines!”\footnote{Watson, \textit{The Tales of the Heike}, 86-87.}

Yoshinaka agrees, but as it is winter, he is unlucky enough to ride his horse over a partial frozen rice field that has been hidden by snow. The horse falls through the ice and becomes stuck. Turning to see what has become of Imai, Yoshinaka is fatally struck in the face by an arrow.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 87.}

Yoshinaka besmirched his honor because he let his head be taken by the enemy, specifically by a warrior of lesser stature. However, his allowing Imai to talk him out of rushing into a battle where he would have surely died in the same manner moves the
emphasis to Imai as an ideal retainer. This is the model that Yoshitsune follows in
*Takadachi*. The order that he gives his loyal retainers to abandon him shows that he has
given up and is no longer acting like the heroic figure that he is built up to be in other
works of literature and drama. Maintenance of Yoshitsune’s heroic image would require
him maintaining complete sincerity by defying his brother instead of giving up his head
without a fight.

In presenting Yoshitsune acting in this way *Takadachi* seems to lose its focus on a
heroic main character. Instead of meeting his brother’s army in battle, Yoshitsune kills
himself. Yet, just as Yoshinaka’s failure allows Imai’s qualities to shine through in the
*Heike monogatari*, Yoshitsune’s faltering gives his retainers a chance to step up and
demonstrate their loyalty. Yoshitsune does not take part in the action after the first act,
which allows the loyalty of his retainers to shine through. This is crucial to the narrative.

Acting as a good retainer, Imai kept Yoshinaka from acting incorrectly and
risking his honor by charging headlong into the midst of his enemies with no concern for
the high chance of being killed by a lower ranking warrior.\(^{80}\) Even though Yoshinaka
was ultimately killed before he was able to kill himself to keep his honor intact, Imai
could not have foreseen his lord’s misfortune that resulted in his death. In the same
manner, Yoshitsune’s retainers restrain him from acting improperly. Instead of following
his order to take his head to Yoritomo, they laugh at the very idea of betraying him in
such a way, demonstrating the depth of their feelings.\(^{81}\)

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\(^{80}\) Watson, *The Tales of the Heike*, 87.

\(^{81}\) Asahara and Kitahara, *Mai no hon*, 441.
Kataoka and Kamei no Rokurô said: “How vexing this command is. Who is there who would surrender our young lord’s head in Kamakura? Those who have not fallen till now, surely will attend you. Still, if there is anyone here who thinks he will fall away, say farewell and leave. No one will hold a grudge.” When they said this, and sternly surveying the room, Yoshitake and Hirotsubo responded together, “You speak coldly. Who would respond that way? We know the enemy will come at dawn. Probably they’ll split into two groups to attack the front gate and the rear gate. Though our comrades will be outnumbered, the battle shall scatter blossoms.”

Their loyalty to Yoshitsune demands that they should act to protect his honor by going against his orders and remaining by his side. His retainers waste no time in declaring that they have no intention of betraying their lord to Yoritomo just so that they can survive. Taking note of Yoshitsune’s command, his retainers make their feelings known, calling the command “vexing” and “cold.” Having declared their intention to remain at Yoshitsune’s side, they move to discussing the fierce battle that lies before them. By their refusal to leave Yoshitsune’s side his retainers demonstrate the extent of their loyalty for their lord. They place him before themselves, exactly the conduct of proper retainers.

**Yoshitsune as the Tragic Hero**

There is no question in either version of *Takadachi* that Yoshitsune is the underdog, and this creates his image as what Paul Varley and Ivan Morris refer to as the tragic hero. Morris provides the following description of this kind of character:

> He is the man whose single-minded sincerity will not allow him to make the manoeuvres and compromises that are so often needed for mundane

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82 いくさははなをちらすべし  Literally: war shall scatter blossoms. This is a set phrase that Yoshitake and Hirotsubo are using to imply that they will fight fiercely.

Asahara and Kitahara, *Mai no hon*, 441.
success. During the early years his courage... may propel him rapidly upwards, but he is wedded to the losing side and will ineluctably be cast down.\textsuperscript{83}

Yoshitsune fits Morris’s definition perfectly: a sincere warrior whose skills allow him to rise rapidly, but who, no matter what, will end up losing.\textsuperscript{84} Yoshitsune’s story is one that resonated very strongly with Edo period audiences, who were accustomed to the stories of the bushi and their ideals. Orphaned by the Taira, Yoshitsune demonstrates his loyalty and filial piety to his clan by joining in the uprising against the Taira in order to avenge his father’s death and his clan’s destruction.\textsuperscript{85} Many times, such as the first time he encounters Benkei, Yoshitsune fights when all the odds are against him. During the Gempei War, he serves as a field commander, taking an active and visible role in battle by leading his forces in the field instead of directing his troops passively from the rear.\textsuperscript{86} His is the very image of the heroic warrior who follows the warrior ideal to the letter. In comparison, his brother seems a power-hungry opportunist. Even though it is Yoritomo who was the political winner and who was an immensely important figure in Japanese history as the first Kamakura Shogun, it is Yoshitsune who has been praised for generations throughout Japanese literature. According to Morris’s theory, Yoshitsune had the last laugh over his half-brother precisely because he lost.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{83} Morris, \textit{The Nobility of Failure}, xxi.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Ibid.}, xxi.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid.}, 73.

\textsuperscript{86} Varley, \textit{Warriors of Japan}, 134.

\textsuperscript{87} Morris, \textit{The Nobility of Failure}, 87.
Paul Varley also refers to Yoshitsune as a tragic hero. Citing examples from the *Heike monogatari*, Varley argues that Yoshitsune’s heroic status stems from his victories on the battlefield. He is transformed into a loser-hero, like his relatives Yoshitomo and Yoshinaka, because a personal flaw causes his downfall. In the case of all three of these warriors, their downfalls are caused by their lack of political savvy. Yoshitsune’s ultimate failure is in his historical favor because he faces his failure without blinking and without compromising his principles. However, Morris and Varley do not address the ways in which *Takadachi* Yoshitsune is not the same unswerving hero as depicted in many other texts.

The opening lines of *Takadachi* are almost a perfect preparation for presenting Yoshitsune as a tragic hero. After Yoritomo gives Nagasaki his marching orders, he gives his general a few hundred riders and the support needed to assemble an appropriately sized army. In *Takadachi*, the army vastly outnumbers Yoshitsune’s retainers and gives no hope of victory, even though he has men like Benkei on his side.

Nagasaki took the three hundred riders and when he rushed to the far north, he sent out a summons to arms, and a force assembled. They joined the troops at Yasuhira’s castle. Then, Terui no Tarô took out his brush and quickly made a register of names. First, there was the heir, Yasuhira, followed by Nishikido, Shirô Motoyoshi, Hizume no Gorô, Lord Tamatsukuri no Makura and aside from these brothers, Ketsuso no Yashichi, Kihara no Gengo, Kumoi no Kotarô, Atsuse no Gyôbu, Nakashima no Yôtôji, Matsushima, Tamatsukuri, and Ojima no Hyôdô. These were followed by over seven hundred mounted warriors with

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88 Minamoto no Yoshitomo, father to Yoshitsune and Yoritomo, killed in 1160 during the Heiji Disturbance. See McCullough, *Yoshitsune*, 7.

names, as well as over seven thousand three hundred common warriors. They quickly prepared a list of names for battle.\textsuperscript{90}

The detailing of the forces assembled against Yoshitsune serves to emphasize just how high the odds were against him. He had only nine retainers who were loyal enough to accompany him to the northeast.

The opening of Takadachi builds up the odds facing Yoshitsune in order to provide a perfect opportunity to portray Yoshitsune as the tragic hero. Faced with unbeatable odds, Yoshitsune will make a final stand with his loyal retainers, though they will be doing the fighting while he remains inside the castle preparing for his death. His retainers step in and demonstrate that their loyalty to Yoshitsune upholds the theme of loyalty as the ideal aspect of the Japanese warrior.

\textsuperscript{90} See Asahara and Kitahara, \textit{Mai no hon}, 438-439.
Suzuki as Yoshitsune

While Yoshitsune in Takadachi does not live up to the image depicted in works such as the Heike and the Gikeiki, his retainers fill the hole that is left by his divergence from his heroic image. One in particular takes a prominent place in the opening passages of both versions of Takadachi, Suzuki Saburo Shigeie. For a brief time the story concentrates on this single retainer and the hardships that he undertakes to come and die for his lord, highlighting his loyalty to Yoshitsune and supporting the theme of loyalty for one’s lord being the ideal.

When Takadachi opens, Yoshitsune has already taken refuge at the castle in Ôshu with eight of his remaining retainers who have accompanied in him in his flight to the northeast. Suzuki has yet to join his lord. Not only is he the last of Yoshitsune’s retainers to join him at Takadachi, but he is also the only retainer whose journey to Ôshu is described in the text.

The prominence given to Suzuki allows the playwright reinforce the idea that the retainers are displaying the ideal loyalty of the proper Japanese warrior. Distraught over the odds that he and his men face and their inevitable deaths, Yoshitsune goes as far as to order his men to take his head to Yoritomo in Kamakura and to accept a reward for betraying him. They, of course, refuse to betray him to his brother. They decant sake and begin to drink and dance, ignoring the sure death that faces them the next day. Suddenly they notice that a lone figure is sitting at the gate to the fortress, quietly observing. Benkei’s response is to immediately hike up his hakama and pick up his naginata and
prepare to fight. Recognizing his brother, Kamei restrains Benkei and identifies Suzuki.\footnote{Asahara and Kitahara, \textit{Mai no hon}, 441-442. Also see p.52-53 of this paper.}

According to Takadachi, Suzuki was raised in Kumano on the Kii Peninsula.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 439.}

His family name, according to legend, is divinely inspired. According to the \textit{Kumano gongen engi} (Origins of the Manifestations of the Deities of Kumano), Suzuki’s ancestor was given his name by a heavenly being.\footnote{Herbert Plutschow, \textit{Japan’s Name Culture: The Significance of Names in a Religious, Political and Social Context} (Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library, 1995), 135.} This heavenly being rode down to earth on the back of a dragon and was given offerings by three brothers. The third brother offered ears of rice to the deity and was thus given the name Hozumi, or “pile of rice ears.” This was subsequently changed to Suzuki, which has the same meaning in the Kumano dialect. Suzuki’s descendents rose to the position of officials at the shrines of Kumano.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 135.}

According to the \textit{Gikeiki}, the thirty-sixth descendent of Suzuki, Suzuki Shigekuni, along with his sons and grandson, sided with the Minamoto during the Heiji Rebellion and the Gempei wars. Herbert Plutschow posits that this indicates the Suzuki had become \textit{bushi} in addition to being priests at the shrines of Kumano.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 135.} Later, Suzuki Saburo and his brother Kamei Rokurô sided with Yoshitsune against his brother

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\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 135.}
Yoritomo. Their last stand against Yoritomo’s forces is of course the subject of *Takadachi* and takes up the majority of the play.

**Suzuki Enters the Plot**

Suzuki’s introduction begins when he is named as the member of Yoshitsune’s retinue who has yet to arrive. The text then moves briefly away from Takadachi to a scene in which Suzuki is informing his wife that he will go to fight alongside Yoshitsune.

One day, Suzuki called to his wife, and said: “There is something I have to do. I shall go to Ōshu. I have decided to go without hesitation. If Yoshitsune is victorious, next summer I will send news. If summer comes and goes, as is the way in this insecure world, know that I have vanished like the dew and frost on the grass on the road and pray for me in death. Farewell.”

Understandably Suzuki is unsure as to whether he will be returning from the battle. As a *bushi*, Suzuki must be prepared to fall on the battlefield. This commentary on the ephemeral nature of the world, especially in times of warfare, keeps with *Takadachi*’s theme of the warrior ideal. Suzuki faces the fact that he might not return and instructs his wife, accordingly, that she should pray for him if he does not return. Even as he sets out, the text makes clear the dark emotions associated with this ill-fated journey.

Lord Suzuki, a person raised in Kumano, changed into the shape of a *yamabushi*, hoisted his *oi* to his shoulder, and took up a gloomy walking stick.

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96 Herbert Plutschow, *Japan’s Name Culture: The Significance of Names in a Religious, Political and Social Context*, 135.


98 Ibid., 439.
Suzuki disguises himself because he is not only abandoning his family to fight for Yoshitsune, but he is also leaving a position given to him by Yoritomo. He siding with Yoritomo’s enemy and a disguise is necessary for him to reach Takadachi without being discovered by Yoritomo’s agents. The insight into Suzuki’s state of mind comes from his monouki take no tsue 物憂き竹の杖, or his “gloomy” or “melancholy,” “walking stick.” The take no tsue, Suzuki’s walking stick, is an inanimate object and is not capable of having feelings. Still, in the text it is described with the adjective monouki, meaning “gloomy” or “melancholy.” When Suzuki takes up his “gloomy walking stick” in the michiyuki, the stick helps to create the emotional atmosphere for Suzuki’s journey to Ôshu. The michiyuki describes the emotional tenor of Suzuki’s journey to Takadachi to take part in the action that makes up the majority of the plot, and the emotions that are cultivated during the michiyuki are associated with Suzuki for the rest of the play.

Once he has prepared for the trip and taken up his “gloomy walking stick,” his wife does not grab his sleeve as she does in the kojôruri version. Instead the text describes his journey in this michiyuki:

Setting out from Fujishiro, he quickly arrived at the imperial palace. Since he was traveling clandestinely, as the unnoticed flowers of the capital, leaving with the mist, and riding a boat from the inlet at Ôtsu, continuing on to go ashore at the inlet at Kaizu, as far as coming down to the gloomy rough spot of to Hokkoku Road. Since he didn’t borrow lodging from anyone, destroyed halls, temples, the holes of rocky crags, and unattended shrines became his lodgings. After seventy-five days, he arrived at Takadachi castle in Ôshu on the Koromo River.99

A very common construction in traditional dramatic arts such as nô, kabuki, and jôruri the michiyuki can refer to a dance scene in which the traveler journeys to an important

99 Asahara and Kitahara, Mai no hon, 440.
place or escapes some danger.\textsuperscript{100} In the case of Takadachi, Suzuki is doing both, traveling to join up with Yoshitsune at Takadachi while trying to avoid being discovered by the forces of Yoritomo.

In addition to simply describing the path that Suzuki took from Fujishiro, this michiyuki describes the hardships that Suzuki undertook. Over the course of a seventy-five day journey, not only did he sneak through the capital and take a boat from Ôtsu across Lake Biwa to Kaizu, he spent the entire time avoiding inns and not lodging with anyone.\textsuperscript{101} Suzuki instead slept in broken-down temples and caves, in accordance with his yamabushi disguise.

This section of the text also serves to reinforce Suzuki’s loyalty to Yoshitsune. Coming soon after Yoshitsune’s speech to his retainers telling them to leave him to his fate, it serves to place Suzuki in the light of the ideal warrior. Leaving his family and his position, he undertakes a long and arduous journey just to fight in a battle that cannot be won. At any point Suzuki could have turned around and gone home. The text refers to the difficulties of Suzuki’s route as “Hokkokumichi no uki nanjo 北国道の憂難所” or the “melancholy rough spots of the Hokkoku Road.”\textsuperscript{102} This phrase reinforces the difficulty of Suzuki’s journey. It is the physical hardships undertaken by Suzuki that show the strength of Suzuki’s loyalty for Yoshitsune.

The hardships also serve to evoke a sense of sympathy with Suzuki that lasts for the rest of the performance, as Yoshitsune’s retainers fight against overwhelming odds.

\textsuperscript{100} Leiter, \textit{Historical Dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre}, 234.

\textsuperscript{101} Asahara and Kitahara, \textit{Mai no hon}, 440.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, 440.
Considering that the outcome of the impending battle is a foregone conclusion and the plot would have been common knowledge among the audience because of the popularity of Yoshitsune’s story, focusing on Suzuki allows him and the rest of Yoshitsune’s loyal retainers to take Yoshitsune’s place as the main focus of the story. At the beginning of the performance Yoshitsune is not a very sympathetic character. He does not act in the same manner as the Yoshitsune in the Gikeiki and the Heike monogatari, who refuses to back down from conflict. In Takadachi he seems to surrender before the fight begins, offering to kill himself rather than face Yoritomo’s army. His retainers choose to die defending him, demonstrating the extent of their loyalty and cementing themselves as Takadachi’s example of the samurai ideal of the loyal retainer. Still, the text only deals with Suzuki’s journey and hardships in detail.

**Sympathy for Suzuki**

Suzuki’s role in generating sympathy for Yoshitsune’s retainers is consistent with his depiction in other texts. For instance, even though the *kojôruri* version of Takadachi does not include the *kôwakamai’s michiyuki*, Suzuki is still able to display his loyalty to Yoshitsune and to generate the same sympathy as in the *kôwakamai* version of Takadachi. In the *kojôruri*, once he has taken up his walking stick and disguised himself as a *yamabushi* his wife stops him. Grabbing his sleeve she expresses her grief at his leaving.

His wife saw this and said: “Lord Suzuki, wait! You are packing a pack you are not used to packing, and you are going on a trip that you are not accustomed to walking. How sad that you have decided to go.” She clung to Suzuki’s sleeve and was choked with tears. Her husband Suzuki, seeing this, said: ”Truly you are a trustworthy wife. I feel the same but I have settled upon this journey and I must set off.”

103 Yoyoyama, *Kojôruri shôhonshû*, 16.
The wife’s sadness is only natural; her husband is heading off to battle, and in all likelihood he will not return. It has only been a few years since the end of the Gempei War, and now he is heading out again. This interaction between Suzuki and his wife fits in perfectly with Takadachi’s underlying themes. Suzuki is leaving because of the loyalty he feels for his lord, and as a bushi that is what he is supposed to do. His wife is saddened by his decision but will let him go, because as the wife of a warrior that is what she is supposed to do. Even though she is not a warrior herself, as wife of a bushi she is expected to endure the hardship of her husband going off to war. Suzuki’s wife is not unique in this regard. Oyler points out that as early as the Heike monogatari women provided moving characters because they were left behind when their men left for war. They represent the home that is abandoned as men leave for war, and their stories of loss and longing are among the tale’s most moving. Yet because they are the ones who remain to tell the tales, to pray for the dead, and to make sense of a world that has been turned upside down by war, they also are entrusted with the vital task of turning event into history.¹⁰⁴

Suzuki’s wife is part of this tradition of abandoned women and acts to connect the two versions of Takadachi to reality by demonstrating the hardships and consequences experienced by those left behind by others who leave for the glory of a martial death. Suzuki’s wife appears only briefly and does nothing but grab Suzuki’s sleeve and voice her feelings about Suzuki’s departure for Ôshu. Still, by expressing her feelings, Suzuki’s wife acts to promote sympathy for Suzuki as he departs to fight for Yoshitsune, tapping into the emotions brought up by the image of the abandoned wife. This

emotional scene between husband and wife only appears in the kojôruri, where it provides the sympathy that is generated by the kôwakamai’s michiyuki.

Oddly enough, even though Suzuki’s wife is crucial to the scene, she is never referred to by name. In the text she is only referred to as nyôbô 女房, meaning both “wife” and a “woman who has served in court.” This is understandable in the kôwakamai, as her role is more passive and she does not really provide an obstacle to Suzuki’s departure. On the other hand, she takes a much more active position in the kojôruri. She tries to restrain her husband and beseeches him not to leave.\(^{105}\)

The attempted intervention by Suzuki’s wife is not unique to Takadachi. For example, a similar situation occurs in another text. In the Nô play Suzuki, the namesake of the play is waylaid on his way to Ôshu. This scene is set in a different place and does not involve Suzuki’s nameless wife; instead it is his mother who appears. In Suzuki, Yoshitsune is fleeing to Takadachi to take refuge from the forces of his brother. Along the way he and his retainers have to pass through the Ataka gate,\(^{106}\) and Yoshitsune takes the opportunity to order ten of his twenty remaining retainers to return home. Suzuki is one of the ten to continue on with Yoshitsune to die at the battle at Koromo River. This, of course, differs from the tale in both versions of Takadachi in which Suzuki does not accompany the group that initially goes with Yoshitsune to the fortress. Suzuki’s journey from his home in Kishû is dealt with separately in Takadachi in order to highlight his

\(^{105}\) Yokoyama, Kojôruri Shôhonshû, 16.

\(^{106}\) The Ataka gate was a border gate in Mutsu Province (made up of the modern day prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, and Aomori) that Yoshitsune and his retainers had to pass through during their flight north to Ôtsu. This was famously depicted in the 1465 nô play Ataka 安宅 written by Kanze Kojiro Nobumitsu 観世小次郎信光. See McCullough, Yoshitsune, 39.
loyalty to Yoshitsune. While the play Suzuki uses different ways to show it, Suzuki is presented as the image of loyalty and correct conduct for a bushi.\textsuperscript{107} In the nô play, instead of being accosted by his wife before setting out on a journey, Suzuki’s mother is the one who attempts to change his mind. Traveling from Kishû she meets Yoshitsune’s party at the border crossing and attempts to reason with Suzuki and get him to return with her. Arguing that Yoshitsune does not need Suzuki to come with him since he has other retainers such as Musashibô Benkei who can stand with him in battle, Suzuki’s mother tries to get her son to come home. Yoshitsune is not opposed to this, putting the onus of making the decision solely on Suzuki, who has to choose between his mother and his lord.\textsuperscript{108} In order to highlight his loyalty to Yoshitsune, the only thing that Suzuki can do is to send his mother home and continue on to Takadachi to die alongside his lord.\textsuperscript{109}

Neither Suzuki’s wife nor his mother are central to these narratives except in regards to how they support Suzuki’s own importance and display his character. Suzuki’s presence at this point in the storyline of either Suzuki or Takadachi demonstrates the importance of his relationship with Yoshitsune. In Suzuki the presence of his mother provides Suzuki a chance to return home and avoid dying in a hopeless battle. In fact Yoshitsune would have no problem with him doing so, but it is Suzuki’s own sense of loyalty that causes him to remain at his lord’s side. In Takadachi, it is Suzuki who makes the journey from Kishû and not his mother. Still, by going against his

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{107} Ôta Zennosuke, Nômai – mikansei setsumei (Higashidorimura, Aomori, Japan: Higashidorimura Kyôdo Geinô Hozon Tsuaukai, 1980), 39.
\bibitem{109} Ibid., 109.
\end{thebibliography}
own feelings and the objections of his wife he again demonstrates his loyalty in the face of an inevitable death. That Suzuki is used in similar ways in both Suzuki and Takadachi underscores his role as a symbol of the bushi ideal, specifically through his loyalty to Yoshitsune.

The emphasis on Suzuki’s loyalty to Yoshitsune contributes to the sympathy the audience feels for him. Both the kojóruri and the kôwakamai go to great pains to establish the immense odds that Yoshitsune and his men face. Fighting in the face of these odds supports Paul Varley and Ivan Morris’s argument that part of the reason for Yoshitsune’s popularity and heroic image is that despite his heroic effort he will inevitably lose.¹¹⁰ Still, that is only the case if he continues to act heroically. In the case of Takadachi Yoshitsune does not act in a way that supports his heroic image because he does not take part in any of the fighting, allowing his retainers to hold off his enemy. It is Suzuki who first fills the gap left by Yoshitsune in this story. After the odds of the battle are established, Suzuki makes his journey from Kishû to the fortress of Takadachi. The journey serves to demonstrate the level of Suzuki’s loyalty to Yoshitsune and his conviction in following through on that loyalty. Upon arriving at Takadachi Suzuki is not presented with an army of warriors preparing for a glorious battle, but an empty courtyard.¹¹¹ The image of a solitary warrior observing the disappointing assembly of Yoshitsune’s remaining retainers helps to cultivate a sense of sympathy among the audience. How can the audience feel anything but sympathy for the loyal warrior who

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¹¹¹ Asahara and Kitahara, Mai no hon, 440.
arrives to discover that instead of a glorious army, he will be fighting alongside a handful of men?

At the same time Suzuki temporarily steps in for Yoshitsune as the heroic figure. The young lord appears to have given up, degrading his heroic image. Instead of fearlessly fighting in the face of defeat and death, Yoshitsune has become resigned to his fate and shrinks away from the fight, so much so that he tells his closest retainers to leave him to his fate and return to their homes. Suzuki on the other hand has arrived, despite his wife’s pleas and his reluctance, as suggested by the earlier personification of his walking stick as “gloomy,” to take part in this glorious defeat. At that moment he could leave and no one would know that he had arrived from Kishû, but he stays.

As Yoshitsune’s role as the ideal warrior is transferred to the ideally loyal Suzuki during the opening passage of both versions of Takadachi, the plot’s didactic themes of upholding the warrior ideal of loyalty is kept intact. Yoshitsune changes from being the main focus of the narrative to moving into the background while his loyal retainers, led by Suzuki, step in to take over as the ideal examples of how bushi should act. This is how Takadachi expresses its theme of loyalty being the ideal aspect of a bushi’s character.
Conclusion

In *Takadachi* the portrayal of Yoshitsune provides a way for his retainers to demonstrate the ideal nature of their loyalty. He is shown shrinking from battle when he decides to kill himself instead of meeting Yoritomo’s army in battle. Instead of refusing to back down, which one would expect of the Yoshitsune depicted in the *Gikeiki* and the *Heike monogatari*, he gives up. This allows the focus of the narrative of the *Takadachi* libretto to shift to his retainers, who die defending him. It is the strength of their loyalty, particularly that of Suzuki Saburô, who undertook an arduous journey to join his lord in time to die in a hopeless battle, that reinforces the idea that ideal code of conduct for *bushi* revolves around absolute loyalty to one’s lord.

This ideal code of conduct, while in reality created to define the identity and values of the bushi after they had already begun to go into decline as a class, was attractive to the *bushi* of the Edo Period. Living in a period of relative peace and increased literacy when their role as warriors was increasingly irrelevant, they began to theorize about what defined them as *bushi*. Codes of ideal behavior became attractive and stories such as *Takadachi* connected these rules, as well as those who idolized them, to the popular characters of Japanese history.
The following translation is based on the edition of *Takadachi* that appears in the *kōwakamai* collection *Mai no hon* in Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei (SNKBT), Vol. 59. *Mai no hon* is the title of a collection of *kōwakamai* from the early Tokugawa period. However, *Mai no hon* was also used to refer to any collection of dance drama during the Tokugawa period, but the *Mai no hon* referred to in this paper is a particular collection of *kōwakamai*. Since there are several variant editions of *Mai no hon* published at different times during the early Tokugawa period, the plays that they contain vary. Furthermore, some of the surviving editions are incomplete. In order to make a more complete representation of *Mai no hon*, the SNKBT *Mai no hon* draws on several variant editions. The text of *Takadachi* included is from the *Kaneiseihanbon* variant edition of *Mai no hon*, which was published as a woodblock printed text in 1632.\footnote{Asahara and Kitahara, *Mai no hon*, v.}

Presently, the Lord of Kamakura summoned Kajiwara\footnote{Kajiwara Kagetoki 梶原景時 (？–1200), a retainer of Minamoto no Yoritomo, who joined the Gempei War against the Taira and fought under Minamoto no Yoshitsune against Minamoto no Yoshinaka. He reported back to Yoritomo and helped to solidify Yoritomo’s suspicions about Yoshitsune. See McCullough, *Yoshitsune*, 319.} and commanded: “Somehow, listen and do this! There is no doubt that Yoshitsune is rebelling. We’ll quickly put down Yoshitsune and put the realm back in order.” He bestowed upon Nagasaki no Shirō...
more than three hundred riders. Nagasaki took the three hundred riders, and when he
rushed to the far north, he sent out a summons to arms and assembled a force. They
joined the troops at Yasuhira’s castle. Then, Terui no Tarō took out his brush and
quickly made a register of names. First, there was the heir Yasuhira, followed by
Nishikido, Shirô Motoyoshi, Hizume no Gorô, Lord Tamatsukuri no Makura, and, aside
from these brothers, Ketsuso no Yashichi, Kihara no Gengo, Kumoi no Kotarô, Atsuse no
Gyôbu, Nakashima no Yôtôji, Matsushima, Tamatsukuri, and Ojima no Hyôdô. These
were followed by over seven hundred mounted warriors with names, as well as over
seven thousand three hundred common warriors. They quickly prepared a list of
names for battle. I believe it was on the 27th day of the 4th intercalary month of the 5th
year of Bunji when Nagasaki declared, “Today’s luck is not good. Tomorrow we shall

114 Fujiwara no Yasuhira 藤原の泰衡 was the son of Fujiwara no Hidehira who had
shielded the young Yoshitsune. After Hidehira’s death Yasuhira betrayed Yoshitsune to
Yoritomo. Yasuhira’s death, along with the northern territory of Ōshu falling under
Shogunal control, marks the end of the Northern Fujiwara. See McCullough, Yoshitsune,
310.

115 The 700 mounted warriors are of a high enough class to warrant having surnames,
while the remaining 7,300 warriors are of a lower class and therefore do not possess
surnames.

116 1185 CE. The intercalary month was due to the need to keep the lunar-solar calendar
properly aligned with the solar year. Since each lunar month was the same length, each
subsequent calendar year would start eleven days earlier with respect to the lunar-solar
calendar. In order to keep the two from drifting too far apart, periodically an extra month
would be inserted into the calendar. There was a complex system to deciding where to
insert the month, but it would be referred to as an uruzuki 閏月. In this case it was
inserted after the 4th month, so it is called the uruu 4th month. See Miner, The Princeton
Companion to Classical Japanese Literature, 407.
face the enemy at the hour of the dragon.” 117 Ota, Yamaguchi, and Nakamura had taken up positions.

Then, in Takadachi mansion, Yoshitsune heard the news that the enemy was advancing. When he called for his samurai, by evening there were eight, nine counting the general. 118 The next day at the battle, there were nine warriors, with the general making ten. The reason was that Suzuki no Saburô Shigeie of Kumano in Kii 119 was there.

One day, Suzuki called to his wife, and said, “There is something I have to do. I shall go to Ôshû. 120 I have decided to go without hesitation. If Yoshitsune is victorious, next summer I will send news. If summer comes and goes, as is the way in this insecure world, think that I have vanished like the dew and frost on the grass on the road and pray for me in death. Farewell.”

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117 A full day was broken up into twelve “hours” that were equivalent to two hours. The hour of the dragon denotes a time roughly around seven o’clock to nine o’clock in the morning. See Miner, The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature, 401.

118 Throughout the text Yoshitsune is also referred to as the general or taishô domo 大将 共.

119 Kii Province (Kishû 紀州) was a province that now makes up Wakayama Prefecture and parts of Mie Prefecture. Kii Province encompasses the Kumano 熊野 region that included the three Kumano shrines with which Suzuki Saburo was associated. See Nihon kokugo daijiten 日本国語大辞典 vol. 5 (Tokyo: Shôgakkan 小学館, 1976), 567.

120 Ôshû 奥州 was also called Mutsu Province, Mutsu no kuni 陸奥国. Located in Northern Honshû, Ôshû is made up of the present day prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Aomori. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 2, 352.
Suzuki, because he had grown up in Kumano, disguised himself as a yamabushi, shouldered his pack, and took up a gloomy walking stick, and when night had not yet become light, set out from Fujishiro. He quickly arrived at the imperial palace. Since he was traveling as clandestinely as the unnoticed flowers of the capital, leaving with the mist. Riding a boat from the inlet at Ôtsu, he continued on and went ashore at the inlet at Kaizu, finally traveling up to the gloomy rough spots of the Hokkoku Road. Since he didn’t borrow lodging from anyone, destroyed halls, temples, the holes of rocky crags, and unattended shrines became his lodgings. After seventy-five days, he arrived at Takadachi castle in Ôshû on the Koromo River.

121 A yamabushi is a mountain ascetic. The yamabushi seek spiritual knowledge and power through their ascetic practices in the mountains. There is also a long tradition of yamabushi being powerful warriors. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 19, 574.

122 An oi or pack is a square box-like backpack that is part of the stereotypical yamabushi image. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 3, 311.

123 The text uses the phrase monouki take no tsue. Suzuki’s walking stick is being described by the adjective monouki, meaning gloomy or melancholy. This contributes to the emotions that are associated with his journey north to Ôshû.

124 Fujishiro is now the Fujishiro district of Kainan City 海南市 in present day Wakayama Prefecture. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 17, 363.

125 Capital city of modern day Shiga Prefecture 滋賀県 (formerly Ômi Province 近江国), Ôtsu 大津 is located along the southwestern shore of Lake Biwa.

126 Kaizu 海津 was a small town located on the northern shore of Lake Biwa that is part of the modern day town of Makino マキノ町, which was consolidated with another town in the Takashima District to form Takashima City 高島市. See Asahara and Kitahara, Mai no hon, 440.

127 Takadachi is the castle where Yoshitsune was shielded as a youth by Fujiwara no Hidehira after Yoshitsune left Kurama Temple on Mount Hiei. It is also where he went to make his last stand after running afoul of Yoritomo’s suspicions. See McCullough, Yoshitsune, 14, 61.
What was Suzuki thinking? Hiding his sugukake\textsuperscript{129} and pack, he put on an uchikake.\textsuperscript{130} Pulling an twelve-stitched braided hat\textsuperscript{131} deeply over his eyes he calmly observed the state of Takadachi castle: “What I learned in Fujishiro was that night and day the house was full of people attending to Yoshitsune, and outside the gate there was no place to tether a horse. Yet, how lonely all this is? How mysterious.” Sitting on the gate’s stone\textsuperscript{132} he listened to the state of the house.

Then, inside Takadachi castle, hearing news of the advancing enemy, the samurai were summoned, and, with Benkei\textsuperscript{133} leading them as always, the above-mentioned eight, appeared before their lord Yoshitsune. Seeing this he said, “My luck has run out. Tomorrow will come quickly. Take my head and take it to Kantô, and when you have received the reward for your service, do your duty and pray for me in the next life.”

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{128} The Koromo River 衣川 is a river that runs through northern Honshû, primary through Iwate Prefecture.
\item\textsuperscript{129} A sugukake is a hempen robe generally worn by yamabushi. See See Asahara and Kitahara, \textit{Mai no hon}, 440.
\item\textsuperscript{130} An uchikake was a long robe worn over the standard kimono. See \textit{Nihon kokugo daijiten} vol. 2, 631.
\item\textsuperscript{131} An amigasa was a woven hat commonly worn deeply over the face by mendicant monks and yamabushi to hide their faces. See \textit{Nihon kokugo daijiten} vol. 1, 428-429.
\item\textsuperscript{132} A gate stone, or karaishiki 唐居敷, is the stone that is placed into the ground and provides the foundation for the gateposts. See \textit{Nihon kokugo daijiten} vol. 5, 178.
\item\textsuperscript{133} Saitô Musashibô Benkei 西塔武藏坊弁慶 (1155-1189) was the most well known of Yoshitsune’s retainers. See McCullough, \textit{Yoshitsune}, 39.
\end{itemize}
Kataoka and Kamei no Rokurō said: “How vexing this command is. Who is there who would surrender our young lord’s head in Kamakura? Those who have not fallen till now surely will attend you. Still, if there is any here who thinks he will fall away, say farewell and leave. No one will hold a grudge.” When he said this and sternly surveyed the room, Yoshitake and Hirotsuna responded together, “You speak coldly. Who would respond that way? We know the enemy will come at dawn. Probably they’ll split into two groups to attack the front gate and the rear gate. Though our comrades will be outnumbered, the battle shall scatter blossoms. While it is still the dark of early morning, although we are able to hear voices, we cannot see forms. At this tranquil moment, let us offer the sacred wine to our lord and refrain from saying the final farewell.” “Indeed, that is as it should be,” they said, and they brought out a variety of large bottles of sake and bamboo decanters, and the lord Yositsune came out into the room. The wives poured the sake, and when a cup was placed for their lord and after the aforementioned eight had passed the cups around three times, they mingled together, giving and taking cups as they pleased, and pouring sake for themselves. As they danced

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134 A little known retainer of Yoshitsune. According to McCullough’s Appendix B of her translation of the Gikeiki, there is little known about him and even his full name is in doubt. Several people with the surname Kataoka appear in the lists of Yoshitsune’s retainers in the Hekei monogatari, Gempei seisuki, and the Azuma kagami. See McCullough, Yoshitsune, 320.

135 An otherwise unknown retainer of Yoshitsune. See Asahara and Kitahara, Mai no hon, 441.

136 Genpachi Hirotsuna 源八広綱 was a warrior who served under Yoshitsune during the Gempei wars. See Ibid., 441.

137 This is a set phrase that Yoshitake and Hirotsuna are using to imply that they will fight fiercely.
and sang and drank, Kamei gave the cup he drank from to Benkei and suddenly stood up and danced. “A thousand years have passed on Mount Hôrai, cranes nest in the branches of pine tress, turtles play in the shape of rocky crags.” With feeling he quickly danced the “Three Heads” and the “Duck’s Neck” and finished dancing in the space of one tune. As he turned around, he looked at the outer gate and there was a man with a sword at his side and a braided hat pulled low over his eyes sitting on the gate stone and watching Kamei dance.

Even Kamei no Rokurô thought: “Who will that be?” When Kamei recognized him, he immediately stopped dancing, and poured more sake and sat down. The man by the gate called out, raising his voice loudly: “Hey! I have a message for those inside.” The room became quiet, and everyone wondered: “Who is that?” When Saitô Benkei heard the voice, he said: “The visitor is an enemy, come here in disguise to spy on us. We cannot let this messenger escape.” Saying that, he hiked up the hem of his hakama and took up his naginata. Kamei no Rokurô suddenly stood and took hold of Benkei’s

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138 Mount Hôrai 蓬萊山 was where the eight legendary immortal beings gathered in Chinese mythology. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 18, 87.

139 Both the Three Heads (mitsugashira 三頭) and the Duck’s Neck (kamo no irekubi 鴨の入首) appear to be the names of dances, but I have been unable to find any further explanation.

140 Hakama 袴 are a kind of traditional pleated garment resembling very baggy pants that are worn over the kimono and obi belt. They are secured with four ties or himo 紐 that are tied around the waist. Due to the length of some hakama, it was common to hike up the hem to prevent tripping. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 16, 153.

141 A naginata 蕎刀 is a weapon that traditionally was associated with the yamabushi but found immense popularity among the bushi. The weapon is comprised of a long pole with a long, curved blade on the end. In this scene Benkei, the fearsome warrior monk, has his naginata close at hand. See Nihon kokugo daijiten vol. 15, 218.
sleeve, restraining him. “Calm down, Lord Musashi.”¹⁴² How amazing, I think I recall hearing this voice,” he said. When Kamei ran out of the room and looked, there standing alone was his older brother Suzuki Saburô, worn out from travel. Kamei, unable to tell if it was a dream, quickly ran up and grasped Suzuki’s sleeve. The brothers clung to each other, saying: “How could this be?” After a time, Suzuki said: “Well then, what is it, Kamei?” When Kamei heard this he said: “Our lord Yoshitsune’s luck, and my luck as well, will run out tomorrow. This is because, if Hidehira were in this sad world, he would respect our lord, but as is the way of this world, Hidehira died last year in winter. His child [Yasuhira] has betrayed Yoshitsune. Coming from Kamakura are Lord Nagasaki no Shirô and the generals Terui and Date¹⁴³ who continue to face us, and we hear that Ôda, Yamaguchi, and Nakamura are taking up positions. If you stand and remember this person, who left the capital two or three years ago,¹⁴⁴ enjoy one moment. When you think of your memories, how our fortunes have shortened. That you came today, in my joy, I grieve. Above all else I am happy that we met in this life. My delusions about this sad world have cleared. Even our lord does not know. He is not a suspecting or blameful person. Take advantage of the hospitality of people near and far and quickly return to Kumano, Lord Suzuki.” When Suzuki heard this he said, “That is stupid, Kamei.

¹⁴² Commonly referred to as Benkei, his full name is Saitô Musashibô Benkei 西塔武蔵坊弁慶. While he is called Benkei in the text, Kamei is showing the proper deference in calling him Lord Musashi. See McCullough, Yoshitsune, 39.

¹⁴³ A retainer by the name of Nakamura Tomomune 中村朝宗 after bring the Date region伊達 under control of the government in Kamakura was awarded the new name of Date Tomomune in 1189. See Asahara and Kitahara, Mai no hon, 443.

¹⁴⁴ Kamei is referring to Yoshitsune, who had fled from his brother’s suspicions a couple of years before the battle at Koromo River.
Though our bones may be buried by the Ryômon Genjô, it would be stupid to bury our names. Like the relationship between teacher and student, father and child, or husband and wife, if it weren’t for the karmic link of the three worlds, why would I have come today? Tell our lord that Suzuki has come, Kamei.” Having spoken, he flung off his straw sandals, took off the *uchikake* that he wore over his kimono and cast it aside with a flourish. Together the brothers went before their lord Yoshitsune.

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*Kamei is saying that even if their bodies are lost in the wasteland of the battlefield, it would be regrettable if their names were lost along with their bodies. See Asahara and Kitahara, *Mai no hon*, 443.*
Bibliography


