

DROPS OF BLOOD ON FALLEN SNOW:
THE EVOLUTION OF BLOOD-REVENGE PRACTICES IN JAPAN

A Thesis Presented

By

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DEDICATION

To all those who have come before me, who have journeyed with me, and who will follow on this path to learning Japanese language, literature, and culture.

頑張ってください。

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ABSTRACT

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Blood revenge – or *katakiuchi* – represents the defining principles that characterize the Japanese samurai warrior; this one act of honorable violence served as an arena in which warriors could demonstrate those values which have come to embody the word *samurai* : loyalty, honor, and personal sacrifice. Blood revenge possessed a long and illustrious history in Japan – first, as the prerogative of the gods in the *Kojiki*, then as a theoretical debate amongst imperial royalty in the *Nihongi*, and at last entering into the realm of practice amongst members of the warrior class during Japan’s medieval period. Originally, blood revenge served a judicial function in maintaining order in warrior society, yet was paradoxically illegal in premodern Japan. Throughout the medieval period, the frequency of blood-revenge undertakings likely increased, acquiring social legitimacy despite the practice’s illegal standing; however, under the rule of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, blood revenge was granted the legitimacy of law as well through the legalization of this practice. The social and cultural influences of blood revenge were so profound that the *bakufu* decided to harness its benefits in order to allow the samurai class, who now existed in a time of peace, a method through which to express themselves, while simultaneously using this practice as a device of social control. Yet, little is known about the evolution of this practice and its reception between the first official accounting of blood revenge in the *Azuma Kagami* and the legalization of this practice under *bakufu* law. In this Master’s Thesis, I endeavor to bridge the gap in modern scholarship between the highly ritualized blood-revenge practices of the Tokugawa period and its origins in medieval Japanese history. To this end, I will explore the evolution of blood revenge practices in the sphere of social, political, legal, and cultural history, as well as an analysis of the first literary representation of the pioneering blood revenge incident in Japan – the revenge of the Soga brothers – in the *Manabon Soga Monogatari* and its later Tokugawa *ehon* adaptation.

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INTRODUCTION

When the appointed hour came, the *ronin* set forth. The wind howled furiously and the driving snow beat in their faces, but little cared they for wind or snow as they hurried on their road, eager for revenge.

– A.B. Mitford, *The Tales of Old Japan* (1871)

One of the Western world's first glimpses of the Japanese culture is one of fierce determination and steely resolve on the path of revenge in the writing of British Diplomat A.B. Mitford (1837-1916). Thus, the infamous revenge of the 47 *rōnin* (浪人) became one of the most memorable characteristics of Japanese warrior society in the West. Even Mitford himself seemed awed by the selflessness of the actions of the forty-seven labeling them a true example of vassalage loyalty. Over a century later, scholars still see the 47 *rōnin* as epitomizing blood revenge practices in Japan, seemingly oblivious to the history of this practice as first established by the blood revenge of the Soga brothers.

The tale of the Soga brothers, recounted in the *Soga Monogatari* (曾我物語, ca. 14th century), has come to serve as a literary representation of a shift in the political, social, and cultural history of medieval Japan. More specifically, the *Soga Monogatari* is a literary

representation of the pioneering event that led to the development of a blood-revenge culture important to the early-modern samurai culture, both symbolically and functionally.

Tokugawa blood revenge developed into a subculture admired for its complexity and multifaceted nature that has become a topic in academic discourse. The subject of blood revenge has received the attention of such scholars as Eiko Ikegami and D.E. Mills, among others, who have provided the most comprehensive study of Japanese blood-revenge practices to date; however, while these two scholars have endeavored to provide explanation and description of this practice and its variants, the focus their analyses lie primarily with the practice's early modern manifestations. Of course, to do justice to the work of D.E. Mills, one must mention that in his 1976 article entitled "Kataki-Uchi: the Practice of Blood Revenge in Pre-modern Japan," Mills attempts to bridge the gap in blood revenge studies by looking at earlier occurrences of blood revenge in Japan. To this end, Mills discusses the first accounts of blood revenge in the *Kojiki* (古事記 712) and the *Nihongi* (日本記 797), as well as the blood revenge of the Soga brothers recounted in the *Azuma Kagami* (吾妻鏡 compiled between 1266 and 1301) and other literary accountings. Yet, the focus of his research was drawn back to the early modern period, without much discussion of the evolution of this practice, which led to the development of the blood revenge culture in the Tokugawa period.

Traditionally, the gap in scholarship between the revenge culture of the Tokugawa period and its pre-modern origins has been attributed to a lack of documentation, which does present an obstacle in pre-modern research; nevertheless, there still remain enough written records to identify changes in this practice over time. Perhaps the most prominent reason for the lack of more comprehensive scholarship on the subject of blood revenge in Japan could be due to the

lack of interdisciplinary research; while it is true that historical documentation prior to 1600 is scarce, what is lacking in official documentation can be found in abundance in literature. While the historical reliability of literary sources can be of dubious quality, one cannot discount the value of literature as a mirror reflecting the world as perceived by the writers of these tales; thus, information regarding a myriad of topics such as culture, religion, social and political climates of a given period, and so forth in literature are too valuable to disregard. Through the analysis of literature, it is possible to identify information that broadens one's understanding of blood revenge practices in Japan. In this way, through the analysis of both history and literature, one can come to a more complete understanding of this complex practice.

Over time, revenge practices in Japan came to take on many forms including wife revenge (*megatakiuchi* 妻敵討), disrespect killings (*bureiuchi* 無礼討), and lord revenge – a practice that existed in Japan, but possessed no term of its own. The pursuit of each of these practices was triggered by similar motivations, yet they each possessed defining characteristics that set them apart from one another. Lord revenge, for example, was often described as *katakiuchi* 敵討 – perhaps because avenging one's lord was symbolically akin to avenging one's father as the vassalage system mimicked the hierarchical structure of the family; yet, this practice, in many ways, stands apart from the form of blood revenge that claims this term. Thus, the practice of lord revenge is left without a word to represent it in the Japanese language; perhaps the lack of a precise word for this term can be attributed to the infrequency with which it was pursued – in fact, the only clear evidence that lord revenge existed in Japan came about in the 16th century with the revenge of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) and later with the revenge of the 47 *rōnin* in the 18th century. Thus, the more obscure aspects of blood revenge requires

further examination and its multifaceted nature needs to be addressed; therefore, I will devote some time to the discussion of the forms of revenge mentioned above, but will focus primarily on blood revenge (*katakiuchi*) in this thesis.

Many cultures possess, or once possessed, their own version of revenge, as well as their own words to represent these individual practices. Vengeance is part of the human condition that is the seed for family feuds and, on a larger scale, provides an incentive for the creation of warrior cultures. In order to understand the various forms of revenge that existed in various periods of Japanese history, it is necessary to arrive at an understanding of perceptions of revenge that were integral to Japanese culture. For the purposes of this thesis, I will define the term “blood revenge” as the use of deadly violence to redress the offense of deadly injury and, by association, injured honor.

As I mentioned above, many cultures around the world possessed their own form of revenge with socially determined norms that governed those who took part in these practices. Icelandic blood revenge presents the most striking similarities to Japanese blood revenge; however, the complexity of Icelandic blood revenge presented a number of dissimilarities to Japanese blood revenge. The topic of Icelandic blood revenge is one too complex to examine in depth in this thesis; thus, I will only briefly highlight a few of the more prominent characteristics of Icelandic blood revenge in order to enrich our understanding of blood-revenge practices in Japan.

William Ian Miller writes that in ancient Iceland vengeance was “hedged in by norms of varying strength, generality, and applicability.”¹ In Saga Iceland, the practice of blood revenge

¹ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 189.

was governed through a combination of cultural norms and law although these two systems did not always operate in tandem. For example, while law was intended to introduce order to this practice by dictating the timing and location of revenge based on the severity of the offender's wrongdoing, the execution of blood revenge was ultimately in the control of the avenger.²

Gaining the support of legislation in the act of revenge provided the Icelandic avenger a legitimacy that would ultimately benefit him in ways that operating outside of the legal process might not, although legality was not necessarily important. Yet, the law provided a secure avenue for those seeking blood revenge. If the would be avenger could prove the severity of his enemy's crime in a lawsuit, the law would subscribe outlawry as the only judicial recourse – amounting to a death sentence for the accused, since outlawry not only stripped the individual of his status and property, but also awarded any one the right to kill him, particularly the individual who prosecuted him.³ Miller writes, “people took care to find adequate legal justification for their acts of revenge. They also planned with the knowledge that legally unjustified vengeance was liable to legal reprisal.”⁴ Thus, while an avenger could operate outside the legal process, such actions would come with a price: continuing with illegitimate revenge could have led to outlawry for the avenger rather than for his enemy. Killing, regardless of its motivations, was grounds for outlawry. Therefore, the avenger's best course of action was to make his enemy an outlaw which would establish the avenger in the role of state executioner, legitimizing his enemy's death and protecting himself from legal reprisal.

² Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 192-193.

³ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 234.

⁴ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 238.

The legal aspects of Icelandic blood revenge resembled, to an extent, Tokugawa blood revenge which was defined by the legislation of the *bakufu*. Yet, the legal process in Saga Iceland comprised only one dimension to this multidimensional practice. As previously discussed, Icelandic blood revenge did not necessitate the pursuit of legal legitimization, although outlawry provided a safer alternative in the pursuit of blood revenge for the avenger. Another dimension to blood revenge practices were the cultural norms that affected the social perception of revenge – that is, the guidelines one would be expected to follow in the pursuit of revenge dictated by the moral perceptions of acceptable behavior dictated by the society in which one lived. Yet, beyond these rather broad guidelines, that generally characterize Icelandic blood revenge, the multifaceted nature of this culture’s practice makes it difficult to definitively define. Revenge could not occur unless there was a specific justification that corresponded with a “balance-exchange model” – as Miller calls it – in order for the revenge to be perceived as legitimate within the avenger’s community. Miller writes that the social approval for the pursuit of blood revenge required “a wrong of some specificity that the relevant community would recognize as demanding repayment.”⁵ Primarily, Miller’s guidelines of Icelandic blood revenge spoke to three broad categories: method, timing, and target. There were limits to what could be categorized as proper methods of pursuing revenge, but they were generous limits. Miller cites examples to demonstrate honorable and dishonorable actions in this regard; for example, he explains that to kill a sleeping enemy was considered shameful behavior, but the limits of acceptable behavior did not exclude one from waking up the enemy and killing him before he had the opportunity to arm himself.⁶

⁵ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 216.

⁶ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 196.

Timing was also a factor in the pursuit of blood revenge particularly in the societal perceptions of successful revenge which was dependent on society's recognition of honorable behavior on the part of the avenger. In Icelandic blood revenge, Miller explains the importance of timing in Icelandic blood revenge by saying that those who were too slow to act risked shame, but "hasty revenge was vulgar."⁷ However, cultural guidelines for the appropriate timing of revenge is unclear even though it was such an important factor in blood revenge.

The importance of Timing was frequently debated in Japanese culture in blood revenge with the famous actions of the 47 *rōnin*. During the Tokugawa period, the preoccupation of the samurai class with the philosophical exploration of what it meant to be samurai, led to the conclusion that being samurai lay in possessing a certain attitude towards death and the compliance with certain behaviors in life. Thus, the specific details of these behaviors become particularly important; in the case of blood revenge, one such detail concerned the time of one's retaliation. In Yamamoto Tsunemoto's famous *Hagakure* (1716), the author insists that only rash action in the heat of the moment can ensure one's honor, where excessive plotting brings shame upon the one who waits. Many scholars of Japan agree that the guidelines in the *Hagakure* tend to be extreme; yet, Yamamoto suggests not only that the issue of time was important, but also that an avenger was expected to begin the pursuit of blood revenge in a timely fashion. Even though the issue of timing was important to this practice in both Icelandic and Japanese culture, success was, ultimately, more important.

Through cross-cultural comparisons I have come to the conclusion that the development of socially dictated norms for blood revenge in these cultures demonstrates the conflict between

⁷ Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 193.

a perceived necessity for such practices, yet an understanding that such things, left unchecked, could also be dangerous.

It is important to clarify that blood revenge in Japan was not a blood feud. The term “blood feud” implies a long-standing history of grievances and violence between two family units that spawned a never-ending cycle of secondary violence to redress perceived injustices suffered on each side. Often revenge and blood feuds are interconnected, one a tool in the perpetuation of the other; however, revenge and blood feuds can also exist independent of one another, although this was not usually the case in Icelandic blood-revenge practices. Japanese blood revenge, on the other hand, was often the cause of a singular action by one individual against another. Thus, the acts of violence that I will discuss can not be labeled feuds.

In Chapter One, I will define honor and blood revenge, exploring the relationship between them in both Western and East Asian cultures. Blood revenge is triggered by physical or spiritual injury to the integrity of self or group. If that notion of honor is violated, retribution is called for with or without the assistance of the law. In Japan’s warrior culture, rules and regulations to ensure the preservation of honor developed to such an extent that blood revenge became extremely ritualistic during the early modern period.

In Chapter Two, I will explore the earliest records of blood revenge in Japan. Pre-modern blood revenge is a difficult topic to discuss since, prior to the Tokugawa period, documented cases are few; however, despite the lack of documentation, blood revenge incidents have been traced back as far as the Nara period (奈良時代 710-794) with the practice of *igō* (移郷).⁸ The *Nihongi* (compiled in 797), contains one of the first discussions of blood revenge, dated 486

⁸ *Igō* was the practice of moving someone who had become the object of revenge out of the village and relocating him elsewhere to deter outbreaks of blood revenge. There is no indication that this practice existed after the end of the Nara period.

A.D., which features an ethical debate about this practice. Another blood revenge was recounted in the *Kojiki* (compiled in 712) and saw the graduation of blood revenge from debate to practice. No other such accounting emerges in Japanese texts again until the blood revenge of the Soga brothers in 1193, which was first recorded in the *Azuma Kagami*, then retold in literary adaptations in later periods. With the inclusion of the brothers' revenge, the *Azuma Kagami* provides an official record of a pioneering event for blood-revenge practices in Japanese society.

Medieval judicial recourse featured a paradoxical system of law through lawlessness. Conlan writes, “a tendency to ignore codified laws became a cultural norm. In the case of fourteenth-century Japan, unwritten, widely shared notions of justice co-existed with an almost congenital disregard for codified laws.⁹ Although blood revenge was legally prohibited, often if the killing of the individual was deemed contributory to the betterment of society, the offense would be overlooked and penal laws would be disregarded altogether. In this way, the practice blood revenge held importance more for its functionality, than its cultural significance. Perhaps the defining feature of pre-modern blood revenge is the lack of restriction – either legal or cultural – surrounding the practice. By the Muromachi period (室町時代 1333-1467), some guidelines for blood revenge were developed in the laws of autonomous *daimyo ie* such as those contained in the *Chosokabe Motochika Shikimoku* (長宗我部元親式目 compiled 1597) suggesting that this practice was becoming more common amongst the Japanese warrior class.

In Chapter Three, I explore the significant changes to blood revenge practices during the Tokugawa period, including most prominently the legalization of blood revenge and its impact, both functionally and symbolically to Japanese culture. Prior to 1600, blood revenge held a

⁹ Thomas Conlan, *State of War: the Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 95.

more functional position in society; however, with the onset of peace under the Tokugawa *bakufu*, blood revenge became a tool of control for the state, while simultaneously, coming to serve as a safe avenue through which the samurai could prove their worth as warriors to society. While blood revenge has been referred to as *katakiuchi* in documents of the pre-modern period, the term *katakiuchi* really seems to acquire a very specific meaning, which sets it apart as a unique practice, during the Tokugawa period. Government-sanctioned revenge allowed the Tokugawa *bakufu* to control outbreaks of violence in the name of honor without alienating the samurai class. According to Ikegami, this system “provided an intelligent form of control” while offering “both context and occasion for demonstrating the spirit of an honorable samurai.”¹⁰

With the legalization of blood revenge came a set of government-mandated criteria including an application process for this practice. To keep track of these applications, the magistrate offices of the *bakufu* created blood revenge registries. Blood-revenge registries show that the samurai were not the only social class to pursue blood revenge during this period; merchants and villagers also petitioned the government to pursue *katakiuchi*, although to a lesser degree. Thus, the discussion of social class becomes important to examining how this practice changed during the Tokugawa period.

The method of social ascension and the frequency of transmigration between social classes are what make social structure puzzling during the Tokugawa period, considering the rigid social hierarchy established by Toyotomi Hideyoshi during the medieval period. The question arises: with this blurred line between the classes, to whom did the practice of blood revenge really belong? The participation of these classes in traditional samurai practices is due,

¹⁰ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 249 & 250.

in large part, to the dissemination of samurai values amongst the lower classes. Douglas R. Howland suggests a legal hierarchy in which economics played a key role in one's mobility within the social hierarchy of the Tokugawa period. Wealthy *chōnin* would pay impoverished samurai to adopt their children, thus buying their way into samurai lineages. The unique aspect of Tokugawa blood revenge was its accessibility to any social class, thus irrevocably changing the demographics of a historically exclusive practice.

In Chapter Four, I will explore history through literature by examining the Soga Monogatari – a tale of two brothers who avenged their father's death by killing his murderer – as “archetypal”¹¹ for the development of later blood-revenge practices in Japan. Thus, their tale provides invaluable clues about the rules that governed this emerging practice. The cultural institutionalization of specific rules that governed blood revenge during the Tokugawa period can be traced back to the actions of the Soga brothers as presented in the *Soga Monogatari*.

Furthermore, I will also examine the similarities between the two most famous blood-revenge incidents in Japanese history: the Soga brothers and the 47 *rōnin*. When these two incidents are viewed comparatively, the similarities in the timing, target, and results of their revenges are striking. The 47 *rōnin* blood revenge – and society's positive reception of it – suggests that the *Soga Monogatari* could perhaps be categorized as one of the most influential texts in Japanese history.

In this thesis, I set out to establish a clear timeline of blood revenge practices in Japanese history, highlighting the pivotal moments in Japanese history that mark a distinct change in blood-revenge practices. Throughout the course of my research, I have also sought to explore

¹¹ This is a term borrowed from D.E. Mills. See Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 530.

these elements of Japanese blood revenge practices that have gone largely unnoticed or have been only marginally discussed in academic discourse.

CHAPTER I
THE PRACTICE OF BLOOD REVENGE

1:1 Defining Blood Revenge

The language of “honor” and the reciprocity it demands is universal among varying cultures around the world; however, a single term to describe a universal revenge practice does not exist for while the intentions, and rational behind them, may be an inherent human condition and the same across cultures, the specific practices involved in such an undertaking vary from culture to culture. Many cultures possess, or once possessed, their own version of revenge – for many Western cultures, this took the form of dueling – as well as their own words to represent meaning behind these individual practices.

Over time, one can see the emergence of a myriad of words in the Japanese language to represent the act of revenge – such words include *fukushū* (復讐), *adauchi* (仇討ち), *megatakiuchi* (妻敵討ち), *bureiuchi* (無礼討ち), *katakiuchi* (敵討ち), for example; however, these words are not synonymous. The very existence of these words suggests a variation of meaning between them. Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) explains, in his writings on the development of human perceptions, that the many words within a language, which refer to the various levels of meaning within a particular concept, are a result of a progressive step forward in humanity’s capacity to distinguish concepts from one another; as one’s capacity for distinction develops, one adopts an analytical mindset, which leads to the recognition of a variety of differences between emotions and human affairs that were once thought to be identical.¹² In

¹² Michael Bordaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy, eds., *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 78.

other words, the very existence of different terms to represent this concept of revenge indicates that there is a perceived variation that could not be categorized using one term alone, thus necessitating the creation of another term to represent the different meanings.

In English, the words we use to discuss “private retribution” include “revenge,” “vengeance,” “an eye for an eye,” for example; yet, the fundamental connotations behind all of these words are linked by a single thread of meaning, which can be succinctly summarized in a single word: vigilantism. In many Western societies, vigilantism possesses negative implications, but historically, vigilantism manifested in the form of citizen committees who attempted to maintain social order and eradicate violence when law enforcement organizations were either absent all together or lacked efficiency. These committees would even model their own procedures for justice on those practiced by law enforcement agencies; however, this should not suggest that there were no other motivations behind the actions of such groups. The most common alternative motivation for vigilantism was a frustration with a seemingly ineffective legal institution. Today’s use of the word “vigilante” describes the actions of a group of individuals who punish others for their wrongdoings outside the bounds of the legal system.¹³ Although acts of revenge are sanctioned among those who initiate them, they are officially condemned in public.

In his article, entitled “Norms of Revenge,” social theorist Jon Elster makes a reference to “the relation of norms of revenge to (allegedly) rational revenge behavior”¹⁴ slightly mockingly, which suggests a general perception that westerners, typically, perceive the act of revenge – or,

¹³ Robert M. Guth and Cynthia R. Poe, “Vigilantes,” in *The Dictionary of American History*, ed. Stanley I. Kutler, 10 vols (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2003), 8:336.

¹⁴ Jon Elster, “Norms of Revenge,” *Ethics* 100.4 (July, 1990): 863.

vigilantism – to be a primarily irrational behavior stemming from an intense emotional response to a given situation. As such, Elster claims that revenge is unpredictable and, subsequently, dangerous to the society as a whole. Yet, while Elster considers this kind of judicial violence detrimental to society, Thomas Conlan explains, in his book *State of War: the Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan* (2002), that it was violence that maintained order in Japan rather than codified laws, which I will discuss in more depth later on. However, during the early modern period, violence became more symbolic in nature, rather than functional – although some functionality still remained – and those forms of violence claimed by samurai culture became highly ritualized.

In order to understand the many forms of revenge that existed in various periods of Japanese history, it is necessary to arrive at an understanding of perceptions of revenge that are integral to Japanese society. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term “blood revenge” to discuss the use of deadly violence to redress the offense of deadly injury and, by association,¹⁵ injured honor. Typically, blood revenge was undertaken by a close relative of the victim; however, this was not always the case. In some cases, blood revenge was undertaken by a person in some other way connected to the victim of deadly violence. I chose the term “blood revenge” to represent these violent actions because this term seemed to be the closest one could come to a neutral inferential word in the English repertoire; however, the problem with any English word for this kind of violent retribution is its slightly negative connotations; therefore, one can never adequately represent, in a single word or phrase, the Japanese perception of this action, nor the esteem in which it was held.

¹⁵ To become the victim of deadly injury was to incur shame for not only the victim, but also his family.

1:2 The Japanese Culture of Honor and Shame

The reasons for violence inflicted and incurred often have to do with honor. The term “honor” is an extremely complex one. It is difficult to decipher and so complex and open to individual interpretation that it may never be adequately defined. In the words of Eiko Ikegami, “honor is a complex multidimensional concept.” In a nutshell, honor involves a deep concern for one’s reputation and a desire to maintain social dignity. As in many societies, “one’s honor is the image of oneself in the social mirror, and that image affects one’s self-esteem and one’s behavior. Because of this very nature, honor mediates between individual aspirations and the judgment of society.”¹⁶ The notion of “honor is inevitably a social concept,” Ikegami goes on to say, “concerned with the evaluation of individuals within the social groups in which they claim membership.”¹⁷ Devotion to maintaining their honor, pride, and overall reputation were more important to a samurai than all other obligations.¹⁸

The Japanese have many terms to express the desire for honor as well as for the desire to avoid shame, the most common of which are the terms *na* (name) and *haji* (shame).¹⁹ One of the most important aspects of a samurai’s life was the avoidance of shame and the seeking of honor and social recognition.²⁰ For the samurai, the most effective demonstration of honor was the

¹⁶ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 23.

¹⁷ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 6.

¹⁸ Karl F. Friday, *Samurai, Warfare, and the State of Early Medieval Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 137.

¹⁹ Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 17.

²⁰ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 18.

willingness to use violence.²¹ Often a samurai's honor depended greatly on his physical prowess, namely in the form of violence. The desire for honor was a powerful motivation that had the power to spur the samurai to fight bravely during battle in a desire to bolster their reputation.

As discussed earlier, violence served a judicial function in Japan and became extremely ritualized over time. In his book *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), René Girard writes, “the function of ritual is to ‘purify’ violence. Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of ‘good’ violence.”²² Thus, violence became indispensable to maintaining social order to such an extent that it is legitimized through the creation of ritual, which sanctions it. As violence was the medium through which one obtained honor, the term “violence” requires closer scrutiny for it is a related concept. In this article, “The Anthropology of Violent Interaction,” Christian Krohn-Hansen points out that violence is a subjective term, the definition of which is dependent on the social norms of the culture in which the term is being defined.²³ How is violence justifiably incorporated into society? In Japan, violence emerged as a form of social control during the medieval period. The medieval legal system was comprised of three divisions of law: administrative, judicial, and penal. Prior to the Muromachi period (室町時代 1333-1467)– and the onset of successive civil wars – any violence that occurred outside of the institutionalized justice system was stigmatized and subject to punishment.²⁴ However, with the outbreak of civil war in the fourteenth century, the power of central authority declined and warriors began

²¹ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 21.

²² René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 37.

²³ Christian Krohn-Hansen, “The Anthropology of Violent Interaction,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 50 (Winter 1994): 368.

²⁴ Thomas Conlan, *State of War: The Violent Order of Fourteenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 212.

defending their own rights. Thus, administrative laws were often disregarded entirely and penal laws were rarely enforced. Conlan writes, “a disregard for central authority, coupled with a tendency to resort to blood shed in resolving disputes, became the dominant pattern or judicial recourse.”²⁵ The use of violence to protect one’s rights constituted a defining feature of medieval Japan.²⁶ However, while private violence became a proxy for central authority, violence was not arbitrarily committed nor did it continue indefinitely. Once the parties involved in the violence achieved parity, the violence would end.²⁷ By linking honor – which was a vital to a warrior’s reputation – to violence, society was, in fact, bestowing legitimacy on violent acts. In this thesis, I will define violence, not in terms of legality, but simply as the use of physical force with the intention of causing physical injury or death.

Honor was central to a samurai’s existence because his honor or shame would belong not only to himself but also to his family name. Honorable conduct demanded a willingness to use violence against another in a show of strength, displaying a willingness to sacrifice one’s own life in the pursuit of restoring one’s honor or that of one’s extended family or *ie*. According to Karl Friday, “honor – or conversely, shame – could reach beyond the warrior himself, and even beyond his lifespan. [Warriors] could prosper through the inherited glory of their ancestors or suffer the stigma of their disgrace.”²⁸ It is this driving force to enhance one’s reputation and good name that often drove a samurai’s behavior.²⁹

²⁵ Conlan, *State of War*, 218-219.

²⁶ Conlan, *State of War*, 195.

²⁷ Conlan, *State of War*, 203.

²⁸ Friday, *Samurai, Warfare, and the State of Medieval Japan*, 137.

²⁹ Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, 71.

It was not until the Tokugawa era that such a document, one that attempted to address the ethos of the samurai, came into being. The idea that a samurai “honor code,” contained within a single collection of written documentation on how a samurai should behave, has always existed, is a common misconception. For that matter, it was not until this period that the samurai became universally literate. These new works that emerged, regarding samurai morality, held largely Neo-Confucian views.³⁰ Up until this period in history, however, although many samurai held common beliefs and goals, such as enhancing one’s own honor and the avoidance of shame, the execution of these goals varied. According to Ikegami, “this wedding of violence and honor, this planting of violence within one’s sense of dignity, was thus the most forceful art of the samurai culture of honor...”³¹

1:3 Blood Revenge vs. Blood Feuds

The term “blood feud” refers to what René Girard would consider an endless cycle of violence and revenge killings;³² however, it is important to clarify that blood revenge, in Japan, was not a blood feud. The term “blood feud” implies a longstanding history of grievances and violence between two family units that spawned a never ending cycle of secondary violence to redress perceived injustices suffered on each side. In this context, the blood feud is self-perpetuating. William Ian Miller, author of *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, discusses the distinction between blood feuds and vengeance in the Icelandic culture; Miler writes that unlike

³⁰ G. Cameron Hurst III, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushido Ideal,” *Philosophy East and West* 40 (October 1990): 515.

³¹ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 117.

³² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 14.

“revenge killing that can be an individual matter, feuding involves groups.”³³ Blood revenge, in Japan, was often the cause of a singular action by one individual against another.³⁴ Due to the singularity of the vengeance-triggering act, one undertook blood revenge knowing that there would be an end to the violence once retribution had been carried out on the offending party; however, one cannot say that second round vendettas did not occur – although, the violence typically ended with the punishment of the first offender. With this exception and the above mentioned reasons, the acts of violence that I will discuss cannot be categorized as a blood feud.

In conclusion, the concept of “honor” exists among many cultures around the world, and varies in prominence not only between cultures, but within the time periods of each culture. Many cultures possess or once possessed their own blood-revenge practice, as well as their own terminology. The number of words that exist in both the English and Japanese languages to represent the practice of blood-revenge are many and the meanings they encompass are vast. By trying to assign clear definitions to each term, one comes closer to a better understanding of the function and social complexities of the vendetta culture in Japan.

The practice of blood revenge manifests itself in a myriad of forms throughout the world and throughout history. The reason for the existence of blood revenge is due to the need to regain honor. Honor is interwoven with the ethics of “living well” or even “dying well.” Despite some variation in form, it has been viewed in many societies throughout history as a morally accepted practice despite what the law of any age dictates. Thus, we will see that honor – and its ties to filial duty – is what ultimately drove an avenger to pursue blood revenge, rather

³³ William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 180.

³⁴ This statement refers to the original offense that led to the subsequent blood revenge pursuit and should not suggest that there could not be more than one avenger. I will go into greater detail about the subject of multiple avengers in a later chapter.

than grief over the death of a loved one. In Chapter Two, I will explore the first emergence of blood revenge occurrences in Japan through the literature that recounts them, as well as the political, legal, and social context in which they existed.

CHAPTER II

PRE-MODERN BLOOD REVENGE

Pre-modern blood revenge in Japan is a difficult topic to discuss since, prior to the Tokugawa period, documented cases are few; however, regardless of the lack of documentation, blood revenge did occur in the pre-modern period; yet, it is impossible to determine its frequency. Based on social and political histories of the various pre-modern periods one could speculate that, prior to the Heian period, blood revenge incidents were common enough for policies meant to deter blood revenge – such as *igō* – to be implemented. In the Heian period, with the establishment of an aristocratic class, and the societal preoccupation with court aesthetics (*miyabi*), blood revenge fell into obscurity. Yet with the establishment of a warrior government in the Kamakura period (鎌倉時代 1185-1333), there came a shift from aesthetic to ethic principles which would have heralded a renewal in these practices and the frequency of blood revenge would increase exponentially. Through official documentation and literature, we see the steady development of blood revenge from theory to practice, then from historical custom to a legal practice that held a sanctified position in warrior culture during the early modern period.³⁵

2:1 The Legality of Pre-modern Blood Revenge

At the end of the Gempei war in 1185, Minamoto no Yoritomo sought and received sanction from the Imperial court that authorized him to appoint certain officials to act as

³⁵ D.E. Mills, “Kataki-Uchi: The Practice of Blood Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 4 (1976): 530.

representatives of the government – in this case, *shugo* (守護 military governors) and *jitō* (地頭 land stewards)³⁶ – a conferral of power which legitimized Yoritomo’s position as the leader of a new government in Kamakura. Over time, the *bakufu* re-appropriated land (*shōen* 莊園) to temples, shrines, and those vassals of the government who proved deserving. At the top of the warrior aristocracy that developed were the shogun’s vassals, known as *gokenin* (御家人). In return for their service, Yoritomo protected their economic status and legitimized their holdings by issuing them official letters of commendation. One’s title as *gokenin* was one awarded based on demonstrations of meritorious deeds. If at anytime a warrior failed to live up to the standards expected of him, his title would be given to one deemed more deserving. Prior to the establishment of an exclusive vassalage system that developed during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (室町時代 1333-1467), warriors were more akin to mercenaries, participating in multiple patron-client relationships at any given time. Yet, during the Kamakura period, warriors developed more exclusive ties through an exchange of interests, which formed the foundation of the lord-vassal relationship that emerged in the Muromachi period.³⁷ Warriors used their martial skills to distinguish themselves on the battlefield and would be rewarded accordingly for their feats by the lord they served.

In addition to this political and social restructuring, there were also a number of judicial changes. Three systems of law co-existed during the Kamakura period: *kuge-hō* (公家法), *honjō-hō* (本莊法), and *buke-hō* (武家法). The *Goseibai Shikimoku* (御成敗式目) promulgated

³⁶ *Shugo* and *jitō* were positions often awarded to *gokenin*. *Shugo* were military governors who were posted in each province to maintain law and order, while *jitō* were land stewards who oversaw both public and private lands to supervise local activity and ensure the obligations of the *shōen* were met.

³⁷ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 84.

in 1232), the first behavioral code by warriors for warriors, was a reflection of *buke-hō* law.³⁸ The *Goseibai Shikimoku* consisted of 51 articles that were created in accordance with accepted customs and practices of the warrior class. This legislation outlined the rights of the warrior class, attempted to generally discipline and restrict warrior behavior, and enunciated the duties and responsibilities of government-appointed officials. Consequently, “the entire ritsuryō system was swept away and replaced by laws that grew out of the social structure and special needs of the warrior class.”³⁹

Actual blood revenge incidents can be traced back as far as the Nara period (奈良時代 710-784). Ishii Ryosuke traced blood revenge incidents through documentation regarding a practice called *igō* (移郷), which was designed to forestal instances of blood revenge by sending the target of that revenge away from his home village. While it is uncertain how long such a practice lasted, it appears that such a practice fell out of use by the time the Kamakura *bakufu* took control in 1185.⁴⁰

While blood-revenge incidents can be traced back to the Nara period, such practices seemed to have emerged more commonly in Japan’s medieval period. Perhaps the defining feature of pre-modern blood revenge is the lack of restriction – either legal or cultural – surrounding the practice. In fact, the only *bakufu* legislation that directly speaks to blood revenge lies in the *Goseibai Shikimoku* (御成敗式目 promulgated in 1232). Article 10 of this

³⁸ Ryōsuke Ishii, *A History of Political Institutions in Japan* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980), 46.

³⁹ Minoru Shinoda, “History of Japan (Kamakura History),” in the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 3:9 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983): 170-171.

⁴⁰ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 534.

code, one could speculate, was written in response to similar instances of blood-revenge undertakings. The article reads as follows:

[If] a son or grandson slays the enemy of his father or grand-father, even if they were not privy to the offense, [they] are nevertheless to be punished for it. The reason is that the gratification of the father's or grand-father's rage was the motive prompting to the sudden execution of a cherished purpose.⁴¹

Often during this period, if the killing of the individual was thought to contribute to the betterment of society, the offense would be overlooked and penal laws would be disregarded all together.

Yet, while the defining feature of the Kamakura *bakufu* was its emphasis on the law and order, medieval society – from the 14th century onward – operated according to an interesting system of law through lawlessness. The Muromachi government was unstable and unable to extend much control over the rebellions instigated by peasants and samurai who rose in insurrection. Meanwhile, *shugo* were busy misappropriating lands and converting *jitō* into their personal retainers, transforming the provinces they oversaw into feudal domains under their leadership. The more powerful *shugo* ignored the government altogether and promulgated their own legal codes, creating a judiciary independent of the *bakufu*.⁴² Thomas Conlan writes in the *State of War: the Violent Order in Fourteenth-Century Japan*, “a tendency to ignore codified laws became a cultural norm. In the case of fourteenth-century Japan unwritten, widely shared notions of Justice co-existed with an almost congenital disregard for codified laws.”⁴³ As discussed earlier in my first chapter, there were three components to medieval law:

⁴¹ John C. Hall, *Japanese Feudal Law* (Washington D.C.: University of Publications of America, Inc., 1979), 23.

⁴² Ishii, *A History of Political Institutions in Japan*, 50.

⁴³ Conlan, *State of War*, 195.

Administrative, judicial, and penal law. Administrative laws were often disregarded in favor of giving judicial edicts priority, while penal law was rarely enforced. In this way, the dominant method for judicial recourse in medieval Japan came to disregard central authority and resort to violent measures to resolve conflict.

The economy of honor was revitalized during the Kamakura period, gaining currency as the warrior class developed. Honorable feats – in the form of great displays of martial skill through violence – could be traded for wealth and status in Kamakura society. This economy of honor encouraged a certain type of behavior amongst this class, uniting them while simultaneously promoting individuality. Overtime, as patron-client relationships became more exclusive with the development of the vassalage system, the individualistic nature of honor also transformed becoming more communal. With the development of the *ie* in the Muromachi period, the warrior's honor came to reflect upon that of the *ie*, thereby promoting its prestige. At this point, the master-vassal relationship had become more than an exchange of interests, but had also acquired an emotional dimension that cultivated a distinctive mental disposition of self-sacrifice in the name of that relationship. This relationship created a community in which a “warrior's honor was publicly evaluated and conferred,”⁴⁴ thus creating a collective identity through these shared notions of honor. Ikegami writes:

The development of the *ie* provided a critical step in the development of the samurai culture of honor. With the emergence of the *ie*, he [the warrior] now had a reason beyond his own honorable name for risking his life. The property of the *ie* would be passed onto each samurai's descendants and the reputation of the samurai house as a whole had to be maintained toward this end.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 84.

⁴⁵ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 71.

In this way, honor was becoming a more abstract concept, one that extended beyond the individual to the communal, yet also continued to possess a kind of individual currency similar to that we see in the Kamakura period.

As the *ie* developed and gained greater autonomy during the Muromachi period, daimyo established their own laws and behavioral codes that governed the actions of the members of that household, which may have included regulations regarding blood revenge practices. The bulk of legislation of blood revenge in the pre-modern period came primarily from autonomous *ie* laws. Most likely the first legal statement condoning the practice of blood revenge, in Japan, came from the house law of the Date family, in 1536; however, this text is unclearly written and difficult to decipher. A much clearer statement was made in the *Chōsokabe Motochika*⁴⁶ *Shikimoku* (compiled 1597), which states:

In the matter of vengeance: a son may avenge his father and a younger brother his elder brother, but it is not proper for an elder brother to avenge his younger brother, nor is it acceptable for an uncle to avenge his nephew.⁴⁷

With this legislation, we see the establishment of blood revenge as an acceptable and established practice in Japanese culture, as long as it was intended to avenge the older rather than the younger in the genealogical hierarchy.

Throughout the medieval period, the pursuit of blood revenge was a precarious balancing act between legitimacy and legality. While culturally an avenger was perceived to be involved in a legitimate pursuit to fulfill filial obligations, legally this practice was illegal outside the realm of autonomous *ie*. D.E. Mills writes, “certainly the conflict between law and custom was not an

⁴⁶ Chōsokabe Motochika (1539-1599) was a powerful daimyo and head of the Chōsokabe clan in Tosa from 1560 until his death in 1599. For more information about this document or its compiler, see John W. Hall and Marius B. Jansen, *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

⁴⁷ D.E. Mills, “Kataki-Uchi: The Practice of Blood Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 10, vol. 4 (1976): 536.

easy one to resolve and it would seem that custom frequently won.”⁴⁸ Thus, one could never be sure if his blood revenge would be overlooked or condemned by *bakufu* authority. In this way, blood revenge was a dangerous endeavor to pursue – in more ways than one. Due to the contradiction between law and practice – as well as the distinct lack of documentation regarding such occurrences – it is difficult to discuss blood revenge in pre-modern Japan. However, Conlan’s conclusions regarding the frequent use of violence for judicial matters regardless of codified laws suggest that there were many more of these incidents than were ever documented.

2:2 The Earliest Accounts of Blood Revenge: The *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*

The *Nihongi* (compiled 797), one of Japan’s oldest chronicles, contains one of the first such discussions on blood revenge, dated 486 A.D.:⁴⁹

The Emperor addressed the Prince Imperial Ohoke, saying: — “Our father the late prince was, for no crime, slain with an arrow shot by the Emperor Oho-hatsuse, and his bones cast away on a moor. Even now, I have been unable to get hold of him, and my bosom is filled with indignation. I lie down to weep, and as I walk abroad I cry aloud. It is my desire to wash away the disgrace cast on us by our enemy. Now, I have heard that no one should live under the same Heaven as his father’s enemy, that no one should lay aside arms against the enemy of his brother, that no one should dwell in the same country with the enemy of his comrade. Even the son of a common man, rather than serve with the enemy of his parents, sleeps on a coarse mat, and making a pillow of his buckler, refuses office. He will not dwell in the same country as his enemy, but whenever he meets him, in market or in court, will not lay aside his weapon until he has encountered him in combat. Much more I who, two years ago, was raised to the rank of Son of

⁴⁸ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 534.

⁴⁹ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 529.

Heaven! It is my desire to demolish his *misasagi*, to crush his bones and fling them broadcast. Would it not be a filial act to take revenge in this way? ⁵⁰

This story, which features an ethical debate about the practice of blood revenge, directly references Confucian texts, thus revealing the tale's influencing philosophy. In the above example one can see a link connecting blood revenge and one of the greatest virtues in Japanese culture: filial piety.

One of the first accounts of a blood revenge incident was recounted in the *Kojiki* (compiled 712), the oldest known history of Japan.⁵¹ This text served as the court's statement of origin, legitimizing the imperial family's rule while simultaneously containing a compilation of myths, legends, historical and pseudo-historical narrative, and genealogies.⁵² The *Kojiki* recounts the blood revenge of an imperial prince named Mayowa 眉輪王, whose father was Prince Ōkusaka 大草香皇子. Prince Ōkusaka was executed by the Benevolent Emperor⁵³ without having committed a crime. When the Prince turned seven, he overheard a conversation between the Emperor and his mother, learning that the Emperor was responsible for his father's death, so the Prince stabbed the Emperor to death while he slept. Afterwards, the Prince ran away and hid in the home of the Minister of Finance, but was captured by a soldier of Prince Yūryaku, who would later become emperor. Both Prince Mayowa and the Minister – who vainly petitioned for clemency – were burned at the stake.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ W.G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1956), 389-390. D.E. Mills also discusses this entry in his article "Kataki-Uchi: The Practice of Blood Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan," 529.

⁵¹ "Katakiuchi かたきうち," *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2001): 701.

⁵² Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press: 1968), 3.

⁵³ Emperor Anko; see Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 343.

⁵⁴ "Katakiuchi かたきうち," 701.

Given that the tale of blood revenge in the *Kojiki* is predated by the ethical debate of the *Nihongi* suggests that the *Nihongi* acts as a validation for the actions of Prince Mayowa in the *Kojiki*. Furthermore, these two texts represent a progression in blood revenge practices in Japan; the progression starts as a theoretical debate regarding the moral ramifications of blood revenge, which, with the philosophies of Confucianism as evidence, suggests the righteousness of such actions. The theoretical speculations end when the act of blood revenge becomes a reality in the *Kojiki* with the recounting of Prince Mayowa's blood revenge in which it is suggested that filial piety is a legitimate reason to pursue violent resolution, even though he was ultimately executed. Filial piety, and the value the Japanese people placed on this virtue in warrior culture, will become one of the driving factors in the continued, even increased, perpetuation of this practice over time. No other such accounting emerges in Japanese texts again until the blood revenge of the Soga brothers in 1192, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

2:3 Blood Revenge in the *Azuma Kagami*

While the blood revenge tale recounted in the *Kojiki* marks the first occurrence of blood revenge in Japan, its credibility as a historical event cannot be proven. The first blood-revenge incident recognized by scholars of Japan today is the incident of the Soga brothers in 1192. It became one of the most influential blood-revenge tales in Japanese history – second only to the tale of the 47 rōnin after the 18th century. The details of this revenge were first recorded in the *Azuma Kagami* (吾妻鏡 *Mirror of the East*, likely compiled between 1266 and 1301), a record of

political and military affairs of the Kamakura *bakufu*.⁵⁵ The *Azuma Kagami* provides a specific date for the revenge (the 28th day of the 5th month of 1193) and dedicates nearly two and a half pages to the description of the incident, demonstrating the impact this incident had within society. The entry for the Soga brother's revenge, translated by Laurence Kominz, reads as follows:

The Soga brothers, grandchildren of Itō Sukechika, broke into Kudō's lodge on the plain of Mount Fuji and killed him and his attendant, Ōtōnai...and the brothers raised a great victory cry. These shouts created an uproar in the camp. The shogun's guards ran out, unaware of what was happening. "Rain and thunder pounded like beating drums, torches were extinguished in the dark night, and the samurai were in such confusion that they could not tell east from west. This worked to the advantage of the brothers, who wounded many of them." Jūrō was slain by Nitta no Shirō Tadatsuna. Gorō, after penetrating the shogun's camp in the hopes of taking on Yoritomo, was captured by the shogun's attendant, Goshō no Gorōmaru.

The next day the shogun interrogated Gorō. Gorō expressed his anger and resentment, speaking of his family's fall in fortune after the death of his grandfather. Gorō said that he killed Kudō to "wash away the shame from his father's corpse." Gorō informed the shogun of the vows he and Jūrō had made as children and of their unremitting dedication to those vows. He declared that he had attacked the shogun to avenge his grandfather; now that he had failed, he requested permission to commit seppuku. Gorō identified Jūrō's severed head, brought in by Nitta. Kudō's wife and son requested and were given permission to arrange Gorō's execution. Messengers brought the brothers' last letter, intended for their mother. Its tone was proof of the brothers' noble characters, and the shogun was so impressed that he said it would be kept in the archives forever.

Three weeks after the vendetta, Jūrō's mistress, a prostitute from Ōiso, was interrogated but released after her innocence was ascertained. Kudō's widow and son accused the youngest Soga brother, the monk Onbō (1177-1193) (he was born shortly after his father's death), of complicity in the murder of Kudō. Onbō's

⁵⁵ The dates of compilation are ambiguous, but most likely reached completion at the beginning of the fourteenth century. William McCullough cites an argument that suggests that the main body of the *Azuma Kagami* had been compiled as early as the 1270. See William McCullough, "The *Azuma Kagami*: Account of the Shōkyū War," *Monumenta Nipponica* 23 no. 1/2 (1968): 103. However, Laurence Kominz writes that much of what is recorded in the *Azuma Kagami* was actually compiled from court diaries, popular tales, and official documents, sixty years later. See Laurence Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance: Japanese Drama and the Soga Literary Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 16-17.

stepfather denied the charge, but a messenger was sent to bring Onbō to Kamakura.

Onbō was brought to Kamakura and was informed that he would be beheaded. He requested permission to read the sutras and to commit seppuku. He reiterated his family's hatred of the shogun, and then committed ritual suicide.⁵⁶

The validity of this entry, considering the origins of the information is dubious. While such information as names, dates and locations seem reliable, the narrative itself is suspect.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the *Azuma Kagami* provides an official record of a pioneering event for blood revenge practices in Japanese culture.

The speed with which the story was romanticized among the people, having been orally transmitted and recorded little more than 100 years after the incident, also provides proof of the impact this incident had on society. The social acceptance of the Soga brothers' actions, by the emerging warrior culture of the Kamakura period is clearly represented in the written accounting of their vendetta, the *Manabon Soga Monogatari*. The fame of the Soga brothers' revenge led to the adoption of certain practice parameters in the early modern period, but this was not so during the pre-modern period, although this incident marked a turning point in judicial undertakings that became the impetus for the development of a blood revenge practice.

2:4 Lord Revenge: the Blood Revenge of Toyotomi Hideyoshi

Perhaps the most intriguing form of blood revenge in Japan is lord revenge. Lord revenge occurred when a vassal's lord was wrongfully slain and his vassal(s) pursued his murderer with the intent to inflict deadly injury for his offense. Accounts of lord revenge were

⁵⁶ Kominz's translation was based on Hotta Shōzō, *Takubun Azuma Kagami Hyōchū* (Meicho KanKōkai, 1979), 309-16. Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 17-18.

⁵⁷ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 16-17.

so rare that no word exists in the Japanese language to describe this form of revenge. Typically, lord revenge has been categorized as *katakiuchi*, but such a categorization is inappropriate due to the laws that define this practice during the Tokugawa period.⁵⁸ The first account of lord revenge may be Toyotomi Hideyoshi's 豊臣秀吉 (1537-1598) blood revenge against Akechi Mitsuhide. In 1582, Toyotomi Hideyoshi defeated Akechi Mitsuhide's 明智光秀 troops at the Battle of Yamazaki in what appeared to be vengeance for the death of his lord, Oda Nobunaga 織田信長, whom Mitsuhide had ambushed and killed at a Buddhist temple in Kyoto called Honnōji eleven days earlier.

Although there exist theories as to why Akechi Mitsuhide attacked his lord, the prevailing theory is ambition: by attacking and killing Nobunaga while he was vulnerable, he could take his place as the most powerful warrior lord in Japan.⁵⁹ He attacked Nobunaga on June 21, 1582 with an army of 13,000 of Nobunaga's own men while he was visiting Honnōji in Kyoto. Nobunaga and his companions, having been surprised by the attack, fought back, but the enemy outnumbered them significantly. Jeroen P. Lamers writes that, rather than be killed by his enemy, "After a short skirmish, Nobunaga retreated with a wound to his elbow and committed suicide in a back room of the burning Honnōji."⁶⁰ Eleven days later, Toyotomi Hideyoshi defeated Mitsuhide at the Battle of Yamazaki in the southern part of the Kyoto prefecture.⁶¹ Hideyoshi used his role as Nobunaga's avenger to solidify his power as Nobunaga's successor.⁶²

⁵⁸ This defining characteristics of *katakiuchi* will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three.

⁵⁹ Jeroen P. Lamers, *Japonius Tyrannus*, (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2000), 215.

⁶⁰ Lamers, *Japonius Tyrannus*, 216.

⁶¹ Lamers, *Japonius Tyrannus*, 217.

⁶² Lamers, *Japonius Tyrannus*, 224.

This becomes pivotal *adauchi* in blood-revenge history and was retold many times and in many forms during the Tokugawa period based on its first recounting in the *Taikōki* (太閤記) – a document chronicling the history of Japan from 1572-1593. Later retellings of Hideyoshi’s *adauchi*, based on this accounting can be seen in *ehon* (illustrated) texts, such as Jippensha Ikku’s *Bakemono Taiheiki* (化物太平記, 1804) in which Ikku, a prolific satirist, wrote a burlesque version of Mitsuhide’s murder of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi’s subsequent revenge at the Battle of Yamazaki. Hideyoshi’s biography in the *Ehon Taikōki* (An Illustrated Chronicles of the Regent), which was published between 1797 - 1802,⁶³ served as the inspiration for Jippensha Ikku’s *Bakemono Taiheiki*.

It is impossible to determine whether or not an incident of blood revenge is improper or not without the *ie* legislation the avenger would be expected to abide by. Thus, since blood revenge practices in the pre-modern period lacked any kind of universal definition or structure independent of those contained in *ie* legislation, there really was no “improper revenge.” Perhaps the only influence on undertakings of blood revenge were moral perceptions. What is clear is that blood revenge occurred when a member of the family – typically a father or older brother – was killed. There were multiple factors influencing moral perceptions, but the greatest influencing force in one’s perceptions of family was Confucianism. Yet, there were also cases of blood revenge on behalf of slain lords. D.E. Mills explains that “in the context of Confucian society, family loyalty and loyalty to one’s superior are two aspects of basically the same ideal.”⁶⁴ Since the family structure strongly resembled the vassalage relationship in some ways,

⁶³ Julie Nelson Davis, “The Trouble with Hidyoshi: Censoring Ukiyo-e and the Ehon Taikoki incident of 1804,” *Japan Forum* 19:3 (Nov., 2007): 281.

⁶⁴ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 533.

logically this relationship became as important, if not more so, than the family. Thus, if one were to apply Confucian perspectives on blood revenge to the family where the father acted as master of the household, it would also make sense that such principles could be applied to the lord-vassal relationship.

In conclusion, it is difficult to discuss blood revenge in pre-modern Japan because of the contradiction between laws and practice, as well as the distinct lack of documentation regarding such occurrences. What is known for sure is that officially, blood revenge was illegal – given the statute in the *Goseibai Shikimoku* – but, unofficially, more often than not, warriors resorted to violent measures, outside the boundaries of central authority, to resolve conflict. During the Muromachi period (室町時代 1333-1573), it is likely that blood revenge began occurring more frequently, thus autonomous *ie* promulgated their own codes of conduct, two of which have become renown for condoning the practice of blood revenge: that of the Date family and the *Chōsokabe Motochika Shikimoku*. In Chapter Three, I will explore Tokugawa blood revenge (*katakiuchi*), which marked the climactic period in this practice's evolutionary history. The notion of honor became increasingly more abstract during the Tokugawa period, losing much of its currency within society. Thus, honor became more important to one's self-image and social standing and less valuable politically or economically.

CHAPTER III
TOKUGAWA BLOOD REVENGE (*KATAKIUCHI*)

The Tokugawa period was full of fascinating contradictions; this period saw the romanticization of the samurai ethic that existed, paradoxically, within a society with strict regulations against violent behavior. The *bakufu* tried both to accommodate and restrict the pursuit of honorable violence. Although private retribution by samurai was generally prohibited under *bakufu* law, the Tokugawa shogunate made a few concessions in order to appease a class that customarily used its capacity for swift action as an expression of one's manhood.⁶⁵ To this end, the *bakufu* established officially sanctioned acts of violence. Thus, certain retribution practices – such as *katakiuchi* 敵討, *megatakiuchi* 妻敵討, *bureiuchi* 無礼討 – were legitimized as legal undertakings. In this chapter, I will examine the development of blood-revenge practices during this period, primarily focusing on *katakiuchi*. I will narrow my focus even further by looking, more specifically, at the effects of status on the demographics of blood revenge.

3:1 Institutionalized Blood Revenge During the Tokugawa Period

Katakiuchi, as a term to represent blood revenge, is truly a product of its metamorphosis as an institutional practice during the Tokugawa period. While blood-revenge incidents of the have been referred to as *katakiuchi* in documents of the pre-modern period, the term *katakiuchi* really seems to have acquired a very specific meaning, which sets it apart as a unique practice, during the Tokugawa period. *Katakiuchi* was, first and foremost, a practice of legality, a fusion

⁶⁵ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 244.

of Confucianism and Tokugawa feudalist ideology that was recognized by society – and the government – as a justifiable use of violence and an approved custom for generations. It was not institutionalized, however, until the 17th century, but thrived until the practice was abolished at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912).⁶⁶ Ikegami writes:

The Tokugawa introduction of registered revenge was probably the most successful innovation, in terms of the regime’s intention to enclose samurai vengefulness within the framework of the Tokugawa order, while at the same time supporting the samurai’s defense of their honor.⁶⁷

In short, permission to undertake blood revenge was granted only when one’s family predecessor – such as one’s father or older brother, etc – was murdered and the killer managed to escape punishment. Government sanctioned vendettas, therefore, were only granted to petitioners if the situation was deemed proper, that is, if the avenger stood in a lower hierarchical kinship position to the avenged. When there was no such avenger, the aggrieved families were expected to leave the matter of justice to the authorities.⁶⁸

In order to legally carry out blood revenge, one had to petition the *bakufu* for permission. If the samurai was serving a daimyo lord, he would first ask his lord for permission to leave the premises or the domain in pursuit of revenge. If the lord granted him permission, the lord would then send a message to the government to have the avenger’s name added to a list of official blood revenges. This letter would also include the names of any helpers, usually relatives of the avenger, accompanying the avenger on his revenge – these people also had to be officially

⁶⁶ Mikito Ujiie 氏家幹人, *Katakiuchi: Fukushū no Sahō* かたき討ち：復讐の作法 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha 中央公論新社, 2007), 118.

⁶⁷ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 247.

⁶⁸ James T. Araki, “Review of *The Historical Literature of Mori Ogai*. Volume I: *The Incident at Sakai and Other Stories* and Volume II: *Sakai Koi and Other Stories*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 33 (Summer 1978): 219.

registered. A copy would then be sent to the avenger, giving him permission to seek out and attack his enemy.⁶⁹

It is important to clarify that law was not uniform during the Tokugawa period because *bakufu* law was only enforced in *bakufu* territory. Outside of these territories, autonomous daimyo fiefs were granted autonomy in legal matters – as long as those laws did not contradict that of the *bakufu* – and thus promulgated their own laws regarding various categories of behavior including the practice of blood revenge;⁷⁰ however, in the end, the *bakufu* alone could either grant or deny a vendetta, especially if the offender was captured outside the boundaries of the *daimyo*'s territory.⁷¹

By the late 17th century, government-sanctioned revenges had been established throughout Japan.⁷² If an avenger did not gain formal permission from the *bakufu* for *katakiuchi*, he would run into numerous problems on his journey, the most problematic of which coming from the local authorities and the transgressor's family. Without official documentation authenticating the vendetta, local authorities would arrest the successful avenger for murder, believing that the avenger had committed a random act of violence. Likewise, if the avenger attacked the enemy, and succeeded in killing him without having gained permission for the vendetta, he would then face retaliation from the offender's family. By gaining permission from the government for *katakiuchi*, the avenger was protected from such retaliation. The Tokugawa government did not allow what Ikegami calls "second-round revenges." In other words, the

⁶⁹ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 248.

⁷⁰ Carl, Steenstrup, *A History of Law in Japan Until 1868*, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 121; Ujiie, *Katakiuchi*, 120.

⁷¹ Mills, "Kataki-Uchi," 538.

⁷² Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 248-249.

vendetta became equivalent to a duel meant to settle the conflict once and for all. If the avenger was successful, the offender's family could not then petition for revenge against the avenger. Similarly, if the avenger was killed by the offender, his relatives could not take his place to gain revenge against the original offender.⁷³

These government-sanctioned revenges allowed the Tokugawa government to control outbreaks of violence in the name of honor without alienating the samurai class. The *bakufu's* control of Japan was dependent on its ability to control the warrior class. In order to maintain peace – and, subsequently, control – the *bakufu* had to develop ways to cultivate the warrior class in a time without war. This is the primary focus of Ikegami's argument in her book *Taming of the Samurai* (1997); she looks at how the *bakufu* managed to retain and maintain a warrior class in a time without war by transforming them from warriors to statesmen. The *bakufu's* success can be attributed to the politically safe alternatives to war they provided: legalized violence. According to Ikegami, this system “provided an intelligent form of control”⁷⁴ while offering “both context and occasion for demonstrating the spirit of an honorable samurai.”⁷⁵

There seem to be only three possible outcomes for those who pursued *katakiuchi*: the avenger was successful; the would-be avenger was killed in his attempt to exact revenge upon his enemy (this is called *kaeri-uchi*) and the case is turned over to the authorities; or the would-be avenger was unsuccessful, either never finding his enemy or abandoning the endeavor all

⁷³ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 249.

⁷⁴ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 248.

⁷⁵ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 250.

together. Those who failed in *katakiuchi* were not allowed to return home.⁷⁶ It was expected that one would pursue revenge until the enemy was slain, which may have meant searching for their enemy until the day s/he died.⁷⁷

To keep track of these application approvals, the magistrate offices of the *bakufu* created a blood-revenge registry. The blood-revenge registry, along with the police, local law, and town administration, was all controlled by the town magistrate offices in Edo.⁷⁸ By writing this practice into law, the *bakufu*, having adopted Confucian ideology and by understanding the cultural norms of the warrior class, adopted a practice that suited the needs of the governmental legal system, which was still in the beginning stages of development.⁷⁹ With the legalization of this practice came a set of government-mandated criteria for an application process for revenge. It is not clear when the registry was first implemented, but according to Mikito Ujiie it was probably not until the beginning of the Keian Era 慶安 (1648-1652) and came into common use by the beginning of the Kanbun Era 寛文 (1661-1673).⁸⁰ Upon the implementation of such a

⁷⁶ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 540. While there seem to be no definite statements – beyond claims made in literature – regarding why one could not return home if they failed in the pursuit of *katakiuchi*, there are certain speculations that one could safely make. A samurai who chose to pursue blood revenge likely had to acquire permission from his lord to leave his service before he could petition the government for permission to hunt down the object of his revenge. In this way, the samurai lost his place within society and would have had nothing to return to, as a result. Another reason would involve the level of commitment such an undertaking required: once the decision to pursue revenge had been voiced, there could be no going back. Perhaps one could even say that the pursuit of blood revenge was comparable to taking the tonsure in that once one had denounced the world, he/she could never again become a part of it. Lastly, one cannot ignore the shame that would befall one who had failed in his revenge and returned home to tell of it. Such an individual would likely have become a social pariah. This prospect likely made it impossible for one to return to their former life. Those who did not succeed in their revenge – yet, also escaped death in the pursuit – likely either became monks or relocated to another area and began a new life.

⁷⁷ Mori Ōgai, “Gojiingahara no Katakiuchi,” Trans. David Dilworth in *The Historical Fiction of Mori Ōgai*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 115.

⁷⁸ The town magistrate had two divisions – the North town and the West town magistrates; however, from Genroku 元禄 15 (1703) to Kyōhō 享保 4 (1720) there were three districts the North, the West, and the Middle town magistrates.

⁷⁹ Ujiie, *Katakiuchi*, 121.

⁸⁰ Ujiie, *Katakiuchi*, 118.

system of registration, if one did not gain permission prior to taking revenge, but succeeded in it, his blood revenge would be considered murder. Ujiie analyzes the content of such registries for the kind of information that was expected in such an application. A sum total of eighteen incidents were recorded as *katakiuchi* registry samples in a selection from the *Katakiuchi Genjōchōshōhan*.⁸¹ Ujiie found that it was typical for a would-be avenger to report information concerning the bloodshed incident that led to the *katakiuchi*, the enemy's identity, the relationship of this person and social status, the identity of the person who had murdered the victim, and the identity of the person who would perform *katakiuchi* and any helpers that would be involved.⁸² Such a registry information example can be seen in the following example taken from the *Kitamachi Bugyōsho Katakiuchi Chō* 北町奉行所敵討帳:

一浪人水嶋伝右衛門申上候、私伯父清水新右衛門と申者、去年...戌六月廿三日に武州忍に而桑原忠大夫と申者に被討申候、右之忠大夫は郎時に立退申候、伯父之敵之義に候間、見合次第討可申候、為後日申上候由、右之伝右衛門申来候⁸³

The rōnin Midzushima Den'emon reports: A senior uncle of mine called Shimidzu Shin'emon was killed in a stealth attack by a man called Kuwabara Chūdayū last year on the 23rd day of the Sixth Month in Musashi Province. The aforementioned Chūdayū [then] immediately departed. As he is truly the enemy of my senior uncle, when I encounter him I am bound to kill him. The afore-mentioned Den'emon has come to say that he makes this report for future reference.

In this example, the blood-revenge applicant provides his name and status. The applicant then explains the situation in which the murder of his uncle occurred and asks for permission to pursue the murderer. At the end of the application, the applicant states that he will return to

⁸¹ A report of revenge activity. Dates unknown.

⁸² Ujiie, *Katakiuchi*, 120.

⁸³ Ujiie, *Katakiuchi*, 182.

report on the success on the *katakiuchi* once it was complete, in compliance with *bakufu* regulations. Thus, this recitation of information provides one with an understanding of the procedure that surrounds the undertaking of blood revenge during this period.

Even though the *bakufu* had established a registry system through which avengers could petition for *katakiuchi*, the government had not yet established guidelines for the actual act of blood revenge, only the legal obligations one had to fulfill in order to pursue blood revenge. In the Kansei Codes that had been promulgated (the fundamental code of law for the Tokugawa *bakufu*) at the order of Tokugawa Yoshimune, there was legislation concerning *megatakiuchi*, but nothing about *katakiuchi*.⁸⁴

The Tokugawa *bakufu* did not include anything on blood revenge until the promulgation of two documents: the *Legacy of Ieyasu*⁸⁵ and the *Itakura Seiyoki*.⁸⁶ Article 51 of the *Legacy of Ieyasu*, translated in Sakae Shioya's *Chūshingura* (1940), reads:

As regards avenging injury done to master or father, it is acknowledged even by Confucius that you and the injurer cannot live together under the same heaven. A person harboring such vengeance shall give notice in writing to the district criminal court and carry out his design within the period stated in the notice. Secondary vengeance is strictly forbidden. Any avenging act done by those who have neglected to give preliminary notice of it shall be treated as a riot, and the offenders shall be punished according to the circumstances of the case.⁸⁷

This blood revenge not only applied to murder offenses, but also to injury. Mills writes, “the *Legacy of Ieyasu*, on the other hand, goes beyond the original Chinese terms – outlined in

⁸⁴ Ujiiie, *Katakiuchi*, 118.

⁸⁵ Although I have searched many sources to determine the original Japanese title and date of this record, I have been unable to find this information. Therefore, I must rely on the scholarship of Shioya and Mills for the accuracy of this information.

⁸⁶ As with the *Legacy of Ieyasu*, I have been unable to obtain the original Japanese, nor the date of this record.

⁸⁷ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 532.

Confucian precepts – in speaking of injury done to lord or master as well as to blood relations, thus demonstrating the strong emphasis of Japanese Neo-Confucianism on feudal loyalty.’⁸⁸

The *Legacy of Ieyasu* did not allow for second-round revenges.⁸⁹ If an avenger were to be killed by his enemy (called *kaeri-uchi*), another could not take his place. Additionally, only the avenger had been licensed kill his enemy, not any registered helpers. Likewise, if the enemy died before the avenger could kill him, the avenger could not transfer his rage to another family member.⁹⁰

The *Itakura Seiyoki* provides further exposition on the regulations of blood-revenge practices: one shall not pursue revenge in the vicinity of the emperor’s palace nor in the vicinity of temples or shrines. In addition, anyone who murders for personal grievance in the guise of vengeance or without gaining the proper documentation for legal *katakiuchi* would be liable to receive the death penalty.⁹¹

While there were largely disseminated legal regulations as to who could act as an avenger in blood-revenge, there were also anomalies to be dealt with. While uncommon, there have been cases in which an older brother sought *katakiuchi* for a younger brother. Furthermore, there have also been cases of women avenging their fathers or husbands, although such cases were not ordinary. In some cases where there was no male heir or relative unable to pursue revenge, a wife or daughter could be granted permission to undertake *katakiuchi*.⁹²

⁸⁸ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 533.

⁸⁹ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 249.

⁹⁰ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 540.

⁹¹ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 537-538.

⁹² Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 247.

There are frequent debates about whether or not one could undertake *katakiuchi* for a person who was not a familial relation. Regardless of whether or not such a revenge was proper, there were instances of those who avenged their lord or lady in both pre-modern and early modern Japan. Yet, if one were to adopt Kominz's evaluation of the Tokugawa social structure, particularly what he calls the "vertical bonds of samurai society," which he claimed "operated like an extended family structure,"⁹³ then it stands to reason that one's duty to avenge his lord was just as, if not more, important than avenging a blood relation.

There were also cases in which those who set out on a blood-revenge quest stopped before the revenge was complete. Not all *katakiuchi* quests were successful, usually because the avenger could not locate his enemy who had fled to other provinces. Thus, avengers often searched for years, sometimes finding their enemy and sometimes not. There are cases where the *katakiuchi* was abandoned and the avenger became a monk, entering the priesthood.⁹⁴

What impact these anomalous cases had on the practice of *katakiuchi* is uncertain. However, the fact that they occurred at all suggests some influencing factor – probably the Tokugawa ideology that promoted a feudal hierarchy and intense perceptions of loyalty – to such an extent that these anomalous agents would operate outside of social norms in order to adhere to the social norms.

3:2 *Megatakiuchi* and *Bureiuchi*

There are two forms of revenge that are important to the discussion of blood revenge in Japan. These two practices are *Megatakiuchi*, or wife revenge – which occurred when a man

⁹³ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 12.

⁹⁴ Ujiiie, *Katakiuchi*, 122.

killed his wife in retaliation for her adulterous relationship with another man – and *bureiuchi* – which occurred when a samurai retaliated against a commoner for insulting his honor, resulting in either injury to the commoner or his death. While these two forms of revenge merit discussion, they will not be considered blood revenge in this thesis. I will only consider those blood revenge undertakings that fall under both definitions that I previously established in Chapter One.

Megatakiuchi was traditionally accepted as a custom originating in the Kamakura period with the development of a more rigid marriage system and the emergence of a patriarchal samurai *ie*. A wife's adultery, in the eyes of *bakufu* law, was grounds for her husband to file for blood revenge against both the wife and her lover. The procedural matters surrounding this form of blood revenge were similar to *katakiuchi*: the husband petitioned the *bakufu* for permission to pursue the revenge against his wife and her lover, then pursued them both to kill them for the shame of having cuckolded him.⁹⁵ Previously, I established for blood revenge involves the use of deadly violence to redress the offense of deadly injury. However, the definition blood-revenge, in Japan, could be refined even further; blood-revenge only occurred with the murder of a familial relation. Yet, since the social structure of Tokugawa Japan greatly resembled that of the family, there were also instances when blood revenge occurred with the murder of one's lord and would be undertaken by members of the *ie* – such as the blood revenge of the 47 *rōnin*. In the context of kinship, *Megatakiuchi* could also be defined as blood revenge.

⁹⁵ For more information on this topic, see Eiko Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 244-247 and Nagai Michiko 永井路子, *Rekisho wo Sawagaseta Fūtochi* 歴史をさがせた夫婦たち (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū 文藝春秋, 1979).

Depending on one's definition, *bureiuchi*, or disrespect killing, has generally fallen under the category of blood revenge, as well. *Bureiuchi* occurred when a samurai retaliated against a commoner for insulting his honor, resulting in either injury to the commoner or his death.⁹⁶ Killing a person for being "disrespectful" does not necessarily possess the same universal moral connotation as, say, would killing a person who murdered one's father. If one were to adhere to the definition of blood revenge that I had previously established, to inflict deadly injury on another person as redress for disrespectful language or behavior could not be classified as blood revenge; however, among the warrior class "disrespect-killing," known in Japanese as *bureiuchi* (無礼討ち), fell under the heading of revenge because of the affect such actions had on one's honor. The term *bureiuchi* is used to represent a situation wherein a *samurai* could inflict deadly injury to any person of lower social status for abusive language or disrespectful behavior that was considered an affront to the *samurai's* honor. During the Tokugawa period, as with the practice of *katakiuchi*, the *samurai* would be exempt from criminal charges in cases of *bureiuchi*. Ikegami, explains that the political implications of this practice were to demonstrate the collective superiority of the *samurai* class relative to commoners.⁹⁷ While *bureiuchi* certainly falls within the realm of revenge, it does not fit the perimeters of blood revenge that I defined above. Nevertheless, both *bureiuchi* and *megatakiuchi* were an intricate of the blood revenge culture that developed during the Tokugawa period.

⁹⁶ For more information on this topic, see Eiko Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 244 and Mikito Ujiie 氏家幹人, *Katakiuchi: Fukushū no Sahō* かたき討ち：復讐の作法 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha 中央公論新社, 2007).

⁹⁷ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 244.

3:3 *Katakiuchi* and the Neo-Confucian State

Neo-Confucian state philosophy had a great influence on *bakufu* law and politics.⁹⁸ Perspectives on *katakiuchi* have been influenced by Confucian principles, which have had great impact on political thought in Japan, particularly during the Tokugawa period. The integration of Confucian principle in Japanese ethical thought – with particular regard to the practice of blood revenge – can be traced back to the fifth century. The discussion of Tokugawa Neo-Confucian ideology is one that is much too vast for a lengthy discussion in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is one that needs to be addressed briefly. In this section, I will not engage in a debate about the origins of Neo-Confucianism in Japan nor a discussion of its beginnings in the Tokugawa state; rather, I will only discuss the nature of this ideology as it pertains to the practice of blood-revenge.

After the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu became the undisputed ruler of Japan. To solidify his power, and cultivate peace under his rule, he adopted the doctrine of Neo-Confucianism as the ideology of the newfound state.⁹⁹ Of course, that is not to say that Shinto and Buddhism were not equally important during this period; rather, Confucian ideology was most influential in political thought. For the sake of simplicity, I am not going to focus on the various schools of thought within Neo-Confucianism, but discuss the ideology as a whole.

⁹⁸ Steenstrup, *A History of Law in Japan until 1868*, 111.

⁹⁹ Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs 1570-1680* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3.

The integration of Confucianism¹⁰⁰ into a social or political ideology was not a radical change at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Confucianism had been introduced to Japan at the end of the fourth century¹⁰¹ and became increasingly more influential than Buddhism in the promulgation of individual daimyo house rules as early as the thirteenth century and was the dominant philosophy of these texts by the sixteenth.¹⁰² However, despite the influences of Confucianism in earlier periods, Masao Maruyama claims that the Tokugawa period represented the golden years of Confucianism in Japan¹⁰³

The success of Confucianism during this period has to do with the complementary nature of this philosophy with that of the feudal society that was being constructed during this time.¹⁰⁴ The ethic of the master-servant relationship in Confucianism fit Japanese feudalism well for the development of objective ethical codes in autonomous daimyo domains.¹⁰⁵ The familial structure and societal structure of Tokugawa Japan very closely resembled each other. Masao Maruyama quotes Fukuzawa Yukichi who described the samurai familial structure as follows:

Since feudal Japan was dominated by the samurai, by examining the conditions of the samurai family we will be able to gain insight into the spirit that prevailed in the society as a whole. The head of the family was like an autocratic dictator and held the entire family authority in his hands. He dealt with the members of his

¹⁰⁰ The teachings of Confucius (6th c. BCE - 479 BCE) were a system of ethics and a theory of government based on certain central themes such as *li* (the course of life as it is intended to go) and *jen* (humaneness), which were used as social guidelines for behavior and etiquette in hierarchical relationships in Japanese society. The teachings of Confucius regarding *li* were most closely followed by feudalistic governments such as that of the Tokugawa state. In a society that lives by *li*, theoretically, things move smoothly. For more information see Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward, *Religions of the World* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 1991), 184-186.

¹⁰¹ Masao Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, trans. Mikiso Hane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 7.

¹⁰² Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology*, 19.

¹⁰³ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 10.

family with stern dignity. In his presence, women and children, from his wife downwards, had to behave as if they were his servants or maids and show proper deference. The rigid distinction in status between husband and wife resembled the relationship between lord and servant rather than that between male and female.¹⁰⁶

It is clear that this symmetry in social and political relationships provided the necessary conditions in which a social hierarchy could be formed within the boundaries of Confucianism.

However, the kind of ideology that thrived during the Tokugawa period was not traditional Confucianism, but rather an ideologically transformed version known as Neo-Confucianism, which had been introduced to Japan during the Kamakura period 鎌倉時代 (1185-1333).¹⁰⁷ Edo Neo-Confucianism was a social and ethical philosophy.¹⁰⁸ The *bakufu*'s adoption of Neo-Confucianism was intended to encourage the peoples' education in an attempt to distract them from violent behaviors in order to cultivate and maintain the new state of peace.¹⁰⁹ Maruyama writes: "Ieyasu was interested in Confucianism because of its fundamental moral principles and its concepts of political legitimacy, not because of its literary or exegetic values."¹¹⁰

Yet, with regards to the social aspects of this philosophy, Neo-Confucianism placed a great emphasis on filial piety within a hierarchical system.¹¹¹ The most famous passage in

¹⁰⁶ Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Zoku Fukuzawa Zenshū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo, 1932), 631-632, quoted in Masao Maruyama's *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ In the abstract, the core of this philosophy is a belief that the universe can be understood through human reason and contains no traces of the mythological elements – such as gods or dieties – of Buddhism or Shinto.

¹⁰⁹ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 16.

¹¹⁰ Maruyama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 16-17.

¹¹¹ Within this philosophy, filial piety is a virtue to be regarded above all else. In essence, filial piety means to respect one's superiors, do one's duty, and refrain from any action that would incur shame (including rebellious behavior). Filial piety usually described actions that are performed toward the family; however, filial piety also applied to one's social superiors outside the home.

support of blood revenge, in Confucian philosophy, comes from the “Tangong” section of the Book of Rites (*Li Chi* ca. 1050-256 BCE):

Zixia asked Confucius, saying, “How should [a man] conduct himself with reference to the man who has killed his father or mother?” The Master said, “He should sleep on straw, with his shield for a pillow; he should not take office; he must be determined not to live with the slayer under the same heaven. If he meet with him in the market place or the court, he should not have to go back for his weapon, but [instantly] fight with him.”¹¹²

This Confucian precept reflected the blood-revenge philosophy that drove the development of this culture during the Tokugawa period.

Considering the great emphasis placed on one’s duty to family, how does Confucianism explain lord revenge? D.E.Mills explains that “in the context of Confucian society, family loyalty and loyalty to one’s superior are two aspects of basically the same ideal.”¹¹³ Since the family structure mimicked the master-servant relationship, logically, the master-servant relationship became as important, if not more so, than the family. Thus, if one were to apply Confucian perspectives on blood revenge to the family, where the father acted as master of the household, it would also make sense that such principles could be applied to the lord-vassal relationship. Therefore, blood-revenge was performed on behalf of slain lords.

Confucianism was important in shaping the moral and ethical imperative founded on the unquestionable esteem in which filial obligations and duties were upheld that perpetuated blood revenge throughout Japanese history.

¹¹² Michael Dalby, “Revenge and the Law in Traditional China,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 25, no. 4 (October 1981): 271.

¹¹³ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 533.

3:4 The Demographics of Blood Revenge

Most scholars seem to agree that the status system was the defining feature of the early modern period. My goal here is not the further examination of the definition of social status, but rather the examinations of the social hierarchy that exists within the samurai class as far as it pertains to the pursuit of blood revenge during this period. With the legalization of blood revenge practices under *bakufu* law, this practice became available to any member of society. Therefore, the question becomes: “Did the demographics of blood revenge change and, if so, to what extent?”

Blood revenge registries show that samurai were not the only class to pursue blood revenge during this period; merchants and villagers also petitioned the government to pursue *katakiuchi*, although to a lesser degree. The participation of these classes in traditional samurai practices is due, in large part, to the dissemination of samurai values amongst the lower classes. The transmission of samurai values to the non-samurai classes (artisans, merchants, peasants) came from the sermons of itinerant popular preachers.¹¹⁴ During the 17th century, the *bakufu* and autonomous domains hired Confucian scholars to educate their samurai on proper values and behaviors¹¹⁵ and early in the 18th century, these sermons became open to the rest of the populace, as well; however, the commoners¹¹⁶ could not understand these teachings and so very few people attended. Considering these values supported the hierarchical, social, and political

¹¹⁴ Aoki and Dardess translated such a sermon by a Confucian Scholar named Hosoi Heishū (1728-1801) to exemplify the popularization of samurai values in the Tokugawa period. For more information, see Michiko Y. Aoki and Margaret B. Dardess, “The Popularization of Samurai Values: A Sermon by Hosoi Heishū,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 31, no. 4 (Winter, 1976): 393.

¹¹⁵ Such values included filial piety, loyalty and obedience to one’s lord, diligence to duty, self-discipline, etc.

¹¹⁶ For the purposes of this thesis, the term “commoners” will be defined as any person not belonging to the samurai class.

structure of the Tokugawa state, which had as its backbone Confucian ideology, *bakufu* and autonomous domains realized the importance of dissemination these teachings through all levels of society; therefore, they supported popular preachers who could relate these Confucian sermons in terms that commoners could understand through anecdotal recitals that ended with a moral that embodied the Confucian precepts.¹¹⁷ From official documents, such as blood revenge registries, we can discern that the members of the non-samurai classes found at least one way to apply these values to actions in their everyday lives.

It is erroneous to think that social class was affected by only the one factor of heredity; rather, it was multiple factors that determined social class. In this case, there are socio-economic considerations to take into account when discussing the concept of social status; for example, even though samurai were considered the “ruling class,” by the 19th century, the lowest samurai in this class was economically worse off than most commoners and, conversely, many merchants became wealthier than many samurai. Douglas R. Howland suggests a legal hierarchy in which economics played a key role in one’s mobility within the social hierarchy of the Tokugawa period, which is significant for explaining the mobility of hereditary *chōnin* into samurai families. As the period progressed, wealthy *chōnin* would pay impoverished samurai to adopt their children, thus buying their way into samurai lineages. Howland writes, “The existence of the legal hierarchy, in other words, meant that the social relations defined by rights and duties could be both animated and compromised by the desire for status and prestige.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Aoki and Dardess, “The Popularization of Samurai Values,” 393.

¹¹⁸ Douglass R. Howland, “Samurai Status, Class, and Bureaucracy,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 2 (May, 2001): 358.

Furthermore, the hierarchy that existed within the samurai class deserves some consideration. With the establishment of a warrior class, during the Kamakura period, came the invention of different titles within this class to differentiate those of higher political standing from those with less political power. Thus, we have historical titles of *gōshi* (郷士),¹¹⁹ *jitō* (地頭),¹²⁰ *shugō* (守護),¹²¹ *daimyō* (大名),¹²² *samurai* (侍), *rōnin* (浪人),¹²³ etc.¹²⁴ Howland writes, “the status differences that united the samurai as a social elite, gave them their superior position in society, and differentiated them from other status groups, were fractured.”¹²⁵ These statuses are relevant to our discussion of demographics because while these titles all represent varying hierarchical levels within this class, I have established above that such classes had been infiltrated by wealthy peasants and *chōnin*. The most common title such individuals obtained was that of *gōshi*, or country samurai. *Gōshi*, like other samurai, were allowed to carry swords and use a surname and were either independent cultivators or small scale land owners. Sometimes they were either country samurai who were never made part of a large fief or samurai of a defeated clan whose new lord demoted them to overseeing small holdings on the outskirts of clan territory. Perhaps more common were circumstances in which clan chiefs would allow

¹¹⁹ Rural samurai who were often wealthy peasants who bought their status and had little administration power.

¹²⁰ Medieval land stewards appointed by the shogun.

¹²¹ Governors in feudal Japan who oversaw one or more provinces of Japan and were appointed by the shogun. As these officials began to acquire land of their own, it gave rise to daimyo of the Muromachi period.

¹²² Powerful territorial lords and feudal rulers who ruled vast amounts of land and who often inherited their lands and titles.

¹²³ Masterless samurai. A term that crops up in most often in documentation and literature during the Tokugawa period.

¹²⁴ It is important to point out that not all of these titles existed at the same time; rather, this list is only intended to be a demonstration of the social evolution of the warrior class over time.

¹²⁵ Howland, “Samurai Status, Class, and Bureaucracy,” 366.

wealthy peasants to claim new land under contract by granting them the title of *gōshi* for a price. This encouraged the cultivation of new land and also allowed members of the peasant class to move up the social ladder into the samurai class.¹²⁶

Blood-revenge registries, as previously discussed, required an avenger to report certain things to the government about the revenge, including the social status of the avenger. Thus, with these records, we can look at which classes pursued *katakiuchi* in different eras during the Tokugawa period. There were three magistrate divisions that presided over legal matters in Edo – the Northern, Central, and Southern Magistrates. Each magistrate kept his own *katakiuchi* records which detailed the name and social status of the avenger, the name of their enemy, and the original conditions that led to the revenge. The Northern Magistrate’s blood-revenge registry (北町奉行所敵討帳 *Kitamachi Bukyōsho Katakiuchi Chō*), which provided records for *katakiuchi* performed between 1661 and 1801, will serve as a representative sample in my analysis on the demographics of blood-revenge during the Tokugawa period (See Figure 1).¹²⁷

It is clear, from Figure 1, that representatively, the most blood-revenge incidents¹²⁸ occurred between 1661 and 1704, in the first hundred years of the Tokugawa shogunate’s reign; however, the register also indicates that the frequency of blood-revenge incidents continued to

¹²⁶ Herbert E. Norman, “Soldier and Peasant in Japan: The origins of Conscription,” *Pacific Affairs* 16, no. 1 (March, 1943): 54.

¹²⁷ Jinbo Fumio 神保文夫. “*Kitamachi Bukyōsho Katakiuchi Chō*” 「北町奉行所敵討帳」 *Nagoya Daigaku Hōsei Ronshū* 名古屋大学法政論集 224 (2008): 279-326.

¹²⁸ At least those incidents in which avengers applied for official sanction for their blood revenge.

北町奉行所敵討帳

Era Name	<i>Katakiuchi</i> 敵討	<i>Megatakiuchi</i> 妻敵	<i>Ronin</i> 浪人	Merchant/Villager
Kanbun 寛文 (1661-1673)	28	1	22	7
Enpou 延宝 (1673-1681)	52	3	46	9
Tenna 天和 (1681-1684)	6	0	3	3
Joukyou 貞享 (1684-1688)	10	0	9	1
Genroku 元禄 (1688-1704)	27	0	24	3
Houei 宝永 (1704-1711)	4	0	2	2
Shoutoku 正徳 (1711-1716)	4	1	5	0
Kyouhou 享保 (1716-1736)	6	9	13	2
Genbun 元文 (1736-1741)	5	1	5	1
Kanpou 寛保 (1741-1744)	2	1	2	1
Enkyou 延享 (1744-1748)	2	2	4	0
Kan'en 寛延 (1748-1751)	2	0	2	0
Houeki 宝暦 (1751-1764)	2	7	9	0
Meiwa 明和 (1764-1772)	1	1	1	1
(1772-1781)	No Data			
Tenmei 天明 (1781-1789)	1	1	2	0
Kansei 寛政 (1789-1801)	1	2	2	1

Figure 1: Northern Magistrate's Record of Blood-Revenge Incidents, 1661-1801

Statistical Conclusions		
Of All the Recorded Blood-Revenge:	16% Merchants/Villager	84% <i>Rōnin</i>
Of All the Recorded Merchant/Villager Blood-Revenge:	9.7% <i>Megatakiuchi</i>	90.3% <i>Katakiuchi</i>
Of All the Recorded <i>Rōnin</i> Blood-Revenge:	17.2% <i>Megatakiuchi</i>	82.8% <i>Katakiuchi</i>

Figure 2: Statistical conclusions based on the Northern Magistrate's Record of Blood-Revenge Incidents, 1661-1801

decrease over time.¹²⁹ Even though this representative sample only provides one with a glimpse at blood revenge from the mid- to late 17th century, given the progression of data, it suggests that the number of blood-revenge incidents in the early 17th century would have been even higher.¹³⁰ Yet, as time passed, society – particularly the class most likely to engage in violent behavior, the samurai – adapted to a life of peace leading to increasingly fewer situations that would incite blood-revenge pursuits.

Alternatively, even though the *bakufu* promoted, even legally enforced, peace amongst the people, it also promoted a warrior culture with a history – centuries long – of socially sanctioned violent practices. With that same government continually restricting, or directly outlawing, these practice, there were only a few legal options for honorable veneration open to samurai. In the Kanbun Era 寛文 (1661-1673) – one of the periods with the highest number of

¹²⁹ It seems necessary to point out the timing of this sudden decrease in blood revenge occurrences; With the revenge of the 47 *rōnin* in 1703 – and the precarious position of the *bakufu* given the 47's rebellious behavior – that the government implemented even more rigorous control of this practice.

¹³⁰ With the transition from military to civil government, the samurai class was transformed from warriors to administrators and their way of life radically altered through the seizing of their lands and weapons to the rigid restrictions to historical warrior practices whose violent nature threatened *bakufu* rule.

blood-revenge incidents – the *Buke Shohatto* was revised to prohibit the practice of *jūnshi*¹³¹ amongst samurai whose lord had died.¹³² Later, in the Genroku Era 元禄 (1688-1704), there is another increase in the number of blood-revenge incidents. Coincidentally, during this same era, there was an increase in the use of blood-revenge motifs in theater, as well as the infamous “blood” revenge of the forty-seven *rōnin* in 1703. It would be difficult to argue that such events did not have an effect on the undertaking of blood revenge at that time.

In sum, of all blood-revenge incidents registered with the North Magistrate, 84% of them were pursued by *rōnin* while the remaining 16% were pursued by merchants and villagers.¹³³ Of all recorded *rōnin* blood revenges, 83% were *katakiuchi* and 17% were *megatakiuchi*. Similarly, of all recorded merchant or villager revenges, 90% were *katakiuchi* and the remaining 10% were *megatakiuchi* (See Figure 2).

According to Figure 2, 16% of blood revenge undertakings registered with the North Magistrate’s Office were pursued by either merchants or villagers. While this number seems fairly insubstantial when viewed comparatively to the percentage of *rōnin* who pursued blood revenge, it is actually a rather remarkable number considering the obstacles that a commoner would have faced in order to undertake blood revenge. Non-samurai were at a considerable disadvantage in this particular endeavor, primarily due to their lack of martial training. If the object of their revenge was a member of the samurai class, death was more likely an inevitability

¹³¹ *Jūnshi* occurred when a vassal committed *seppuku* in order to follow his lord into death.

¹³² Along with blood revenge, such practices as *seppuku* and *junshi* fell under the heading of honorable violence and were held in great esteem for generations. However, with the continued restriction of these practices by the Tokugawa *bakufu*, blood revenge was increasingly becoming the only option through which samurai could express themselves as warriors. John Whitney Hall ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 4 Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12.

¹³³ In this registry, samurai, merchants, and villagers all petitioned for blood revenge over the years.

rather than a mere possibility –as it would have been with men of more or less equal abilities. Additionally, the desire – the need even – to demonstrate or reaffirm one’s honor through acts of violence traditionally belonged to the warrior class; thus, for those of a non-samurai status to desire such a thing to the extent that they pursued a task as dangerous as blood revenge suggests the great influence that samurai values possessed in Tokugawa society, even among the non-samurai classes.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the masterless samurai, or *rōnin*, were the most commonly registered undertakers of blood revenge. The question then becomes: Why? Was this an socially accepted way for them to prove something they believed people thought they had lost along with their employment and stipend? After all, Ikegami confirms that “registered revenge offered both context and occasion for demonstrating the spirit of an honorable samurai.”¹³⁴ On the other hand, could their motives be more straight forward? Did they simply have more free time to undertake revenge than those samurai who were employed by a daimyo lord? However, the cultural etiquette of *katakiuchi* dictates that one should pursue blood-revenge regardless of one’s obligations to one’s lord. Thus, could they have become *rōnin* after requesting to be dismissed in order to pursue blood-revenge?

Given the historical context in which these blood-revenge incidents occurred, it is possible that the motivations for the *ronins*’ involvement were a combination of the above-mentioned possibilities – particularly, a desire to reaffirm their honor and relative mobility due to their lordless status. From the research of Eiko Ikegami, we are shown the impact of honorable violence in the social perception of the individual. The reasons for violence inflicted and

¹³⁴ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 250.

incurred often have to do with honor. As a result, “honor” becomes an extremely complex concept. It is difficult to decipher a concept so complex and open to individual interpretation that it may never be adequately defined. As Ikegami has noted, “honor is a complex multidimensional concept.” In a nutshell, honor involves a deep concern for one’s reputation and a desire to maintain social dignity within and for the family. This concept had a profound effect on one’s self-esteem and identity.¹³⁵ The notion of “honor is inevitably a social concept,” Ikegami goes on to say, “concerned with the evaluation of individuals within the social groups in which they claim membership.”¹³⁶ Honor, pride, and overall reputation were more important to a samurai than all other obligations.¹³⁷ One of the most important aspects of a samurai’s life was the avoidance of shame and the seeking of honor and social recognition. Considering the relative social stigma attached to the *rōnin* social status, it is plausible that the high number of *rōnin* avengers is directly related to this desire to bolster their reputations.

While it is true that a great number of employed samurai lost their livelihoods and became masterless as the number of daimyo decreased throughout the Tokugawa period, another likely explanation for the growing numbers of the *rōnin* may also be a by-product of blood-revenge undertakings. It also seems likely that samurai would be forced by necessity to become *rōnin* in order to pursue *katakiuchi*. For the above-mentioned reasons, one could speculate that it was statistically inevitable that this growing *rōnin* class of the Tokugawa period would dominate blood revenge.

¹³⁵ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 23.

¹³⁶ Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 6.

¹³⁷ Friday, *Samurai, Warfare, and the State in Early Medieval Japan*, 137.

The onset of Tokugawa rule brought about many radical changes to the political, economic, and cultural realms of society. Blood revenge during this time was a complicated practice both culturally and legally as one of the few available avenues through which the samurai class could demonstrate their value as warriors; however, the unique aspect of Tokugawa blood revenge was its accessibility to any social class, thus irrevocably changing the demographics of a historically exclusive practice. Additionally, with exceptions to the rule of hereditary status, commoners marginally gained access to the samurai class, which would have also affected the demographics of blood revenge, increasing the number of commoners who participated in this practice. Through an analysis of the Edo North Magistrate's blood-revenge registry, we discovered that *rōnin* were the most common applicants for blood revenge. The reasons behind the *rōnin*'s domination of blood revenge, during the Tokugawa period, were most likely the result of the samurai class's struggle to maintain honor according the historical customs of their social class within a legal system that greatly restricted such practices. Yet, one is left wondering from where did the social regulations that governed this practice originate? In Chapter Four, I will find the answer to this question through an examination of the pioneering incident of blood revenge in Japan: the revenge of the Soga brothers.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOGA BROTHERS - PIONEERS OF BLOOD REVENGE

Like many established practices in the Japanese culture, blood revenge in pre-modern and early modern Japan is a complex phenomenon that evolved over the centuries in Japan's warrior society. From my discussion in Chapter Three of blood revenge during the Tokugawa period, I postulate the birth of a blood-revenge literary canon with the *Soga Monogatari* 曾我物語 (ca. 14th c.) as the father of later vendettas in literature and practice. From this point on, the actions of the Soga brothers can be seen as “archetypical”¹³⁸ for the development of later blood-revenge practices in Japan. While the *Soga Monogatari* is a treasure trove of valuable information regarding the emerging warrior culture of the Kamakura period 鎌倉時代 (1185-1333), I will limit myself in this chapter to discussing four elements of the tale that became defining characteristics of blood-revenge practices in later centuries.

The Soga brothers were the pioneers of blood revenge in Japan. Thus, their tale provides invaluable clues about the rules that governed this emerging practice, particularly since Tokugawa authors promoted the brothers as prototypical avengers. It is my contention that the cultural institutionalization of specific rules that governed blood revenge during the Tokugawa period, can be traced back to the actions of the Soga brothers as represented in the *Soga Monogatari*. The question then becomes, what does the *Soga Monogatari* tell us about the elaborate etiquette formalizing blood-revenge practices that was to develop in later years? The

¹³⁸ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 530; he uses the term “archetypical” to explain the relationship between the Soga brother's blood revenge and blood-revenge practices in the Tokugawa period, yet does not expand on the how or why of it. It is my intention to do so here.

origins of many rules of conduct for the pursuit of blood revenge or the conditions under which blood revenge could be pursued, can be traced back to this one literary presentation of a historical incident.

In addition to my analysis of blood-revenge etiquette in the *Soga Monogatari*, I will explore the ways in which this tale of revenge served as an inspiration for the forty-seven *rōnin*'s blood revenge in 1703 – also frequently referred to as *Chūshingura* (the treasury of loyal retainers) – through an examination of the similarities between the two incidents, as well as an examination of the role of the *Soga Monogatari* in Tokugawa Japan.

4:1 The Tale of the Soga Brothers

The premise of the *Soga Monogatari* (the Tale of the Soga Brothers) is a familial land dispute that occurred long before the Soga brothers were born.¹³⁹ Itō no Suketaka¹⁴⁰ had many sons, but when the time for succession came, there were only two possible candidates left as heirs: Itō no Sukechika (?-1182), who was the eldest son of Suketada's deceased eldest son, Sukeie, and the son of his step daughter, Kudō no Suketsugu.¹⁴¹ Suketaka chose Kudō no Suketsugu as his successor, which angered Sukechika, who believed he had been cheated of his birthright. In 1160, Suketsugu died and, since Suketsugu's son, Kudō no Suketsune, was still a child, Sukechika was given custody of him; as a result, Sukechika gained control of Itō lands, a control that he never relinquished, even when Suketsune became an adult, and, by right, should

¹³⁹ The exact year in which this dispute arose is unknown. One can deduce that it occurred prior to 1160 since that was the death date we have for Suketsugu, the father of Suketsune and the successor of Suketaka.

¹⁴⁰ Dates unknown.

¹⁴¹ Suketsugu was an illegitimate son of Suketaka by his step-daughter, which was why Sukechika was angered by Suketada's choice of successor; however, Suketsugu, although illegitimate, was a son, rather than a grandson, which also explains Suketada's decision.

have resumed control. Suketsune petitioned the courts for the rightful return of his lands, but he was denied. When Sukechika learned of the trouble Suketsune was trying to cause him, he forced a divorce between Suketsune and his wife, who was actually the daughter of Sukechika. After these events, Suketsune decided to have Sukechika killed and take back what he believed to be rightfully his. He hired assassins who followed Sukechika to a hunt and, while he and the others were returning home, the assassins killed Sukeyasu, Sukechika's son, and the Soga brother's father. At this time, the Soga brothers were three years old and five years old. After their father's death, they were adopted by Soga no Sukenobu¹⁴² and grew to manhood with the story of their father's murder in their mind. It was while they were growing up that they planned to seek blood revenge on Suketsune for the murder of their father.¹⁴³ After eighteen years, the brothers followed Suketsune on a hunt and finally accomplished their goal. Jūrō died in the ensuing battle and Gorō was captured and executed the next day. As Donald Keene writes, over the years, the actions of the Soga brothers "came to be held up as unparalleled examples of filial behavior..."¹⁴⁴ In a sense, the Soga brothers became archetypes for others to emulate, promoted as such particularly in literature during the Tokugawa period, which will be explored later on in this chapter.

¹⁴² Much about Soga no Sukenobu is unknown. The *Rufubon Soga Monogatari* does not provide additional information beyond his familial relationship (as a cousin) to the Itō clan. Soga no Sukenobu's dates are unknown.

¹⁴³ For a visual representation of the rather complex and inter-connected relationships of the characters in this tale, see Figure 3. Figures are my own creation unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴⁴ Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993): 891.

This text provides much fertile ground for academic scholarship about blood-revenge practices in Japan. If one were to assume that there had been no actual instance of blood revenge in Japan prior to that of the Soga brothers, their actions, as pioneers of blood revenge, might be considered prototypical of later manifestations of the practice. They set the standard by which all other blood-revenge practices were measured and their actions became, in a sense, necessary elements, or requisites, that were crucial to any act classifiable as blood revenge. In the following, I will analyze the text and extract information that will shed light on the actions that set the standard for future blood-revenge practices in Japan.

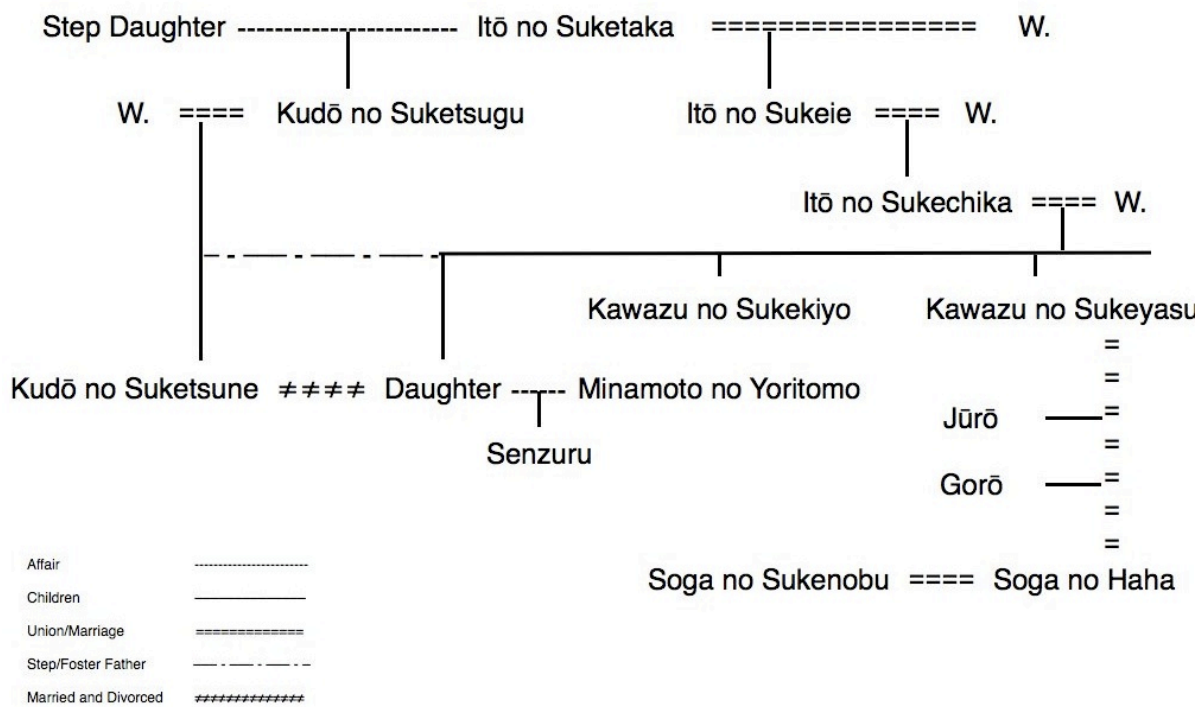


Figure 3: Relationships in the *Soga Monogatari*

While the tale presents a deceptively simple picture of brothers seeking to avenge the wrongful death of their father, there are actually multiple blood-revenge paths being followed simultaneously. If one were to blur the lines of the blood-revenge definition I previously

established, one could count three inter-connected threads of revenge in this tale: starting with Suketsune, continuing with the Soga brothers, and ending with Yoritomo (1147-1199).¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Oyler writes, “The brothers’ revenge is most often recognized as the prototype for later vendettas by loyal retainers (most notably that of the forty-seven *ronin*) that would become a mainstay of medieval and early modern culture. Yet, it is also inextricably linked with the cycles of revenge connected to the war, through not only the themes of parricide and patrimony, but also a complex of relationships connecting the brothers to Yoritomo.”¹⁴⁶

4:2 From Oral Tradition to Textual Tradition

Many prominent scholars – Laurence Komintz, Donald Keene, Susan Matisoff, and Thomas Cogan, to name only a few – have written, in various contexts, on the methods of transmitting of the *Soga Monogatari* – from oral to written transmission and, eventually, to stage performances in the Tokugawa period; however, the details of this transmission bear reviewing in order to facilitate my exploration of how the *Soga Monogatari* grew to influence the public imagination.

There is little information of where or when this particular tale was first orally told, or of who told the tale. Upon their close textual analysis of the early versions of the *Soga Monogatari*, scholars have generally come to agree that the tale was part of an oral tradition – as the written text contained many of the formulaic expressions customarily used in oral recitation – and that it was spread during the thirteenth century by the priests and nuns of the Hakone Shrine 箱根神

¹⁴⁵ The *Soga Monogatari* contains a number of revenge undertakings that extended beyond the Soga brothers’ own blood revenge. I will discuss Yoritomo’s position among them in more detail later on in this chapter.

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Oyler, *Swords, Oaths, and Prophetic Visions: Authoring Warrior Rule in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006): 119.

社.¹⁴⁷ Although Kominz points out that there is no surviving evidence to suggest that the Soga brothers' tale was spread by priests or monks, there is evidence to suggest that it was disseminated by female entertainers, nuns and female minstrels known as *goze*.¹⁴⁸

The oral transmission of the *Soga Monogatari* continued for over a hundred years. It was not until the Muromachi period 室町時代 (1336-1575) that a written version of the tale came into existence. There are many different written versions of the tale – the four major variants being the *Manabon* 真本 (ca. 14th c.), the *Rufubon* 流布本 (ca. 16th c.), the *Taisekijibon* 大石寺本, and the *Taisanjibon* 太山寺本 – most of which are descendants of two textual lineages: either the *Manabon* (ca. 14th)¹⁴⁹ – a text written in Chinese known for its accuracy regarding geographical and genealogical references – or the *Kanabon* – a textual version written in Japanese.¹⁵⁰ The *Rufubon Soga Monogatari* (ca. 16th c.) is a descendant of the *kanabon* line of texts written in the sixteenth century presumably by Jōdo (Pure Land sect) priests.¹⁵¹ I will use the *Rufubon Soga Monogatari* for my analysis of the development of blood-revenge etiquette in Japan.

The *Rufubon Soga Monogatari* was completed sometime during the early sixteenth century, well after the establishment of a samurai behavioral code of ethics. It varies

¹⁴⁷ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 31.

¹⁴⁸ *Goze* were wandering female entertainers who retold tales of battle by claiming to channel angry spirits to recall events as they really happened. Legend has it that Jūrō's lover Tōra became such an entertainer after his death in the tale, but there is no evidence to suggest she even existed; however, interestingly, those nuns who wandered Japan, spreading the tale were called *tōra bikuni*. See Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 39.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), xxxvi.

¹⁵¹ This is the text most commonly known by Japanese people today and was the version re-published most during the Tokugawa period; see Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999):888 and Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 40.

considerably from the *Manabon Soga Monogatari* and is known for its garishness, possessing more straightforward language than that of its predecessor.¹⁵² Kominz writes in his book *Avatars of Vengeance*, “the *Rufubon* delights in the drama of argument, confrontation, and combat,” with the vivid and garish descriptions and imagery of battle scenes.¹⁵³ While the tale possesses a strong contrast between characters – the gentle-hero and the wild-hero dichotomy frequently found in medieval literary motifs – and the romantic, adventure motifs (such as the romance between Jūrō and Tora), which are typical of Muromachi period literature, the *Rufubon* borrows many motifs of the *Heike Monogatari* 平家物語 (1371), particularly the motifs from longing, retribution, and Buddhist consolation for painful loss.¹⁵⁴

One might question the legitimacy of using a textual version of the *Soga Monogatari* incident – and after centuries of oral transmission – to explore the origins of blood-revenge standards in pre-modern Japan. One may speculate that the text, over time, was corrupted by the additions that reflected a change in warrior ethos. After all, the date of this text tells us that it was recorded after the creation of a few samurai behavioral codes (including the *Goseibai Shikimoku* 御成敗式目 ca. 1232); thus, it is likely that much of the dialogue of the tale was influenced by a warrior’s perception of honor and shame. However, it would not have had much of an effect on the actions of the characters in this tale. My conclusions are a result of abundant textual evidence: literary reproductions of the tale, even 400-500 years removed from the first written record of the incident, contain the same representation of the brothers’ actions. Evidence of this is apparent in the two versions of the *Soga Monogatari* I will analyze in this chapter: the

¹⁵² Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 45.

¹⁵³ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 41..

first being an English translation of the *Rufubon Soga Monogatari* entitled *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, by Thomas Cogan, and the second being a Tokugawa version of the tale with images called the *Ehon Soga Monogatari*. These two texts will provide insight into the actions that samurai would come to perceive as guidelines and standards for blood-revenge practices.

4:3 The Historical Context of Blood Revenge

In order to fully understand the tale being analyzed, it is first necessary to understand the social and political conditions in which the Soga brothers were raised and in which the blood revenge was performed.¹⁵⁵ The revenge of the Soga brothers was carried out during a time when Japanese society was experiencing the aftershocks of great political upheaval with the conclusion of the Gempei war 源平戦争 (1180-1185), which marked the downfall of the Heian court aristocracy and the beginnings of a new warrior government. According to Jeffrey Mass, “by the end of 1185, the newly formed *bakufu* stood momentarily at the center of national governance in Japan.”¹⁵⁶ With the end of the war, the court exile Minamoto no Yoritomo (源の頼朝 1147-1199) became the *shogun*, or undisputed ruler of Japan, and sought to swiftly quell the chaos caused by the final years of war. The primary challenge facing the new government was how to re-establish the balance between local and central government. As Yoritomo’s military government was the dominant governing body in Japan, it soon found itself in the position of mediator for numerous land disputes. Mass writes, “it was in this way that Japan now came to acquire its first warrior-based judicial authority.”¹⁵⁷ In its position of mediator, the *bakufu* 幕府,

¹⁵⁵ See Figure 4.

¹⁵⁶ Jeffrey Mass, “The Origins of Kamakura Justice,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer, 1977): 303.

¹⁵⁷ Mass, “The Origins of Kamakura Justice,” 300.

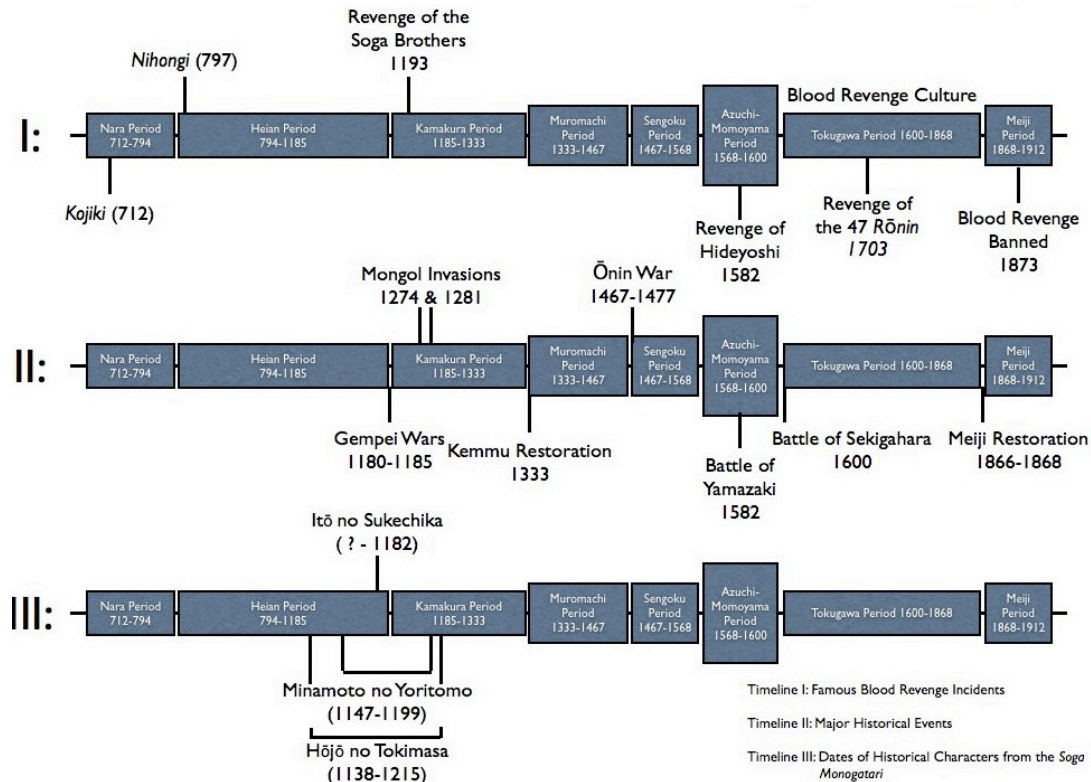


Figure 4: Timeline of Events

as a way of promoting order, issued judgments that were fair and impartial while simultaneously trying to maintain the status quo. The *bakufu*'s balancing act resulted in a particular attention to the development of investigative techniques.¹⁵⁸ Mass writes, "Under the Kamakura system, justice might be rapid or drawn out...that elite warriors subjected themselves to long-running encounters on the legal field of battle rather than on military battlefields proved to be one of the *bakufu*'s most enduring accomplishments."

Within this budding new government, the remaining lawlessness of the war was swiftly quelled and a new form of judicial control was developed, which simultaneously forced restriction of the emerging warrior class and rewarded those who proved useful to the new

¹⁵⁸ Mass, "The Origins of Kamakura Justice," 301.

government.¹⁵⁹ Restoring law and order to a war-torn society by re-establishing balance between local and central government is believed by many scholars to have been the primary objective of the new *bakufu*.¹⁶⁰ However, a judicial system made up of a court and professional investigators did not appear on the Kamakura stage until much later. The primary concern was that warriors would perpetuate the lawless state by stealing and holding land by force. To control such outbreaks, the *bakufu* established a system of reward and control through *jitō* 地頭 and *shugō* 守護.¹⁶¹ This new policy for land ownership awarded warriors, known as *gokenin* 御家人,¹⁶² a certain amount of power and prestige, while allowing the *bakufu* to retain an element of control. This system cunningly placed fighting men in the role of administrators of land placed in their charge by the *bakufu* that elevated them, in a way, as the arms of government, a position more lofty than that of a mere land-owner. While effective, the firm establishment of such a system did not come about until many years after the brothers' deaths; however, within the *Soga Monogatari*, one can see evidence of the way in which warriors attempted to curry favor with the government in the hopes of gaining promotions. Yoritomo, whose character in this tale can be

¹⁶⁰ Mass, "The Origins of Kamakura Justice," 299.

¹⁶¹ *Jitō* was a title awarded to warriors based on governmental favor, which granted them power over land as overseers or administrators; *shugō* was a title awarded to warriors, also determined by governmental favor, which granted them power as representatives of the *bakufu* in the provinces.

¹⁶² *Gokenin* 御家人 was a term used, during the Kamakura period (1185-1333), to refer to a professional warriors, who were eligible for positions within the *jitō/shugō* system. Later, during the Muromachi period (1333-1600), this position lost its significance with the emergence of *daimyo* lords. According to Mass, the term *gokenin*, prior to this period, did not possess "warrior" as its meaning; rather, the term can be broken down, linguistically, into the honorific prefix "go" and the noun "kenin," which meant "slave" or "house servant." Thus, Mass believes the term *gokenin* to be misleading; however, I am inclined to disagree. For one to become *gokenin*, he had to take an oath of vassalage to the *bakufu* and seal this oath by entering one's name in a government registry. In other words, one had to put himself in the service of the *bakufu* as its protector in order to acquire the title of warrior. In this context, the title of "honorable servant" seems fairly logical. For more information on this topic, see Jeffrey Mass, *Antiquity and Anachronism in Japanese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 79.

considered the face of the Kamakura *bakufu* and the vehicle through which its control is manifested, continuously grants land to those who perform meritorious deeds during his tenure.

While one might think that with the beginning of a warrior government a warrior ethic would arise, such a development did not occur until 1232 with the promulgation of a behavioral code for *gokenin* called the *Gōseibai Shikimoku*.¹⁶³ The *Gōseibai Shikimoku*, soon became the core of the Kamakura judicial system. Mass states that the *Gōseibai Shikimoku* was “... the first document of its kind by and for warriors...it represented not so much the creation of binding rules as the establishment of standards...The *shikimoku*'s objectives were thus to define the parameters of the *gokenin*'s world and to enunciate standards that would both exalt and restrain him.”¹⁶⁴ When one speaks of a text that provides guidelines for the establishment of a warrior code, one thinks of the *Gōseibai Shikimoku*; however, even though the Soga brothers' revenge was often described centuries later in literature as embodying such a behavioral code, the reality is that the *Gōseibai Shikimoku* should not have had any effect on the Soga brothers' revenge since their revenge predates this legislation by approximately forty years.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, according to the *Rufubon Soga Monogatari*, the brothers would have begun their plans for revenge approximately another eighteen years before that, creating a temporal distance between the two of approximately sixty years. In light of this historical timeline of events, it is plausible to conclude that there was no legislation governing blood-revenge practices prior to 1193. Quite

¹⁶³ Sometimes referred to as the Hōjō codes of legislation in honor of its active legislator Hōjō Yasutoki (1183-1242).

¹⁶⁴ Mass, “The Kamakura Bakufu,” 78.

¹⁶⁵ The brothers' blood revenge, according to the *Azuma Kagami* 吾妻鏡 (ca. 13th c.), occurred on the 28th day of the 5th month of 1193, which according to the Western calendar, becomes July 5th, 1193. For more information see D. E. Mills, “Soga Monogatari, Shintoshu and the Taketori Legend,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 30, no. 1 (1975): 37.

to the contrary, the actions of the brothers, and the dispute from which it sprang, may have led to the creation of blood-revenge litigation in the *Gōseibai Shikimoku*.

By exploring the way in which the Kamakura *bakufu*, and its judiciary, developed from the end of the Gempei war to the promulgation of the *Gōseibai Shikimoku*, it is possible to obtain a clearer understanding of the context in which the Soga brothers' revenge took place. Armed with information on the political climate of the early Kamakura period, one can fully comprehend the origin of the land dispute that was the impetus for the brothers' blood revenge, the conflicting wishes of the brothers' mother who, on one hand, wants her husband's murderer dead while, on the other, also fears Yoritomo's wrath should her sons succeed, and the swift reaction of the *bakufu* to what could be perceived as an act of insurrection against the shogun, Yoritomo.

4:4 A Succession Dispute

An examination of the social and political conditions of the Kamakura period, reveals a new judiciary preparing itself to deal with sibling land disputes, under the stress of which families often fractured into smaller clan units. This kind of dispute initiated a chain of events that, ultimately, led to the Soga brothers' blood revenge, was just such a dispute.

When the time for succession came, only Suketsugu, one of Itō no Suketaka's two sons (the other being Sukeie) was still alive. Suketsugu was a child born out of a relationship between Suketaka and his stepdaughter; however, Sukechika, as the eldest son of Sukeie, the eldest son of the two brothers in line for succession, was under the impression that he should be considered for succession. Instead, Sukechika was passed over and Suketsugu became successor. Years later,

when Suketsugu lay on his death bed, he asked Sukechika to act as proxy over his lands until his young son, Kudō no Suketsune, came of age and could take control of his inheritance. Sukechika agreed and adopted Suketsune as a step son, thus gaining control of the lands he had been denied years before. When Suketsune came of age, Sukechika refused to return the lands that, by inheritance rights, should have belonged to Suketsune. Suketsune petitioned the court for the return of his lands, but was repeatedly denied. It was not until after the conclusion of the Gempei war that Yoritomo seized the lands from Sukechika and returned them to Suketsune.¹⁶⁶ These actions would culminate in the Soga brothers' blood revenge.

4:5 Suketsune's Blood Revenge

In this tale, the cycle of blood revenges begins with Kudō no Suketsune. The fact that Sukechika had cheated Suketsune of his inheritance was only one way in which he aroused Suketsune's desire for blood revenge. Prior to the beginning of their dispute, Suketsune had married Sukechika's daughter; however, after Suketsune's incessant attempts to regain his inheritance, Sukechika retaliated by taking his daughter back, effectively divorcing Suketsune and his daughter by force. This, in addition to the ineffectiveness of his court petitions, created another layer of humiliation that now tainted Suketsune's name.

In the context of the *Soga monogatari*, the narrator portrays Suketsune as a cruel, land-greedy warrior who takes pleasure in tormenting the child-heroes of our story with the death of

¹⁶⁶ The most likely reason for Yoritomo's action in this matter was two fold: (1) a way of rewarding Suketsune for service during the war and, thereby, issuing fair judgment in the name of this new government while (2) punishing a man who had committed crimes against him and, by association, the new *bakufu*; however, this is all simply speculation based on historical context.

their father; however, if one were to considering the situation outlined above, the root of his desire for revenge is the desire to erase this humiliation.

During the Gempei war, Suketsune earned favor with Minamoto no Yoritomo through his continued service and support and was rewarded, as explained above, with the return of his father's lands, which were seized by the *bakufu* after Sukechika's execution. In a society where the amount of land one controls is directly proportionate to one's level of prestige, the seizure of his land was a devastating blow to both Sukechika's social and political ambitions. Thus, one aspect of Suketsune's revenge was complete; however, this was not enough for him. His humiliation could only be washed away with the blood of the one who caused it. The problem facing Suketsune is that he could not attack Sukechika directly, for to do so would have cost him his life under Yoritomo's rule. To solve this problem, Suketsune hired a couple of undesirables to do the deed for him. These two hired hitmen followed Sukechika and developed a plan to ambush him on a hunt; however, they ended up accidentally killing Sukechika's son, Sukeyasu, instead.¹⁶⁷ Thus, a second revenge was born out of this incident. Sukechika, when his son died, called for his other son, Sukekiyo, and ordered him to kill the men who murdered Sukeyasu and bring him their heads, which he did in short order.

Although his plan failed, Suketsune did not pursue Sukechika again, seemingly satisfied with the death of Sukechika's son. The question becomes: can the death of one's child be considered a suitable substitute for the death of the father in cases of blood revenge? It seems that in a culture where one can inherit the sin of his father, it might be conceivable that the blood relations of the object of one's blood revenge could be seen as an acceptable substitute.

¹⁶⁷ It is unclear whether or not the death of Sukechika's son was Suketsune's goal or an accident. Each version of the tale presents a different perspective on this. The *Rufubon*, which is the narrative of events that this research reflects, presents Sukeyasu's death as an accident.

4:6 The Soga Brothers' Blood Revenge

The act of blood revenge seems self-perpetuating, a beast that transforms and thrives on a cycle of provocation and reprisal which lead to death; yet, in the *Soga Monogatari*, this cycle was finally brought to an end with the Soga brothers' blood revenge. Of the four instances of blood revenge present in this tale, it is the blood revenge pursued by the Soga brothers that is the narrator's primary focus. For the brothers, their blood revenge was not the result of sibling-rivalry nor an inheritance feud; their blood revenge was a direct response to the wrongful death of their father, Sukeyasu. While the brothers grew to adulthood knowing that their father's murderers, Omi and Yawata, had already been killed in his name, the man ultimately responsible for Sukeyasu's death went unpunished, living a life of privilege under the protection of Yoritomo. Such an ending to this tragedy, when viewed through the eyes of duty between father and son, was unacceptable.

The childhood of Jūrō and Gorō, aged five and three, were irrevocably changed in the aftermath of their father's death, which sealed the boys' fate to grow up with one objective: deliver death unto their father's enemy. At their father's funeral, the boys' mother, in her grief, says to her children:

If a baby still in the womb can understand its mother's words, how much more so should you boys, being five and three, understand what I have to say. When you become fifteen and thirteen years old, slay your father's enemy and show his head to me.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 40.

Even Gorō, at only three years old, seemed too young to understand, but Jūrō vowed, when he reached adulthood, to “cut off the head of my father’s enemy and show it to everyone.”¹⁶⁹

When the brothers were eleven and nine, Suketsune, perhaps realizing the brothers’ intention to kill him, set a plan in motion to see that they would not live to carry out their desires. As with Sukechika, he could not attack them directly – especially after they were placed under the protection of Soga no Sukenobu, who was looked on favorably by Yoritomo – and, so, he sought to convince Yoritomo that the boys would become a threat to him if he allowed them to live to adulthood. Convinced by Suketsune’s cunning, he called for the boys execution; however, after considerable pleas from his retainers, Yoritomo finally agreed to spare the boys at the request of a man named Hatakeyama Shigetada (畠山重忠 1164-1205). From then on, the boys, aware of how easily one could incur Yoritomo’s wrath, made their plans for blood revenge in secret.

After eighteen years, the brothers followed Suketsune on a hunt to the base of Mt. Fuji where they finally accomplished their goal. In the dead of night, the brothers infiltrated Yoritomo’s camp and killed Suketsune. Suketsune’s death caused an uproar within the camp and a battle ensued. Jūrō was killed in the battle and Gorō was captured and executed the next day. Despite their fall, or perhaps because of it, the actions of the Soga brothers “came to be held up,” as Donald Keene notes, “as unparalleled examples of filial behavior.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 891.

4:7 Yoritomo's Blood Revenge

In the *Soga Monogatari*, the cycle of blood revenge ends with Yoritomo. While, chronologically, Yoritomo's blood revenge began before the Soga brothers were old enough to plot their own revenge against Suketsune, it was not until after the brothers had achieved their violent goals that Yoritomo's blood revenge was finally complete. The reasons for Yoritomo's revenge were two fold. First, while he was in exile, Yoritomo had an affair with the daughter of Sukechika, which resulted in an illegitimate child, named Senzuru. When Sukechika found out about the affair and the resulting pregnancy, he was so outraged that he had the child drowned when he was only three years old. There are several instances in the text where Yoritomo discusses the ways in which he will gain revenge against Sukechika for his son's death. One such scene occurred when Yoritomo called for the death of the Soga brothers, Jūrō and Gorō, as children. He explains to Kagesue, a warrior charged with bringing the Soga brother to him for execution, his reasons for ordering the boys' execution:

You have probably heard of the misery I suffered at the hands of Itō no Sukechika. He killed my three-year-old son...And I was determined that the descendants of that man...would not be allowed to live...These boys are...his direct heirs. Put them to death at once. Then I shall have carried out the memorial service for my son...¹⁷¹

In this scene, it becomes clear that the sins of the father become the sins of the son and, in this way, the son could be punished for the crimes of the father – or, in this case, grandfather. Thus, those connected to the impetus of blood revenge can find themselves as the object of that revenge. What this scene also tells us about Yoritomo's blood revenge in particular is that his methods for delivering revenge upon his enemy is through what is called, in the Judeo-Christian

¹⁷¹ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 77.

tradition, an “eye for an eye.” Similarly, Yoritomo makes it clear that he intends to inflict the same pain upon Sukechika that he himself had suffered. Killing Sukechika was not enough; instead, he sought to destroy his familial line by ordering the execution of his descendants. Yoritomo’s desire for blood revenge was further incited by Sukechika’s lack of support during the Gempei war (1180-1185). After all, Sukechika had allied himself with the Taira clan, the Minamoto’s enemy. In this way, Sukechika committed two acts of betrayal against Yoritomo, which only fueled Yoritomo’s need for blood revenge.

Ultimately, Yoritomo accomplishes his blood revenge in two ways. Yoritomo begins by ordering Sukechika’s execution and reclaiming his lands only to award them to Suketsune. Yoritomo then completes the blood revenge against Sukechika, indirectly, by killing Jūrō and Gorō. Although Jūrō was killed in a battle that ensued upon the death of Suketsune, the battle was the result of a threatening force in Yoritomo’s own camp. Such a death could, ultimately, be attributed to Yoritomo since Jūrō’s death came at the hands of his men. Gorō was captured during this same battle and promptly executed by order of Yoritomo.

The death of the Soga brothers was not just a case of Yoritomo achieving his blood revenge against Sukechika; there were other elements at play in this incident. The brothers’ actions – i.e., the violence in the camp of Japan’s first shogun only a few of years after the conclusion of the Gempei wars – represented a threat to the *bakufu*’s newly established authority. The act of killing one of Yoritomo’s vassals, Suketsune in particular, could and probably was considered an act of violence against the shogun, which warranted the death penalty.

4:8 The Soga Brothers: Pioneers of Blood Revenge

Due to the unprecedented and unusual nature of the Soga brothers' blood revenge, their actions set the standard for later blood-revenge practices in Japan; from their tale, one can deduce certain rules that governed blood revenge. As with many other aspects of Japanese culture, perspectives on blood revenge came to be heavily influenced by Confucianism and Chinese folklore.¹⁷² Blood Revenge was primarily sparked by the wrongful death of an older male relative; sometimes this death was the culmination of a feud, as depicted in the *Soga Monogatari*, while at other times the murder occurred in accidental situations involving petty crimes – i.e. robberies, etcetera. In the *Soga Monogatari*, the brothers' blood revenge is inspired by the death of their father, which came about as the culmination of hostilities in a dispute between the Itō siblings over land inheritance.¹⁷³ The fact that the object of the brothers' blood revenge was Suketsune, a man who though responsible, did not directly murder the boys' father, suggests that revenge could be sought against those indirectly responsible for the murder. One might have assumed that with the death of the murderers, Ōmi and Yawata, at the hands of Sukeyasu's brother, Sukekiyo, the blood revenge would have been complete; however, the narrative of the tale conveys an air of dissatisfaction among those most affected by Sukeyasu's death. Despite the retribution Sukekiyo brought upon Sukeyasu's murderers, their deaths did not serve to satisfy the survivor's desire for blood revenge. The reason for the lack of closure is that those who survived Sukeyasu saw Ōmi and Yawata as puppets controlled by the whims of a man who gave the order that led to Sukeyasu's death and, therefore, the true murderer: Suketsune.

¹⁷² In addition to the sermons of Confucius regarding a son's duty to his murdered father, the way in which the *Soga Monogatari* promotes the Soga brothers' blood revenge with the use of Chinese tale as precedent for, and as approval of, their actions, serves as evidence of Chinese influences in Japan.

¹⁷³ Suketsune, his anger over the slight having reached murderous proportions, hired men to kill Sukechika, but they killed Sukechika's son, Sukeyasu, instead.

Despite this indirect connection, he was the cause, the impetus of the primary blood revenge in this tale and, as a result, only his death would prove to be the sacrifice needed to end the cycle of blood revenge.

The narrative of the *Soga Monogatari* also suggests the existence of a familial hierarchy that determines who can be avenged and who can be the avenger. After the death of Sukeyasu, Sukechika calls for his youngest son, Sukekiyo, and demands the death of Ōmi and Yawata:

Lay Priest Itō contemplating how fruitless his future would be without Sukeyasu, summoned his other son, Sukekiyo, and said, “Do your filial duty to me, your father, while I am still alive: cut off the heads of Ōmi and Yawata and bring them to me.”¹⁷⁴

The insight contained in this passage, comes not necessarily from what is said, but rather from the implications of what is said. Sukechika asks his other son to bring him the head of Sukeyasu’s murderers, which implies that, for whatever reason, Sukechika is unable to do the deed himself. The reasons for Sukechika’s inability to act are never actually stated. Perhaps it was a desire to avoid bringing undo attention upon himself for fear of incurring the wrath of Yoritomo. Regardless of why Sukechika delegated the duty of blood revenge to his son, this scene would become a source from which future generations would establish a blood-revenge etiquette according to which a father cannot avenge a son and an older brother cannot avenge a younger brother.

Sukekiyo also serves as evidence of a hierarchically determined avenger. Once Sukekiyo had performed his blood revenge, he returned to his father with the evidence of his success:

When Sukekiyo took the heads of the two men and presented them to his father, the Lay Priest praised him for his exceptional feat...Sukekiyo, by avenging his

¹⁷⁴ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 44.

brother's death and soothing his father's anger, showed his extraordinary sense of duty and loyalty.¹⁷⁵

In the same way that Sukechika's command to Sukekiyo indicates the inability of a father to avenge his son, Sukekiyo's actions here indicate that it is the duty of a younger brother to avenge the wrongful death of his elder brother.¹⁷⁶ The narrator, by continually reminding the reader of Sukekiyo's kin relationship as Sukeyasu's younger brother, leads the reader to such an interpretation. As in the other examples, this scene led to the later developed regulations that insisted would-be avengers be determined by a degree of kinship.

There is one scene in the *Soga Monogatari* in which Yoritomo expresses his intentions to avenge his son, Senzuru, who was drowned by Sukechika at the age of three. After ordering the Soga brothers' execution, Yoritomo says to Kagesue:

Put them to death at once! Then I shall have carried out the memorial service for my son.¹⁷⁷

One could argue that by having both Sukechika and Gorō executed, Yoritomo was carrying out blood revenge on Sukechika and his descendants for the death of his son, thus negating the implied restriction on who may act as avenger; however, it is my contention that Yoritomo's actions in this regard could have been understood as a means of ridding himself of any existing perceived threats to the *bakufu*; rather, it is most likely that any perceived notions of blood revenge were romanticized later by reciters of the tale.

¹⁷⁵ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 45.

¹⁷⁶ There are two instances in which the narrator reminds the reader of Sukekiyo's status as the younger brother: first, by informing the reader that Sukeyasu was Sukechika's heir apparent, which, the inheritance customs during the medieval period, suggests that he's the eldest of the two brothers and, secondly, just before Sukekiyo is ordered by his father to avenge Sukechika, states it more directly, telling the reader that Sukekiyo is the younger brother of Sukeyasu.

¹⁷⁷ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 77.

In Japan's shame culture, the transgressions (or *tsumi*) of the father would become the sins of the son. This inherited shame had a great impact on one's undertaking of blood revenge. The *Soga Monogatari* has many examples of inherited shame. Inherited shame plagues the brothers throughout their lives primarily through the threat that Yoritomo presented to them:

We shall be killed because of the deeds of our grandfather...¹⁷⁸

In the context of blood revenge, the issue becomes not so much inherited sin, but rather inherited shame. Eventually, with the evolution of blood-revenge practices within the warrior culture of Japan, one of the primary motivations for pursuing blood revenge was the desire to expunge familial shame incurred through the manner in which the murdered individual died – in order to restore honor to the name of the deceased and, by familial association, one's own. In this way, through inherited shame, the motivation for blood revenge takes on a personal quality, which drives the avenger to action. Although there was not much mention of the brothers' inherited shame in the dialogue or narration of the tale, it did exist in the way the brothers view their own honor and shame. In one episode of the *Soga Monogatari*, Jūrō had to choose between reaffirming his honor in the face of humiliation and his duty to blood revenge. The retainers of Jūrō's uncle accused Jūrō of acting improperly with his uncle's mistress and stealing her away to Soga.¹⁷⁹ These overzealous retainers chased Jūrō down on his return to Soga and accosted him at arrow point. Jūrō, thus humiliated, was confronted by a decision between personal honor and familial duty:

¹⁷⁸ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 78.

¹⁷⁹ What the retainers did not know was that Jūrō's aunt, spurred to action by her jealousy, sent for Jūrō, who was unaware of the girl's position in his uncle's household, and asked him to take the girl to Soga, so that no undesired impropriety would befall her in her unmarried state.

There was nothing to be gained by fighting them and dying; he had to escape. He threw down his bow, and said, “This might sound as if I am making excuses, but I have no recollection of my impropriety. Even if I am guilty of wrongdoing, you need not have acted in this way. Calm yourselves. I have reasons for begging you to allow me to proceed. You will know them in due time.”...Jūrō wished he could have killed himself or died fighting to seek release from the intense humiliation he had suffered. But, he had to live to avenge his father’s death, he could not throw away his life uselessly. He was to be pitied, for he was denied the freedom to take his own life.¹⁸⁰

Without the larger context from which this excerpt is taken, Jūrō’s words would appear to be those of a coward according to the emerging warrior ethos; however, the narrator praises him by lamenting Jūrō’s dilemma, which labels Jūrō’s actions as commendable, rather than cowardly. The narrator, in a bid to convince the audience of the truth of his words quotes the words of the *Tso-chuan*:¹⁸¹ “Should you have a task to accomplish, abandon considerations of honor and escape harm.”¹⁸² The question then becomes, within this new warrior culture, where having to endure personal shame is deemed a fate worse than death, what could possibly be more important than one’s honor? In this context, what could possibly be so vital to Jūrō that would cause him to beg for his freedom rather than reaffirm his own honor? The answer is the honor of the *ie*. If one were to imagine honor in terms of a pyramid structure of social levels, the honor of the *ie* would rank higher than the honor of the individual. The honor associated with the family or the individual has the ability to travel back and forth through time, affecting future generations. Personal honor, or conversely dishonor, is determined by the acts of an individual. The acts of one individual determine how one views those people surrounding that individual,

¹⁸⁰ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 109-110.

¹⁸¹ A chronicle of Chinese history during the warring states era (722-468 BCE) recording among its accountings of political and military affairs thoughts of Confucius and his followers. See Burton Watson, *Tso-chuan: Selections from China’s Oldest Narrative History* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1992.

¹⁸² Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 110.

those who associate with him; therefore, should one's personal honor become tainted by dishonorable actions, this perception of taintedness would have a ripple affect influencing the reputations of all to whom the individual is connected (see Figure 5).

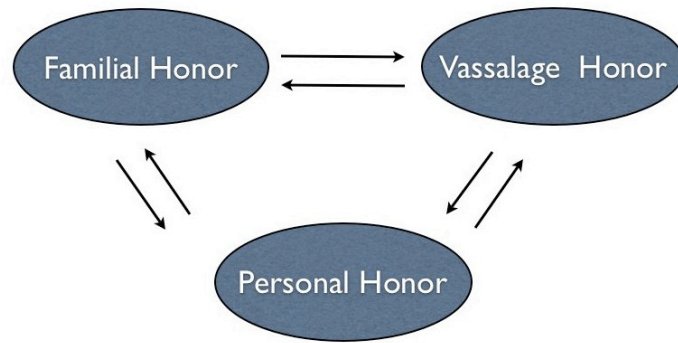


Figure 5: Reciprocal Nature of Honor

In this way, all forms of honor are interconnected to form a web of reciprocal relationships – between personal and familial honor, as well as between the personal honor of a vassal and his lord's honor in later periods with the establishment of the medieval vassalage system. This interconnected cycle of honor and shame is self-perpetuating, never reaching cessation and continuously circulating through these reciprocal relationships. Viewed from this perspective, with this hierarchical relationship between agents of honor, *Jūrō*, in a paradoxical manner, shames himself in order to carry out the actions that will re-establish his honor. By controlling his own impulse to prove himself honorable by denying himself that privilege, he indirectly does just that by begging for his life.

The fact that there are different variants of honor in a hierarchy should not suggest that they are mutually exclusive. Rather, the opposite is true: one can either positively or negatively influence the different kinds of honor, mentioned above, through the actions of an individual.

Jūrō's actions in the incident mentioned above provides an example. In this one act of seeming cowardice, Jūrō performs his filial duty to his father's memory, preserves his family honor and, therefore, indirectly reaffirms his own.

In one of the few instances, in the *Soga Monogatari* (book four), in which there are references to the brothers' incurred shame, as a result of their father's death, the brothers' mothers says to them:

Shame degrades a family and stays with it for generations. ...If you wish to survive in this world, you must endure shame.¹⁸³

In this scene, the mother is asking her sons to abandon their plans for revenge, arguing that they should live with shame rather than face ruin in life.¹⁸⁴ This reference to the perpetual nature of honor and shame is representative of the cycle I previously mentioned and exemplifies the interconnected relationship between different kinds of honor, as well as the inherent reciprocal relationship among them. This excerpt also directly highlights the catalyst for blood revenge in a way that we had not seen until this point in the tale. While it had not been explicitly stated prior to this instance, the brothers' attitudes and actions – their disinterest in land or title, disloyalty to their mother, endurance of personal shame without retaliation, belief in a higher duty to their filial obligation to their father – all suggest a more complex motivation for revenge than “an eye for an eye.” They express the desire to remove the shame that degrades their family as a result of their father's murder. While one cannot conclusively say that this desire for retribution was not a

¹⁸³ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 103-104.

¹⁸⁴ In an earlier passage, the mother, in her grief, implores her children to avenge their father's death, but over time, comes to attribute more value to survival than honor and contradicts her earlier entreaty; such an example could lead to interesting conclusions regarding one's inner struggle between the instinct of survival and the pursuit of honor in the samurai “death culture” that later developed.

factor in the brothers' motivations for blood revenge, the driving factor in their motivation would have been the stronger desire to reaffirm their familial honor.

One of the strongest themes in the *Soga Monogatari* is the pursuit of blood revenge at all costs. The brothers' single-minded determination and willingness to forsake all else in their lives suggest that, socially, one was expected to pursue blood revenge vigilantly. Blood revenge could become one's sole focus to the neglect of all else – even one's own life. In this tale, the Soga brothers show no ambition for the acquisition of land or title. In spite of the great conflict they face, their duties to their family members, particularly their mother, who fears that her sons might be executed, but also from the fact that if they were to pursue their revenge, the repercussions of their actions would lead to the ruin and even death of those associated with them – as dictated by the laws of reciprocal punishment in Japanese society. In her bid to convince the brothers to abandon their blood revenge, she even went so far as to disinherit Gorō, who had disobeyed her wishes by taking his coming-of-age ceremony, rather than religious vows. Gorō¹⁸⁵ remarks to his brother, in book four:

If I am to be filial to the memory of my father, whose death I grieve, I must be unfilial to mother.¹⁸⁶

Gorō struggles deeply with his filial obligations, which are at odds with one another: on the one hand, he had a duty to his father, which demanded that he undertake blood revenge and, on the other, a duty to his mother, which demanded that he abandon that blood revenge. Gorō's decision to continue with his plans, despite the filial obligations he had to his mother, suggests

¹⁸⁵ Much of the vocalized commentary regarding the proper actions for one who undertakes blood revenge comes primarily from Gorō in this tale, who is by far the more pertinacious of the two brothers.

¹⁸⁶ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 100.

that, when one is confronted by one's duty to others, one's duty to blood revenge comes before all else.¹⁸⁷ Gorō confirms as much, in book four, when he says:

A person intent on revenge forsakes all other concerns and does not covet land; he can think only of revenge.¹⁸⁸

Such direct proclamations regarding what is proper behavior for avengers are rare in this tale; however, it clearly summarizes a perspective on blood revenge that would become a well established characteristic of the practice in later years.

The narrative voice in this tale is also quite significant. With the emergence of a developed samurai ethic in the Tokugawa period and authors used literature as a mirror reflecting their perceptions of the world. Thus, the narrator represents the voice of society in a text; it is often very clear in literature whether or not society viewed an incident or individual in a favorable light through the tone of the narrative voice.¹⁸⁹ One such example of this interpretive role of the narrative comes at the end of an accounting of Jūrō's death during the battle that ensued following Suketsune's death:

Jūrō was not the first man to give his life on behalf of his parents, for that is the way of the warrior. But, even if his corpse were dumped alongside the road, his reputation would rise as high as the clouds at Dragon Gate. It seems useless to speak of the sadness of his death.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Gorō's decision to choose to honor his filial duty to his father's memory over his mother's protests also suggests a gender bias existed within the familial hierarchy.

¹⁸⁸ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 105.

¹⁸⁹ However, one perspective cannot be taken as representative of an entire society since the narrator is, ultimately, the creation of just one man; yet, the perspectives of this one man are shaped by the society within which he exists, thus it is logical to conclude that those perspectives have colored his own perception of the incident and, so, we can make certain assumptions based on his perspective. It is also the abundance with which this tale was retold and reprinted, the many different versions providing very similar tones of the narrative voice, that gives this argument credence.

¹⁹⁰ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 242.

Much like the narrative voice in the *Tale of the Heike*, the narrative voice in the *Soga Monogatari* frequently reminds the reader of the praiseworthy nature of the brothers' actions.

Although the narrator often injects a sentence or two regarding the nature of the brothers' actions, he also refers to Chinese tales as a justification of the brothers' actions. Sometimes this citation of precedent is as direct as using the actions of famous, perhaps even mythical, Chinese characters to reaffirm the righteousness of the brothers' revenge or, even more indirectly, themes of karmic retribution on the wicked to explain why the brothers' goals had to be met. The following excerpt from book four refers to such a tale:

The Story of Mei Chien-ch'ih

Hakoō's plight brings to mind an ancient story. Long ago in the nation of Ch'u in China there lived a great king named Shang. He had many wives, one of whom was named Tung-yang. Being warm-blooded, she cooled her body by leaning against an iron post. Soon she was heavy with child. The king, who had no sons to inherit his throne, was overjoyed to hear that she would give birth. Three years passed, however, and she had still not given birth. The king thought this to be unusual, so he summoned a doctor of divination and asked for an explanation.

"She will give birth to something you will treasure," the doctor said, "but it will not be a human being."

The king waited anxiously, wondering what it would be. As the doctor of divination had predicted, she gave birth not to a human being, but to a lump of iron. The king sent for Mo Yeh and had him fashion it into a sword. It was a miraculous and distinguished sword that shone brighter than any other in the land. The king greatly valued this sword, and he was never without it; but he was puzzled because the blade was constantly covered with mist. Therefore, he again summoned the doctor of divination and had him interpret this phenomenon.

The doctor wrote out his divination and presented it to the king. It stated: "Two swords, a female sword and a male sword, were made from that lump of iron. They are husband and wife. The sword smith kept the female sword and gave you only the male sword, which now sheds tears of yearning for its mate. You must send for the female sword and reunite them."

The sword smith was immediately summoned by the king. Before he left his house, he said to his wife, "The king has probably summoned me to demand the sword which I kept for myself. Because I do not intend to hand it over to him, I shall surely be tortured to death. That sword is buried at a spot on Southern

Mountain. When our three-year-old son reaches manhood, have him dig up the sword and keep it.” He then went to the palace. Because he defied the king, he was tortured, and finally put to death.

When the sword smith’s son became twenty-one, he excavated the sword in accordance with his mother’s wish. Fearful of the king’s power, however, he did not return to his home, but hid in the mountains.

One night the king dreamed that a man, with eyebrows one foot apart, would come and kill him. His name was Mei Chien-ch’ih. Frightened by this dream, the king proclaimed, “If there is a man of this description, capture him and bring him to me.” He also announced that the person who accomplished this would receive any reward he wished.

A man named Pai Chung went to Mei Chien-ch’ih, and said to him, “A large reward has been offered for your head. That king killed your father. You would probably like to kill him. But he is also a bitter enemy of mine. Cut off your head and give it to me. If I have both your head and your sword, I can easily draw near the king and slay him. After I use your head to achieve our goal, I also intend to die, for one is destined to die sooner or later.”

“I would gladly give my life to have my father’s enemy slain,” Mei Chien-ch’ih replied. “Do it for me!” He then cut off his own head and gave it to Pai Chung. He had bitten off the tip of his sword and hidden it in his mouth.

Pai Chung took the head and the sword and brought them to the palace. The king, showing them to the Great Minister, said, “This is the same head that appeared in my dream. The eyebrows are one foot apart. Also, this sword is exactly the same as the one in my possession.” The king was overjoyed.

However, there was life still remaining in the head, for it opened its eyes. The king became increasingly frightened of it, and ordered that water be boiled in a large pot. The head was put into the pot and boiled for three weeks, but the eyes still remained open, and the mouth was twisted in a scornful grin.

Pai Chung then said to the king, “Life remains in that head because you are its enemy and it is determined to meet you. Do not be troubled by it. Let it see you. That will dispel its resentment.”

The king agreed, and drew near the iron pot. When he looked at the head of Mei Chien-ch’ih, it spat out the sword tip which it had in its mouth. The sword tip flew at the king and cut off his head. Pai Chung sprang forth, picked up the king’s head, and put it in the pot in which Mei Chien-ch’ih’s head had been boiled. The king’s head, its strength not yet exhausted, and Mei’s head gnashed at each other.

Pai Chung remembered the agreement he had made with Mei on the mountain. “I also bear a grudge against the king,” he said. “That is the reason I am doing this.” No sooner had he finished speaking than he cut off his own head and threw it into the iron pot. The three heads fought in the pot throughout the day and night. The head of the king was finally defeated. Eventually life ebbed away from the other two heads; they were frightening examples of what may be

accomplished through determination. The three heads were interred in three tombs, which are known today as the Three Imperial Tombs.

Although Hakoō was still young, he had resolved to slay his father's murderer. His determination, which never weakened day or night, was no less than that of Mei Chien-ch'ih and Pai Chung. In the words of the *Wen-hsūan*: "A great stream is not likely to dry up, and a profound wish is not likely to die out." Therefore, there was no one who did not hold out hope for the eventual success of the Soga brothers.¹⁹¹

While seemingly unrelated, the narrator connects the Chinese tale to the previous incident in the Soga brothers' tale; the narrator has just relayed the tale of Suketsune's visit to Hakone as a member of Yoritomo's entourage. There Suketsune searches out a young Gorō¹⁹² who was studying at the temple to enter the priesthood, to taunt him about having murdered the boy's father. The narrator concludes that tale by telling his audience that Hakoō's resolve to kill his father's murderer was reaffirmed in that moment, then begins a seemingly irrelevant Chinese tale as a roundabout way of emphasizing to his audience just how firm his new resolve was. In this way, the narrator creates an argument, concluding the Chinese tale by tying the moral of the tale back to his original point that the young Gorō would succeed in his blood revenge aided by his steely resolve.

Some may say that the above example represents a warrior perspective or a warrior ethos, that had not yet been firmly established at the time of the Soga brothers' revenge, therefore the text does not accurately reflect a perspective of the new practice at the time of the incident, but rather a perspective of the incident and the brothers' actions as interpreted during a later era, one where warrior ethics had a firmer foundation. There is truth to this argument; however, I am not trying to prove the existence of a well-established warrior ethic as early 1192 with my primary

¹⁹¹ Cogan, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, 94-96.

¹⁹² Gorō, at this point in the story, had not yet received a coming-of-age ceremony and therefore, still possessed his childhood name Hakoō.

evidence from the narrative of the *Soga Monogatari*. In fact, it is impossible to know the inner thoughts that drove the avengers. In this way, the narrator's talk of dying a warrior's death for one's parents is irrelevant. My point is, rather, that the actions of the brothers, in this tale, are formative for later standardized blood-revenge practices in Japan. What the brothers did was unprecedented, which is why they merited such extensive mention in the *Azuma Kagami*. Their actions provide the basic guidelines for revenge practices to come; however, the narrative is important in determining the public's reaction to this action in later years. In book three, the narrator describes the brothers' grief over their father's death and the way in which their tale served as an inspiration to others:

They reminded each other that they must not let themselves be seen grieving. Although they tried to keep their thoughts concealed, being mere children, they could not but betray themselves from time to time. Everyone who saw them or heard them at those moments felt both admiration and pity for them. In this regard, it is well known that fine bamboo grows straight after it sprouts and sandalwood trees are fragrant from the time they are seedlings. Therefore, the two boys would eventually gain their wish and slay their enemy and their fame and influence would extend throughout the realm. The story of these boys, as it spread by word of mouth, inspired pity and sympathy.¹⁹³

In this passage, the narrator explains the means by which the brothers' tale spread – by word of mouth – and how the dissemination of their tale influenced a warrior class for generations to come; with each generation retelling the tale to the next, the brothers' fame and influence continued to grow, culminating in a blood-revenge canon in the Tokugawa period with the *Soga Monogatari* at the helm. In it the epitome of warrior ethical behavior is exalted.

¹⁹³ Cogan, 71.

4:9 *Soga Monogatari*: Its Influence in the Tokugawa Period

During a period of peace when the meaning of *samurai* existence was defined, the *Soga Monogatari* came to epitomize the warrior ideal as it pertains to the practice of blood revenge. While aspects of the tale gained popularity through oral transmission prior to the Tokugawa period, it was not until this period that the *Soga Monogatari* gained its reputation as one of the two most famous blood-revenge tales in Japanese history. In the previous chapter on Tokugawa blood revenge, I explored blood revenge as it was known during this period – as the government-sanctioned practice of *katakiuchi* – and enumerated the ways in which what would become the governing etiquette of blood revenge in the Tokugawa period, was originally derived from examples of the brothers actions and behaviors in the *Soga Monogatari*. The purpose of this section is to explore the role of the *Soga Monogatari* in the Tokugawa period and the way in which the tale changed the demographics of blood revenge during this time: what was once the prerogative of the samurai class would become popular among the townspeople, who were able to gain access to this lawful practice.

As in any long period of peace, there was a great literary boom during the Tokugawa period. The new technique of woodblock printing made possible literary mass production. Over time, literacy also spread from the upper classes to the *chōnin*, or townspeople, who would become the greatest consumers of literature during this time. Often, the most popular works of literature were ones that promoted *samurai* valor. In this way, the warrior ethos that had been cultivated, by *samurai* households, for hundreds of years was being spread among the masses who sought to emulate the behavior of the elite upper class by emulating the behaviors and

actions they read about in these tales, particularly the ones that were considered to be historical fact.

As the influence of a warrior ethos permeated the *chōnin* class through such literature, townspeople tried to link a newly learned ethos with *samurai* behaviors by emulating these practices developed to serve as demonstrations of one's honor, the most venerated of which was *seppuku*; however, as the incidents of blood revenge grew among the masses, and with the practice considered legal and not segregated by class-restrictions, what was once the prerogative of the *samurai* became more common among the *chōnin* class. It is my contention that the mass re-productions of the *Soga Monogatari* led the charge in revenge literature that sparked the frequent perpetuation of this practice among the townspeople of the Tokugawa period.

As mentioned above, during this period, the role of the *Soga Monogatari* was to promote a warrior ethos among society. The Soga brothers' revenge as an archetype of blood-revenge behavior gained a reputation in subsequent ages, through the heroic portrayals of the brothers and their actions in literature and theater, particularly *kabuki*, the theater style of choice amongst *chōnin*. The *Soga Monogatari* text that I will be using to represent the role of this text to promote blood-revenge practices was re-published during the Tokugawa period and uses multiple devices with which to praise the *Soga Monogatari* to the masses: through the preface, imagery, heroic character portrayal, and the restating of famous quotations from the original tale, among others.

The author opens the tale with a preface (see Figure 6) in which he begins his praise of the brothers in the opening line, a re-statement of a well known Confucian principle:

「君父の仇には共に天を戴ず」¹⁹⁴

Kunfu no kataki ni wa tomoni ten wo itadakazu.

One cannot live under the same heaven as his father's enemy.¹⁹⁵

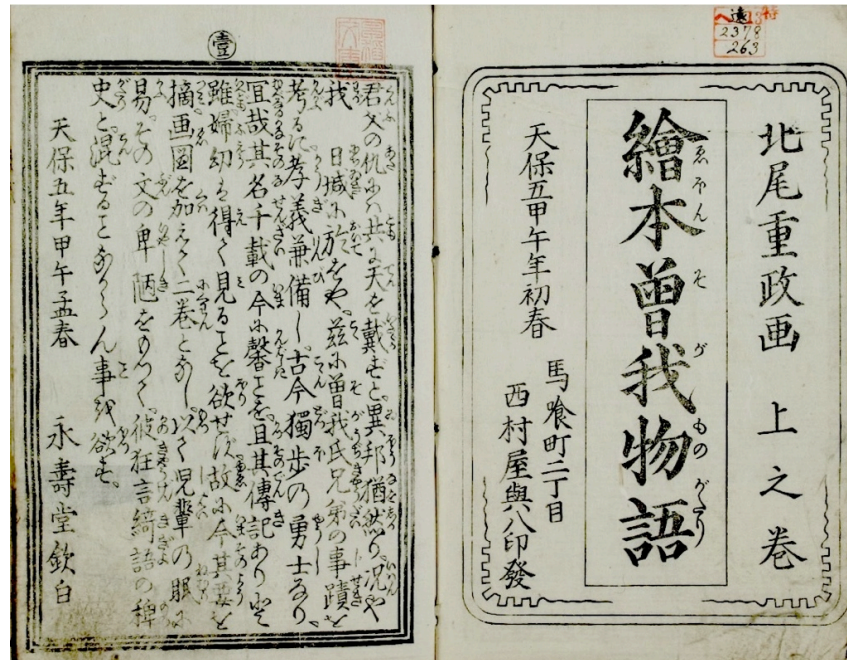


Figure 6: Preface of the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 繪本曾我物語

The author of this preface, in this one line – the re-statement of a Confucian principle that acts much like a bible precept in Western cultures, a commandment of blood revenge, so to speak, – reminds the reader of the brothers' righteousness¹⁹⁶ in undertaking blood revenge, which is a manifestation of one's obligation to familial duty and honor. This statement also had the added

¹⁹⁴ Kitao Shigemasa 北尾重政, *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 繪本曾我物語 (Edo: Eijudō 永寿堂, Tenpō 5 天保 5 [1834]), preface.

¹⁹⁵ Translations of excerpts from the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 繪本曾我物語 are my own from this point on unless otherwise noted.

¹⁹⁶ The people living during the Tokugawa period, both *samurai* and *chōnin* alike would have been familiar with the Confucian perspectives on a son's duty to his murdered father, which was discussed in detail in the previous chapter on Tokugawa blood revenge.

effect of reminding the readers that they too have such an obligations, thus promoting the perpetuation of this practice in Tokugawa society. The author of the preface reinforces his statement with praise of the brothers and a reminder to the reader of the fact that their name has been synonymous with honor, as a result of those actions, for generations:

「...孝義兼備し古今獨歩の勇士なり。宜なる哉其名千載の今に馨れこと...」¹⁹⁷

...kōgi kenbishi kokon doppo no yūshi nari. Mubenaru kana sono na senzai no ima ni kanbashire koto...

[The Soga brothers] were brave warriors unsurpassed in history, proficient in both duty and filial piety. How right it is that their names have been known as a thing of honor now for a thousand years!

In this way, the author restates to the audience the benefits of filial behavior – in this case through undertaking blood revenge – while subliminally suggesting that the reader could also attain such honor and notoriety through similar actions.

After the preface, the author of this tale launches into character introductions, giving a page of introduction to the key players in this tale, both heroes and villains. The portrayal of the heroes and the villains promotes the positive tone coloring the brother's story, thus advocating on behalf of their behaviors. Much of the heroic portrayal of the brothers in the character introductions involves imagery: heroic woodblock images of the brothers. We also see, in the imagery, evidence of Muromachi literary motifs of the *Rufubon*, which this version of the tale was most likely adapted from. In the character introductions, Jūrō is all posh and sophistication (see Figure 7), where as Gorō is the vision of the wild and brave warrior (see Figure 8). Jūrō is depicted in elaborate dress, given delicate, feminine facial features, headdress to signify a man of

¹⁹⁷ Shigemasa, *Ehon Soga Monogatari*, preface.

status and aristocratic demeanor – even though in the tale Jūrō was impoverished – yet, he is also depicted with bow and arrow, which brings the readers’ attention to his martial prowess as a warrior, despite his appearance of nobility. The introduction of Tōra, next to Jūrō, also adds another dimension to Jūrō’s character, as a Casanova figure or as the great lover; it also makes a plot connection for the tale being told. The posh and sophistication of a charming man with a gentle demeanor gains the love of a woman whose loyalty and dedication to him would spread his story and promoting his honor.

Gorō, on the other hand, is depicted as Jūrō’s polar opposite. In his character introduction, Gorō is shown as the brave and heroic warrior locked in fierce struggle with another warrior in a double spread print. Gorō’s has wild hair, a fierce expression of a warrior with no indication of softness, exaggerated muscular extremities, a sword at the ready and warrior attire. All of these elements come together to promote a profile of the kind of individual a warrior in Tokugawa society should strive to cultivate and one who is considered an ideal candidate to act in the role of avenger.

Another device by which the author promotes the brothers’ blood revenge is through inspiring sympathy for the murdered victim. In this tale, the Soga brothers’ blood revenge is sparked by their father’s murder. The author chose, like in the *Rufubon* version of the tale, in both imagery and text, to promote Sukeyasu’s virtuous and heroic nature through the explanation of the moments leading up to his death. In this way, the author set up Sukeyasu as the heroic warrior – strong, brave, honorable, and dutiful – by depicting his shining moment in this tale: a



Figure 7: Character Depiction in the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 絵本曾我物: Jūrō



Figure 8: Character Depiction in the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 絵本曾我物語: Gorō

sumo battle prior to the hunt during which he was killed (see Figure 9); by emphasizing these qualities, the author is able to amplify the readers' emotions, setting the reader up to experience the tragedy of Sukeyasu's death all the more keenly during the scene of mourning. The emphasis is on the loss of such a skillful warrior making the death of Sukeyasu all the more tragic and, thus, creating a more negative view within the reader of Sukeyasu's enemies and the object of blood revenge in this tale.

In the funeral scene, during which the loved ones of Sukeyasu mourn his death, the language of the text reflects the *Rufubon*'s tone of wistful longing and painful loss over such heroes by emphasizing the grief of Sukeyasu's wife – known in the tale as Soga no Haha 曾我の母 – and Jūrō, as well as through a restatement of other famous quotations from the original tale, the importance of which would have been known to the audience. The first of the two famous utterances in this tale is the mother's supplication to her sons for them to avenger her husband's death (see Figure 10). Soga no Haha says to her sons:

泣く泣く申しけるは、「はらの子だにも、母のいふ事は聞きしるものぞ。
なんじらもはや兄は五つ弟は三つになるぞかし。十五十三にもならば父御
の仇を討ち、わらわに見せよ」といふて

Naku naku mōshikeru ha, "Hara no ko dani mo, haha no iu koto ha, "kikishiru mono zo. Nanjira mohaya ani ha itsutsu otōto ha mitsu ni naruzo ka shi. Jūgo, Jūsan ni mo naraba, tetego no kataki wo uchi, warawa ni mise yo," to ifute.

While weeping, she said to the boys, "Even a child in the womb listens to what its mother has to say. Already you [Jūrō] as the older brother are five-years-old and you [Gorō] as the younger brother have become three-years-old. When you become fifteen and thirteen, you will kill your father's enemy and show him to me."

In her tearful supplication, Soga no Haha repeats the sentiment of the Confucian principle that is present in the preface, stating that Sukeyasu's sons will kill the enemy of their father, a statement



Figure 9: Character Depiction in the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 絵本曾我物語:
Sukeyasu



Figure 10: The Soga brothers mourn their father in the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 絵本曾我物語

that broaches no uncertainty, one in which their mother states what she knows, not what she wants.

Similarly, Jūrō at the tender age of five years, and grieving over the loss of his father ,makes a vow to kill his father’s murderer (see Figure 10):

[なり] 兄の一万ししたる父が顔をつくづくまもりて泣き入しが、涙を押さへ、「いつか我々成人なし、父の仇の首とって人々に見せまいらせん」といひつつ

Ani no Ichiman shi-shitaru chichi ga kao wo tsukuzuku mamorite naki-irishiga, namida wo osahe, “Itsu wareware seijin nashi, chichi no kataki no kubi totte hitobito ni misemairasemu,” to ihitsutsu...

The older brother, Ichiman,¹⁹⁸ had begun to weep as he sat gazing on the face of his dead father, but holding back the flow of tears, he said, “In time we will grow up and then we will take the head of our father’s enemy and show it to everyone.”

By including this quotation in his rendition of the tale, the author implies that notions of familial duty were ingrained in the boys from an early age, such discipline attributing to their later honorable notoriety. This incident also suggests to the audience that one should cultivate such qualities in oneself, or one’s children, if they wanted to attain such honor themselves.

The positive portrayal of the brothers during the climax of the story – Suketsune’s death scene in which the brothers succeed in their blood revenge – lies primarily in its imagery, while the language of the scene reflects the *Rufubon’s* garish description of Suketsune’s death (see Figure 11). In this scene, Suketsune’s role and that of his vassal, are both just as telling and also promote a certain perspective in the reader: Suketsune lying in the prostrate position with a sword to his throat and his death imminent at the hands of not one, but two other warriors suggests the dishonorable nature of Suketsune’s death; his death is the ultimate dishonor for the

¹⁹⁸ Ichiman was the childhood name by which Jūrō was known until his coming-of-age ceremony after which he took the name Jūrō no Tokinari.

shameful actions of his past. Adding yet another level to that dishonor, making his death even more disgraceful, are the actions of his vassal in this image who is seen fleeing from death and leaving his master behind. Given the hierarchy of filial relationships among warriors, as well as the concept of shared honor and shame, one can conclude that the actions of Suketsune's vassal, which were dishonorable then project that dishonor upon his lord Suketsune, thus adding yet another dimension to his own shame. This whole scene possesses a tone of righteousness in the brothers' actions, which comes across clearly to the reader.

The last scene of the *Ehon Soga Monogatari*, in which the author promotes the brothers' actions, and, as a result, the practice of blood revenge, occurs on the last page of the book: the supplication at Hakone Shrine (see Figure 12). By this point in history, the Hakone Shrine has been irrevocably linked to the Soga brothers and the tale of their blood revenge, a cultural association that would have come to mind when presented with the image of a temple at the end of this tale. With an association made between the Soga brothers and the shrine, as well as the image of a villager knelt with hands together and torso bowed forward in supplication, implies that due to the Soga brothers' blood revenge, an action that led to a legacy of honor, the brothers had been deified in death. The villager's actions, in this scene, suggest to the reader that the Soga brothers, who have become deities, can be petitioned to aid in blood-revenge endeavors, reinforcing my conclusions that the Soga brothers were the prototypical avengers that sparked the development of blood-revenge practices in Japan.

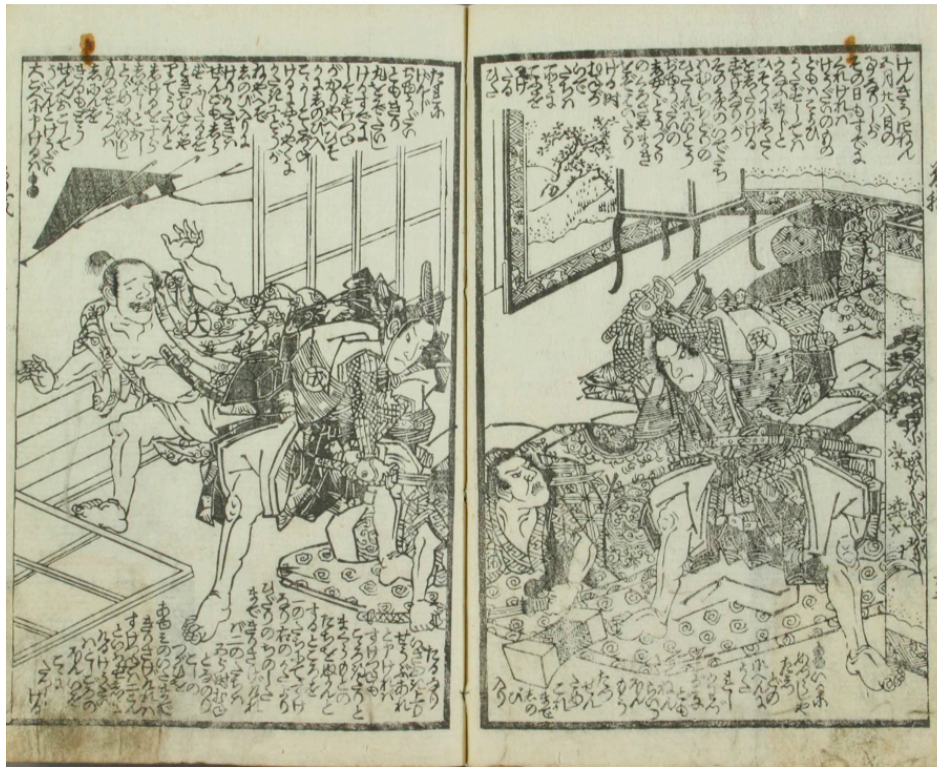


Figure 11: The Soga Brothers' Revenge in the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 絵本曾我物語



Figure 12: The Brothers are Deified in the *Ehon Soga Monogatari* 絵本曾我物語

4:10 A Comparison with the Forty-Seven *Rōnin*

While blood revenge gained popularity among the masses, it grew into something even more influential among *samurai*, attaining an almost sacred status during the Tokugawa period.¹⁹⁹ Among the blood-revenge literary canon of the Tokugawa period, the *Soga Monogatari* was the leader of the charge, so to speak, as the most influential and well-known tale of blood revenge in Japan until the blood revenge of the forty-seven *rōnin*, who killed the man they believed to be responsible for the death of their lord, in 1703. Kominz writes:

In Japan today, the best known traditional revenge story is Chūshingura...not the story of the Soga brothers...the god-like status of the forty-seven samurai was made possible by generations of adulation of and worship of the Soga brothers...The replacement of the Soga brothers by the loyal forty-seven as the focus of adulation for Edo-period townsmen resulted partly from the Akō samurai's proximity in time and closeness in culture to theater audience and partly from the excellent plays that were written embellishing the revenge.²⁰⁰

Given the nature of their revenge and the high regard with which society held the tale of the Soga brothers' blood revenge, it is my contention that the *Soga Monogatari* provided the cultural sanction necessary for the positive reception of the blood-revenge incident of the forty-seven *rōnin*, as well as its later literary canonization.

While there exist discrepancies between the actions of the Soga brothers and the actions of the forty-seven *rōnin*, there are too many similarities in the two incidents of blood revenge to be ignored or merely written off as coincidence – while in the forty-seven *rōnin*'s case, the samurai were seeking revenge for their lord, fulfilling their duty to him as his vassals, the Soga brothers sought revenge for their father, fulfilling their duty to familial honor; although one victim was murdered by hit-men, the other was honorably punished under *bakufu* law; lastly,

¹⁹⁹ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 12.

²⁰⁰ Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance*, 7.

Jūrō and Gorō were brothers who were avenging their father, whereas the forty-seven *rōnin* were a relatively large group of retainers avenging their lord; however, there are just as many similarities as there are differences between these two incidents of which I will examine four points of similarity in this section.

In both instances of blood revenge, the would-be avengers sought out the individual they believed to be ultimately responsible for the death of their superior as the object of their blood revenge. The only difference in these cases is the way in which the “murderer” brought about his victim’s death. In the *Soga Monogatari*, Suketsune hires two thugs to kill Sukechika, but they killed Sukeyasu instead. Thus, Suketsune, even though he did not deliver the killing blow directly, was responsible for Sukeyasu’s death. Similarly, in the case of the forty-seven *rōnin*, the belief was that Lord Kira gave their Lord Asano false instructions, which led to his public humiliation in front of the *shogun* and other *bakufu* officials. In retaliation, Lord Asano drew his sword and attacked Lord Kira in the Shogun’s palace, a capital offense, which led to Asano’s honorable punishment by *seppuku*. Unlike Suketsune, Lord Kira did not order a hit on his enemy, but in the eyes of the forty-seven, directly caused the fight that led to Lord Asano’s *seppuku*. As a result, the object of blood revenge in both the *Soga Monogatari* and in the incident of the forty-seven *rōnin* became the person believed to be ultimately responsible for the wrongful death of the victim.

In both cases of blood revenge, the avengers waited a number of years – two years for the 47 *rōnin* and eighteen years for the Soga brothers – before taking their revenge out on their enemies. The reasons for these long waits were never specifically stated, but the most likely reason is the necessity to wait for the most opportune moment to ensure successful blood

revenge. Despite writings such as the *Hagakure*,²⁰¹ in which the author insists that only rash action in the heat of the moment can ensure one's honor, whereas excessive plotting brings shame upon the one who waits – it appears from the actions of these two groups of avengers that the shame incurred because of failure would be a shame far worse than shame incurred through failure. One could also argue that the forty-seven *rōnin* saw wisdom in the Soga brothers' wait before carrying out their blood revenge, a wait which would provide one with knowledge of the enemy and, thus, greater chances for success; therefore, by waiting two years themselves before carrying out their blood revenge – in order to instill a false sense of security within their enemy, as did the Soga brothers – the forty-seven *rōnin* were actually emulating, either consciously or unconsciously, the brothers' actions.

In both tales, the avengers died as a result of their blood revenge; however the manner in which the two parties died differed slightly. In both tales, the avengers expected to die. In the *Soga Monogatari*, Jūrō dies in the ensuing battle, but Gorō is captured and executed. When the forty-seven *rōnin* completed their revenge, they, like Gorō, were also arrested and sentenced to execution; however, the discrepancy between these two deaths is in the manner of execution. When he was sentenced to execution, Gorō asked Yoritomo for the right to commit *seppuku*, but was declined and executed dishonorably by decapitation. When the forty-seven *rōnin* made the same request to the Tokugawa *bakufu*, these samurai, unlike Gorō, were granted permission for *seppuku*; thus, even though they were sentenced to execution, they were allowed to receive an honorable alternative, an option denied Gorō. In this way, one can see the influences of the *Soga Monogatari*, an influence that grew over hundreds of years and, culturally, disseminated an ethos

²⁰¹ The *Hagakure* 葉隠 was an instructional guide for the behavior of warriors, written by Yamamoto Tsunetomo 山本常朝 (1659-1719).

of righteousness that enveloped blood-revenge practices, not just among the forty-seven *rōnin*, but even amongst the ranks of the *bakufu* as well.

Another factor that features prominently in the order of execution for both sets of avengers was political: in both instances of blood revenge, the avengers operated outside of the legal system, in fact, even in direct opposition to it, breaking laws in order to succeed in their revenge. In the case of the Soga brothers, by killing one of Yoritomo's senior advisors, their action became a direct threat to the *bakufu* and Yoritomo himself. The case of the forty-seven *rōnin* was quite similar in this regard: the *bakufu* had ordered the execution of Lord Asano for his crime of wielding a weapon in the Shogun's palace which was a capital offense. Having investigated Lord Kira and finding him not guilty of any wrongdoing, the *bakufu* let him go free. By disregarding the *bakufu's* ruling, and killing Lord Kira for the very actions he was exonerated of, the forty-seven *rōnin* posed a direct threat to the government and, by law, did not commit blood revenge, but murder which was a capital offense during the Tokugawa period; in this way, their actions and consequences mirror those of the Soga brothers, yet as I mentioned before, due to the influences of the *Soga Monogatari*, the *bakufu* allowed the forty-seven *rōnin* a certain amount of latitude not shown to the Soga brothers. Nevertheless, we see a consistent theme of avengers who operate outside the law to see justice wrought. The price they are willing to pay is death.

As pioneers of blood revenge in Japan, the actions of the Soga brothers came to epitomize this practice during the Tokugawa period. Through the examination of the *Soga Monogatari*, I have established various links between the actions of Jūrō and Gorō and the cultural establishment of blood-revenge norms in later centuries.

During the Tokugawa period, blood revenge gained immense notoriety with the Soga brothers deified as the fathers of revenge. With the mass re-publication of their tale, which was targeted at the largest consumer population, the *chōnin*, there came a shift in the demographic of blood revenge; the authors of these reproductions used the *Soga Monogatari* to promote a warrior ethos within Tokugawa society; however, through the positive portrayal of the brothers' actions, authors also promoted the practice of blood revenge itself as an honorable endeavor among the masses. *Chōnin* could also undertake revenge, which was no longer the prerogative of the *samurai* class exclusively, and saw the Soga brothers as an ideal to aspire to. Likewise, the forty-seven *rōnin* were also influenced by the *Soga Monogatari*, and hence sought revenge on the man they believed ultimately responsible for their lord's death. The numerous similarities between the two incidents of blood revenge suggests that the forty-seven, who found themselves in a similar situation to the brothers, sought to mimic the brothers' actions to ensure the success of their blood revenge. For all the above-mentioned reasons, the *Soga Monogatari* could perhaps be categorized as one of the most influential texts in Japanese history. After all, it was from this text that legends were born.

CONCLUSION

The most difficult aspect of writing this thesis has been in limiting the scope of my research to meet the time limitations I have faced. As a result, I was forced by necessity to limit my research to those forms of revenge that were motivated by the death of a linear forbearer, a form of revenge I have labelled “blood revenge” – to indicate the type of retaliation inflicted on the target of revenge – for the purpose of this thesis. Yet, even with these self-imposed restrictions, I have only achieved at best a superficial analysis of a topic much more complex in nature than I had originally anticipated; some topics only received a brief analytical inspection, while others were beyond the scope of discussion at this time.

The structure of this thesis was designed to be more comprehensive than episodic in order to establish a chronological understanding of how blood revenge practices developed in Japan over time. Above all else, I attempted to make clear the complexity of Japanese blood-revenge practices in this thesis. As a result, there are still many aspects of blood revenge that remain unexplored and beyond the scope of this Master’s thesis. The continuation of this research would require a more in depth exploration of blood revenge prior to 1600 in order to minimize its relative obscurity in Japanese scholarship. Pre-modern blood revenge has proved to be a challenging research topic due to the general lack of documentation. One of the things I would like to pursue further is a search for more legislation regarding blood revenge in *ie* documents of the Muromachi period. I am confident that there are more legal documents or private records on the topic of revenge that are just waiting to be discovered.

One topic I was unable to discuss to any great degree in this thesis – but, one that is a very important component all revenge practices – is the timing of revenge. The issue of timing is a factor in all forms of revenge, yet varies among them. Timing was important with regards to societal perceptions of successful revenge, which were dependent on society’s recognition of honorable behavior on the part of the avenger. In Icelandic blood revenge, Miller describes the complexity of timing by explaining that those who were too slow to act risked shame, but “hasty revenge was vulgar.”²⁰² However, cultural guidelines for the appropriate timing of revenge is unclear even though it was such an important component of this practice.

The best way to understand the complicated nature of timing is through a comparative analysis of this component in *bureiuchi* and *katakiuchi*. While *bureiuchi* was not considered blood revenge in this thesis, it is – nevertheless – a form of revenge in which timing is important. *Bureiuchi* required immediate retaliation. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, *bureiuchi* occurred when samurai were publicly humiliated by a member of a lower class. Confronted with an attack on his honor, a warrior had a limited window of time in which he could avenge himself. Thus, the timing of his revenge must be immediate or he would lose the opportunity to regain his honor.

On the other hand, the appropriate timing of *katakiuchi* is a debatable. In Yamamoto Tsunetomo’s famous *Hagakure*, the author insists that only rash action in the heat of the moment can ensure one’s honor, whereas excessive plotting brings shame upon the one who waits.²⁰³ While this behavior may be appropriate for *bureiuchi*, in order to determine whether or not such

²⁰² Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, 193.

²⁰³ It is important to note that these suppositions can only be applied to blood revenge of the Tokugawa period. To little is known of pre-modern blood revenge to assume similar notions about this practice existed prior to 1600.

should be the case with *katakiuchi* one must examine the circumstances in which this form of revenge occurs. With *katakiuchi*, the avenger is not the recipient of a direct attack from the target of his revenge, thus there is no opportunity for immediate attack against the offender. By the time the would-be avenger began his pursuit, the target of his revenge would have fled which would have led to a pursuit that lasted of many years before the revenge was complete; therefore, the timeliness of revenge would have been determined by the avenger's the initial petition for revenge. As long as the would-be avenger petitioned for revenge in a timely fashion – relative to the timing of the original offense – then the length of the pursuit becomes relatively unimportant. What seems even more paradoxically is that even though the issue of timing was important to this practice, success was ultimately more important. This apparent conflict between the importance of timing verses the importance of success makes this topic intriguing and worthy of further study.

In writing this Master's thesis I realized that blood-revenge practices can be separated into two larger categories: blood revenge in times of war and blood revenge in times of peace. One of the obstacles in my research – as I mentioned above – has been the general lack of documentation on blood revenge, which can be attributed to the political and social upheaval of medieval Japan. However, it never occurred to me to question whether or not blood revenge could exist in a time of war. If a blood revenge came about on behalf of a casualty of war, can it be called blood revenge? While I was unable to address this question to any extent, I noticed a characteristic difference between pre-modern and early modern blood revenge in Japan, which can be attributed to a difference in social climate between times of war and peace; blood revenge prior to 1600 was more expedient in nature, utilized more for its functionality in maintaining

order in medieval Japan, whereas early-modern blood revenge was integrated into culture, becoming highly ritualized and more symbolic in nature. Even so, blood revenge retained its functionality – although in different capacities – over time until the practice abolished in 1873.

There are a number of other components of Japanese blood revenge that were beyond the scope of this thesis, yet are too important to be dismissed all together. The topic of “improper revenge” is one that comes up again and again in Japanese history, with the revenge of Yoritomo in the *Soga Monogatari*, the first instance of lord revenge with Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and even in Icelandic blood revenge, which I discussed briefly in my introduction. Improper revenge occurred when legal or cultural conventions that governed the practice were bent or ignored altogether. The most common reason a revenge undertaking would be considered improper was if the agent of revenge was not considered appropriate for the task (i.e. women). Another characteristic of improper revenge was avenging an inappropriate victim, such as a younger brother or a child. During the medieval period, it was impossible to determine whether or not an incident of blood revenge was improper or not without the *ie* legislation the avenger would be expected to abide by. Thus, one could conclude that – without any kind of universal definition or structure independent of those contained in *ie* legislation – there really was no improper revenge during this time.

On the other hand, labels of proper and improper can be more easily applied to blood revenge practices that occurred during Tokugawa period (*katakiuchi*) when there were clearer legal and cultural expectations that governed this practice. While uncommon, there have been anomalous cases in which an older brothers sought blood revenge on behalf of a younger brother, as well as women who sought revenge for their fathers or husbands. What impact these

anomalous cases had on the practice of blood revenge is uncertain; however, the fact that they occurred at all suggests some influencing factor important enough to lead these anomalous agents to operate outside of socially established guidelines of revenge in order to adhere to the moral dictates of that society.

Lord revenge has often been categorized as a form of improper revenge since the avenger – or avengers – sought revenge on behalf of a man to whom they possessed no familial connection. As I mentioned earlier, lord revenge is intriguing in that it existed as a form of blood revenge and, yet, possesses no word in the Japanese language to categorize it. It has generally been considered a variation of *katakiuchi*, but considering the legal restrictions that make lord revenge an improper – and, therefore, unable to be categorized as *katakiuchi* – another term must be found to label this practice. Nevertheless, lord revenge is all the more intriguing for its rarity. The revenge of Hideyoshi – and that of the 47 *rōnin* less than two centuries later – was clearly motivated by an individualized attack against the victim of the original violence, thus placing lord revenge within the realm of blood revenge as defined in this thesis. One could even speculate that the infrequency of lord revenge serves as proof of the relative obscurity of blood revenge practices during periods of war.

The undertaking of blood revenge (*katakiuchi*) was governed by government-mandated regulations that determined the actions of an avenger. During the Tokugawa period, these regulations stipulated such things as the who, where, and when of blood revenge. The topic of location is a compelling one. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the *Itakura Seiyōki* stipulates that one shall not pursue revenge in the vicinity of the emperor's palace nor in the vicinity of temples or shrines. Such stipulations make one wonder whether or not these locations were ones of

sanctuary. A question one could ask is “Did Japanese society ever possess a notion of ‘sanctuary’ similar to that of medieval England?” I have yet to come across any evidence that would suggest that the regulations that prevented avengers from attacking their enemy in or near temples and shrines were connected to this notion of ‘sanctuary;’ rather, it would seem more likely that any regulation intended to keep violence from erupting on religious grounds was perhaps a result of cultural or spiritual beliefs held by Japanese society. Similarly, the reasons behind the regulations regarding violence in the vicinity of the Emperor’s palace was likely a measure of protection for Japan’s sovereign. Nevertheless, this notion of sanctuary from violent retribution – or even in times of war – is worthy of further exploration.

As I discussed in my introduction, the bulk of scholarship regarding the topic of blood revenge analyzes this practice at the peak of its cultural development during the Tokugawa period. This leads one to wonder: “If the tokugawa period marks the climactic moment in blood revenge history, then where did it all start? What events created the capacity for blood revenge to emerge in pre-modern Japan?” This was the original question I pursued when I first began my research. What I discovered was that I could not discuss pre-modern blood revenge without discussing its early modern counterparts. Therefore, I chose to dedicate a chapter of my thesis to the discussion of early modern revenge. While I discussed the basic characteristics of Tokugawa blood revenge, which set it apart from its pre-modern predecessor – it was clear that the legality surrounding the practice at that time, made it unique: blood revenge was now open to all members of society, not just the warrior class. Thus, the question became, “With this practice available to anyone, which class did blood revenge really belong to and how did this effect the emerging blood revenge culture of Tokugawa Japan?”

Perhaps the most intriguing question is “What happened to blood revenge after the Tokugawa period?” It seems the answer is rather simple: the Meiji period saw a time of rapid cultural transformation in the wake of westernization. Consequently, blood revenge met a rather abrupt end when the practice was abolished in 1873, five years after the start of the Meiji Period (明治時代 1868-1912):

The taking of human life is strictly prohibited by the law of the land, and the right to punish a murderer lies with the Government. However, since ancient times it has been customarily regarded as the duty of a son or younger brother to avenge the murder of his father or elder brother. While this is a natural expression of the deepest human feelings, it is ultimately a serious breach of the law on account of private enmity, a usurpation for private purposes of public authority, and cannot be treated as other than the crime of willful slaughter. Furthermore, in extreme cases the undesirable in the name of revenge without regard for the rights and wrongs of the case or the justification for his act. This is to be deplored, and it is therefore decreed that vengeance shall be strictly prohibited. In future, should some close relative unfortunately be killed, the facts should be set out clearly and a complaint be laid before the authorities. Let it be plainly understood that anyone who ignores this injunction and adheres to the old customs, taking the law into his own hands to kill for revenge, will be subject to a penalty appropriate to his offense.²⁰⁴

One can see the impact of western thought in the intellectual history of Japan with language of this decree. While blood revenge was once a sanctified undertaking during the Tokugawa period, it came to assume the Western connotations of vigilantism under the Meiji government. The abolishment of blood revenge marks the concluding chapter in the story of this practice’s evolutionary history.

²⁰⁴ Mills, “Kataki-Uchi,” 525.

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