

Rethinking the Akō Ronin Debate

The Religious Significance of *Chūshin gishi*

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This paper suggests that the Tokugawa Confucian debate over the Akō revenge vendetta was, in part, a religious debate over the posthumous status of the forty-six ronin who murdered Lord Kira Yoshinaka as an act of revenge for the sake of their deceased master, Asano Naganori. At issue in the debate was whether the forty-six ronin were chūshin gishi, a notion typically translated as “loyal and righteous samurai.” The paper shows, however, that in Tokugawa discourse the term chūshin gishi had significant religious nuances. The latter nuances are traceable to a Song dynasty text, the Xingli ziyi, by Chen Beixi, which explains that zhongchen yishi (Jpn. chūshin gishi) could be legitimately worshiped at shrines devoted to them. The paper shows that Beixi’s text was known by those involved in the Akō debate, and that the religious nuances, as well as their sociopolitical implications, were the crucial, albeit largely unspoken, issues in the debate. The paper also notes that the ronin were eventually worshiped, by none other than the Meiji emperor, and enshrined in the early-twentieth century. Also, in prewar Japan, they were extolled as exemplars of the kind of self-sacrificing loyalism that would be rewarded, spiritually, via enshrinement at Yasukuni Shrine.

Keywords: Akō ronin — *chūshin gishi* (*zhongchen yishi*) — Chen Beixi — *Xingli ziyi* — Yamaga Sokō — Bakufu — apotheosis

CHŪSHIN GISHI 忠臣義士 WAS the pivotal notion in the eighteenth-century controversy among Confucian scholars over the Akō 赤穂 revenge vendetta of 1703. The vendetta climaxed with the murder of Kira Yoshinaka 吉良義央, a retired Bakufu specialist in court ritual, by forty-six ronin 浪人, or masterless samurai, who had earlier served the *tozama* daimyo of Akō domain, Asano Naganori 淺野長矩 (1667–1701). Naganori had been ordered to commit *seppuku* as punishment for an outrageous criminal offense: drawing his sword and attacking Lord Kira within Chiyoda Castle, the Tokugawa shogun’s residence, during an important annual ceremony welcoming emissaries of the imperial

court bearing New Year's greetings to the shogun Tsunayoshi 綱吉 (1646–1709). The ronin who carried out the 1703 vendetta blamed Kira, who survived the attack, figuring that in some way or another, he had provoked Naganori's attack. After breaking into Lord Kira's Edo mansion and decapitating him, the ronin reported their deed to the Bakufu, which ultimately decided that the ronin would have to commit *seppuku* as punishment for their crimes. In the ensuing debate over the vendetta, Confucian scholars who defended the ronin lauded them as *chūshin gishi*. Their detractors most vehemently denied the same.

While the notion *chūshin gishi* can be translated via its component parts as “loyal and righteous samurai” or “loyal and dutiful samurai,” such easy glosses hardly convey its whole meaning. In particular, such glosses overlook significant religious nuances that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tokugawa (1600–1868) religio-philosophical discourse either asserted or assumed the notion to have had. Scholars such as Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657), Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685), Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725), and prominent followers of Yamazaki Ansai's 山崎闇齋 (1618–1682) Kimon 崎門 school of Neo-Confucianism explicitly understood the term to denote persons who had sacrificed their lives for some transcendent cause associated with a ruler, nation, or community. The same scholars also recognized that *chūshin gishi*, depending on the spiritual circumstances surrounding their martyrdom, could be enshrined and legitimately worshiped via regulated sacrifice. Because Razan and others who discussed the nature of *chūshin gishi* were either samurai or were philosophizing for samurai, they assumed the accolade to be primarily applicable to those of samurai birth. Early-Tokugawa discourse thus understood the notion *chūshin gishi* to denote not merely loyal and dutiful retainers, but rather samurai martyrs who had sacrificed themselves for a cause to which they were ultimately loyal, and who, because of their martyrdom, might be legitimately apotheosized in shrines devoted to their worship and veneration.

The Chinese *Book of Rites* provided some classical Confucian grounds for such understandings of *chūshin gishi*. Tokugawa discussions of *chūshin gishi*, however, were more directly influenced by the writings of a Song 宋 (960–1279) scholar, Chen Beixi 陳北溪 (1159–1223). In his *Xingli ziyi* 性理字義 (Lexicography of Neo-Confucian terms, ca. 1226; Jpn. *Seiri jigū*) (CHAN 1986),¹ Beixi defined the religious contours of *zhongchen yishi*—as *chūshin gishi* is read in Chinese—in ways that became,

¹ For a discussion of this text in Tokugawa thought, see TUCKER 1990. For a translation of one of its most complete editions, see CHAN 1986. The edition of the *Ziyi* that figured most prominently in Tokugawa thought was the “Yuan edition,” as republished in 1553 in Korea.

in Tokugawa Japan, most directly pertinent to the Akō debate. Via commentaries on and colloquial explications of the *Ziyi*, Razan and others transplanted Beixi's ideas into the arena of Tokugawa ideas, and transformed them so that they more or less accorded with the more indigenous religio-political concerns of the *bakuhan* polity. With Tokugawa discourse on the *Ziyi* concept of *zhongchen yishi* as a semantic background, the notion *chūshin gishi* figured in the Akō debate as the most crucial attribute that various scholars either asserted or denied vis-à-vis the ronin.

If the debate is read with a sensitivity for the religious nuances implied in the term *chūshin gishi*, at least four new layers of significance become apparent. First, a new religious layer emerges: the Akō debate can be recognized as one relating to the possible enshrinement of forty-six new samurai deities. Due to the divine status that the ronin would have enjoyed had there been consensus about regarding them as *chūshin gishi*, the debate cannot be dismissed as a mere academic discussion of samurai ethics via reference to a sensational issue, or as a boring Confucian anticipation of the popular dramatization of the vendetta, *Chūshingura* 忠臣蔵. Rather, the Akō debate must be recognized as involving, at its core, an essentially religious question: whether the ronin might be apotheosized. If participants in the debate had concluded with quick unanimity that the ronin were *chūshin gishi*, the ronin would have indeed become immediate spiritual candidates for legitimate, liturgically defined sacrificial worship.

Second, overlapping religious and political concerns emerge as another layer of significance. Allowing the apotheosis of the ronin might have raised sensitive and embarrassing legal questions about judicial decisions made earlier by the Tokugawa regime. After all, the Bakufu had condemned the ronin as criminals. Tolerating their worship might have implicitly allowed a religious sanction for overall critiques of Bakufu justice, or provided spiritual grounds tying opponents of the regime into a cult devoted to supplicating new deities. Given the regime's use of apotheosis to enhance its own legitimacy and authority, neither the Bakufu nor scholars who were primarily concerned with its legal foundations were likely to acknowledge that the ronin were *chūshin gishi*. Affirming that the ronin were *chūshin gishi* did not necessarily imply, however, opposition to the Bakufu. Rather, those recognizing the ronin as *chūshin gishi* in some cases meant to emphasize that the foundation of Bakufu legitimacy consisted in personal bonds defined by samurai ethics centered around notions of loyalty and duty, rather than in merely legalistic relations.

Third, a layer of significance related to power struggles among

philosophical schools also emerges. Enshrinement of the ronin might have sanctioned apotheosis of *shidō* 士道, or the way of the samurai as defined by Yamaga Sokō. Between 1652 and 1660, Sokō served the *tozama* daimyo of Akō domain, Asano Naganao 浅野長直 (1610–1672), as his “guest teacher” (*hinshi* 賓師). Though Sokō helped Naganao plan the construction of Akō’s new castle, he spent little time in Akō, residing instead in Edo and presumably teaching his daimyo when the latter was in the shogun’s capital fulfilling *sankin kōtai* duties. After resigning this position in 1660, Sokō remained in Edo, teaching his “sagely” brand of Confucianism as a freelance ronin-scholar, one who was increasingly bold in his rejection of Neo-Confucianism. Sokō’s publication of his *Seikyō yōroku* 聖教要録 (Essential notions of the sagely Confucian teachings), an ostensibly anti-Neo-Confucian text, seriously offended Hoshina Masayuki 保科正之 (1611–1672), then one of the most powerful officials in the Bakufu and a recent convert to Ansai’s purist Neo-Confucian teachings. As a result, Sokō’s work was branded “intolerably disruptive” and he was promptly banished from Edo. Many Japanese scholars have speculated that Ansai, then establishing himself in Edo as a Neo-Confucian teacher, urged Masayuki to exile Sokō (HORI 1959, pp. 206–30; BITŌ 1993, pp. 116–17; TAHARA 1994, pp. 836–37). Because of his earlier service to the Asano daimyo, Sokō was sent to Akō. Although exiled for life, Sokō’s banishment only lasted about a decade, as a result of a pardon he received three years after Masayuki’s demise. Despite Sokō’s return to Edo, his school never recovered as an academic force in the shogun’s capital. Sokō’s links with Akō have led some to infer that his teachings impacted the samurai there, and even influenced the 1703 ronin vendetta (EARL 1964, p. 39; INOUE 1902, pp. 25–26). However, as Hori Isao’s biography of Sokō has shown, there is no evidence, apart from circumstance, that Sokō’s teachings had any direct impact on the vendetta (HORI 1959, pp. 276–78). Allegations linking Sokō to the vendetta ultimately trace back to the Akō debate itself, and seem to have been originally intended to discredit Sokō’s ideas and seal the fate of what remained of his Edo school.

Endorsing, even implicitly, the apotheosis of the ronin as *chūshin gishi* would have entailed similar elevation for Sokō and an upsurge in the Yamaga school’s sagging popularity. On the other hand, denying that the ronin were *chūshin gishi* implied that the Bakufu’s earlier verdict of Sokō had been just, even merciful. Indeed, it even suggested that the Bakufu had been too lenient with Sokō since, while in exile, he apparently had sowed the seeds of future criminal activity that plagued the Bakufu. As if to reaffirm the Bakufu decision to exile Sokō, Kimon scholars concerned with the regime’s legal and judicial

authority condemned the ronin as criminals and blamed Sokō posthumously for their unruly behavior. In denying that the ronin were *chūshin gishi*, Kimon scholars also denied that Sokō and his teachings would receive residual credit for the vendetta. Moreover, it seems that their claims sought to ensure that further ignominy would befall the Yamaga teachings.

Other Kimon scholars who affirmed that the ronin were *chūshin gishi*, however, scoffed at the notion of crediting Sokō with having taught the ronin anything. Instead, Kimon scholars who praised the ronin pointed to the more general sources of their behavior, while belittling Sokō's role. Within the Akō debate neither those Kimon scholars lauding the ronin as *chūshin gishi* nor those denying the same had any praise for Sokō. Given the appeal that Kimon allegations linking Sokō and the vendetta had vis-à-vis the Bakufu, it is not surprising that one significant casualty of the debate was Sokō's school, at least as an active philosophical force in Edo, in 1744 (HORI 1959, p. 319).

Fourth, the unofficial, late-Tokugawa attempts at apotheosis of the Akō ronin and, to an extent, Sokō, appear as another layer of significance, one that was not anachronistic to the debate as many Tokugawa participants had understood it. Upon their atrophy and demise as a philosophical force in Edo, Sokō's teachings received the patronage of Matura Shigenobu 松浦鎮信 (1622–1703), the *tozama* daimyo of Hirado 平戸 domain on Kyūshū, and Tsugaru Nobumasa 津軽信政 (1646–1710), *tozama* daimyo of Hirosaki 弘前 domain in northwestern Honshū. In these distant corners of the realm, the Yamaga school remained a vital force until the end of the Tokugawa. Although its disappearance from Edo was partly due to allegations linking it critically with the vendetta, later proponents of the Yamaga teachings saw the wisdom of accepting the same allegations as truths worthy of pride and honor. Indeed, by *bakumatsu* times the ronin had become, albeit unofficially, spiritual heroes for many, especially those challenging the Bakufu.

As an instructor of the Yamaga school in Chōshū 長州 domain, Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰 (1830–1859) particularly exemplified this trend toward revering the ronin. Shōin asserted that Sokō's teachings were apparent in the Akō vendetta from beginning to end (YOSHIDA 1973, p. 138). In Shōin's travels, *Chūshingura* was a regular topic of conversation (YOSHIDA 1978a, p. 522); while in Shimoda prison, the *Akō gishi den* 赤穂義士傳 was among Shōin's reading matter (YOSHIDA 1978b, p. 549), and throughout his life the "*gishi*," as Shōin reverently called them, were among his models for personal emulation (YOSHIDA 1978a, p. 447). Even before Shōin, there had been an attempt at commemorating the ronin religiously: in 1819, a monument had been

erected at the Sengaku-ji 泉岳寺 temple, where Asano Naganori and the ronin were buried, declaring the ronin to be *gishi*. The Bakufu, however, had it destroyed (SASAKI 1983, p. 537). Despite Bakufu opposition to such developments, the Sengaku-ji continued to serve as the unofficial center of ronin veneration in the Kantō region during late-Tokugawa times. Such efforts towards venerating and/or commemorating the ronin reflected, significantly enough, the distinctive religious nuances that were associated with the notion *chūshin gishi* and that were implicit throughout the debate over their vendetta.

Chūshin gishi as a Notion in Chinese Philosophy

The compound *chūshin gishi* is not in the *Analects*. However, Confucius did discuss the component terms of that compound, *zhong* 忠 (Jpn. *chū*), loyal, and *chen* 臣 (Jpn. *shin*), minister, in ways that foreshadowed the later development of the notion *chūshin gishi*. When asked about relations between rulers (Chn. *jun* 君, Jpn. *kun*) and ministers, Confucius replied that rulers should serve their ministers with ritual, while ministers should serve their rulers with loyalty. Confucius added that “great ministers” (Chn. *dachen* 大臣, Jpn. *daijin*) should serve their rulers by following the moral way (Chn. *dao* 道, Jpn. *michi*). Emphasizing the inescapability of such political obligations, Zilu, one of Confucius’s disciples, asked if the “duty” (Chn. *yi* 義, Jpn. *gi*) binding rulers and ministers could ever really be discarded (CONFUCIUS 1988, 3/19, p. 5; also, 11/22 and 18/7, pp. 21, 38). Amplifying Confucius’s pronouncement, Mencius later characterized ruler-minister relations in terms of mutual respect (Chn. *jing* 敬, Jpn. *kei*). Mencius similarly saw “duty” as the bond between ruler and minister just as love bound father and son (MENCIUS 1988, 2B/2, 3A/4, 7B/24, pp. 14, 20, 56). Confucius had also advocated remonstrance with a misguided ruler more than mere loyalty, reminding his disciples that if critical feedback were not offered by ministers its absence might lead to the ruin of a state. Going beyond this, Mencius asserted that so-called rulers who tyrannized their people and ignored remonstrance by their ministers were usurpers who should be executed as common criminals (CONFUCIUS 1988, 13/15, p. 26. MENCIUS 1988, 1B/8, 3B/9, pp. 7, 25). Given the early Confucian emphases on loyalty as right duty, the moral way, remonstrance, and even the legitimate execution of usurpers, it seems fundamentally mistaken to interpret Confucian teachings on ruler-minister relations as inculcating an ethically blind or critically impotent form of loyalty.

As a compound, *chūshin* first appeared not in Confucian texts but

in Daoist works. The *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* both declare, “When the state is on the verge of anarchy, *chūshin* appear” (LAOZI 1978, vol. 1, p. 144; also see ZHUANGZI 1978, vol. 3, p. 126). Of course, in those Daoist texts, *chūshin* is a satirization of the Confucian notion rather than an accurate articulation of it. The Daoist meant to imply that *chūshin* were representatives of a degeneration of the natural and spontaneous order of things that ordinarily precluded their appearance. Despite the Daoist use of the compound, later Confucians accepted the convenient term *chūshin* as a reference to ministers who served their rulers in an exemplary manner.

The notion *gishi* derives rather indirectly from Mencius. Speaking of *yi* (Jpn. *gi*) or “rightness,” Mencius suggested that all people should desire rightness even when it entails death, rather than violate rightness for the sake of enjoying a prolonged life. Mencius’s endorsement of self-sacrifice for the sake of rightness can easily be interpreted as espousing a form of martyrdom. Mencius added that the knight-scholar (Chn. *shi* 士, Jpn. *shi*) in particular should never forsake *yi* even in times of adversity. Mencius’s remarks thus link the notions *yi* and *shi* (or *gi* and *shi* in Japanese) in ways that imply that a righteous scholar/samurai should be ever ready for martyrdom if the latter is necessary for serving rightness (MENCIUS 1988, 6A/10, 7A/9, pp. 44–45, 51).

Han dynasty historical texts such as Sima Qian’s (145–186 B.C.) *Records of the Grand Historian* brought the two themes, *chūshin* and *gishi*, closer together in passages such as the following,

Wang Chu 王蜀 said, “A loyal subject (*zhongchen*) does not serve two rulers.... Because the King of Qi would not listen to my remonstrations, I retreated to work in my fields. But now the kingdom is about to be destroyed, and I cannot flee. If I were to lead an army it would be like aiding the wicked King Jie in oppressing the people. Being boiled alive is better than enjoying life via sacrificing rightness.” Wang Chu then tied a rope around his neck and hanged himself from a tree.

(SIMA 1984, p. 77)

Sima Qian’s notion of *zhongchen* reflects the early-Confucian view that loyal service should be coupled with remonstrations and an ultimate dedication to rightness. As a result of his ruler’s tyrannic refusal to heed his remonstrations, Wang Chu refused to defend him. Yet rather than serve another ruler and enjoy life by forfeiting rightness, Wang Chu chose suicide. With the latter twist, Sima Qian coupled the Mencian theme of *yishi* with *zhongchen*, though without using the term *zhongchen yishi* as such. Nevertheless, via other pronouncements such as, “A brave warrior does not sacrifice his reputation by fearing death.

Nor does a loyal subject (*zhongchen*) consider his own life first, and his ruler second” (SIMA 1984, p. 86), Sima Qian further adumbrated the notion that a willingness to sacrifice oneself for one’s ruler, or rightness in serving one’s ruler, characterized *zhongchen*.

The religious nuance that later came to be associated with the notion *chūshin gishi* traces to the *Book of Rites*. Without broaching *zhongchen yishi* as such, the *Rites* nevertheless provides the classical Confucian rationale for understanding them as potential deities. It states,

The regulations of sage-kings allow that sacrifices be offered to those who have promulgated good laws for their people (*fa shi yu min* 法施於民); to those who have died doing their duty (*yi si qin shi* 以死勤事); to those who have toiled to pacify the nation (*yi lao ding guo* 以勞定國); to those who have stopped disasters (*neng yu da zai* 腦禦大災); and to those who have prevented others from suffering (*neng han da huan* 腦捍大患).

(LEGGE 1967, pp. 207–8; also see CHEN 1632, p. 77a;
YAMAGA 1912, p. 225; ARAI 1975, p. 176)

This passage probably was meant to sanction the deification of dynastic founders who brought order and stability to China. Much the same rationale informed the deification of Ieyasu 家康 (1542–1616), the founder of the Tokugawa Bakufu who came to be worshiped at the Tōshōgū Shrine 東照宮 in Nikkō 日光 as an avatar of the sun goddess, Amaterasu (OOMS 1985, pp. 57–62). The notion of *chūshin gishi* that pertained to the Akō debate harbored nuances deriving directly from the *Rites* provision that “those who died doing their duty” might be deemed worthy of deification. Given the links between duty and *zhongchen* in early-Confucian literature, and those between scholar-knights (*shi*), righteous duty (*yi*) and self-sacrifice, it should come as no surprise that later interpreters of this *Rites* passage identified “those who had died doing their duty” as *chūshin gishi*.

Between the late-Song and the early-Ming (1368–1644), a substantial amount of loyalist literature was produced honoring those who had died defending their dynasties against barbarian invasion. Works like *Records of Loyal Subjects* (Chn. *Zhongchen lu* 忠臣錄, Jpn. *Chūshin roku*) by Ceng Kong 曾鞏 (1019–1083) brought together biographies of ancient Chinese loyalist-martyrs in a manual for teaching the “ultimate” values of political morality (MOROHASHI 1968, p. 4373). Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) added to this genre with *Records of the Words and Deeds of Eminent Loyalists* (Chn. *Mingchen yanxing lu* 名臣言行錄, Jpn. *Meishin genkō roku*), an anthology of anecdotes about Northern Song martyrs meant for use in teaching political ethics (MIYAZAKI 1978, p. 126). Zhu’s text was important in Tokugawa Japan, especially for

Ansai's school: first published in 1667, it remained in print through the early-Meiji (KATSURA 1982, p. 132). In the Yuan (1279–1368) dynasty, many anonymously compiled works such as *Records of Illustrious Loyalists* (*Zhaozhong lu* 昭忠錄, Jpn. *Chōchū roku*) “containing biographical notices on 130 persons (including three women) who died as martyrs... when the Mongols invaded,” continued this genre (FRANKE 1978a, p. 124). Also noteworthy was the *Anthology of Loyalty and Righteousness* (*Zhongyi ji* 忠義集, Jpn. *Chūgi shū*), by Zhao Jingliang 趙景良 (13th–14th c.), which includes poems eulogizing Song patriots such as Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283) and Chang Shijie 張世傑 (d. 1279) who died defending China against the Mongols (FRANKE 1978b, p. 445).

Chinese loyalist literature appealed to many Tokugawa readers and to some of the scholars involved in the ronin debate. One of Ansai's Kimon disciples, Asami Keisai 淺見綱齋 (1652–1712), in compiling *Seiken igen* 靖獻遺言, an anthology of Chinese loyalist biographies, continued this genre in seventeenth-century Japan. Keisai's *Seiken igen* was widely read throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, giving the Kimon school a name for devotion to *taigi meibun* 大義名分, or the ethic of readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice in fulfilling the duties (*taigi* 大義) attendant to one's status and station (*meibun* 名分). Indicating the importance of Keisai's *Seiken igen* to later Japanese history, Abe Ryūichi observes that there were no *shishi* 志士, or “ardent, loyalist samurai,” in either *bakumatsu* or early-Meiji Japan, who were not fond of Keisai's anthology of *chūshi gishi* 忠士義士 (ABE 1980a, p. 590).

Hayashi Razan's Notion of Chūshin gishi

Prior to the Tokugawa period, Japanese intellectual history had produced no significant discussions of the notion *chūshin gishi*. Its earliest appearance in Tokugawa discourse occurred when Hayashi Razan, in promoting Chen Beixi's late-Song Neo-Confucian text, the *Xingli ziyi*, explained the meaning of the term *zhongchen yishi* (*chūshin gishi*), which Beixi used several times in discussing legitimate forms of sacrifice. Razan's remarks, though instrumental in introducing this term to early-Tokugawa discourse and defining its religious context, were arguably mere vernacular repetitions of claims made in Beixi's *Ziyi*. Scrutiny of the remarks of Beixi and Razan on *chūshin gishi*, however, shows that Razan significantly amplified notions that the *Ziyi* had simply adumbrated. For example, in discussing “Ghosts and Spirits” (*guishen* 鬼神), Beixi noted,

In later ages there were loyal subjects and righteous scholars (*zhongchen yishi*) who plunged into naked blades, sacrificing

themselves to prevent calamities and dangers.

(CHEN 1632, p. 83a)

Going beyond Beixi, Razan added that such self-sacrifice had been for the sake of defending the national realm (*kokka o mamoru* 國家を守る) (HAYASHI 1659, 7: 26a–b). Razan’s proximity to the Bakufu leadership possibly influenced his reading here since he explains the *Ziyi* passage in terms of national purposes, a theme that well reflected his service to a regime that, not long before, had restored a modicum of order and unity to Japan. Arguably, however, Beixi had had Chinese national interests in mind, too: within sixty years of his death, the Southern Song was overrun by Mongol forces. Beixi perhaps had recognized legitimate worship of *zhongchen yishi* knowing that doing so might encourage Chinese to fight more wholeheartedly to defend what remained of the Song. Thus, while the nation-centered justification is at least implicit in Beixi’s *Ziyi*, Razan made it front and center in his vernacular exposition of *chūshin gishi*.

Beixi next stated,

Zhang Xun 張巡 and Xu Yuan 許遠 died defending Suiyang; thus a double temple was founded to enshrine them. Su Zhongyong 蘇忠勇 died in Yongzhou, and so a temple was established for him there.² The King of Manifest Spirit (Lingzhu Wang 靈著王) of Zhangzhou sacrificed his life to defend his people and therefore the people of Zhangzhou built him a temple so that they could offer sacrifices. These shrines for loyal subjects and righteous knight-scholars were, in each case, legitimate ones (*zhengdang* 正當, Jpn. *seitō*). (CHEN 1632, p. 83a)

Realizing that Beixi’s allusions to Zhang Xun, Xu Yuan, Su Zhongyong, and the King of Manifest Spirit would be obscure to most Tokugawa readers, Razan annotated the *Ziyi* passage with material from Chinese dynastic histories detailing the heroic deeds of these *zhongchen yishi*. Clarifying the identities of Zhang Xun and Xu Yuan, whom Beixi mentioned only in passing, Razan quoted biographical data about them from the *History of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tang shu* 唐書). One such account related that Xu Yuan and Zhang Xun had defended the city Suiyang during the final year of the An Lushan 安祿山 (d. 757)

² CHAN 1986, p. 156 adds a line that was not part of the 1632 Japanese woodblock edition of Beixi’s *Xingli ziyi*, nor of Razan’s *Seiri jigū genkai*. This line states, in Chan’s translation, “Now prefect Chen has properly established a shrine in this prefecture.” CHAN explains (1986) that he follows the 1688 Japanese edition in reading *kung* (*gong*) as *chen* (*zhen*). He identifies the prefect as the Neo-Confucian scholar Chen Te-hsiu (Zhen Dexiu 真德秀, 1178–1235), who established the temple in 1219. The Japanese edition to which Chan refers is the 1668, not 1688.

rebellion. Although killed by rebel troops, Zhang and Xu were later enshrined as *zhongchen yishi* for their heroic defense of the dynasty (HAYASHI 1659, 7: 27a–b; also see CHAN 1986, p. 155, note 47). Razan next offered nearly a page-long account from the *History of the Song Dynasty* (*Song shi* 宋史), relating that Su Zhongyong had been enshrined after he burned himself to death following his defeat by an invading barbarian force from areas south of China (HAYASHI 1659, 7: 27b–28a; also see CHAN 1986, p. 156, note 48). Razan turned to the *History of the Tang Dynasty* and the *History of Fukien* (*Min shu*) for his data on the King of Manifest Spirit, relating the real name of this late-Tang general, Chen Yuanguang 陳元光, and his military and political exploits (HAYASHI 1659, 7: 28a–29a; also see CHAN 1986, p. 156, note 50).

Razan's vernacular accounts of these figures made explicit what for Chinese was implied: the notion that those who sacrificed themselves in defending a particular area for the sake of the greater defense of a dynasty could be legitimately worshiped by the people of that area and by representatives of the dynastic line, including the emperor. Beixi's accounts recognized two sacrificial sources for *zhongchen yishi*, one imperial and one popular. In Razan's redaction, however, the interpretive balance shifted towards the explicit level of what might be called the "national realm." Thus while Beixi related that the King of Manifest Spirit "sacrificed his life to defend his people" (*wei ren* 衛人), Razan described his death as "protecting the people of the national realm" (*kokumin o mamoru* 國民を守る) (HAYASHI 1659, 7: 26b). The difference here might be slight, but with Razan it can be argued that dying for *kokumin*, or the people of one's national realm, became a more explicit attribute of *chūshin gishi*.

Beixi added that shrines dedicated to the worship of *zhongchen yishi* must be carefully administered so that people would not defile them. With such supervision, the shrine would be legitimate. Beixi observed that the people 民間 should be allowed only to burn incense as an act of sacrifice and not be permitted to exceed this in worshiping the enshrined deities (CHEN 1632, p. 83a–b; CHAN 1986, p. 156; HAYASHI 1659, 7: 26b). Beixi's remarks on *zhongchen yishi* mostly appear in his "Discussion of the Worship of the Virtuous, Loyal, and Righteous" (*Lun daode zhongyi zhi ji* 論道德忠義之祭). Other portions of Beixi's discussion of "Ghosts and Spirits," however, include reaffirmations of his thoughts on *zhongchen yishi*. For example, in explaining the impropriety of "lewd sacrifices" (*yinshi* 淫祀), Beixi added,

The Buddha is an alien deity! What religious link does he have to Chinese? However, loyal subjects and righteous knight-scholars should be enshrined at Confucian temples along with

those of great accomplishments (*yuanxun* 元勳). Deities which should not be worshiped are foreign ones with no connection to us. (CHEN 1632, p. 83b; CHAN 1986, p. 156)

Razan's redaction of Beixi again reflects his reading of the *Ziyi* notion of *zhongchen yishi* in terms of the national realm: he explains that "those of great accomplishments" refers to "people who possess great, meritorious virtue" (*gongde* 功德, Jpn. *kōtoku*) and "found a national political order" (*tenka kokka o hiraku hito* 天下國家をひらく人). Razan added that "enshrining *chūshin gishi*" means that "when 'those of great accomplishments' are worshiped, so should *chūshin gishi*" (HAYASHI 1659, 8: 1b). By sanctioning worship of *chūshin gishi* and linking it with "those of great accomplishments," Razan ensured that the enshrined *chūshin gishi* would be compatible with the interests of the state.

Later Beixi explained that not all deities were, in their lifetime, "intelligent and upright." Some "plunged into naked swords, sacrificing themselves in their prime;" therefore, "their heroic souls did not readily dissipate" (CHEN 1632, p. 86a; Chan 1986, p. 161). This passage does not mention *zhongchen yishi*, but it does refer to those who "plunged into naked swords" (*dao bairen* 踏白刃), an idiom that the *Ziyi* otherwise used only in referring to *chūshin gishi* (CHEN 1632, p. 83a; CHAN 1986, p. 155). Significantly, Razan chose not to explain this statement at all. Perhaps he wished to bypass Beixi's suggestion that some powerful deities, ones comparable to *chūshin gishi*, were hardly moral exemplars, but were nevertheless propitiated so that their undispersed souls might be laid to rest. To illustrate this point, Beixi noted the case of Bo You 伯有, a belligerent drunkard whose strong soul terrified people; thus a shrine was established to pacify it and end his spiritual "reign of terror" (CHEN 1632, p. 86a; CHAN 1986, p. 161). Apparently not wishing to suggest, as Beixi's *Ziyi* had, that Bo You's spirituality was on a par with that of *chūshin gishi* who had "plunged into naked blades," Razan suppressed the passage via silence. Thus his interpretation of Beixi's notion of *zhongchen yishi* recast the latter more exclusively in terms of self-sacrifice for the national realm rather than as potentially unruly and terrifying forces. Both Beixi and Razan agreed, however, that *zhongchen yishi* could be legitimately enshrined and worshiped via regulated sacrifice.

Sokō's Notion of Chūshin Gishi

One of Razan's students, Yamaga Sokō, drew substantially from Beixi's *Ziyi* in articulating a philosophical system tailored specifically for samurai. Sokō's *Classified Conversations of Yamaga Sokō* (*Yamaga gorui*

山鹿語類), for example, not only appropriates the *Ziyi*'s lexicographic methodology and much of its conceptual repertory, it also explicitly quotes and discusses the *Ziyi* as a typical expression of Zhu Xi's views, criticizing them nearly as often. Sokō's *Essential Notions of the Sagely Confucian Teachings* (*Seikyō yōroku*), the work that earned him exile from Edo for nearly a decade, is structured as though it were, in part, a miniature *Ziyi*, and alludes to the *Ziyi* repeatedly (YAMAGA 1912, pp. 170, 178, 187, 197, 201, 222, 330, 332, 335, 339–40, 359, 363, 383, 397, 406, 410, 415). Not surprisingly, perhaps, Sokō also discussed *chūshin gishi*, and did so in ways that merged his familiarity with Beixi's *Ziyi* and his respect for ancient Confucian texts.

Sokō's accounts of *chūshin gishi* presupposed that his readers were familiar with Beixi's *Ziyi*. Indeed, many of Sokō's remarks about *kishin*, or "ghosts and spirits," read like thinly veiled paraphrases of Beixi. Yet as Sokō broached *chūshin gishi*, he left off the *Ziyi* and cited the *Rites* passage quoted earlier, revealing that his acceptance of the possibility of apotheosis for *chūshin gishi* was grounded in ancient Confucian classics. Sokō related that sacrificial worship as sanctioned by the *Rites* was meant to propitiate the *kishin* of those who had founded laws for people, died doing their duty, labored to establish a state, and prevented calamities and disasters. He added that such worship also celebrated the abundant virtue of such deities. "How much more," he asked, "is the same true of the sage [Confucius] who has been worshiped for myriad generations by people and honored by families? And how could it not also be so with *chūshin gishi* and the emperors of the Han and Tang dynasties?" Elsewhere Sokō explained to a disciple that even though it was true that *kishin* did not respond to sacrifices offered by persons unrelated to them, sacrificial worship of *seiken chūresshi* 聖賢忠烈士, or "sages, worthies, and loyal and courageous samurai," was effective since humanity had received the "true essential influences" of Confucius, Mencius, and the *chūresshi*. Sokō further noted that the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 had displayed a "beautiful intention" in enshrining *chūshin gishi* and virtuous women, despite the fact that he improperly abused them (YAMAGA 1912, pp. 225, 236, 237).

Apart from such scattered remarks, Sokō had little to say about *chūshin gishi*; rather, the focus of his teachings was on the responsibilities of a living *chūshin*, or loyal samurai, serving a ruler. In defining the latter Sokō did return to Confucius's early emphases on loyalty, duty, respect, and remonstrance as the defining characteristics. Also, Sokō's samurai philosophy was, vis-à-vis the topic of *chūshin gishi*, conservative: rather than encouraging a readiness to die for honor, Sokō emphasized that life should not be lightly discarded, even if an enemy offered a challenge. Sokō thus stressed that "succumbing to momen-

tary anger and discarding one's life... was not the way of the loyal samurai" (MINAMOTO 1973, p. 82). Still, in his few statements about *chūshin gishi*, it is clear that Sokō subscribed to Beixi's religious view of them as individuals who because of their exceptional service to the state, the dynasty, or the region, might be legitimately enshrined as deities.

Ansai's Notion of Chūshin Gishi

Beixi's claims about *zhongchen yishi* were grounded in the *Rites*, i.e., the ancient Confucian canon; they did not, however, completely reflect Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian thinking; for example, Zhu did not actively promote the legitimacy of worship of *chūshin gishi*. In conversations with his disciples, he admitted that the spirits of those who had "killed themselves" (*zihai* 自害, Jpn. *jigai*) or "died loyally" (*zhongsi* 忠死, Jpn. *chūshi*) did not disperse naturally, implying that rituals would be needed to disperse them (LI 1984, pp. 68, 71). While Zhu Xi did compile the previously mentioned loyalist anthology, the relative space devoted to these topics as compared with Zhu's other writings suggests that they were not his crucial concerns. Kimon scholars, supposedly faithful to Zhu's ideas, did not typically highlight the legitimacy of *chūshin gishi* worship. One of Yamazaki Ansai's most talented Neo-Confucian disciples, Satō Naokata 佐藤直方 (1650–1719), for example, did not broach the topic in his *Anthology of Confucian Accounts of Ghosts and Spirits*, although Naokata did include Zhu's discussions of Bo You, the drunkard whose strong soul terrified people until a shrine was established to pacify it (SATŌ 1940; 1977). There can be little doubt that Naokata was familiar with the topic *chūshin gishi* and its religious implications. Beixi's *Ziyi* was, after all, a well-known, if not well-liked—at least by Kimon scholars—Neo-Confucian text (ABE 1980b, pp. 551–53; YAMAZAKI 1980a, p. 37; 1980b, p. 77). Kimon scholars, although they were Neo-Confucians like Razan, were supposedly more faithful to Zhu Xi's writings, or to those of the Zhu Xi purist scholar of Korea, Yi T'oegye 李退溪 (1501–1570), than Razan and his students were. T'oegye faulted the *Ziyi* for imperfectly expounding Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism. Concurring with T'oegye's strict and mostly orthodox views, Ansai and many of his Kimon disciples similarly criticized Beixi for debasing Zhu's doctrines by awkwardly and ineptly paraphrasing them (Yi 1982, p. 109; also, YAMAZAKI 1936, p. 167). Not surprisingly, Naokata not only refrained from acknowledging worship of *chūshin gishi* in his *Anthology of Confucian Accounts of Ghosts and Spirits*, he also denied, in his essay on the Akō vendetta, that the ronin were anything more than criminals.

Not all Kimon scholars disparaged Beixi's writings as did Ansai and

Naokata: Asami Keisai and his Kimon disciples defined their thought via lexicographic lectures on the *Ziyi*. Unpublished manuscripts recording Keisai's lectures (ASAMI ca. 1706–1707; also see ABE 1980b, p. 552), as well as those of his disciple Wakabayashi Kyōsai 若林強齋 (1679–1732) (WAKABAYASHI ca. 1727–1728; ABE 1980a, p. 599) and other Kimon scholars, reveal that Keisai's teachings acknowledged the religious status of *chūshin gishi* and worship of them as sanctioned in the *Rites*. A 1783 manuscript recording Kimon lectures on the *Ziyi* endorsed the notion of *chūshin gishi*, and cited as an exemplar not Chinese loyalists but the medieval Japanese imperial loyalist Kusunoki Masashige 楠正成 (1294–1336), whose self-sacrifice for Emperor Go-Daigo's 後醍醐 (r. 1318–1339) failed Kenmu 建武 Restoration (1334–1336) led to his posthumous worship (NAKAMURA 1783, 4: 27a).³ Keisai's understanding of *chūshin gishi* partly drew on material found in Chinese loyalist anthologies. He related, for example, that “the great duty (*taigi* 大義) of *chūshin gishi*” had been displayed by Chinese generals who, upon hearing of the An Lushan rebellion, raised armies, punished the rebels, and returned authority over the empire to the Tang ruler (ASAMI 1980a, p. 389). Keisai also acknowledged that “*chūshin gishi*, in sacrificing their lives for rightness, were invariably compared to Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊,” two martyrs of ancient China who starved themselves rather than serve King Wu of the Zhou dynasty (1122–256 B.C.), whom they saw as a usurper. Keisai does not discuss the legitimacy of making sacrifices to *chūshin gishi*, but given that his lectures were on Beixi's *Ziyi*, which does explicitly recognize such sacrifices, there can be little doubt that he realized the religious nuances associated with such martyrs (ASAMI 1980b, p. 210).

Convergence in Tokugawa Thinking about Chūshin Gishi

Tetsuo Najita has proposed that Tokugawa intellectual historians investigate “convergence,” or “conceptual interconnections” that shape a “‘central’ or ‘governing’ discourse” and that contribute to “the formation of an ‘epistemological perspective’ out of disparate theoretical orientations.” To exemplify this approach, Najita notes that both Satō Naokata, a Kimon Neo-Confucian, and Dazai Shundai 太宰春臺 (1680–1747), a disciple of the ancient teachings of Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728), agreed in condemning the ronin as crimi-

³ NAKAMURA 1783, 4: 27a, refers readers to Razan's *Seiri jigi no shō* 性理字義の抄 [sic] for more information about the Chinese loyalists whom Beixi cites. Clearly, Kimon scholars knew of Beixi via Razan's explication of the *Ziyi* in his *Seiri jigi genkai* (1659).

nals (NAJITA 1978, pp. 8–13). It might be added that Razan, Sokō, and Kimon disciples of Keisai similarly converged in their understandings of *chūshin gishi* as loyal samurai who sacrificed themselves for a higher cause, such as the nation or dynastic line, and therefore became legitimate candidates for posthumous apotheosis and worship in shrines dedicated to them. When the views of Ogyū Sorai and Arai Hakuseki are considered, “convergence” on *chūshin gishi* becomes more evident and even suggests that recognition of the religious nuances of the notion *chūshin gishi*, in one form or another, characterized many if not all Confucian and Neo-Confucian worldviews before and after the Akō debate. It is true that Sorai did not recognize *chūshin gishi* as such. But in deifying a group of ancient sages whom he called the “Early Kings” and deeming belief in them to be beyond doubt, Sorai modified Beixi’s *chūshin gishi* position, making it more ruler-focused and more beneficial to the state than ever before. In Sorai’s view, the “Early Kings” were not martyrs, but because their lifework consisted in founding the basics of civilization—government, writing, socioeconomic institutions, and religious rituals—they were considered divine in nature and thus worthy of reverent sacrificial worship.

This trend continued in the eighteenth century with Arai Hakuseki. Hakuseki is often described as a rationalistic thinker whose writings exposed, via logical analysis, the “superstitions” that tradition had bequeathed to his day (DE BARY 1958, pp. 470–79). However, Hakuseki’s “Essay on Ghosts and Spirits,” drawing extensively on Beixi’s *Ziyi*, recognized that *chūshin gishi* who sacrificed themselves for the sake of a higher cause could be worshiped. Also, Hakuseki cited the *Rites* as classical Confucian justification for such worship. Unlike Razan, Hakuseki further recognized the legitimacy of worshiping *chūshin gishi* in the context of his critique of *inshi* 淫祀, or “illicit sacrifices,” i.e., sacrifices that lacked spiritual legitimacy but which persisted because of people’s naiveté. According to Hakuseki, the spiritual phenomena seemingly elicited by *inshi* were actually the unsettled spiritual effects of *chūshin gishi*. In order to pacify them, Hakuseki allowed that legitimate sacrifices be offered according to *Book of Rites* provisions for those who died fulfilling their duty. Allowing that enshrinement might further be justified for the sake of encouraging virtue, Hakuseki recalled the *Analects* observation, “Encourage people to rightness (*yi* 義) by having them revere spirits, even while keeping their distance from them” (ARAI 1975, pp. 176–77; CONFUCIUS 1988, p. 11).⁴ Hakuseki was not enthused about worship of *chūshin gishi*, but even his rational-

⁴ TOMOEDA 1975, pp. 150, 488–89, 583, 585, notes Hakuseki’s many allusions to Beixi’s *Ziyi*. Also see NAKAI 1965, p. 33.

istic critique of “lewd sacrifices” did not prompt him to deny the possibility of their legitimate sacrificial status.

Converging Views of the Ronin as Chūshin Gishi

Convergence is most evident in the essays elicited by the Akō vendetta. One line—associated with Hayashi Hōkō, Muro Kyūsō, Asami Keisai, and Goi Ranshū—tended to view the ronin as *chūshin gishi*, despite their crime. Advocates of this line apparently saw the loyalist ethic behind the vendetta as admirable, and something that the Bakufu ought to endorse even as it enforced its laws. This line also implied that Tokugawa authority grew from bonds of fidelity uniting the regime; legal authority, on the other hand, had only limited value for securing such legitimacy. In defining this “ethical” view of the ronin vendetta and, implicitly, Bakufu authority, its proponents accorded with early Confucian thinking praising the efficacy of rule by moral example, yet warning that law and the threat of punishment produced mere compliance, and a readiness to disobey if possible (CONFUCIUS 1988, p. 2). Consideration of the religious nuances associated with *chūshin gishi* suggests that the “ethical” line of analysis advocated by Hōkō, Kyūsō, Keisai, and others would have allowed that worship of the ronin was legitimate. Though they did not actively promote such worship, their affirmation that the ronin were *chūgi* implied their realization that apotheosis of the ronin was a possible corollary of their views. Another line of convergence—linking Ogyū Sorai, Satō Naokata, and Dazai Shundai—held that the ronin were mere criminals who had no understanding of rightness, and thus could not be deemed *chūshin gishi*. Implied here is the view that Bakufu authority was secured most effectively via having Bakufu law serve as the ultimate arbiter of all claims. This “legalistic” position was not typically Confucian, but neither was it entirely foreign to Confucianism either. Most saliently, however, it recalls the ancient Chinese Legalist thought of Han Feizi 韓非子 (d. 233 B.C.), which emphasized strict enforcement of the law as the most effective way to rule. Furthermore, the “legalistic” view implicitly precluded the possibility of legitimate apotheosis for the ronin, who were, in its view, simply felons.

Praising the Ronin as Gishi

HAYASHI HŌKŌ

One of the earliest writings in the Akō debate, the brief “Essay on Revenge” (*Fukushū ron* 復讐論, 1703) by Hayashi Hōkō 林鳳岡 (1645–

1732), acknowledged that the ronin vendetta had violated the law. Yet Hōkō also observed that the Confucian classics and Bakufu law, though seemingly contradictory, actually complemented one another. Explaining his view, Hōkō affirmed that there must be humane rulers and wise ministers above who illuminate the laws governing the land, while below there must be *chūshin gishi* manifesting the ethical principles espoused in the classics. Implied, of course, was that the ronin were such *chūshin gishi*. But how could the Confucian classics, which sanction revenge, be consistent with laws forbidding it? Hōkō recalled that the *Book of Rites* not only allows sons to take revenge against their fathers' enemies, but also sanctions worship of *chūshin gishi* who died, typically as martyrs, for a higher cause. Hōkō makes the latter point circumspectly by alluding to canonized Chinese loyalists such as Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785), who met death opposing the An Lushan rebellion, as well as other admirable martyr loyalists such as Wang Chu 王蜀, the retainers of Tian Heng 田頌, and Yu Rang 予讓 (5th–6th century B.C.), all of whom Sima Qian had immortalized (SIMA 1984, pp. 56–63; 77–78; 133, 136–39).⁵ Hōkō's allusions hinted that the Confucian classics, which sanctioned canonization of Yan Zhenqing, might permit similar reverence for the ronin since their exceptional deeds matched those of Chinese loyalists. Also suggested was that the ronin could fully realize their status as *chūshin gishi* only by sacrificing themselves, as the law demanded. Thus, Hōkō proffered, the demands of law meshed with the ethical imperatives of the Confucian classics (HAYASHI 1974, pp. 372–73).

MURO KYŪSŌ

In *Accounts of the Righteous Men of Akō*, published in 1703, Muro Kyūsō 室鳩巢 (1658–1734) discussed the vendetta from beginning to end, and added biographical sketches of each ronin. Kyūsō wrote this work while serving as a scholar-vassal of the *tozama* daimyo, Maeda Tsunanori 前田綱紀 (1643–1724), lord of Kanazawa (Kaga) domain. In it Kyūsō does not mention *chūshin gishi* as such, but so frequently broaches the notion via its constituent parts that his familiarity with it seems more than evident. Kyūsō, for example, referred to the ronin not as ronin but as *gishi* 義士, *gijin* 義人, or “righteous men” and as *chūshin* 忠臣, adding that they “illuminated the way of loyalty and righteousness (*chūgi no michi* 忠義の道) for posterity” (MURO 1985a, pp. 283, 324, 334). Also, Kyūsō's correspondence with other scholars shows

⁵ Tian Heng's five hundred retainers committed suicide after learning that he had done so rather than submit to the first Han emperor. Yu Rang killed himself after failing to kill his master's enemy.

that he often cited Beixi's *Ziyi* in his discussions of Confucianism (MURO 1985b, p. 276), leaving little room for doubt that he knew the *Ziyi* and was acquainted with Beixi's thoughts on *zhongchen yishi*. Kyūsō's knowledge of Chinese loyalist literature is also indicated by his allusions to figures such as Lu Xiufu 陸秀夫 (1236–1279), Xie Fangde 謝枋德 (1226–1289), and Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283), all of them famous patriot-martyrs (MURO 1985b, p. 347).⁶ By alluding to Wen, a canonized loyalist, Kyūsō implied that he fathomed the religious significance associated with *chūshin gishi* status. Further suggested, but never explicitly stated, was that the ronin were worthy of sacrifices. Kyūsō's admiration for the ronin was probably most welcome among samurai of the remote *tozama* domain of northwestern Honshū. Surely Kanazawa's distance from Edo provided Kyūsō with a greater amount of intellectual liberty than he might have had otherwise. Yet Kyūsō apparently harbored no long-standing anti-Bakufu sentiments: in 1711 he was retained by the Bakufu after being recommended for the position by Arai Hakuseki. Later he also served as a lecturer to the eighth shogun, Yoshimune 吉宗 (1716–1745). Still, there can be little doubt that his essay on the vendetta would have been less welcome, in 1703, had it issued from an Edo scholar with a substantial local samurai following. The most sensible interpretation of Kyūsō's position, however, is that it reflected his belief that Bakufu authority grew out of the kind of loyalism evidenced by the ronin vendetta; thus, for the sake of promoting such loyalism, Kyūsō believed that the ronin should be lauded as *gishi*, and possibly apotheosized.

ASAMI KEISAI

Although Kyūsō was among the most consistent critics of Ansai's Kimon school of Neo-Confucianism, his praise for the ronin was echoed in the Kimon essay "On the Forty-Six Samurai," written between 1706–1711 by Asami Keisai 淺見綱齋, one of Ansai's leading disciples. Somewhat like Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627–1705), Keisai remained an independent, Kyoto-based scholar his entire adult life, never receiving a stipend for scholarly service to a samurai lord. His judgment of the ronin, which was somewhat critical of the Bakufu, reflected his independence as a scholar. Keisai was not, however, personally or culturally at odds with the samurai estate, as was Jinsai; rather, he apparently liked *bushi* culture, regularly wearing a sword and riding a horse (TAKEBAYASHI 1978, p. 110). His popular writings,

⁶ Lu drowned himself and the last Song emperor with him after fleeing from the Mongol invaders into Guangdong Province. Rather than serve the Mongols, Xie starved himself to death. Refusing to pledge his loyalty to the Mongols who captured him, Wen was beheaded while bowing towards the Song imperial capital (GILES 1964, pp. 290, 543–44, 874–75).

such as *Seiken igen*, dealt with loyalist topics appealing to samurai. Nevertheless he shunned service as a *han*-scholar, preferring life in Kyoto as a relatively poor scholar devoted to encouraging his students energetically in his brand of Kimon learning.

Keisai argued that punishment for the original altercation between Asano Naganori and Kira Yoshinaka should have accorded with the principle of *kenka ryōseibai* 喧嘩両成敗, which holds all parties involved in an altercation responsible for it. The Bakufu, however, only punished Asano and allowed Kira to go free. Because Kira was not punished, the ronin had no choice but to kill him in order to honor their duty to their lord, Naganori. Keisai's essay responded to Satō Naokata's views condemning the ronin as criminals. In rebutting Naokata, Keisai mocked as laughable Naokata's suggestion that the assassination of Kira issued from the ronin's study of Yamaga Sokō's teachings. Keisai recalled that even Kusunoki Masashige and Chinese tacticians such as Zhang Liang 張良 (d. 187 B.C.) could not dispense with strategy. Keisai never explicitly lauded the ronin as *chūshin gishi*, but he did claim that discussing *chūshin gishi* was senseless if samurai were to stand aside meekly when their masters or fathers were harmed by others (ASAMI 1974, p. 390; see SASAKI 1983, p. 484). Implied was that the ronin had behaved as *chūshin gishi*, despite their breach of Bakufu law. There can be little doubt that Keisai knew of Beixi's *Ziyi*: his lectures on the text were recorded as *Seiri jiggi kōgi* 性理字義口義 by Wakabayashi Kyōsai in 1707 (Hōei 4), about the same time that Keisai recorded his thoughts on the Akō vendetta (ABE 1980a, p. 583). Later studies of the *Ziyi*, apparently written by Kimon scholars, built upon Keisai's lectures. In commenting on Beixi's discussion of *zhongchen yishi*, however, rather than cite the ronin, Keisai lauded Kusunoki Masashige and noted the Minatogawa 湊川 Shrine dedicated to his worship (NAKAMURA 1783, 4: 27a). The latter association hinted that Keisai fully grasped Beixi's notion of *zhongchen yishi* and might have identified the ronin and Masashige as native manifestations of that spiritual category. As Keisai surely understood, however, lauding the ronin as *chūshin gishi* could have been most problematic, politically and intellectually, if the Bakufu took umbrage.

Naokata had earlier blamed Sokō's teachings for the vendetta. Keisai's critique of that charge, suggesting that it was laughable, defended Sokō's teachings from what would have otherwise been an embarrassing connection, given the Bakufu decision that the vendetta was criminal. Yet Keisai was not necessarily doing the Yamaga school a favor in offering such a defense. After all, Keisai's overall argument was, simply put, that the ronin were righteous and that the vendetta was an admirable display of loyalism. Had Keisai endorsed Naokata's allegation linking

Sokō's teachings to the ronin, he would not have been criticizing Sokō but instead praising his ideas for their ability to instill such exemplary behavior. Yet Keisai's purpose was not to laud Sokō. Rather, like Naokata, albeit from a diametrically different angle, Keisai sought to criticize Sokō's school. One Kimon scholar thus took the debate as an opportunity to denigrate Sokō's school by blaming it for the outrage, while the other Kimon scholar denigrated Sokō's teachings by mocking their supposed link to the glorious vendetta. In this regard, the debate reflected intra-school rivalries among early-eighteenth-century Confucian and Neo-Confucian scholars.

GOI RANSHŪ AND ITŌ JINSAI

Writing in 1739, the scholar Goi Ranshū 五井蘭洲 (1697–1762), an intellectual leader of the Osaka merchant community, the Kaitokudō 懷徳堂, sought to refute Dazai Shundai's claim that the ronin had acted out of a desire for fame and profit (GOI 1974, pp. 418–22; TAHARA 1978, pp. 165–90). Ranshū never denied that the ronin had broken the law. Indeed, he admitted that Asano had attacked Kira in a moment of anger. Because Kira had not returned the attack, Ranshū argued that he should not have been deemed Asano's enemy, and that revenge against him was therefore mistaken. Nevertheless Ranshū admired the willingness of the ronin to finish their lord's task, killing Kira, for whatever the reason, legitimate or not. Significantly, Ranshū's position thus allowed, unlike Shundai and Naokata, that an action could be criminal and yet also righteous. Ranshū's notion of righteousness, moreover, had little to do with the exclusively samurai conceptions of Shundai and Naokata. For Ranshū, "righteousness consisted in what the world agrees upon as righteous." Furthermore he asserted that righteousness was not exclusive to samurai, but instead was a matter of discussion for commoners too. Implied, though never proclaimed as such, was that the ronin were righteous. Ranshū implicitly recognized that such status carried a posthumous, religious nuance. In his essay's opening line, he stated that "since antiquity people have celebrated *chūshin sesshi* 忠臣節士," a modification of *chūshin gishi*. Here Ranshū alludes to the long-standing and well-documented Chinese practice of enshrining loyalist martyrs. His remark also hints that there was widespread admiration for the ronin, at least among merchants and townspeople, regardless of what the Bakufu had decided. As much as anything, such admiration expressed a relatively new form of political discourse, one including both merchants and samurai. Surely Ranshū's ideas reflected his socioeconomic setting, that of the premier merchant academy of Osaka, and the tendencies towards assertiveness in politico-economic thought fostered there. However,

Ranshū was also indicating an awareness that *chūshin gishi* were not simply appointed from on high: they often acquired their status because people recognized them as such. Implied, of course, was that a similar process was occurring with the ronin.

Ranshū thus extended a theme, emphasizing the importance of a broader social base in politico-legal thinking, otherwise evident in Itō Jinsai's *kogigaku* 古義學, or philosophy of ancient Confucian semantics, promoted at his Kogidō 古義堂 academy in Kyoto. For example, Jinsai judged that the ancient Chinese rulers Tang 湯 and Wu 武 had not followed an "expedient course" (*ken* 權 Chn. *quan*) in overthrowing the tyrants of their day, Jie 桀 and Zhou 紂. Rather, they embodied nothing less than the moral Way (*michi* 道 Chn. *dao*) in deposing the despots because that was what all people wanted done (ITŌ 1985, pp. 78–79; also MENCIOUS 1988, p. 6). Discussing ghosts and spirits, Jinsai noted that "the sage kings of the three dynasties did not lead people via personal brilliance, but instead took pleasure in what pleased their people; believed what others did; and thought what others thought.... The sage kings simply followed the proper way practiced by the people" (ITŌ 1985, p. 84; also see NAJITA 1987, pp. 25–43). In stating that righteousness was not merely a concern of samurai, but that it involved merchants as well, Ranshū was further developing Jinsai's more inclusive perspective on the role of "the people" (*min* 民, Chn. *men*) in political discourse.

Nakai Riken 中井履軒 (1732–1817), another Kaitokudō scholar influenced by Jinsai's ideas, similarly sympathized with the ronin. It might be added that Jinsai's eldest son and philosophical successor, Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯, supposedly wrote a poem, "The Deeds of the Righteous Samurai," extolling the Akō ronin as *gishi*. Presumably apocryphal anecdotes even relate that Ōishi Yoshio 大石良雄 (d. 1703), the leader of the ronin, studied with Jinsai and was praised by him as a "capable individual." Jinsai was probably aware of the vendetta because it occurred well before his death in 1705. His son's diary, the *Tōgai nikki* 東涯日記, did record the "news" of Asano's attempted murder of Lord Kira in 1701 (SASAKI 1983, pp. 340–41, 460). Curiously, however, Jinsai's masterwork, the *Gomō jigi* 語孟字義 (Lexicography of Confucian and Mencian Terms), never broaches the topic *chūshin gishi*. This is curious because Jinsai's *Diary* (*Hitami no kakuchō* 日次之覺帳) does relate that Jinsai was lecturing on Beixi's *Ziyi* when the first manuscript of the *Gomō jigi* was recorded (SHIMIZU 1985, pp. 502, 622). Jinsai's silence on *chūshin gishi* perhaps reflected his disuse for the notion as well as his suspicion that criticizing it was imprudent given the Bakufu's own apotheosis of Ieyasu. Jinsai did not hesitate, however, to declare the *Book of Rites* an inauthentic Confucian text due

to its seemingly Daoist terminology (ITŌ 1985, p. 83). Since the *Rites* provided classical grounding for *chūshin gishi*, this negative appraisal was possibly an implied censure of *chūshin gishi* as well. Unlike Ansai, his contemporary rival, Jinsai never sought self-deification in life nor was he worshiped posthumously (OOMS 1985, pp. 231–32). The absence of apotheosis from his school, led by his direct descendants, presumably reflected Jinsai's skepticism regarding such. It is therefore doubtful that he would have been sympathetic to viewing the ronin as *chūshin gishi*, despite whatever admiration or disgust he might otherwise have had for them.

Jinsai notwithstanding, essays affirming that the ronin were *chūshin* and *gishi* increased during the remainder of the Tokugawa period, making that appraisal the more popular one, at least in terms of the number of scholars endorsing it. Noteworthy among them was Miyake Shōsai 三宅尚齋 (1662–1741), another of Ansai's leading disciples (TAHARA 1978, pp. 107–8). Also the Kimon scholar, Miyake Kanran 三宅觀瀾 (1674–1718), who studied with Keisai before serving the lord of Mito domain, Tokugawa Mitsukuni 光圀 (1628–1700), modified *gishi* to *resshi* 烈士, and argued that the ronin exemplified the latter, more aggressive, form of samurai loyalty (SASAKI 1983, p. 495). The eclectically inclined, Edo-based scholar Matsumiya Kanzan 松宮觀山 (1686–1780) also defended the ronin against charges that their vendetta had been motivated by a desire for wealth and fame (MATSUMIYA 1974, pp. 414–16). Kanzan was one of few Edo scholars to praise the ronin. Apparently, his standing with the Bakufu did not rise as a result of it. After Kanzan was implicated in the Yamagata Daini 山形大弐 Incident supposedly aimed at overthrowing the Tokugawa regime (WAKABAYASHI 1995), the Bakufu banished him from Edo. While the ronin had no shortage of supporters, most were not from Edo. Similarly, in 1762, Yokoi Yayū 横井也有 (1702–1783), a ronin from Owari 尾張 domain who later became a Kimon scholar-poet, defended the ronin against critical charges made by Dazai Shundai (YOKOI 1974). Matsumura Kyūzan 松村九山 (1743–1823), a physician-scholar of Fukui 福井 domain (Echizen 越前), did much the same in a posthumously published piece (KOKURYŌ 1984). A cursory listing of all pro-ronin writings exceeds the bounds of this paper. Suffice it to say that while there were anomalies, those authors praising the ronin were most often distant from Edo, and rather independent of the Bakufu power structure. Thus they were able to adumbrate ideas more critical of Bakufu justice than Edo scholars could have voiced.

In Meiji Japan, however, with the exception of Fukuzawa Yukichi's 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) critique of the Akō ronin as misguided men who died like stubborn dogs for a cause contrary to civil political life

(FUKUZAWA 1986, pp. 54–72, 166; DILWORTH and HIRANO 1969, pp. 35–47, 115–23), nearly all who wrote about the ronin praised them in quasi-religious terms. The pro-ronin trend especially accelerated in the late-Meiji and early-Taishō periods when the ronin became virtual heroes of prewar culture in tandem with the rise of the self-sacrificing ethic of imperial loyalism. Arguably, the notion that Japanese who died fighting for the imperial cause would be worshiped at shrines devoted to them had significant, though not exclusive, roots in the notion of *chūshin gishi* as adumbrated by Beixi, popularized by Razan, and applied in eighteenth century debate vis-à-vis the ronin vendetta and the ethico-religious status of those involved in it.

Viewing the Ronin as Felons

SORAI, NAOKATA, AND SHUNDAI

In contrast to the seemingly endless Tokugawa titles such as “Akō gishi ron,” works faulting the ronin were relatively few and invariably the subject of counterattack via denunciatory essays authored by defenders of the ronin. In the eighteenth-century literature, three important critiques, authored by Ogyū Sorai, Satō Naokata, and Dazai Shundai, emerged. Sorai’s early participation in the debate is well known, despite ambiguities surrounding his analyses of the vendetta. When the incident occurred, Sorai was a Neo-Confucian scholar-retainer serving Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu 柳澤吉保 (1658–1714), the *sobayōnin* 側用人, or grand chamberlain, to the Tokugawa shogun, Tsunayoshi. His learned views were supposedly sought to facilitate Bakufu adjudication of the vendetta. The alleged result was Sorai’s *Legal Brief* (*Giritsu sho* 擬律書), which argued that while the ronin had fulfilled their private duty, they violated public law in doing so and therefore had to be punished (TAHARA 1978, pp. 65–66). Sorai’s views thus at least reflected, and perhaps shaped, the Bakufu verdict that the ronin commit suicide.

Following their deaths, however, Sorai authored his “Essay on the Forty-Six Akō Samurai,” where he rebutted Kyūsō’s *Akō gijin roku* and its suggestion that the ronin had behaved rightly in their vendetta. Sorai claimed that since Kira had not tried to kill Asano, it was wrong for the ronin to conclude that Kira was their lord’s enemy. Furthermore, Kira had not taken Akō domain away from the Asano family; rather, Asano’s unprovoked attack on Kira was responsible for that. Again, Sorai argued, there was no reason for deeming Kira the enemy. Sorai thus blamed Asano for his own fate, charging that his brief anger made him forget his ancestors and attack Kira. Such base

behavior, Sorai concluded, must be called unrighteous. Although the ronin could be lauded for completing the “evil intentions” (*jashi* 邪志) of Asano, Sorai asked how their vendetta could possibly be called righteous (OGYŪ 1974, pp. 400–401). Clearly Sorai did not deem the ronin fit candidates for apotheosis.

SATŌ NAOKATA

Commenting on the incident from less lofty heights, Naokata endorsed Sorai’s reading of the vendetta by stressing the ultimate supremacy of the law and thus deciding the issue of “rightness” (*gi*) via appeal to the transcendent legal authority of the Bakufu. As was true with Sorai in 1703, Naokata, writing two years later, never questioned whether the ronin had been loyal or not. Rather the crucial issue was whether they had been righteous. Explaining why vulgar opinion lauded the ronin as *chūshin gishi*, Naokata stated that “the uneducated, being unenlightened about right principle, are prone to errors.” Naokata furthermore identified Hayashi Hōkō’s essay as the origin of such mistakes. Like Sorai, Naokata claimed that the ronin had wrongly deemed Kira to be their late lord’s enemy. Asano attacked Kira in a moment of anger, but Kira had not fought back. Thus Kira was not Asano’s enemy, and should not have been targeted for revenge. Those who thought otherwise, praising the criminals as *chūshin gishi*, were blindly following the claims of Hōkō and Kyūsō. Naokata confessed that he might have pitied the ronin had they committed suicide at Sengaku temple. But instead the ronin notified the Bakufu inspector general (*ōmetsuke*), Sengoku Hisanao 仙石久尚, about their vendetta and waited for the Bakufu judgment on their fate. Suspecting that the ronin had hoped for a pardon, Naokata declared that he felt no sympathy for them. Rather he branded them criminals who had committed a grave offense (*daizai* 大罪). One version of Naokata’s essay alleged that Ōishi Yoshio and the ronin had been students of Yamaga Sokō’s *bushi* teachings, implying that the latter prompted their illegal assassination of Kira. The crimes of the ronin did not, Naokata declared, issue from a sense of “loyalty and righteousness” (*chūgi*) (SATŌ 1974, pp. 378–80).

It is noteworthy that Naokata, a representative of the Kimon school, was the origin of allegations that Sokō’s teachings were behind the vendetta. Though Dazai Shundai later attributed the same suggestion to Sorai, there is no evidence that Sorai ever made such a charge. Ansai’s school was an old enemy of Sokō’s teachings in Edo, perhaps fearing their appeal to some intellectually inclined samurai. Naokata revived the attack on Sokō—one which Asami Keisai participated in, though via a different strategy—with his charges linking Sokō and the

criminal vendetta. Between 1688 and his death in 1719, Naokata was a Confucian lecturer in Edo, having been invited there by Lord Sakai 酒井 as his *hinshi*, or guest teacher. Given his proximity to the *bakufu*, he could hardly have endorsed the ronin as righteous and still hoped to find many students. Perhaps like Sokō before his untimely exile to Akō domain in 1666, Naokata dreamed of serving the Tokugawa as a Confucian lecturer. In criticizing the ronin after the fact, his views can easily be construed as at least partly flattering the judicial wisdom and legal authority of the Bakufu. They can also be seen as an attempt to accelerate the atrophy of the Yamaga school in Edo. Significantly the latter, without responding to Naokata, abandoned Edo in the 1740s.

DAZAI SHUNDAI

Sorai's successor as a philosopher of political economy in Edo, Dazai Shundai, writing some thirty years after the vendetta, contributed decisively to the so-called "second round" of the debate via lambasting the ronin as common criminals searching for fame and reputation (TAHARA 1978, pp. 108-9). Shundai first attributed Asano's attack to a "grudge" that Asano had harbored towards Kira, implying that the incident was Asano's fault from the start. Echoing Sorai's claims, Shundai suggested that the ronin had wrongly deemed Kira to be their lord's enemy. Also, Shundai questioned the strategy of the vendetta, implying that the ronin were self-serving in the execution of their revenge. After all, Kira might have died of natural causes before their attack. Did not their delay reflect, Shundai proffered, self-centered indolence rather than righteousness? While some attributed Kira's murder to the "punishment of Heaven" (*tenchū* 天誅), Shundai charged that it was simply due to luck. Although Sorai's writings never said such, Shundai claimed that his "teacher" Sorai had declared that the ronin "did not understand righteousness," and that their murder of Kira was nothing more than a reflection of the misguided "military teachings of Mr. Yamaga [Sokō]" (DAZAI 1974, pp. 404-8).

To clarify the misguided nature of the revenge attack, Shundai enumerated the mistakes of the ronin. He asserted, for example, that the ronin should have challenged the excessive punishment that the Bakufu had heaped on Asano. After all, Asano had only wounded Kira, not killed him. Yet the ronin should not have targeted Kira, whose role in the matter was minor. Shundai further suggested that because the ronin did not immediately commit suicide after murdering Kira, but instead waited for the Bakufu to decide their fate, they seemed motivated by "desires for fame and wealth" (*myōri o motomuru* 名利を要むる). Shundai further charged the ronin with "feigning righteousness" while

“trying to satisfy selfish desires for profit.” How could that be called righteous? In concluding, Shundai also recalled that Sokō had served an earlier Akō daimyo as a military instructor; during that period, Ōishi Yoshio and the other Akō samurai were Sokō’s disciples. In assassinating Kira, Shundai charged that the ronin had followed Sokō’s tactics in every respect. Pathetically they never realized what they should avenge and thus failed to embody perfectly their “great duty” (*taigi*). Such was the mistaken nature of Sokō’s philosophy. Shundai then lamented that few samurai understood righteousness, implying again that mistaken teachings, such as Sokō’s, were misleading and dangerous. Yet as much as Sokō, Shundai blamed Asano, implicitly at least, for having failed to illuminate righteous teachings in his domain (DAZAI 1974, p. 408).

As a Confucian teacher in Edo, Shundai was far less successful than Sorai at either attracting students or gaining daimyo support for his work. Though he opened an academy in the Koishikawa 小石川 district of Edo, it was not a dynamic center of Confucian learning (NAJITA 1972, pp. 821–41). In part Shundai, though a respected scholar, was hampered by his severe and demanding approach to education. The latter traits are evident in his critique of the Akō vendetta as well. Noteworthy here is that Shundai’s critique of the ronin was also a critique of the Yamaga school, one which drew on both Sorai’s ideas and Naokata’s. Clearly it was meant to discredit Sokō’s teachings and the ronin. While Shundai’s analyses might be viewed as slightly critical of Bakufu justice in suggesting that the ronin should have resented the fact that Kira was not punished at all, the real target of Shundai’s attack was the ronin and Sokō’s ideas, not the Bakufu. Indeed, Shundai’s suggestion that the ronin should have taken the Bakufu as their enemy seems more like sarcasm than sincere analysis.

Clarifying the Religious Significance of the Debate

One task of the intellectual historian is to bring to light implicit nuances that even seemingly familiar notions might have had at one time, but that, because of their implicit nature, came to be lost over time. In the debate over the Akō vendetta, the notion *chūshin gishi*, no doubt, referred to “loyal and righteous samurai,” but it also referred to much more than that. Early-Tokugawa discourse, especially as flavored by Neo-Confucian writings such as Chen Beixi’s *Xingli ziyi*, understood *chūshin gishi* to signify a kind of loyal and righteous self-sacrifice, or martyrdom, which warranted apotheosis and legitimate religious veneration at a shrine or shrines devoted to the martyr or

martyrs. Thus, Tokugawa scholars who argued that the ronin were not *chūshin gishi*, were not simply defending the legal wisdom of the Bakufu. Rather, they were denying that the ronin were worthy of such apotheosis. Since worship of them might have provided the beginnings of a cult of martyrs around which Bakufu opponents might rally, checking that possibility was perhaps a greater service to the regime than was simple support for its notion of justice. On the other hand, those extolling the righteousness of the Akō ronin were not merely offering posthumous praise for their heroes. Rather, they were pioneering their apotheosis. Given that the ronin had defined themselves in opposition to Bakufu law, their enshrinement would have been a boon for those intent on rallying self-sacrificing opposition to the Bakufu. The gods for the latter would have been ready at hand.

Yet it might have been premature, even in the mid-eighteenth century, for admirers of the ronin to advocate immediate apotheosis. A crucial first step, if the pattern followed in China is any indication, would have been the creation of a substantial literature recording their heroic loyalism and providing a scriptural basis for their adoration. Some of this literature appeared with the historico-biographical accounts of the ronin; it was supplemented by the essays defending their deeds. From the perspective of those intent on apotheosis, heretical literature appeared in the form of writings by Sorai, Naokata, and Shundai. But even the latter's writings served a necessary purpose in eliciting a flood of essays and treatises reaffirming impassioned approbation of the ronin as *chūshin gishi*. In many ways the ronin literature continued the genre of loyalist writings from China. However, unlike the latter, wherein the spiritual glory of loyalist martyrdom was dimmed by the conquest of Song China, the successful and popular ronin cause seemed ascendant throughout the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, increasingly becoming associated with, by Bakufu default, imperial loyalism. Apotheosis was not accomplished via the debate, but some of the scriptural grounds for the possibility of the liturgico-spiritual transformation of the ronin were established through it.

Partly because later proponents of the Sokō school embraced the notion that the Yamaga teachings had played a crucial role in the vendetta, the ronin came to be celebrated in the early-Meiji (1868–1912) period, especially as those educated in the Yamaga teachings assumed prominent positions in the new imperial regime. Fully detailing the eventual rise of the ronin to religious status and mass adoration in Meiji Japan exceeds the bounds of this paper. Suffice it to say, however, that because the Yamaga teachings were promoted by Yoshida

Shōin, who praised Sokō for having educated the ronin in military strategy and philosophy, the same teachings were revered by Shōin's ex-students, and their political pawn, the Meiji Emperor. Thus, one of the first liturgical acts of the Meiji Emperor following the establishment of the new imperial regime was his dispatch of a messenger to the graves of the ronin at the Sengaku-ji temple in Tokyo. The imperial message declared,

Yoshio, you and the others resolutely grasped the righteous duty binding a lord and his vassal (*shujū no gi* 主従の義) in exacting revenge and then greeting death according to the law. Even a hundred generations later, people are still inspired by your deeds. I wish to express my deep appreciation and praise to you. (TAHARA 1971, pp. 10–11)

The Meiji Emperor's pronouncement effectively revised the legal and religious judgment handed down by the Tokugawa Bakufu, all but sanctioning the ronin vendetta and public veneration of the ronin at the Sengaku-ji.

Helen Hardacre's *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* relates that in the Meiji period Shinto acquired, for the first time in history, a comprehensive organizational structure, one constructed by state initiative and "linking shrines into a single hierarchy... installing deities with national or patriotic significance in virtually all shrines of the nation." Hardacre notes that the state made "a concerted and sustained effort to promote a cult of the war dead and historic loyalists," one manifest in the creation of the "Special Shrines (chief among them the Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社), local level shrines for the war dead (*shōkonsha* 招魂社), so-called Nation-Protecting Shrines (*gokoku jinja* 護国神社), and hundreds of lesser war memorials (*chūkonhi* and other terms)." While shrines such as the Minatogawa, a center of worship for the *chūshin gishi* Kusunoki Masashige, were classified as Special Shrines (HARDACRE 1989, pp. 10, 90–93), the Sengaku-ji, on the other hand, was the Buddhist temple at which Naganori and the ronin had been laid to rest, and so did not experience similar elevation within the Shinto hierarchy of shrines. However, the Meiji Emperor's message left no doubt that public reverence for the ronin had the sanction of the new imperial regime.

Perhaps the Meiji government was reluctant to sanction apotheosis of the ronin more aggressively because the deed which had prompted their revenge vendetta, an attack by their lord, Asano Naganori, on Lord Kira Yoshinaka, had occurred during the Bakufu's ceremonial reception of imperial messengers from Kyoto conveying the emperor's New Year's greetings to the shogun. Thus, at the beginning of the

vendetta there had been an act of disrespect for representatives of the emperor. Or perhaps the Meiji regime realized that the ronin were exceptionally popular loyalist martyrs who would need no official backing for the sake of their apotheosis. In any event, the Sengaku-ji became, in the Meiji period, an extremely popular destination for pilgrims who admired the ronin. Without official prompting, conservative Meiji intellectuals moreover demonstrated a willingness to defend the ronin against any offensive, “enlightened” critiques. As noted earlier, when Fukuzawa suggested that the ronin had died pointlessly, defenders of the ronin emerged from virtually every corner, denouncing Fukuzawa personally and even making threats against his life. Fukuzawa eventually toned down his critiques by later admitting that the ethic of *chūshin gishi* was not in itself a bad thing, no more so than Christianity or Buddhism. Rather, assessment of the ethic depended on the cause it served. If one marshalled the ethic to serve the cause of enlightened civilization, then there was every reason to praise it (FUKUZAWA 1959, p. 211; DILWORTH and HURST 1973, p. 197). Silenced, however, were Fukuzawa’s more shocking assessments of the ronin as pathetically misguided and uncivilized samurai.

As a result of the late-Meiji efforts of General Nogi Maresuke 乃木希典 (1849–1912), Yamaga Sokō, the supposed teacher of the ronin, came to be commemorated annually in a graveside ceremony at the Sōsan-ji 宗三寺 temple in Tokyo, the site of Sokō’s grave, by a small but influential clique of scholars and military figures. Nogi also spearheaded efforts to have Sokō honored posthumously, in 1907, with senior-level fourth imperial rank (*shōshii* 正四位). And, in 1912, Nogi presented the young Taishō Emperor with a copy of Sokō’s *The True Central Imperial Regime* (*Chūchō jijitsu* 中朝事實), which the General had published in a modern edition. The day after, General Nogi and his wife committed suicide, following the Meiji Emperor in death (TAHARA 1971, pp. 12, 17).

Nogi’s promotion of Sokō was partly inspired by the writings of an influential scholar at Tokyo University, Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944). Inoue advanced the cause of veneration of the ronin by declaring in no uncertain terms that they had been students of Sokō, as well as *gishi*. Creating a genealogy for the Yamaga teachings, Inoue claimed that Sokō’s ideas, which he identified as “the constitution of *bushidō* 武士道,” could be traced from the Akō *gishi*, to Yoshida Shōin, and finally to General Nogi himself, who, in his “pure loyalty” (*junchū* 純忠), was comparable only to Kusunoki Masashige (INOUE 1902, pp. 770–822). In Inoue’s writings, Sokō’s teachings, as philosophical expressions of Japan’s *kokutai* 國體, became, along with the ronin, cen-

tral figures in what Inoue called *kokumin dōtoku* 國民道德, or National Morality, a set of highly nationalistic ideological notions taught increasingly in schools through 1945. Inoue's writings, which drew regularly on religious discourse, thus contributed to the indoctrination of "patriot ronin" in the 1930s and 1940s.

MARUYAMA Masao suggested that the roles played by such twentieth-century ronin distinguished Japanese fascism from that of Nazi Germany (1963, pp. 31, 79, 92). While that may be, it seems clear that some of the religious implications of the Tokugawa debate over the Akō ronin only became fully manifest in early-twentieth century nationalistic ideological initiatives urging loyal self-sacrifice for the imperial cause, and rewarding it with enshrinement at the imperially-sponsored Yasukuni Shrine. Not surprisingly, the forces behind enshrinement of the Akō ronin rose in tandem with those of Sokō, and prevailed in 1912 with the founding of the Akō Ōishi jinja 赤穂大石神社, a shrine dedicated to the ronin leader, Ōishi Yoshio. In the Kyoto area, the Yamashina Ōishi jinja 山科大石神社, founded in 1935, served a similar role (KOIKE 1994, p. 191; FUNATO 1994, p. 129). In prewar times, these *chūshin gishi* shrines were among those providing religious sanction for what Maruyama considered to be Japan's distinctively fascist course. In significant respects, these early-twentieth-century religious developments can be construed as logical unfoldings of the Tokugawa debate over the Akō vendetta, and as concrete manifestations of hitherto obscure religious nuances that were associated with the notion of *chūshin gishi*.

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