

tant for people living in early modern Japan. Chapter titles even for short sections and the elaborate table of contents for the Sakura Sōgorō story that help make the structure of the narrative explicit for an audience hearing the story have been left as the authors had them. Lists of names and places which bestowed veracity and fixed the text in a specific place and time are included, even though the modern reader soon grows impatient with them. I have not abbreviated, eliminated, or shortened the many episodes included in texts like "A Thousand Spears at Kitsu nezuka." Walter J. Ong has pointed out that whereas oral cultures construct stories episodically, written and especially published stories build to a climax.⁹⁶ For modern readers accustomed to a strictly linear plot development, its absence in these texts may cause discomfort. I hope so, for out of discomfort arises a consciousness of difference.

Annex: What? How?!, Peasant Uprisings in Japan
(Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951)

The Sakura Sōgorō Story

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NO HISTORY OF PEASANT UPRISINGS IN JAPAN would be complete without Sakura Sōgorō. Sōgorō, or Kiuchi Sōgo as he is sometimes called, is the archetype of the peasant martyr, a man who deliberately sacrificed himself on behalf of his community. Even today most Japanese know the story of how he took pity on peasants driven to the verge of starvation by the cruel and rapacious taxes levied by Hotta Masanobu, villainous lord of the Sakura domain. Sōgorō appealed repeatedly to the officials for mercy in governing the people. When all his efforts failed, however, he dared petition the shōgun, even though he knew he would lose his life for this impropriety. By accepting death in remonstrating to his ruler, he forced Masanobu to remit the harsh taxes; peace and prosperity returned to the land. Over the course of time Sōgorō has remained a symbol of resistance to tyranny; the farmers who opposed the expropriation of their land for the Tokyo International Airport at Narita claimed him as their ancestor.¹

For many Japanese, the legend of Sakura Sōgorō represents the entire body of peasant uprisings in the Tokugawa period. No matter that the legends do not agree on when he died, that no contemporaneous document proves his existence, or that according to the historical record, in 1660 Hotta Masanobu (1632–80) lost the domain he had inherited from his father only nine years earlier for having himself petitioned the shōgun to act benevolently toward samurai and commoners alike. Sōgorō has become synonymous with the rectification of government from below. He is the one to whom the other three hundred or so still-remembered peasant martyrs are most commonly compared. "Why is Sōgorō so famous?" wonders an old man living near the monument to Kainuma

Kyūhachi, who was executed in 1695. "Our Hachiman was equal to Sōgorō, but nothing was ever written down about him."²

Sōgorō is the only peasant to have gained nationwide fame in Japan's early modern era. A hundred years or so after his death, a temple erected in his memory became a pilgrimage site for peasants living on the Kanto Plain, where he was worshiped as a high-rank-ing Shintō deity (*dai-myōjin*). Nursery rhymes, songs, stories, and religious pamphlets spread his fame from the northern part of Japan's main island to Shikoku and even to villages near the Amakusa Islands in Kyushu.³ One song sung during the spring planting in the Kawakami district of Okayama prefecture sketched a fragment of the legend:

Sōgorō, rather than see the hardships of the peasants, took their sufferings upon himself and presented a petition.

Sōgorō, his petition stuck in a split bamboo, approached the lord's palanquin, and thrust it in.

Sōgorō, tortured with water and fire and the rack, saw his innocent children burned with moxa.⁴

Most stories claim that his innocent children were beheaded before his eyes. The song nevertheless evokes the pain and suffering all too readily feared by the peasants.

The parallels between the Sōgorō story and that of other peasant martyrs are too close to be coincidental. "A Daily Record of the Riot over Ten Thousand *Kōku*" (*Man'oku sōdō nichiroku*), written anonymously in 1783, relates the efforts by headmen living near present-day Tateyama city in 1711 to revoke new taxes instituted by an upstart bureaucrat, Kawai Tōzaemon. Three headmen were beheaded, but in so outrageous a violation of procedures that the bakufu had to investigate. The bakufu executed Kawai and his son, dismissed local officials, and demoted the domain lord to a shogunal bannerman (*haianō*). The day the headmen went to present their appeal in Edo, the steps they followed, and the month the ruling authorities handed down their verdict are identical to the dates and course of action given in stories about Sōgorō. Aoki Kōji argues that the details of this incident may have been assimilated to the Sōgorō story to lend it verisimilitude, but it is equally possible that the process worked in reverse.⁵ These similarities may have also arisen out of a common store of traditions, myths, and aspirations handed down orally from one generation to another.

By the nineteenth century, the legend of Sōgorō had taken on new meanings. Some peasants who led their own protests against the government in the decades around the Meiji Restoration of 1868 called on his spirit to aid their endeavors. During the great uprising of 1867 which swept across Musashi, now part of greater Tokyo, peasants performed snatches of a play entitled *Sakura Sōgorō den*, and a puppet theater in Hachioji used mechanical dolls to portray a scene where the ferryman Jinbei defies the authorities to break the lock and carry Sōgorō home to say farewell to his family. The leader of a peasant uprising in 1871 in Mimasaka, now the northern part of Okayama prefecture, wrote his own puppet play praising Sōgorō. As late as 1878 the leader of a riot in Hiratsuka city built a shrine for the worship of Sōgorō. In other instances as well, peasants intent on expressing their grievances to the authorities called on Sōgorō for protection.⁶ Sōgorō had become the patron saint of protest.

In another environment, the Sōgorō story was dramatized on the Kabuki stage in 1851. The bookseller Fujitokaya Yūzō noted in his diary that it achieved tremendous popularity, drawing in audiences from neighboring provinces, encouraging theaters and halls all over town to put on their own imitations, sparking a Sōgorō boom in novelizations and posters, and forcing even the high-class professional storytellers (*kōshakushi*), who ordinarily despised the Kabuki actors as little better than beggars, to incorporate the Sōgorō story into their repertoire. According to rumor, one member of the audience from Shimōsa was so moved by the difference between Sōgorō's sacrifice for his fellows and the way his contemporaries pusillanimously bought off trouble that he went back to his inn and committed suicide. Peasants dropped their hoes in the fields to run off to the theater. They shamed anyone who did not go by expelling them from their youth groups because such types did not understand the obligations owed the country (*kokuon*). Some claimed that the actor playing Sōgorō represented the second coming of Sōgorō as a great august deity (*dai-myōjin*). Whereas these public performances set the scene in the medieval period to satisfy government censors, in the several versions of the story copied into his diary, Yūzō gave dates for the seventeenth century, and he included the petition that Sōgorō was supposed to have presented to the shōgun.⁷ From midsummer to the end of the year, this peasant martyr preempted the space usually reserved for urban heroes.

One of many plays that fed the appetite of urban audiences for cruelty, suffering, and bloodshed, the Sōgorō story was revived in 1861 and quickly found its way into popular novels. According to the playbills and scripts preserved in the Tsubouchi Memorial Theater Museum at Waseda University, the play continued to be performed through the 1870s and sporadically thereafter to 1900. Although it is generally lumped with scripts about thieves and murderers, it constitutes one of the few examples of what might be called social-protest drama, and it is one of only two Kabuki plays where the central character is a peasant.⁸ This history puts it well: with Sōgorō we have "the first time that a common peasant left a name for future generations."

The widespread legends about Sōgorō and their unusual transformation into the Kabuki theater suggest that here was an authentic Japanese hero. He has, however, largely been ignored in books about Japanese history, particularly in the West, except in works by scholars of peasant protest. Neither Ivan Morritt's *Nobility of Failure*, which relates the tragic legends of men beloved in song and story, nor the more staid and historically factual *Personality in Japanese History* and *Great Historical Figures of Japan* include his biography.⁹ Throughout the sweep of Japanese history, and in movies like *Seven Samurai*, the peasants passively endure while the warriors win glory.

Stories about Sōgorō and other peasant martyrs have also been ignored by folklorists. Perhaps because they are based on actual or might-have-been events, these legends have been excluded from the compilations and dictionaries of folklore motifs. In the postwar period, only in *Tales of Old Japan*, a miscellany of exotic stories first published in 1871 by A. B. Mitford, and in *As the Japanese See It*, a reader for college students, have full-blown depictions of Sōgorō appeared in English.¹⁰ Yet, as Barbara Ruch has pointed out, heroes are important. They feed "the emotional and ethical life" of their people, and they allow outsiders "to tap the sources of the nation's most enduring ideals, myths, aspirations, and historical griefs."¹¹

Ruch was talking about Japan's national epic, *The Tale of the Heike*, the story of the struggle that ended in the defeat of the Taira in 1185, but on a much smaller scale she could have been talking about the Sōgorō story. The transmission and conceptualization of the Sōgorō story and classic military sagas suggest deep-seated patterns in the way the Japanese remember heroes. To speak in certain

ways and tell stories about personages in the past were thought to have prophylactic or invocative properties. The Japanese called the beneficent but perilous witchery of words *kotodama*, or "the spirit of words," and through ritual incantations (*norito*) they called the spirit into life. In medieval Europe as well, people believed in the magic of the word. Mention the devil and he appears.¹² Most versions of the Sōgorō legend summoned the power of words to recount how a shrine came into existence. Like many folktales known as *yūsha engi*, which related how some miraculous event took place on the spot where a temple or shrine was eventually built, these versions explained the origin of a place.¹³ They ended with a prayer that with a shrine established for worshipping Sōgorō, everyone from the rulers to the common peasants would enjoy happiness. Telling tales about Sōgorō bestowed a deeply religious significance on his deeds and transformed him into a god.

The power of the voice had other properties as well. In a society in which the oral tradition existed side by side with written literature, the spoken word was the only way for illiterate men to remember where they came from. The version of the Sōgorō story presented here perpetuates Sōgorō's geneology by claiming as his ancestor Taira no Masakado (?-940), who rebelled against heaven itself in trying to wrest the Kanto provinces from imperial control. This noble descent is one indication that Sōgorō had become assimilated to the mythical model of the tragic hero whose extraordinary deeds made him an appropriate bearer of the community's impurities and sins.¹⁴

Recounting the deeds of the dead also helped expiate their inner agonies. As late as 1977, an innkeeper in Yamanaishi prefecture published a book about his ancestors executed after uprisings in 1750 and 1872, "to placate their angry spirits."¹⁵ *The Tale of the Heike* and other warrior sagas were recited not merely to tell a good story but to soothe and comfort the tormented souls of men who died with blood on their hands. Focused on the perils of pride and power, these tales also concentrated the thoughts of the listeners on their own salvation.¹⁶ Legends surrounding *The Tale of the Heike*, furthermore, suggested that relating the exploits of certain warriors would cause them to appear again, bemoaning their fate. In one version of the Sōgorō legend, a monk visited a small shrine dedicated to Jizō, a bodhisattva thought to show special compassion to children. During an all-night vigil, he and the hermit who tended

the shrine traded stories of the Heike heroes and Taira no Masakado, whose feats were immortalized in the earliest war tale told to placate the soul of a failed hero, the *Shômonki*.¹⁷ Then the monk asked about the history of a local shrine. After the hermit told the story of how Sôgorô was punished for trying to help the peasants, the ghost of a man and a woman appeared before the monk, complained of the injustice they had suffered, and abused the Hotta family.¹⁸ At the premier of the Kabuki play *Higashiyama Sakura Sôshi*, in 1851, it was said that the ghosts of Sôgorô and his family came to the theater carrying beams on their backs.¹⁹

The centrality of angry spirits in the Sôgorô story comes from an ancient strain of Japanese beliefs. The spirit of anyone who died in "unnatural" circumstances continued to roam recklessly around until it had exacted its own revenge or yielded to the appeasements of the living. The most potent unnatural circumstances were unfulfilled political emotions, jealousy or grudge, death away from home, and mistreatment of a corpse. Any victim of an unjust, premature, or violent death produced a potentially angry spirit, and Sôgorô fit most of these categories. Placating angry spirits was serious business, for as the monk Jien (1155–1225) wrote, "since ancient times there has been the Principle that vengeful souls ruin the state and destroy man."²⁰ Besides telling tales about the dead, one of the best ways to appease an unquiet spirit was to offer it enshrinement. Several Japanese shrines are dedicated to angry spirits in an attempt to put them to rest, and the shrine to Sôgorô erected by the Hotta family must be included in their number.²¹

Strong emotion was identified with the gods and was thought, indeed, to show their power. In Japanese folklore, many are the tales of a woman's love so strong that it lived on as her spirit after her death, awaiting only the return of the beloved to whom it could relate the sad tale of unrequited desire and terrible death before disappearing. Medieval literature includes stories of jealous women whose rage, transformed into serpents, destroyed their rivals or faithless lovers.²² In contrast to these unselfconscious emotions felt by women, Sôgorô deliberately fed his wrath so that it would be certain to survive his death. One woodblock print based on the Kabuki plays of the late Tokugawa period shows the scene where he returned to haunt Lord Hotta as he disported himself with his maids-in-waiting. Sôgorô and his wife fly through the air, hair streaming wildly around their mournful faces, their robes ending in

nothingness because Japanese ghosts have no feet. The maids have been transformed into demons underneath their colorful kimonos, and snakes rise from the floorboards to entrap Lord Hotta in their coils.²³ Good theater, perhaps, but also a reminder of the mysterious powers that ranged beyond humanity's ken.

The belief in the power of angry spirits informs even the way the Sôgorô story was presented on the urban stage. Before the first performance in 1851, the actor who played Sôgorô, Ichikawa Kodanji, made a pilgrimage to the Sôgorô shrine, which he presented with the tidy sum of 950 *ryô*. In his prayers Kodanji related how he had been casting about for a worthy vehicle for his talents when one night Taira no Masakado appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to visit the grave of his descendant Sôgorô, where he would find what he needed. Like other actors who visited the graves of their subjects, Kodanji wanted to avoid unnecessarily arousing Sôgorô's spirit, but he also sought Sôgorô's help in putting on a successful run. The play opened during the Bon season, still a popular time for ghost plays when the souls of the dead are supposed to return to the world of the living and the audience needs to be reminded to worship them. Unlike the medieval Noh drama, which focused on salvation regardless of whether the angry spirit satisfied its passion for revenge, on the Kabuki stage, salvation came as an afterthought. As in the story translated here, the emphasis was on vengeance. H. E. Plutschow argues that the Kabuki theater was a place of both placation and catharsis, a way to appease angry spirits and to empathize with their revenge on their tormenters.²⁴

In the Sôgorô story, the native belief in the power of angry spirits was uneasily joined to Buddhist notions concerning retribution, magic, and language. Unlike the simple and austere Zen Buddhism so well known in the West, which taught reliance on the self and remained deeply skeptical of speech, or the popular Buddhism which promised salvation through faith in the Lotus sutra or the grace of the bodhisatva Amida, these notions harked back to the early Buddhist teachings on the ways of fate and the pull of karma.²⁵ Doing wrong was always punished. The first line of the text translated here evoked the theme to follow: an attachment to material pleasures ends in damnation, or pride comes before fall, a statement that foreshadowed Hotta's ruin. To exorcise Lord Hotta's pregnant consort of the angry spirits who tormented her, Buddhist priests offered prayers and the lord himself chanted the *Daihannya*

sutra, believed to have a magical potency against evil spirits. These rites of purification expressed through language were supposed to gain Buddhahood for the spirits, thereby relieving them of their negative karma.²⁶ Despite the protestations of Buddhist practitioners, however, sutra readings and mysterious prayers were no more effective against the ghosts of Sōgorō and his wife than they were against the Rokujō Lady in the *Tale of Genji*.²⁷ In tales about Sōgorō, the Buddhist teaching on inevitable retribution for wrongdoing simply reinforced beliefs in the revenge of angry spirits; it provided a public and more universal justification for private spite.

The strongly religious cast given the Sōgorō story in the Tokugawa period gradually became attenuated over time and as the story moved from its rural origins into urban areas. In her study of Semimaru, the blind musician of Japan, Susan Matisoff pointed out that frameworks tying a story to a particular place, for example, those that explained the origin of a shrine, were dropped in texts recorded for urban audiences.²⁸ Kabuki librettos set the Sōgorō story in the fifteenth century in part to evade prohibitions against depicting contemporary events on stage, but this device also made it possible to omit the untheatrical emphasis on worship as a means of remembering the dead. Instead the dramatists added a new twist to the plot: having resolved to sacrifice himself by petitioning the shōgun, Sōgorō sneaked back to his village to bid farewell to his children. In some versions, he also wanted to divorce his wife because otherwise she would be judged equally guilty with him. To prevent the peasants in Edo from communicating with those in the domain, however, the officials locked up all the boats at the Inba swamp. Out of sympathy with the peasants, the ferryman Jinbei bravely broke the locks and carried Sōgorō home. In modern versions, even the angry spirits of Sōgorō and his wife have disappeared. In their place we find Jinbei.²⁹

Lacking angry spirits, retribution, and magic, modern versions of the Sōgorō story have almost completely lost touch with the tradition from which they sprang. In their Tokugawa form, however, they reveal the legacy of what Barbara Ruch has called vocal literature. Unlike oral stories, which usually imply "illiteracy on the part of the producer of a story, on the part of the audience, or both," vocal literature is based on written texts. But each time a story is told, the teller either memorizes it or composes it more or less anew according to the principles of extemporizing on a basic theme. The

art is in the telling, and the magic is in the voice projection. For this reason, "vocal literature, even when secular in content, cannot be easily separated from magico-religious qualities that imbued the environment in which it developed."³⁰ Or, as Clarke Garrett has put it, in a predominantly oral culture, "language is really sound and texts must be recycled back through sound to have meaning."³¹ Ruch claims that the vocal literary tradition coexisted with the written tradition before expiring in the seventeenth century, but the Sōgorō story suggests that in rural Japan, this particular literary tradition, which sought to affect listeners in the spiritual and the real world, continued both to produce new texts and to reproduce old ones.

The manner in which the Sōgorō story spread from villages near Narita to other parts of Japan must be deduced from what we know of early modern communications. The itinerant storytellers, *sekkyōshi* or jongleurs, who roamed the Japanese countryside during the medieval period found their freedom of movement severely restricted during the first two centuries of Tokugawa rule.³² To a certain extent, their place was taken by licensed traveling proselytizers (*ōshi*) who made regular trips around Japan, drumming up business for their shrines and temples. According to various accounts, monks from a local temple wrote the petition Sōgorō presented to the shōgun and appealed the verdict to execute his entire family, episodes insinuating that the monks may also have helped disseminate stories about Sōgorō and write them down.

The establishment of a shrine to Sōgorō by the Hotta family in 1746 may have played a crucial role in propagating stories about him, most of which date from the second half of the eighteenth century or later. Once the shrine became a pilgrimage site, visitors could carry his story back to their homes, to be turned into songs and poems as well.³³ In the nineteenth-century text translated here, monks were criticized for having passively accepted the dictates of the ruling class. In two texts from the 1860s preserved in Aoki village high in the mountains of Nagano prefecture, the monks played no part at all. By this time, the ruling authorities were no longer able to enforce prohibitions against traveling entertainers, and religious proselytizers had lost their monopoly over the dissemination of news in the countryside.

The different modes of dissemination for the Sōgorō story have left a number of extant versions. The thirty-some manuscripts that

remain from the Tokugawa period are few compared to the one hundred versions of *The Tale of the Heike*, but the issue of textual evolution is similar.³⁴ Ono Masaji, who made a close study of some twenty texts located in and around the old Sakura domain, tried to determine which was the oldest and which provided the most historically accurate account of Sōgorō's life. He based his published edition, the only printed version of the Sōgorō story in Japanese that unquestionably comes from Tokugawa-period texts, on a manuscript that was well organized under title headings, but he interpolated parts of other documents to produce a composite to suit his taste.³⁵ My approach follows Alfred B. Lord, who criticized the folly of viewing variant texts of the same story as derived from a hypothetical urtext. They should instead be seen as separate stories in their own right, each valid unto itself.³⁶ In this approach, every text stands on its own merits as an authentic rendering of the story.

The text translated here was found by a leading scholar of Japanese peasant martyrs, Hosaka Satoru, in a used bookstore far from Sakura in Aizu-Wakamatsu. Although it is undated, it was probably written before the Kabuki dramatizations of the story became widely known. Its vocabulary is much simpler than that found in the composite edited by Ono or in the story recorded by Mitford in *Tales of Old Japan*, nor does it replicate the style of Noh chanting that distinguishes parts of the Ono text. Even the religious terms would have been familiar to the common people. The political terminology is drawn directly from the documents that passed between peasants and rulers. The handwriting is clear and relatively easy to read. Less erudite than village headmen, the producer of this text was probably a low-ranking village official or simply a landholding peasant.

This Aizu-Wakamatsu version is remarkably similar to both the Mitford and the Ono texts. All three call Hotta Masanobu by the title Kōzuke no suke, the name by which he was publicly known, but also the title for Lord Kira, villain in *Chūshingura* (A treasury of loyal retainers). Also the same are the title for Masanobu's father, Kaga no kami (his true title was Dewa no kami), the positions held by father and son at the shōgun's court, the names of their chief followers, and the name of the senior councillor to the shōgun (*royū*). Sōgorō's illness, which prevented him from joining the other village headmen in Edo, serves in all three texts to retard the forward movement of the story.³⁷ Although each text puts the

peasants' petition at a different place in the story, the grievances it contains are similar. Like the careful attention to proper and place-names, it lends verisimilitude to an otherwise improbable tale. The central episodes of the story—from Sōgorō's appeal to the shōgun to the decision to execute Sōgorō, his wife, and children—follow the same pattern in all three texts. They even repeat the pathetic story of the boil on the second son's neck, a scene certain to wring the emotions of the audience. Common to all is how Sōgorō took revenge on the house of Hotta, including Masanobu's quarrel with a fellow noble in the shōgun's palace, an event that also resonates with echoes from *Chūshingura*. All three texts explain that a shrine has been erected in memory of Sōgorō.

The texts show the most differences where they purport to be the most precise. Was Sōgorō the headman of Kōzu village as Ono's text would have it, or was he from Iwabashi? Was he executed in 1653 (Ono), or in 1645 (Aizu-Wakamatsu, Mitford) before Masanobu became the domain lord, or at some other time in between? Was he forty-three (Aizu-Wakamatsu), or forty-eight (Ono) years old? What about the names and ages of his children, which in the Mitford text differ slightly from the other two. How many villages and what areas did Sōgorō represent when he appealed to the shōgun? On this point, the Aizu-Wakamatsu version is not even internally consistent. It also puts the curse on the Hotta family in the mouth of Sōgorō's wife, a realistic touch exposing a mother's anguish at her children's death, whereas in the other two texts she is resigned to her fate. Each text names a different horse that Masanobu took for his mad ride back to Sakura. Was Masanobu (Mitford) or his son (Aizu-Wakamatsu) allowed to move to Utsunomiya, and did his title then become Hida no kami (Mitford) or Chikuzen no kami (Aizu-Wakamatsu)?³⁸ Then there are the documents incorporated in the text, the verdict for Sōgorō and the other headmen (Aizu-Wakamatsu, Ono), and the verdict for Masanobu (Mitford). Diverse as they are, these details lend each text a spurious air of authenticity.

Aside from the episodes that constitute the essential structure of the story, each text includes sections unique to itself. The Ono text describes the siege of Odawara in 1590 and the 1615 attack on Osaka castle. The Mitford version includes a petition presented by village officials to the domain office in Edo asking that Sōgorō's children be pardoned. In the Aizu-Wakamatsu version is a long diatribe

against monks, an anticlericalism absent from the other two texts, and a fantastic tale of vengeance against a domanial official, Fuchiwatari Shukei, that must have been satisfying to the peasants who heard it. Near the end of the text is a quotation on the imperative of acting loyally, from *Hagakure*, a textbook for samurai written in 1716. Sōgorō was the hero of the story, but if only the ruling class would act as they should, there would be no need for the disruptive deeds of peasants.

The Sakura Sōgorō Story

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The Origin of the Great August Deity Sōgorō, Headman of Kami Iwabashi, the Sakura Domain, Inba District, Shimōsa

Indulging your desires and becoming overbearing and arrogant really means that you will sacrifice everything with a slip of the tongue.

Here lived a peasant called Sōgorō, headman of Kami Iwabashi, Inba district in the Sakura domain of Shimōsa. Because he was a man of innate virtue who resolved to sacrifice himself to save the people, everyone revered and respected him as the August Deity of a shrine. Worship is truly the means through which popular sayings and proverbs transmit stories of such earth-shattering spiritual power. This was the first time, nonetheless, that a common peasant left a name for future generations.

Were you to inquire about Sōgorō's ancestors, you would find that he was a descendant of the imperial prince Taira no Masakado, who even today enjoys high repute in Kami Iwabashi.

During the Kan'ei era [1624–43], Lord Kōzuke no suke, the legitimate son of Hotta Kaga no kami Masamori, lord of Sakura castle, Inba district, Shimōsa, succeeded his father as the second lord of the castle. His father Masamori had been appointed a senior councillor because his ancestors excelled in valor, sincerity, and loyalty. After Masamori died, the succession was conferred on Lord Kōzuke no suke, and he was also appointed to a position among the senior councillors. It was only because his father had governed

without any irregularities at all that Lord Kōzuke no suke was allowed to serve as a senior councillor. He had reason to be extremely grateful for the shōgun's favor.

During the Shōhō era [1644–47], Lord Kōzuke no suke changed things from the way they were before and ordered that the taxes paid by the peasants of his domain be increased. He also had levied a variety of excess duties. The tax collectors became exceedingly strict. As a result, the peasants in the domain suffered extreme hardships and fell into uncommon poverty.

In desperation, the peasants presented a petition begging for the lord's mercy, but the local officials refused to accept it. The peasants thus had no choice but to plot together in small groups. Many of them ran away from their villages. Finally the village headmen and officials of 230 villages representing peasants on land worth over twenty thousand *koku* gathered to discuss what to do. After much debate, they agreed to present a petition which everyone would have to sign. At first they took their petition to the local Sakura government office, but the officials refused to accept any of it, so they went to appeal to the house elder Lord Fuchiwatari Shukei. They crowded in front of his gate carrying their petition, but once again the officials refused to accept it.

Then the headmen and village officials returned home and debated what to do. Several times they had gone to the government office. They had even petitioned one of the house elders, but the officials had always refused to accept their appeals. Now there was no one left to try. But if they just let the matter drop, the vast majority of peasants would be unable to survive. Besides, what about the poor peasants who would grumble and abuse them, saying that the officials were heartless? They were losing face. They really had no choice but to go to Edo and make their appeal at the mansion of their lord. If the officials refused to accept it even then, they would have to agree to find some way of reaching the ear of high shōgunal officials, appeal to have the merits of their case investigated, and ask that the bakufu be the judge. It would be best, they decided, if the 243 headmen and village officials went together to Edo to make the appeal.

They had just reached this decision when Sōgorō, then forty-three, the headman of Kami Iwabashi, shrewd, clever with words, and more intelligent than most, came forward and asked: "What you have just decided to do, to go to our lord's mansion in Edo and

make an appeal, is completely out of the ordinary and very dangerous indeed. What can you be thinking of?"

The headmen and officials all spoke together. "You're right. We think it is a dangerous thing to do." Then there was a silence while no one said anything at all. Finally Sōgorō spoke:

"Up to this point we have made a number of appeals to the local government offices, and we have even crowded in front of the gate of a house elder to make our appeal, but the officials have refused to accept any of them. Going to Edo where the lord is in residence may appear to be a good idea, but our petition is not likely to be approved very readily.

"If we go to Edo without having received permission from local government officials," he continued, "our actions will undoubtedly be judged to have been an appeal made en masse directly to the authorities, and we will be punished for our insolence. Each and every one of us will be thrown in prison and put in chains. Some of us will even be executed for being the ringleaders of a riot. Even suffering such hardships, however, will not solve our problem. We must commit ourselves to petition high shōgunal officials, come what may.

"I know that we will be taking an extremely grave and dangerous step, but what do you think? If we make an appeal to the bakufu, we will never see our families again. Now are each of you convinced in your own heart that you are determined to carry through with this petition? Do any of you want to put a stop to this before the situation gets more serious? Please let me know how you feel."

Steeling his own resolve, Sōgorō ascertained everyone's views down to the very bottom of his heart. It was apparent to all that he excelled even the most splendid warrior in bravery, not to mention indomitable determination. After everyone had listened to what he had to say, they replied:

"You're right. Were we to continue to make appeals as we have been doing up to now and were the officials to continue to refuse to accept them, we would be forced to go as high as shōgunal officials even if it meant running the risk of making enemies of the officials serving our own lord. Nevertheless, we don't see how we can stop petitioning to relieve the sufferings of all the peasants in a twenty thousand *koku* area, no matter how severely we are punished."

"Everyone who has made up his mind to steel himself not to return to our homeland again should now bid his parents, siblings,

wives, children, and kinsfolk a fond farewell and prepare for his departure," Sōgorō announced.

Everyone agreed to this, and they decided to leave for Edo on the thirteenth day of the eleventh month. Then each went back to his own home.

Around this time some people appeared in the castle town accompanied by their parents, siblings, wives, and children. In all about 734 people from eighty-five families fled to other areas, abandoning land worth over six hundred *koku* and deserting eleven temples and shrines.

According to another report, peasants in the countryside heard a rumor that a few dozen headmen from the 236 villages in Lord Kōzuke no suke's domain had gone to his mansion in Edo where they made an appeal en masse directly to the authorities, forcing them to accept the petition to remit the excess levies and taxes. The peasants assumed that punishments would follow, and so they conspired together, captured the house elder Fuchiwatari Shukel, dragged him out to a forest in the mountains, stripped him naked, and wrote the names of the 236 villages on his bare body. There they crucified him and stabbed him with bamboo spears, each aiming at the name of his own village. People have slanderously accused the house elder in Edo, Kojima Shikibu, of having insisted on Sōgorō being severely punished and even his relatives chastised for this crime committed owing to a misunderstanding, but that is not true.

Also it has been said that the priest from Tōkō-ji begged for the lives of Sōgorō and his children. That is simply an embellishment added to the main story, and it is false.

The Assembly of the Village Officials at the Funabashi Post Station

A messenger is dispatched because Sōgorō is late.

The village officials each made their farewells and finished their preparations. As they had promised, they arrived at Funabashi on the appointed day and gathered at three inns, spending a night there in a rendezvous before the departure set for the thirteenth. But Sōgorō from Kami Iwabashi did not show up. In growing apprehension, the village officials discussed whether they ought to send an envoy to find out what had happened while they remained

at Funabashi through the night of the fourteenth. Finally they chose Rokurōzaemon of Takezawa, Inba district, and Jūzaemon of Katsuda, Sōma district, to be sent to Kami Iwabashi.

Sōgorō was at home, taking his ease before a fire. The two men asked, "In keeping with the pledge made a few days ago, all of the village officials left home on the thirteenth, and they have already arrived at Funabashi where they are waiting for you. But then you did not show up. Everyone agreed that your intentions were unmitigable, so what could have caused you to be so late? This has made us all very anxious. The rest have remained at Funabashi while the two of us were sent here to see you. What is the matter?"

"How kind of you to come," Sōgorō replied. "Thank you for your trouble. I am indeed grateful to everyone for the effort they are making in going to Edo. I too planned to set out yesterday morning. I had already finished my preparations when last night I suffered severe abdominal pains. I am forced to stay here, unable to leave, until I recover. You two should return at once to Funabashi, accompany the officials there to Edo, crowd in at the lord's mansion in Edo to present the appeal, and then camp before his gate day and night." Thus he gave them secret and detailed instructions.

The two men left the next morning, arriving at Funabashi about four in the afternoon. There they told how Sōgorō's illness had recurred and passed on his secret and detailed instructions. On the sixteenth everyone left Funabashi, each in his own way.

The Arrival of the Peasants' Representatives in Edo *Sōgorō sets out for the capital.*

Some of the petitioners took the Ichikawa road, some took the Gyō-toku road, and they all made their various ways to Edo. Upon their arrival, at least thirty of them stayed in the Koami area, whereas the others sought lodging as they pleased in Yanagiwara, Muramatsuchō, Iida-chō, and other places.

On the seventeenth day of the eleventh month, 157 peasants and headmen crowded in front of Lord Hotta's gate below the western enceinte of the shōgun's castle. The sight of them gathered there carrying their petition astonished the foot soldiers on guard, who bustled about in great confusion.

"Who are you to create such disorder?" they scolded, defend-

ing themselves with their staffs. Then the official on duty, who had been informed of what was happening, appeared to inquire into the particulars. The village officials all shouted that they had a petition to present.

"In any case, this is the front gate, and you are blocking the public way. Go around to the back gate, all of you."

He repeated this several times, forcing the headmen to go around to the back gate, where as before they crowded in front of it.

Finally an official appeared.

"Come inside the gate," he urged, but not one person obeyed.³⁹

Then he informed them that since the lord was busy attending the shōgun, they should go to the lower mansion at Aoyama Hyakunin-chō on the morrow. That was it for the day, and everyone returned to his inn.

Following their instructions, the headmen went to the lower mansion in Aoyama on the eighteenth. Once they had crowded in front of the gate, an official appeared and said: "Local matters are handled by officials in the domain itself. You have acted outrageously in coming to us here when you should have made your statement to the district magistrate, the intendant, or the superintendant there. In retaliation, we will not accept your petition." He drove them outside away from the gate, withdrew behind it with his men, and slammed it shut.

The headmen returned to their inns at dusk. On the nineteenth, they gathered at a teahouse in front of the Asakusa Kannon, where everyone gave his ideas on what to do. Before they did anything else, they agreed that they needed to know what Sōgorō thought. The next morning, Rokurōzaemon and Jūzaemon were thus once again asked to go to Kami Iwabashi with instructions to bring Sōgorō back with them without fail. The two men left immediately and reached Funabashi in the evening of the same day.

Just at that time Sōgorō had himself set out. That night he stayed at the inn of Kikyōya Gōdemon in Funabashi, where he ran into the two envoys. Overjoyed and excited, they discussed at great length everything that had happened in Edo.

"We came this far again because we were sent to meet you. We are delighted that you too intend to go to Edo. All of us are eager to hear what you think."

"The officials in the domain and those in Edo are not colluding in their dealings over our affair," Sōgorō replied. "Nevertheless, I

doubt that those in Edo will accept our petition. Therefore we will have no choice but to appeal to shogunal officials regardless of priority. Tomorrow in Edo we will debate again with the others on what to do about our petition."

Early the next morning they left Funabashi and went in the direction of Edo.

An Appeal to the Senior Councillor Lord Kuse Yamato no Kami as He Rides in His Palanquin

Lord Kuse returns the petition.

Once Sōgorō from Kami Iwabashi had arrived in Edo, all of the peasants who had come to make the appeal went again to meet at the teahouse in front of the Asakusa Kannon, but they could not agree on what they should do. Then Sōgorō spoke: "Everything that each of you has said makes sense, but having already taken a petition to our lord's mansion and had it rejected means that we have severed relations with him. Therefore we have no choice but to wait for a day when Lord Kuse Yamato no kami goes by palanquin to the shōgun's castle, when we can then entreat him to accept our appeal. Each of you must make up your minds to do it. Now is not a time to remain silent, don't you agree?"

Sitting in serried rows, the peasants all said together, "That's it, let's do it." A decision having been reached, everyone returned to his lodgings.

Five men, Sōgorō, Jūzaemon, Rokurōzaemon, Hanjūrō, and Chūzō, then met to write a petition. On the twenty-sixth, Kuse Yamato no kami, whose visit to the castle the peasants had agreed to wait for, was seen leaving his mansion below the western enclosure in a palanquin. Everyone ran pell-mell to catch up with him. Among them was Sōgorō, who strode straight to the fore, clung to the palanquin, and cried, "I have a petition." Knowing that no one would take the petition from him, he flung it into the litter to force Lord Kuse to accept it.

"We are grateful that you have shown yourself to be benevolent," Sōgorō shouted. All the peasants withdrew.

After that Sōgorō had everyone gather at a teahouse in Ryōgokubashi, where he spoke to them once again.

"Well, we have managed to present our appeal to Lord Kuse. Officials will probably consider it within the next few days."

Then everyone spoke at once. "Goodness Sōgorō, what a relief that things worked out as you expected. As you said, all we have to do now is wait for some sort of announcement."

"Now I did say that we have managed to present our appeal to Lord Kuse, and officials will probably consider it within the next few days, but even if that is indeed what happens, we will not be summoned any time soon," Sōgorō replied. "Even in the shōgun's castle our petition will be considered only after much deliberation. No matter how hard we push, we will not speed up getting an answer, either yes or no."

"It's going to get too expensive for us to remain all jammed up here," he pointed out. "It would be best if Rokurōzaemon, Hanjūrō, Chūzō, Saburōbei, and four or five others stayed behind while the rest of you return to your villages back home. That way these six or seven men and I can be the ringleaders in making our appeal. If we get in trouble or if we are accused of wrongdoing, we are relying on you to work together in finishing things up for us. Of course I don't have to say this, but we do need money and so forth for our expenses while we are lodged in Edo to take care of this business."

"We must petition albeit at the risk of our own lives. Even if the heads of all the representatives from 236 villages who signed their names to our petition are exposed at the prison gate,⁴¹ it will be worth it if we have saved the peasants. But now it is time for us to part."

The peasants stayed up all night over a farewell banquet. Each of them wept over Sōgorō's words as they reluctantly bid him good-bye. Finally they finished making their formal bows and returned to their villages.

The six men had already made up their minds to do what they had to do, so how could they be depressed over anything that happened now? Saying good-bye, they returned to the inn at Yanagiwara. Everyone knew in their hearts that the six were truly splendid headmen.

On the second day of the twelfth month, a summons came from Lord Kuse saying that Sōgorō should present himself at nine in the morning. Those who went to Lord Kuse's mansion were Sōgorō, Rokurōzaemon, Jūzaemon, Hanjūrō, Chūzō, and Saburōbei. Upon

their arrival in court, Lord Kuse's officials, Sase Gidayū and Yamazaki Ishiki, raised their voices:

"You have acted absolutely outrageously in petitioning our master while he was going to the castle in his palanquin on the morning of the twenty-sixth. You should be severely punished for having overstepped your bounds by throwing a petition into the palanquin of a senior councillor to the shōgun, but our lord has mercifully agreed to ignore what you did. If you continue with your disorderly conduct, you will most certainly be judged in the wrong. No matter what kind of petition you have to make you must always present it to your own government office according to the regulations for petitions."

After they had made this announcement, Sōgorō came forward and spoke, "I make these remarks humbling myself before you. We have not acted simply on the spur of the moment. Every year we have repeatedly presented petitions, but not a single one of them has ever been accepted. The peasants are all having a hard time surviving, and as a result, we have been forced to overcome our habitual deference to authority. It was in fear and trembling that we overstepped the bounds by throwing a petition into the lord's palanquin. Please be merciful and accept our petition. Were you to make it possible for the peasants to survive, we would be grateful and happy."

"No, no, this we cannot do." Lord Kuse's officials returned the petition after they had written down the names of each of the six headmen. The headmen had no choice but to take back their petition and return to their lodgings.

The Resolve to Act Together by Sōgorō and Five Others

Sōgorō makes an appeal directly to the shōgun in front of the black gate at Ueno.

After that Sōgorō carefully pondered what had happened before he decided on a new plan. Turning to the five men, he said:

"What a regrettable turn of events. Since the petition we had just presented has already been returned by Lord Kuse, how shameful it would be for us to return home right now. Besides, if we simply leave things like this, there will be no end to the villagers' hardships.

Therefore I have made up my mind to find out when the shōgun appears in public and use that opportunity to make an appeal directly to him. Regardless of the merits of our case, I know that in making a direct appeal I will have thrown away my life. Nevertheless, even if I lose my life, I alone must make a direct appeal as the representative of the headmen for the peasants who produce twenty thousand *koku*. What do you think of that?"

Rokurōzaemon and Jūzaemon replied, "That's a good idea. From the very beginning we have been in complete agreement with you, and no matter what kind of wrongdoing we are forced to commit, we cannot hesitate now. Whenever you go, we will go with you."

Chūzō, Saburōbei, and Hanjūrō also moved forward to speak. "We are not surprised at what you have said. From the start, our resolve has been as hard as steel, and we have remained unwavering in our firm determination to act together."

Sōgorō nodded. "I absolutely approve of your determination to act. I have, however, thought over what we should do very carefully. The bigger the crowd that presents a direct appeal, the more likely we are to be punished and the petition rejected. Besides, if we arouse suspicion in how we appear before the shōgun, we will be unable to appeal directly to him at all. Even if he accepts our petition and does what we ask him to do, the crime of having betrayed our own lord in making an appeal directly to the shōgun will certainly be judged a serious one. Surely it will mean the death penalty, so I have resolved to take the responsibility by sacrificing myself. If each of you insists on acting with me, we will not achieve our long cherished desires because there is no way that we can avoid being accused of having committed the crime of acting en masse. In any case, you should leave everything to me. My last request of you while I am still alive is that after I have been executed, each of you should perform memorial services for me. You who have stood firm in your determination to make the appeal of a lifetime shall accompany me in spirit."

Seeing the resignation written on his face, the five men surrendered to his arguments. "Well, my lord, we are all aware of your superior talents. We have reached the point where we can do nothing, but please take us into your confidence and we will do whatever you ask."

The five men wept bitter tears in anticipation of how hard it

would be to part from him. Sōgorō was deeply moved. Now that he had resolved to make a direct appeal, all he had to do was wait for a day when the shōgun would appear in public.

News that the shōgun would make a visit to Kan'ei-ji at Toeiizan in Ueno⁴² on the twentieth day of the twelfth month came like a gift from heaven. Having written a petition and then hidden himself all alone under the east section of the threefold bridge in front of the black gate at Ueno, Sōgorō waited impatiently for the hour of the shōgun's arrival. His heart contained only the thought that by sacrificing his own life, he would take upon himself the entire responsibility for the peasants' sufferings and save the masses from their hardships. How firmly resolved was he to act, and how incomparable was his courage!

At eight in the morning of the twentieth, the shōgun proceeded straight toward the exact center of the bridge. At that instant, Sōgorō suddenly appeared from underneath, startling the attendants and throwing them all into confusion.

"What kind of person is this who belittles the passage of our lord the shōgun by hiding himself here?" The warriors bustled about trying to protect the shōgun in his palanquin, but Sōgorō showed not the slightest discomfiture. Instead he inserted his petition in the tip of a six-foot-long bamboo pole that he had readied beforehand and shouted, "In fear and trembling I appeal directly to you." Then he tried to thrust his petition into the palanquin.

"Get out of here," the attendants scolded him, but they grabbed the petition.

Delighted that his gamble had paid off, Sōgorō shouted, "Thank you very much for your gracious mercy," as he withdrew.

Immediately the order went out for him to be tied up with ropes, thrown in jail, and interrogated at once. The contents of the appeal that he presented are as follows:

In fear and trembling we respectfully present our statement in writing.

The domain of Hotta Kōzuke no suke

The officials from 87 villages in Inba district Shimōsa

The officials from 28 villages in Chiba district Shimōsa

The officials from 21 villages in Sōma district Shimōsa

The total yield from the above area is over 23,531.31 *koku*.

The headmen and general village representatives are:

Sōgorō of Kami Iwabashi, Inba district, Shimōsa
 Heijūrō of Shimo Iwabashi, Inba district, Shimōsa
 Rokurōbei of Shimo Tachizawa, Inba district, Shimōsa
 Jūzaemon of Katsuda, Inba district, Shimōsa
 Hanjūrō of Koizumi, Inba district, Shimōsa
 Chūzō of Iwabashi, Sōma district, Shimōsa

Together these six men make this appeal as the general representatives of all the peasants, headmen, and group leaders⁴³ in the 136 villages listed above.

Between the reign of Doi Toshikatsu,⁴⁴ the first lord of the Sakura domain in Inba district, Shimōsa, and the reign of Matsudaira Yasunobu,⁴⁵ the ruling family changed a number of times. Until recently, however, there has been no increase in taxes or excess duties. After our present lord Hotta Kōzuke no suke began his rule in 1632, he began to collect more for the land tax starting in 1640, and the tax rates have risen enormously. The peasants from the villages listed above are suffering extreme hardships. In fear and trembling we have recorded for your perusal these outrageous increases.

Respectfully we appeal to you to examine this list:

He has ordered an additional tax of .122 *koku* of rice for every *koku* harvested.

He has also assessed various types of excess duties aside from the land tax.

From the reign of Doi Toshikatsu down through the ages to the reign of the previous lord, we were required to make presents to the lord of soy beans, red beans, and sesame seeds, but we were allowed to use the exchange rate for grain in substituting rice in place of these excess duties. The present lord has arbitrarily refused to accept any rice substitutes for the excess duties.

Not being allowed to substitute rice for excess duties, the destitute peasants who managed to scrape together enough to pay their land taxes in full ended up without a single bit of grain in their storehouses. Knowing that they still had to pay the excess duties, they appealed for an extension of the deadline for payments so they could go to other domains in

search of work, but they were allowed not a single day of grace. Besides, all of the village officials were ordered to come to be handcuffed and placed in prison for over one hundred days. We suffered extreme hardships.

Owing to these circumstances, the peasants in the villages have suffered many years of privations. Right now they are on the brink of starvation, and they are unable to survive. Even peasants who with the utmost diligence and care cultivate the fields their families have held for generations find that their estimated yields are so high that they cannot raise enough on their paddies to pay the large amounts they are assessed in taxes, and they are forced to sell the crops on dry fields to supplement their tax payments. Since the dry-field crops are used to supplement these tax payments, many peasants in the villages have almost nothing to eat, and they have fallen into deeper and deeper misery. They have lost the strength to cultivate their fields, they are unable to pay the land tax, and in the natural course of events, they end up going bankrupt and being forced to turn their land and household possessions over to the officials. Many people, old and young, men and women, a total of 737, have starved to death by the roadside or have become beggars. Furthermore, in the years since 1630, 135 farm families have gone bankrupt, and eleven temples have collapsed because their parishoners among the peasants are so destitute that they are unable to send in their contributions. Even the monks have been forced into penury; they have had to evacuate their dwellings, and they have become homeless.

Recently we appealed to the government office in Sakura along the lines given above stating that if the increased taxes and excess duties were reduced, we would not be suffering extreme hardships, and we would not be presenting petitions or doing anything else. If orders had been given to make these tax increases and excess duties conform to the tax assessments levied by previous lords, we would have petitioned expressing our gratitude, but the officials have not listened to us at all. They have refused to accept our petition, letting us know that even if the peasants were to go bankrupt and leave their homes, there is no way that they themselves can manage things any differently.

Might it not happen that some of the people who fled to other provinces, both men and women alike, would be driven by starvation to become robbers? If they were then arrested and interrogated by bakufu authorities, we humbly think that it might reflect badly upon our lord. This concern too we reported to the provincial officials, but they refused to listen to us. We really had no choice but to gather the village officials together and discuss what to do. As a result, we presented a petition to Lord Kuse Yamato no kami as he went to the castle in his palanquin, but he refused to accept it. He returned it to us without doing anything at all.

Not the least falsehood is contained in the statements we have offered to your august ears. Since the peasant masses are suffering extreme hardships, we have been forced to overcome our fear of presenting a petition to you directly. Please deign to be compassionate and accept our petition. No matter how severely we six representatives are ordered to be punished, we will not harbor any grudge against you at all. If you would be pleased to save the peasant masses in the villages from the pangs of hunger, from starvation and loss of life, we will be exceedingly grateful for your compassionate mercy.

The twelfth month of 1644

A Verdict on the Crimes of Sōgorō, His Wife, and Children

Officials decide what to do with the other five.

The shōgun did not even deign to glance at the petition presented by Sōgorō. Instead he ordered that it be turned over to Hotta Kōzuke no suke just as it was. In accordance with his wishes, it was passed to Inoue Kawachi no kami, who immediately thereafter, and in the palace itself, gave it to Lord Kōzuke no suke. Lord Kōzuke no suke received it, returned to his mansion, and read it there. Then he summoned the house elder Kojima Shikibu and said:

"The provincial officials have really blundered badly. Recently the peasants crowded in front of the castle gate with an appeal, but their complaints were ignored so now this petition has come to pass. Nothing could be more outrageous. For me to have received

this information within the confines of the palace itself is a disgrace not merely for me but for my family's reputation as well. Nevertheless, I have no choice but to announce that we will remit the excess duties and lower taxes to the levels they were under Doi Toshikatsu.

"Sōgorō was not the only ringleader involved in organizing the peasants," Kōzuke no suke continued, "but he alone pushed himself forward to make this direct appeal, showing that he treats public authority lightly and despises his lord. His conduct is absolutely inexcusable. Out of all those who signed the appeal, he was the one who presented it, making his crime the most serious. For this reason, once the bakufu has transferred him to us, he and his wife will be crucified, and all of his children will be executed. His family must remain extinguished forever. Jūzaemon, Chūzō, Rokurōbei, Saburōbei, and Hanjūrō will be exiled. Their wives and children are to be made their successors."

After he had issued all of his commands, Kojima Shikibu replied respectfully: "Everything you have said makes sense, but I do not understand why Sōgorō's wife and children should be executed for his crime."

"Is it not the law that wives are punished together with their husbands? How could we mitigate his punishment?"

"Nevertheless, young children are not punished for the crimes of their fathers. It would not go well for us at all if it reached other ears that they had been executed as you have suggested. Would you mind thinking this matter over again once more very carefully?" Losing his habitual deference, he boldly spoke his mind, but Kōzuke no suke shook his head.

"No, no, that's not so. They may be young, but since their father has committed a serious crime, that won't help them."

Shikibu found himself forced to go along with what Kōzuke no suke had announced as his decision because he realized that no matter how much he argued, he would not change his lord's mind.

Once the bakufu had handed Sōgorō over, he was sent to Sakura in a basket covered with nets and thrown in prison. There the provincial officials met to pass sentence on him.

Announcement of Sōgorō's Crimes at the Sakura
Government Office

The other five are ordered into exile.

The officials decided that Sōgorō would be crucified on the eleventh day of the second month of 1645, and they disseminated this decision to the villages in writing. Then they summoned the village officials of the 136 villages, plus Sōgorō of Kami Iwabashi, his wife, and children to the Sakura government office. There the house elder Kojima Shikibu, the inspector general Shinagawa Jōzaemon, and the investigator Machino Gennojō all from Edo were joined by the house elder, the inspectors, and magistrates from the domain plus intendants and other officials—forty-five men in all, who issued the following announcement:

"All of you village officials must understand this. We decree that the various excess duties and the land tax will conform to the assessments from the Kan'ei era [1624—43] as you previously requested in your petition."

"Thank you very much," the village officials replied in acknowledgment.

Then Sōgorō, his wife, and children were brought out. "Sōgorō, of all the petitioners from the villages, you alone made light of the shōgun by presenting an appeal directly to him. That is your first crime. Your second is that of slighting and despising your lord. Your third is that of making an appeal en masse directly to the authorities when you disrupted the way of the senior councillor Lord Kuse Yamato no kami with an appeal to him as he was riding in his palanquin. This too is a very serious matter. You are to be punished by crucifixion. Your wife will suffer the same. Your four sons will be decapitated. Your heirs will be disinherited. As for your daughters, well, we don't care what happens to them. Accept this judgment for these are the words relayed to you by your superiors." The date was the ninth day of the second month of 1645.

The verdict handed down to the peasants was as follows:

Kami Iwabashi, village headman	Sōgorō	age 43
wife	San	age 39
heir	Sōbei	age 11

second son	Gennosuke	age 9
third son	Kihachi	age 6
fourth son	Sannosuke	age 3

Sōgorō's daughter Yuki, age 21, is the wife of Jirōzaemon of Kaba village, Hitachi, in the domain of Lord Araki Shima no kami.⁴⁶ His daughter Hatsu, age 16, is the wife of Genba's heir Tōshirō of Ono village, Hitachi, in the domain of Lord Naitō Geki. These two women are to be spared.

Takizawa village	Rokurozaemon
Katsuda village	Jūzaemon
Chiba village	Chūzō
Takazawa village	Saburōbei
Ono village	Hanjūrō

These men acted outrageously in joining with Sōgorō in making a disorderly petition to Lord Kuse, but they were absent when he made his appeal directly to the shōgun.

Therefore their lives are to be spared, but they will be banished, being ordered to keep at least twenty-five miles in all directions from Edo and twenty-five miles in all directions from their homes. The succession to their houses will be conferred on their wives and children. Acknowledge this announcement. It is to be followed to the letter.

The Crucifixion of Sōgorō and His Wife

His sons are also executed.

It soon became known that Sōgorō and his wife and children were to be executed at the Ebara plateau in Shimōsa province on the eleventh day of the second month, 1645. From far and near, people living in the vicinity and in the domain, or even in other domains, lamented their fate, took pity on them, and grieved as though for their own parents or brothers. Crowds gathered at Ebara. They strained on tiptoe to see the final moments while they chanted prayers to the Buddha in a last farewell. That was not all. The officials and peasants from the villages listed in the petition mourned as though they were losing their own fathers or mothers, and they too

came running, their sleeves soaked with tears. The people swarmed to Ebara. The bamboo fence enclosing the execution ground was so weakened by the horde pushing against it that it almost fell down.

Oh misery. Sogorō and his wife were tied to two crosses which were then set upright. To the spectators, this ghastly sight appeared to be worse than the worst hell for criminals. Unable to bear looking at it, the people who had gathered there shut their eyes and shed many tears. They tried to chant prayers to Buddha, but they choked with tears as they repeated the stanzas, moving them to feel even greater pity.

At midmorning the four children tied with ropes were seated upon coarse mats of straw placed before their parents' eyes. Seeing this the multitude suddenly understood how the parents felt. They drenched their sleeves with tears as though their hearts would burst. The officials within the enclosure seated themselves on campstools and glared in all directions to restrain the crowd. The executioner advanced to the fore. Guards pulled out the eldest son, Sōbei, tied in rough ropes.

"You are a mere youth, but in accordance with the law, you are to be executed for the crimes of your father." In an instant, Sōbei's slender neck was severed from his body. Seeing this as they hung on their crosses, his parents changed color. Their eyes filled with blood. They ground their teeth in rage. Large teardrops of blood fell like the rain blown by the wind splashing against a rock. The spectators gasped. The terror and the pity of this painful spectacle were beyond description.

Next the second son, Gennosuke, was cruelly dragged out. The innocent nine-year-old said: "I have such a boil on my left shoulder that I request you to cut from the right." Even the heartless executioner appeared to hesitate slightly. The officials assembled there to witness the execution found themselves choked with tears and forced to cough. Trying not to enter into the parents' feelings, the executioner summoned his courage. With a flourish of his sword, Gennosuke's head fell forward.

His mother opened her eyes wide. "How cruel is this punishment. What crimes have my children committed to deserve it? Will their deaths be avenged?" To see her turning up the whites of her eyes, her hair standing on end, was a frightening sight, yet pathetic and pitiful as well.

Out of sympathy for the parents, the executioner hastily pulled

out the third son, set him down, and cut off his head with his naked sword.

The fourth son, Sannosuke, saw some candy wrapped in paper that had been thrown into the enclosure from outside. Being a mere babe of three, he did not know he was about to die, so he stretched out his hand to take it. He had just about put it in his mouth when his head left his body. What his parents felt was indescribable. The spectators were overwhelmed with grief. Their eyes swelled with weeping.

The resident priest from Tōkō-ji in Kami Iwabashi came forward to claim the children's bodies. He put them in coffins, covered them with clothing, and took them back to the temple.

A comment: It was fine for the priest from Tōkō-ji to appear at this juncture and accept the children's remains, but it would have been even better had he busied himself before the children were killed, so as not to have had to have taken care of them. As a priest he could have written a petition stating that no matter how serious the crimes of the father, such young children would have had no knowledge of them. Why couldn't he have taken the responsibility of making an entreaty before they were to be executed? Although the lord naturally felt angry at the humiliation suffered by his family's reputation in the shōgun's own palace because Sogorō's direct appeal, a crime which showed disrespect for his superiors, reached the ears of his fellow officials, had the priest begged him forcibly enough, might he not have shown clemency to the children? Even if he did not receive a pardon, for someone who has decided on a life of celibacy not to petition at all does not become a priest. Besides it was not as though his temple was in another domain or anything. "What is the purpose of priests putting on dyed robes and rolling the Buddha's name around in their mouths?" people muttered to each other.

Sogorō was a mere layperson, but for the sake of the peasants he took a crime upon himself, even though he could not have foreseen that he would see his wife and children executed before his eyes and depart this life ahead of him. Why didn't the priest sympathize with him? There are lots of priests in the important temples of the Sakura domain besides the one from Tōkō-ji, but they value their lives, keep their mouths shut from one year to the next, and it is asking too much of them to turn to the Buddha even when they are sick. How these bonzes stink of meat!

Opening his eyes wide, Sōgorō cried bitterly, "Should this kind of cruel punishment have been visited upon us? My resentment has increased beyond measure. How can it ever be dispelled?" He ground his teeth in unbridled rage and showed the whites of his eyes—a truly frightful sight. Seeing him do this, one of Danzaemon's⁴⁷ servants, Shigaemon, lowered the point of his spear and prepared to run him through.

His wife O-San raised her voice: "Wait a minute. My dear husband Sōgorō, we must now agree on what to do hereafter. My body may be left to hang on this cross, but my resolve is unshakable. Even if I am reborn five hundred years hence, I will still seek retribution for the resentment I feel now. No matter how many times I live and die, my wrath will never be dispelled. I will not take advantage of the Buddha's pledge to get myself into paradise.⁴⁸ My body has been hanged on this tree for the sake of all people, and I do not have an evil heart, but my wrath will become demons and devils. I warn you that I will kill to avenge my children. Aah, was that a kind punishment?" She rolled her eyes in a frenzy. Her disheveled hair flew out wildly. What a frightening promise of revenge.

Sōgorō heard her, spread his lips, and laughed loudly. "Well spoken. You are a woman, but the words you have just expressed are those that any superior being would be proud to utter. I agree with you completely. Our bodies are no longer of any use in this world, but our wrath will live on. Go ahead, strike."

As he spoke, Shigaemon brandished his spear and whittled to the right. "Ugh," he grunted, thrusting deep into Sōgorō's armpit. Blood spurted like a waterfall. Shigaemon pulled out his spear, wiped off the blood, turned around facing to the left of the woman in front of him, and pierced her in the side so as to hit all of her vital organs. Her breath rushed out like a flame before the startled eyes of the spectators.

"Aah, what a fine feeling," Sōgorō sneered. "Before three years have passed, heaven will punish Kōzuke no suke without his realizing it. Hurry up, strike my left side," he said impatiently. The spear point pierced him through to his right.

Then O-San opened her eyes and shouted loudly enough to be heard beyond the bamboo fence. "Farewell everyone. This is our last meeting." As she spoke, Shigaemon thrust deep into her right side and pierced her through to the left.

Sōgorō also opened his eyes. "I bid farewell to everyone who

was kind enough to come here today." Having said their good-byes, the couple closed their eyes and took their last breaths as though they were falling asleep.

The assembled multitude chanted prayers to Buddha through their tears. Their voices ceaselessly proclaimed the evanescence of this life.

On the same day, the domainial officials summoned the village officials of Kami Iwabashi to give them orders saying that since Sōgorō was to have no successor, his paddies, fields, and house were to be sold at auction. His personal belongings were to be given to his married daughters to do with as they pleased, and the villagers were not to steal any of them. Jirōzaemon had requested that the two forest plots be donated to Tōkō-ji, Sōgorō's family temple, and so it would be done.

After that, an investigation was made into accusations of negligence on the part of officials in the Edo mansion and in the domain itself. As a result, over twenty men in Edo and Sakura were exiled, sent to distant islands, or dispossessed. Lucky to have escaped with their lives, the officials left Edo and Sakura, each going his own way.

The Death of Kōzuke no Suke's Consort

At the Edo mansion, Sōgorō and his wife transform themselves into monsters.

Just at that time, Lord Hotta Kōzuke no suke's consort was pregnant. In the course of her pregnancy, she took slightly ill, a condition that gradually became more serious. When it began to look as though her condition were hopeless, prayers were naturally offered in various temples and famous doctors did their best, but to no avail.

Once in the dead of night toward the end of the seventh month, the consort's birth chamber suddenly became brilliantly lit. The shrieks of a man and woman could be heard coming out of nowhere. It was indescribably dreadful. Everyone from the maids-in-waiting down to the servants tumbled about in surprise and confusion, as frightened as though a nameless criminal from hell had appeared.

On some nights a ball of fire came rolling out. Shaped like a monkey, it circled the consort with a ring of flames. The maids who

worked in the women's quarters screamed in fear and surprise when they saw it.

At the beginning of the eleventh month, a man and a woman of frightening aspect, all covered with blood, entered the room, and they tried to pull the tormented consort away with them. This happened every night, making her illness worse and worse. She was much to be pitied. Despite the attempts in the middle of the eleventh month to drive the angry spirits away, they refused to leave.

Sogorō and his wife appeared in Lord Kōzuke no suke's palace with spears sticking out of their sides. Looking like they had when they were still alive, they had ghastly pale faces, their eyes glittered like mirrors, and their disheveled hair stood wildly on end. Their angry shouts rolled like thunder.

"Aah, how regrettable, how mortifying. Now, especially, we cannot dispel the memory of how cruelly we were punished." They roamed wildly around the palace, now flying through the air, now shouting, now laughing.

Seeing the angry spirits of this couple was enough to make one's hair stand straight out. The warriors on guard duty trembled; their courage deserted them. Many who saw the apparitions fainted. No one could look them straight in the face.

Then the angry spirits caught sight of Lord Kōzuke no suke. "Ah ha, it was the cruel punishment performed by your administration that aroused our resentment." They flew about, glaring at him with the whites of their eyes.

Lord Kōzuke no suke was a brave man. Without showing the slightest hesitation, he pulled his sword from beneath a pillow and slashed with both hands. Overawed by this display of force, the apparitions instantly vanished in surprise, only to reappear behind him.

In quavering yet penetrating tones they cried, "What sufferings we endure. Can our anger be dispelled so easily?" Their shrieks pierced Kōzuke no suke to the core.

These things happened every night. Then the angry spirits of a man and wife with spears sticking out of their sides began to show themselves even at midday. Regardless of whether it was day or night, they screamed and flew madly about.

Thereafter high-ranking priests in the domain and neighboring provinces were ordered to rotate recitations of the great and secret Buddhist laws that subdue and disperse demons. The mountain

shamans made strenuous and wholehearted efforts in offering their prayers. Lord Kōzuke no suke himself burned incense on a table set up in the great hall and intoned the *Daihannya sutra*. Nevertheless, the couple's angry spirits continued to haunt the palace. The retainers went fearfully about their duties. They guarded their master, wondering what sort of monster or enemy would next appear.

With the passage of that year, the era name was changed to Keian [1648–51]. The angry spirits of Sogorō and his wife caused more and more trouble. Weird events continued to happen. The Hotta family suffered a number of calamities, its misfortunes increased, and turmoil erupted frequently. The retainers felt as if they were treading on thin ice, but they could do nothing except wait in breathless suspense for the next disaster.

A Quarrel in the Palace

Lord Hotta barricades himself at Sakura Castle.

On the eleventh day of the tenth month, 1649, all of the lords proceeded to the shōgun's palace as they did every year for the Gencho rites, a ceremony at which rice cakes made from new grain were eaten in thanksgiving for the harvest. Those who participated wore formal dress and trailed their long pants after them, a splendid sight like the twinkling of stars, showing that this system of government will last forever.

On that day, however, because of some trifling reason or perhaps because of a grudge, Lord Hotta Kōzuke no suke and Lord Sakai Iwami no kami quarreled in the very palace itself. Lord Sakai was forty-three. Lord Hotta, a senior councillor, showed not the slightest deference to his surroundings, but drew the sword he carried at his side and slashed at Lord Sakai. The uproar in the palace was tremendous. Lord Sakai died of his wounds the next day. He had been lord of Matsuyama in Dewa, a domain with an estimated yield of twenty thousand *koku*.⁴⁹

This incident caused tremendous strife between the two families, but what happened is omitted here because it would take too long to describe.

At six in the evening of that same day, Lord Kōzuke no suke took advantage of the confusion reigning in the palace to creep stealthily through the disordered hall. Still dismounted, he pushed

through the retainers encamped outside to return to his own home. With his own hands, he took out the horse named Harasumi, leaped nimbly on its back, and clapped the stirrups against its sides without waiting for any attendants. Seated in the saddle, he raced down Senju Avenue.

His retainers, who were still on foot, were amazed at what he had done. "How rash of him; our master has really done it now. We can do nothing here, so let's go back to the mansion and report on the crisis that has overtaken him."

The more sagacious of Hotta's brave warriors tried to prevent their fellows from jumping on their horses to follow their master and cut their way into the Sakai mansion. In the midst of all the confusion which reigned high and low, they finally managed to get everyone to dismount once more.

Lord Kōzuke no suke whipped up his horse and rode at break-neck speed for Sakura in Shimōsa. In just three hours, he covered the distance of over thirty miles. Riding up to the city gate of the castle, he shouted: "Hurry up, open the gate."

The foot soldiers on watch were amazed. "Who are you to come riding up to our gate and treat us so rudely?" they complained. "If you have business with us, come here and be polite about it."

"No, no. I am the lord of this castle, Kōzuke no suke. Open up, I tell you."

"Would the lord of this castle ever come riding up here all alone in the middle of the night? Do you have any idea how ridiculous you sound?" Grumbling, they refused to open the gate. Then they took a closer look and realized that they had before them a guest of noble appearance. Thinking uneasily that something funny must be going on, they reported everything that had happened to the house elder, Ruchiwatari Shukei. Shukei had no idea of what was happening either, but there was something about the situation that perturbed him. He got up immediately and peered through an opening in the peephole.

"Goodness gracious, it is undoubtedly our Lord Kōzuke no suke." Turning quickly, he gave orders to the guards to open the castle gate part way, then he sank to his knees. Lord Kōzuke no suke deigned to look down on him from his horse.

Shukei lifted his face. "Your unexpected arrival here on horseback all alone in the middle of the night is most surprising. There

must be some good reason for this, but in the meantime, please don't hesitate to come on inside. Your attendants will be delighted to see you."

Accompanied by the warriors on guard duty and some foot soldiers, Kōzuke no suke paraded directly into the main enclosure. Suddenly there was a tremendous commotion among the retainers as they realized, each and every one of them, that something extraordinary had happened. Not yet having heard one word from their master concerning what was going on, they merely stared mutely at one another, wringing their hands in consternation.

The Death of Lord Sakai Iwami no Kami

Lord Kōzuke no suke fortifies himself in Sakura castle. It is decided to send a punitive force against him.

Rumors flew thick and fast that there had been a quarrel in the shōgun's palace in which Lord Iwami no kami. In the end no medical treatment had proved effective, and he had passed away. Furthermore, Lord Kōzuke no suke had gone immediately to shut himself up in his castle of Sakura. No one knew what his intentions were. In the great hall of the shōgun's palace, the officials, the lords both great and small, and even the shōgun's relatives and brothers all held their separate councils on what to do. Everyone agreed in their reports to the shōgun that since Kōzuke no suke had unmistakably committed treason, they would have to raise an army and send a punitive force against him.

Mizuno Settsu no kami and Gotō Yamato no kami were Kōzuke no suke's close relatives. They appeared before the shōgun and pleaded earnestly, "Please order the two of us to lead the punitive force against Kōzuke no suke."

Having received their orders to lead the punitive force, the two men left that very day. By nightfall they had reached the Usui post station. From there they sent a messenger to Lord Kōzuke no suke in his castle at Sakura, telling him the following:

"Recently you wounded Sakai Iwami no kami in the shōgun's palace, then, without receiving permission from the shōgun, you secretly sneaked out of the palace and fortified yourself in your own castle. These are the deeds of a traitor. Words cannot express how

criminally you have behaved. Therefore the government has ordered that an army be sent against you. Just because the two of us are your close relatives, we have been forced to go so far as to ask for command of the punitive forces. If it becomes necessary, we will attack you to wipe out our family's dishonor in the heat of battle."

At the same time they secretly sent a private message to the house elder urging that the lord commit suicide.

Back in Edo, the debate continued over what to do. The officials all wondered what was going on while they waited impatiently for news from Sakura. Doubts arose over whether Mizuno and Gotō would remain loyal to the shōgun. Finally orders were issued to the lords to ready their own troops for the attack on Sakura. Lord Ogasawara Iki no kami, worth fifty thousand *kokū*, and Lord Nagai Hida no kami, worth fifteen thousand *kokū*, were put in charge of this force. They departed for Sakura in Shimōsa with orders given them in the shōgun's palace to take the castle and to report immediately if a rebellion was imminent. That these two men had to make such preparations demonstrated a true state of emergency.

At noon on the fourteenth day of the tenth month, a fast courier arrived with news from Sakura in Shimōsa. He reported the following:

"We have carefully evaluated Hotta Kōzuke no suke's recent illness, and we have concluded that he was insane. Having been treated with a variety of remedies, he has returned to his senses. For the first time, he realizes how badly he behaved in this affair. Now he is seriously concerned, and he admits his mistakes. We have placed him under arrest while we await further instructions."

This message was sent from Mizuno and Gotō to the senior councillors, who immediately passed it along to the shōgun. As a result, conditions in Edo quieted down.

The shōgun issued an order that Lord Kōzuke no suke be tied up in fishnets and carried back to the capital in an enclosed palanquin under strict guard, accompanied by Gotō Yamato no kami's troops. There he was transferred for safekeeping to Akimoto Tajima no kami until the entire affair had been settled. Having been ordered to make sure that all of the Hotta retainers dispersed peacefully, Mizuno Setsu no kami stayed behind in Sakura for a little while.

On the fifteenth, an announcement came from Edo. "Setsu no kami is to protect the castle while the retainers of Kōzuke no suke, who should now be dispersing, evacuate it as soon as possible.

Whoever ultimately takes charge of the castle will be announced at a later date."

With this strict order from the shōgun in hand, Mizuno Setsu no kami summoned the chief officials among the retainers to explain it to them. Then he instructed them to evacuate the castle at once. In return they presented him with a pledge of compliance. The retainers suddenly found themselves scattering in whatever direction they pleased, pulling along their old and young, women and children. The sick hobbled on sticks or had to be carried in litters. How pitiful to see their tears as they left the castle! The Edo mansion was also vacated on the same day, leaving it looking like a fire had hit it.

How fortunate that the government had such supreme authority that the lords had their troops guard against emergencies by patrolling the streets during these troubled times. When Lord Kōzuke no suke became the head of the Hotta family, a family which had endured for generations, the retainers behaved selfishly, causing the peasants of the realm great suffering, but then to have punished Sōgorō so cruelly! Aah, was it perhaps decreed by fate? What injustice for a punishment that should have been visited on Sōgorō alone to have fallen even on his wife and children.

The retainers lamented their grievous error that had polluted the family reputations bequeathed to them by their ancestors. Even if the lord had not acted as a lord should, if the retainers had acted loyally in serving him,⁵⁰ this disaster would not have befallen them. But when the lord acts not as a lord and the retainers act not as retainers, then there is nothing more to be said. What a pity that had Kojima Shikibu but thrown away his life in remonstrating with his lord, the Hotta family would not have become extinct.

Summons for the Two Families to Appear at Court

On the twentieth day of the fourth month of 1651, the shōgun Iemitsu set off on his journey for the next world at the age of forty-eight. He was given the posthumous name of Daiyū-in. Imposing Buddhist services were held for the dead. A general amnesty was granted. Descendants of Sakai Iwami no kami, whose family name had previously been made extinct, were summoned to the palace and given back their old twenty thousand *kokū* domain of Mat-

suyama in the province of Dewa, just as they had held it before. At the same time Kōzuke no suke's uncle succeeded to appear at court, where they were given a domain of eighty thousand *kōku* attached to Usunomiya castle in Shimotsuke. Kōzuke no suke was ordered to retire so that his heir, known as Chikuzen no kami, could become the head of the family.

The Worship of Sōgorō's Spirit as the God of a Shrine

The leagues of villages whose petition was responsible for the extinction of the Hotta family are as follows:

Shimōsa province	Sōba district	39 villages
Shimōsa province	Chiba district	77 villages
Shimōsa province	Inba district	87 villages
Kazusa province	Musha district	7 villages

Sōgorō's great merit for future generations was that in having sacrificed his own life in making an appeal for the sake of peasants in over two hundred villages, he had forced the government to remit the high taxes and excess duties. In order to repay their tremendous debt of gratitude, the peasants wanted to worship him as the deity of a shrine and they so petitioned the Hotta family, thinking the occasion auspicious since the family was happy at having Kōzuke no suke's crimes forgiven. Nevertheless, Chikuzen no kami replied that since his castle was at Usunomiya, it would not do for him to meddle in Sakura affairs, and the peasants would have to wait a while longer. Though it was against their will, the peasants refrained from doing anything. Then when Lord Doi Shōshō⁵¹ exchanged domains with Hotta Chikuzen no kami in Usunomiya, they petitioned again.

Now the peasants respect him as the god of their shrine, and they worship him as the Great August Deity Sōgo. Truly he left a great name for posterity. His body was left to hang on a cross, but his fame as a magnificent hero will shine for a thousand years. To express their devotion, everyone makes their way to the shrine, where he fulfills all their long-cherished desires. His special forte is public lawsuits wherein by distinguishing right from wrong according to morality and faith, he easily demonstrates the unreason of wrong

and the strength of right. The miracles and remarkable happenings attributed to his divine spirit are utterly innumerable.

This incident shows that when a house has disloyal retainers, they inevitably torment the peasants. Once the peasants are driven into poverty, the lord's family will become extinct. Many examples of this may be found in other countries as well as in Japan. Truly if you are a warrior, you ought to leave behind a glorious reputation because your name is written down in the records for all posterity. But if you are a peasant, even if you sacrifice your life to rescue the domain and the people from their afflictions, no one is likely to eulogize your long journey. For that reason, this true account has been prepared without any fictional embellishments being added. Even today, everyone knows of the homage paid to the Great August Deity Sōgo.

The End