THE BUNRAKU HANDBOOK

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A Comprehensive Guide to Japan's Unique Puppet Theatre
With Synopses of All Popular Plays

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take the courtesan into his home after expelling Omatsum's Mother takes exception and angrily enters an inner room.

Omatsum visits the house, accompanied by Chubei, a clerk and several servants. When her retinue has gone, Eizaburo asks Omatsum to sell herself in order to compensate for the damage caused to the brothel owner by the disappearance of Aegami with Sukeroku.

Omatsum agrees but before she is taken to the brothel, Sukeroku's father, Sukeyemon, visits the house to tell Eizaburo that he has already bought the freedom of Aegami making it unnecessary for Omatsum to sacrifice herself.

Soon after Sukeyemon's departure, Denkuro, a wicked clerk formerly in the employ of Sukeyemon, comes to the front of the house, planning to abduct Omatsum in conspiracy with Gompachi. Gompachi falsely tells Omatsum that Sukeroku has come to see her. He takes her outside the house to let her meet Denkuro, who is pretending to be Sukeroku in the dark. Omatsum soon discovers his identity, however. Eizaburo and his mother interfere and foil his attempt.

**KANADEHON CHUSHINGURA**
(The League of the 47 Ronin)

"Kanadehon Chushingura," one of the most famous classical plays, is unparalleled in gorgeousness and scale. It was first staged at the Takemotoza Theatre on August 14, 1748.

Written by Izumo Takeda, proprietor of the Takemotoza, with Shoraku Miyoshi and Senryu Namiki as his assistants, the play deals with the famous vendetta of the 47 ronin of Ako, which took place in 1701. The playwrights, however, used fictitious names for the persons involved in the incident and moved the time of the incident back to the Ashikaga Era, a few centuries prior to the actual occurrence.

The real names of some of the principal characters were: Kuranosuke Oishi (Yuranosuke Ooshi in the play), Kozukenosuke Kira (Moronao), Takuminokami Asano (Hangan,

Enya, Muratoyo Date (Wakasanosuke Momonoi), Sampei Kayano (Kampei Hayano), Kurobei Ono (Kudayu Ono), Kichemon Terasaka (Heiemon Teraoka).

In order to understand the motive which animates the main plot of this play it is important to remember that although private revenge for wrongs suffered was forbidden most strictly by law it was demanded of all men of honor by a custom as strict as the law which denied it. Duelling in Europe offers a contemporary parallel.

In some circumstances it was possible to secure official approval of private revenge but one of the laws governing such actions was that which demanded that the avenger give plain notice to the chosen victim of his intent. In this case, since such notice would have rendered all their plans abortive from the start, the ronin deliberately forfeited all hope of justifying their action by law in order that their revenge might be effective.

**Characters**

Bannai, a retainer of Moronao
Gihei, a forwarding agent
Goemon, a retainer of Hangan
Hangan, a feudal lord
Heiemon, a retainer of Hangan
Honzo, chief retainer of Wakasanosuke
Jirozaemon, a retainer of the Shogun
Jutaro, a retainer of Hangan
Kampei, a retainer of Hangan
Kaoyo, Hangan's wife
Konami, Honzo's daughter
Kudayu, a retainer of Hangan
Moronao, Governor of Kamakura
Oishi, Yuranosuke's wife
Okaru, a maid servant to Hangan (Kampei's wife in later scenes)
Rikiya, Yuranosuke's son
Sadakuro, a retainer of Hangan
Sutbei, proprietor of the Ichimonjiya tea house
Tadayoshi, younger brother of Shogun Takauji Ashikaga
Hangen's message to Wakasanosuke concerning the time of their visit to the palace the next day. On this occasion Rikiya meets his fiancée Konami, daughter of Honzo Kakogawa, chief retainer of Wakasanosuke. Although Rikiya and Konami are abashed at this confrontation Rikiya manages to deliver his message but then both become dumb with shyness until Wakasanosuke enters and Rikiya leaves.

Kakogawa Honzo Matsukiri
(The Cutting of the Pine Branch)

Angry with Moronao for his insult, Wakasanosuke decides to kill him. When he reveals his intention to his chief retainer Honzo, Honzo applauds his decision. To convince his master that he approves, he draws his sword and hacks a branch from a small potted pine tree. He offers the branch on his fan to Wakasanosuke as a symbol that Wakasanosuke should so deal with his enemy.

Secretly, however, he fears for his master's safety and so devises a plan to save him from his own rashness. When Wakasanosuke retires to an inner room, Honzo orders his men to collect together some of his most precious things and to carry them as a present to Moronao's mansion. He then mounts his horse and leaves the house in haste.

Gehasaki Shimomatsu
(The Bribery of Moronao)

Next morning before daybreak Moronao arrives in a palanquin at the front gate of the Ashikaga palace. Honzo, who has been waiting for his arrival, meets him outside the gate and offers him in Wakasanosuke's name a handsome bribe. Moronao gladly accepts it and enters the palace, accompanied by Honzo.

Koshimoto Okaru Fumitsukai
(Okaru Delivers the Letter Case)

Hangen then enters the palace, accompanied by Kampei Hayano, one of his retainers. Soon afterward Okaru, one of Hangen's maid servants, arrives at the gate. Seeing her from
within the palace, Kampei comes out. Okaru, who has been asked by Kaoyo to deliver: to Hangan a letter containing a poem by her addressed to Moronao, asks Kampei to hand the case to Hangan. After delivering the case to Hangan, Kampei, who is in love with Okaru, again comes out to meet her.

**Denchu Ninjo**  
(The Attack in the Palace)

In a corridor of the Ashikaga palace Wakasanosuke waits for the arrival of the arrogant Moronao, fully prepared to attack him. But when Moronao comes, Wakasanosuke finds to his surprise that Moronao is very humble—a result of the bribe Honzo has secretly given him. Deprived by Moronao's attitude from exacting revenge, Wakasanosuke treats him with the coldest civility and leaves.

Moronao is furious with the contempt which his arrogant abject behavior has inspired and when the quietly behaved Hangan arrives he berates Hangan for his lateness. Hangan apologizes and hands to Moronao his wife's poem in the letter case. The poem reveals her refusal to countenance Moronao's amorous approach. Moronao is so enraged that he slams Hangan as a worthless samurai. At first puzzled at the unprovoked abuse, Hangan is spurred to fury by insults on his wife's name and, blind to the consequence of his act, he draws his sword to attack Moronao. Honzo and others rush to the scene and hold back the struggling Hangan in order to rescue Moronao whose face has been slightly cut by Hangan.

**Uramon**  
(The Rear Gate)

Noticing a great confusion about the palace, Kampei, who has been secretly meeting Okaru outside the palace, rushes to its back gate and asks for permission to enter. He is peremptorily told from inside that his master has already left the palace, having been ordered by the Shogun to confine himself to his home.

Kampei wishes to kill himself by way of apology for his neglect of duty but is dissuaded by Okaru, who begs him to come with her back to her distant home. Kampei reluctantly agrees but before they can leave he hears his name called. This is only a trick, however, by Bannai, Moronao's retainer, who wishes to make Okaru his own. When Kampei goes away to meet the caller, Bannai appears and woos Okaru. Okaru repulses him and Kampei, returning, forces Bannai to flee.

**Hanakago**  
(The Flower Basket)

In Hangan's mansion where Hangan is ordered confined pending an announcement of the Shogunate's judgement on the case of Hangan's attack on Moronao in the Shogunate palace, Kaoyo, Hangan’s wife, arranges flowers in a basket in order to cheer her husband. Beside her is her son Rikiya watching her flower arrangement.

Hangan's retainers Goemon Hara and Kudayu Ono visit the mansion. Goemon says he expects a sentence favorable to Hangan, but Kudayu is quite pessimistic, saying Hangan will probably be either exiled or put to death.

**Hangan Seppuku**  
(The Suicide of Hangan)

The messengers from the Shogun, Umanojo Ishido and Jirozaemon Yakishii, come to Hangan's house of confinement to inform him that he has been deprived of his fief and ordered to commit seppuku as a punishment for attacking a superior within the palace. Hangan patiently waits for his devoted chief retainer, Yuranosuke, to arrive but Yuranosuke is delayed and arrives only after Hangan has stabbed himself. The dying Hangan hands Yuranosuke the dagger with which he has stabbed himself in the hope that Yuranosuke will complete his unfinished action and kill the wicked Moronao.

**Kasumigaseki**  
(Yuranosuke Vows Revenge)

All alone at the back gate after Hangan's remains have left the house for the Komyoji Temple, Yuranosuke takes out the bloodstained dagger he has received from Hangan. Look-
ing at it in tears, he makes up his mind faithfully to carry through his master’s wish. The joruri chanting in this passage is a particularly noble piece.

Yamazaki Kaido
(The Yamazaki Highway)

Kampei has become a hunter and lives with Okaru at his parents’ house at Yamazaki halfway between Osaka and Kyoto. (The house, or rather the part of it which includes the room where Kampei, who in real life was Sampei Kajita, actually committed suicide, still exists in an old village street not far from Ishibashi on the Takarazuka line of the Hankyu Electric Railways).

One night in the woods he meets Yagoro, one of his former fellow retainers. Despite his remissness at the time of his lord’s need Kampei begs permission to join the league of Hangan’s former retainers who have pledged to avenge the lord’s death. Yagoro refuses him indirectly, not trusting him fully, but indicates that money might be welcome in order “to build a monument to our lord.”

Futatsudama
(The Shooting in the Dark)

Wishing to raise money to help Kampei join the vendetta league, Yoichibe, Okaru’s father, goes to Kyoto without Kampei’s knowledge to make a contract to sell Okaru to Ichimonjiya tea house at Gion. Receiving 50 ryo as earnest money, he leaves Kyoto at night on his way home. (The curtain rises on the lonely Yamazaki Highway along which Yoichibe hurries his way home).

Yoichibe is overtaken on the dark Yamazaki Highway by Sadakuro, a former retainer of Hangan’s, who refused to sit with the loyal retainers. Sadakuro robs Yoichibe of his money and kills him with a sword. No sooner has Sadakuro pushed the body of Yoichibe into a bush than he is accidentally shot dead with a gun by a man who takes his movements in the dark for those of a wild boar.

The man, who is Kampei, enters, seeking the animal he thinks he has killed but finds instead the body of Sadakuro. It is too dark for him to see his victim’s face but he is deeply shocked to find that he has killed a man. In feeling whether there is life left in the body he finds the money so recently stolen from Yoichibe. Thinking of the sum demanded of him by the other retainers as a subscription to the memorial to their dead lord, Kampei is overwhelmed by temptation, packs the money and hastens from the scene.

Miuri
(The Selling of Okaru)

At Yoichibe’s home Okaru and her mother are anxiously waiting for the return of Yoichibe who is long overdue. Saibei, proprietor of the Ichimonjiya tea house, arrives with a palanquin to take Okaru away. Presently Kampei comes back, having already made his contribution to the memorial fund with the money he found on the body of the man he shot. Informed of Yoichibe’s deal with Saibei, he reluctantly and sadly agrees to let Okaru go to Kyoto. As Saibei is leaving with Okaru he refers to the money he has already paid Yoichibe and describes the purse which held the money. To his horror Kampei recognizes this as a description of the purse he took from the man he shot, whose face he never saw.

Kampei Seppuku
(Kampei’s Suicide)

Not long after Okaru’s departure, villagers bring the body of Yoichibe to his house. Kampei, remembering the purse he took from the man he accidentally killed, believes that he has murdered his own father-in-law. Yoichibe’s wife, seeing Kampei’s distress, realizes something is wrong and, in a moment of intuition, snatches from the breast of Kampei’s kimono the purse which had held the money he found and which she immediately recognizes from Saibei’s description. Distraught with grief, she beats the unresisting Kampei.

Two loyal retainers, Yagoro and Goemon, through whom Kampei has made the contribution, visit the house and tell Kampei that Yuranosuke, who is still angry about Kampei’s
neglect of duty for love, has refused the money. Despairing at the thought that the imagined murder and the sacrifice of Okaru have all been in vain, Kampei suddenly commits seppuku as the only way of redeeming his honor.

Yagoro, inspecting Yoichibei's body, finds that he has been killed not with a gun but with a sword. Kampei has killed not Yoichibei but his murderer. Deeply moved by Kampei's suicide, Yagoro and Goemon agree to admit Kampei as a member of the vendetta league and they let him seal the vendetta document with his blood as he dies in their arms.

Gion Ichiriki Chaya
(The Ichiriki Tea House in Gion)

Knowing full well that the retainers of the dead Hangan, if they observe the code which should bind all loyal servants will seek revenge, Moronao has placed spies to report on every move they make. If Yuranosuke is to succeed with his plan of revenge he must persuade the spies by his behavior that he and his followers are too lost to a sense of honor to be a danger. Yuranosuke therefore ostentatiously frequents the pleasure quarters of Kyoto and particularly the Ichiriki tea house in Gion.

On the night of a lavish party which Yuranosuke is giving at this tea house Kudayu (formerly one of Hangan's retainers who has now deserted to join Moronao) and another Moronao man, Bannai, enter to spy on Yuranosuke. When they leave, some of Hangan's former retainers, including Heiemon (Okaru's elder brother), enter, anxious to see Yuranosuke and impatient to learn how the plans for revenge are going. To their disgust, Yuranosuke enters, staggering, to play Blind Man's Buff with a party of giggling maids. When they can get him alone for a moment, Yuranosuke, still acting his role of drunken dissipation, pretends that the idea of revenge is too dangerous and that he has abandoned all such plans. He pretends to fall asleep and the disgusted retainers would kill him but for the intervention of Heiemon who says that for the once noble Yuranosuke to behave in this appallingly shameless fashion is proof that the shock of Lord Hangan's death has unhinged his mind to the extent that he no longer knows properly what he is about. They go out together, leaving Yuranosuke lying on the matted floor.

Rikiya, Yuranosuke's son, calls at the tea house and from the garden gate sees his father asleep. To wake him he slips his sword home in its sheath and the clink of metal wakes Yuranosuke immediately. He joins his son, both of them watchful for spies. Rikiya hands him a letter from Lady Kaoyo (Hangan's widow) giving details of Moronao's movements and then returns home at his father's order.

The turncoat, Kudayu, returns in time to see part of the meeting of father and son, but though suspicious he cannot trap Yuranosuke into any incriminating disclosure. Kudayu drinks sake with Yuranosuke and, picking out a piece of octopus meat from a dish on the table, offers it to him. Yuranosuke is about to take it when Kudayu pretends to recollect that the day is the eve of the first anniversary of Hangan's death—a time when a man of any honor at all would be abstaining from all animal flesh in memory of his dead lord. Yuranosuke pretends to be completely unaffected by the idea and eats the octopus meat with visible relish. Apparently still tipsy, he staggers off and Bannai, seeing him go, joins Kudayu to find out if he has learned anything. When Bannai hears of Yuranosuke's shameless behavior even when reminded that the time is one when at least a token gesture of respect is called for he agrees with Kudayu that there can be no danger to their lord, Moronao, from that quarter. Yuranosuke's impotence is apparently confirmed when in Yuranosuke's absence the two spies discover that his sword which he has left in the room has the blade rusted in its sheath.

Bannai goes away contented but a faint suspicion still lingers in Kudayu's mind, for he finds it difficult to reconcile the dissipated figure Yuranosuke now shows the world with the noble figure he presented when they were both in service to Hangan. Kudayu therefore hides under the verandah of the room to await Yuranosuke's return.

A beautiful courtesan, elaborately dressed, appears at the window of an upper room. She is Kampei's wife (and Hei-
mon’s sister) Okaru who has been called in to entertain guests at the Ichiriki tea house. Yuranosuke comes in to look for his sword and to read the letter which Rikiya had brought him. Standing on the verandah (above the hidden Kudayu) he reads the letter, thinking himself unobserved. As he unrolls the long scroll which Lady Kaoyo has written him Okaru, inquisitively, leans from her window to read it as well. Seen from the angle at which Yuranosuke is standing she can see the characters in reverse as the light shines through the paper, Okaru uses a hand mirror to read the reversed writing. At the same time, since the unrolled letter hangs lower and lower over the verandah, Kudayu lurking below it can begin to read it as well.

A decorated pin drops from Okaru’s hair and Yuranosuke, startled, hastily rolls up the letter—so hastily that the part which Kudayu was holding to read is torn off. Yuranosuke, noting the torn end, is shaken to realize that two people know something of the letter beside himself but, controlling himself, calls to the girl to come down and join him.

To Okaru’s great surprise Yuranosuke tells her that he will pay for her release from the house to which she has sold herself and that in three days she will be free. She is even more surprised when he tells her that if there is someone whom she really loves he will let her go to her lover and she need feel no obligation to him at all. Yuranosuke tells her to wait while he settles the business straight away and goes.

Heimon enters and tells his sister that he has learned of her presence in Kyoto from their mother. Okaru excitedly tells him that Yuranosuke has promised to free her and that she will be able to return to her husband, Kampei. Heimon asks if Yuranosuke knows that she is Kampei’s wife but Okaru says she believes he is ignorant of her identity. Heimon says that if Yuranosuke is buying a girl unknown to him out of bondage then it must be for his own indulgence whatever may say about releasing her and this is one more proof that he has no intention of redeeming his honor by avenging his dead lord.

Okaru, to refute this injustice to one to whom she is indebted, reveals to Heimon something of that which she read in the letter as proof that Yuranosuke is really noble and disinterested. No sooner has Heimon realized to his joy that the honor of Hangan’s retainers is to be redeemed under Yuranosuke after all than he knows his sister to be now in a position to compromise the whole affair. Drawing his sword he slashes at Okaru who, terrified, tries to run away. She cannot understand his sudden anger and when she protests that all she wants is to return to her family, Heimon tells her of the death of her father and the suicide of her husband, and poor Okaru faints with the shock.

When Okaru recovers consciousness her brother tells her that Yuranosuke must have said he would redeem her because he knows she has read the letter and therefore wishes to get away from the tea house as quickly as she can and then kill herself. Heimon says it would be better if Okaru were to be killed by her own brother, but the girl is courageous enough to insist on killing herself. She takes Heimon’s sword but Yuranosuke is heard calling her to stop and he appears to tie the brother and sister for their loyalty.

Taking up his own rusty sword, he places Okaru’s hands on its hilt and helps her plunge the blade through the slats of the verandah into Kudayu lurking below. Thus she takes revenge on behalf of her dead husband on the enemy of Lord Hangan.

Heimon drags out the spy and Yuranosuke vents on the bitch Kudayu all his grief and rage at the ignoble part he has been forced to play until he tells Heimon to drag Kudayu away and throw his body into the Kamo River.

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**Michiyuki Tabiji no Yomeiri**
(The Bridal Journey)

Tonami, daughter of Honzo Kakogawa, the former chief officer of Wakasanosuke, who has been betrothed to Yuranosuke’s son Rikiya, travels along the Tokaido Highway, accompanied by her mother Tonase, to visit the residence of Yuranosuke at Yamashina near Kyoto.

During the scene the forurei chant tells how everything she
sees reminds the girl of her lover and the contrast between their present sad circumstances and what might have been their happy life had not tragedy overtaken the family whom Rikiya had served.

Yamashina Kankyo
(Yuranosuke's House at Yamashina)

It is a snowy day when Konami and her mother Tonase arrive at Yuranosuke's secluded house at Yamashina. Tonase asks Oishi, wife of Yuranosuke, to allow Konami to be married to her son Rikiya, but Oishi coldly rejects the request, saying that she hates Konami's father, Honzo, because he interrupted Hangan's attack on Moronao. Oishi tells them that she would consent to the marriage if either Konami or Tonase would be Honzo. In despair Tonase and Konami decide to kill themselves.

At this moment Honzo in the disguise of a pilgrim enters the house, saying that he is glad to offer his head. He purposely speaks ill of Yuranosuke and Rikiya, provoking Rikiya into attack him in anger with a spear. Honzo makes the spear pierce his side with his own hand. Revealing that he has sacrificed himself in order to enable his daughter to marry Rikiya, the dying Honzo gives Yuranosuke a plan of Moronao's mansion to assist the league when the time comes to revenge the death of Hangan by the death of Moronao.

Amakawa
(The Testing of Gihei Amakawa)

Gihei Amakawa, a forwarding agent of Sakai, undertakes the supply of all arms to be used for the vendetta in order to keep his work completely secret, he discharges all employees and even sends his wife Osono to her parent home, giving her a notice of divorce.

One day police raid his house and ask to tell the truth. Gihei adamantly keeps silent, sitting on a chest containing the arms, they threaten to kill his four-year-old son under his nose. Gihei still remains unflinching. The boy is about to be killed when Yuranosuke unexpectedly appears from

the chest. Revealing that the "policemen" are none other than his followers in disguise, who came to test Gihei's devotion to the cause, Yuranosuke apologizes to him for his lack of trust.

In recognition of Gihei's courage Yuranosuke announces that the passwords among the attack on Lord Moronao will be parts of his family name, "Ama" and "Kawa," respectively meaning the sky and the river.

At this point should occur the scene which by all Western canons of dramatic art is the climax of the whole play.

Clothed all in the same garments of black and white, the ronin with Yuranosuke at their head break into Moronao's mansion with the winter sky black above them and the courts and gardens white with snow. The fighting is fierce and spectacular and finally Moronao, shivering in his night clothes, found by Jutaro Yazama in a closet and killed by the same dagger that Hangan used to commit seppuku 18 months before. His head is hoisted on a spear and Hangan is at last avenged.

Exciting as the scene is it is very rarely performed in bunraku and only slightly more often in Kabuki, although cinema versions (more close, perhaps, to Western conceptions of dramatic form) make much more use of it as their climax. The reason is that in Japanese eyes the death of Moronao—a being so bad and cowardly—is not worth worrying about and in any case a foregone conclusion, also that the moment of revenge is not really when Moronao is killed but when his head is offered at the tomb of Hangan.

Ryogokubashi
(The Ryogoku Bridge)

Having successfully killed Moronao, their late master's enemy, Yuranosuke Oboshi and 46 other members of his group come across the Ryogoku Bridge on their way to the Kanji Temple where the late lord is buried.

Wakasanosuke Momoi, a feudal lord and the late Hangan's colleague, comes on horseback to meet the heroic group. He praises the group and urges it to hurry to the temple
because Moronao’s retainers may come to counterattack. The 47 ronin thank Wakasanosuke and proceed to the temple.

**Komyoji Shoko**
(The Incense Burning at Komyoji Temple)

**Yuranosuke** and his followers pay homage at the Komyoji Temple where their late lord is buried. They place the severed head of Moronao at the altar. Yuranosuke lets Jutaro Yaza, who discovered Moronao in hiding, burn incense first and then takes out Kampei’s purse and makes it burn incense in place of Kampei.

Although Komyoji Shoko is the final scene of the play, a reader may be interested to know that, historically, once vendetta was accomplished and the head of “Lord Moronao” (historically Lord Kozukenosuke Kira) offered in atonement at the Sengakuji Temple (Komyoji Temple in the play), Shinagawa, Tokyo (which still exists today) the 47 ronin got themselves up to arrest by the authorities.

Although their murder of their lord’s enemy should have been punished by execution as a criminal act, the nobility of their motive was recognized by permission for each to come formal seppuku. All 47 were buried together and their tomb at the Sengakuji Temple are honored with offerings of flowers and incense even to this day.

The castle at Ako, the demesne of “Hangan” (Lord Asano) is now no more but the family temple of “Yuranosuke” (Kuranosuke) still exists in very much the same form as it did at the time of these stirring events and a small museum beside it has many relics of the affair including carved wooden figures of the loyal ronin.

**KANJINCHO**
(The Subscription List)

An adaptation from the Noh play “Ataka,” this play was written for Kabuki by Gohei Namiki and first staged at the Kawanakazaka Theatre in Edo in 1840. Its Bunraku version first staged at the Inariza Theatre in Osaka in 1895.

**Characters**
- **Benkei**, a retainer of Yoshtsune
- **Togashi**, keeper of the Ataka barrier
- **Yoshitsune**, younger brother of Yoritomo, head of the Genji Clan

The story revolves around **Yoshitsune** Minamoto, younger brother of Yoritomo Minamoto, chief of the Genji Clan, which only recently scored a convincing victory over the Heike Clan which had ruled the country.

In spite of the fact that Yoshitsune distinguished himself in the battle with the Heike Clan, Yoritomo falls out with him, alleging that Yoshitsune has a rebellious intent. He sets up new barriers in different parts of the country and issues orders for his arrest.

On the advice of his retainer **Benkei**, Yoshitsune disguises himself as a porter and, together with Benkei and four other retainers who have disguised themselves as travelling priests, tries to flee to the Michinoku district with Benkei as the sensible leader of the group. Learning of their journey in disguise, the Shogunate Government warns the barrier keepers throughout the country to keep an eye especially on travelling priests trying to pass through the barriers.

As the curtain rises on the scene of the Ataka barrier, which has no realistic back scenery but a typical Noh stage background showing a pine tree painted on a wooden wall, Togashi, the barrier keeper, tells his men of the Shogunate order and orders them to inform him promptly if travelling priests come to ask for passage.

Soon after Togashi has taken seat on stage left Yoshitsune and his party enter. Benkei announces that they are priests wishing to pass the barrier. Guards try to arrest them but the priests resist the attempt, protesting that they are bona fide priests. Since neither side would not give in, Togashi himself advances to meet the priests. Benkei explains that they have