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## FACES OF LOYALTY: UTAGAWA KUNISADA'S *SEICHŪ GISHI-DEN*; CONFORMITY AND INNOVATION IN THE *UKIYO-E* PORTRAIT

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### Introduction

For what was to be his last complete serial project, the *ukiyo-e* 'floating world picture'<sup>1</sup> artist Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865) developed a set of portrait representations of protagonists of the kabuki play *Kanadehon Chūshingura* – 'Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers.' Kunisada's portrait sequence reflected, and helped sustain, the enduring popularity of the Chūshingura play and its themes. His compositions drew on conventional modes, including the *ōkubi-e* 'big-head' close-up format, iconographic devices, combined character/actor representations, and high drama dynamics of the theatre. In other ways, however, the project broke new ground for Kunisada and his contemporaries: unusually, rather than promoting a contemporary performance, it represented actors from earlier times in each of the roles of the protagonists; in doing this it refocused his own pictorial attentions on the convincing expression of the psychological dispositions of the play's characters; and it developed a reliable practice for the maintenance of novel re-invention, structural cohesion and dynamic continuity within strictly defined formal frameworks. This article draws on the Chūshingura literature to establish the context for this series, and the enduring popularity of its themes and subjects in general. It then builds through analysis of the primary evidence of the prints themselves to explore Kunisada's pictorial attentions, his engagements with the popular medium of the woodblock print, and the crystallisation of a reliable model for regenerative pictorial development. Its findings contribute to understandings of how Kunisada's project complemented others of the time, and provide something of an insight into the juxtaposition of conventional means and inventive dispositions in the creative process of serial picture making.

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1 *Ukiyo-e* – 'floating world pictures' – refers to the distinctive pictorial form that developed in Edo (now Tokyo) during the Tokugawa period. *Ukiyo*, or 'floating world,' referred to a distinctive Edo attitude described by Asai Ryōi in *Ukiyo monogatari* (1661) as a disposition to "...living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry-blossoms and the maple-leaves, singing songs, drinking wine, and diverting ourselves just in floating, floating, caring not a whit for the pauperism staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current: this is what we call *ukiyo*." Richard Lane. 'The Beginnings of the Modern Japanese Novel: Kanazōshi, 1600–1682' in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20, December, 1957, p. 672.

### *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, kabuki, and Utagawa Kunisada

The *Kanadehon Chūshingura* tale has long been one of the most popular of the kabuki and *bunraku* puppet theatre repertoires. Why did it enjoy such striking popularity in Edo? Why did it attract the attentions of artists like Kunisada? One reason is that the theatrical events portrayed in *Kanadehon Chūshingura* had their origins in an actual incident. The real 'Akō affair' began in the Tokugawa court on the 14th day of the 3rd month of 1701. Asano Naganori (Asano Takumi no kami), Lord of Akō in the province of Harima (present day Hyōgo Prefecture), attacked the *kōke* 'high house' protocol official Kira Yoshinaka (or Yoshihisa; Kira Kōzuke no Suké), wounding him slightly. He was subsequently ordered to perform *seppuku*. Twenty-two months later, in the 12th month of 1702, 47 of Asano's retainers,<sup>2</sup> led by Ōishi Kuranosuke Yoshio, carried out a night attack on Kira's mansion. Kira was killed, and his head was taken in offering to Asano's grave at Sengakuji. The *rōnin* were sentenced to commit *seppuku* by Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, and died on the 4th day of the 2nd month of 1703. Documents explaining the vendetta, together with a receipt for Kira's head, are housed at Sengakuji temple where the *rōnin* were buried.<sup>3</sup> They include a *Document Explaining the Extraordinary Conduct of the Rōnin*, dated the 12th month of the 15th year of Genroku (1688-1704)<sup>4</sup> and signed by Kuranosuke, found on the body of each man.

Popular theatre media offered their audiences privileged insights into these events. Government censorship during the Genroku period prevented publication of events concerning the shogunate or court.<sup>5</sup> The public impact of the Akō affair during the peaceful Tokugawa years was immense, the more so because the conflict between

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- 2 Fewer than one in six of Asano's 308 retainers took the oath. Inoue Hisashi. *Fuchūshingura* (*Treasury of Disloyal Retainers*), 1985, in Henry D. Smith II, *Chūshingura in the 1980s: Rethinking the Story of the 47 Ronin*. Modern Japan Seminar, Columbia University, 2003. [http://www.columbia.edu/~hds2/47ronin/47ronin\\_rev.htm](http://www.columbia.edu/~hds2/47ronin/47ronin_rev.htm) accessed November 17, 2010.
  - 3 David Weinberg. *Kuniyoshi: The Faithful Samurai*. Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2000, pp. 16-17. Their statements describe the origins of the dispute between Asano Takumi no kami and Lord Kōtsuké no Suké and justify their vendetta as a restoration of justice on behalf of their master. Weinberg includes Mitford's 1871 transliteration of the manuscript of their 'speech,' and the receipt for Kira's head signed by Sengakuji priests held today at Sengakuji. Algernon B. Mitford, (Lord Redesdale). *Tales of Old Japan*. Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1966, p. 39.
  - 4 As one of the most shocking incidents of this era, the vendetta is often referred to as 'the Genroku affair.'
  - 5 A similar caution attended the more recent challenge of resurrecting a play promoting 'feudal, militarist and ultra-nationalist ideology' during the period of rigorous censorship by Occupation forces in the post WW II years. James Brandon. 'Myth and Reality: A Story of *Kabuki* during American Censorship, 1945-1949' in *Asian Theatre Journal*, 23(1), 2006, pp. 1-110. When a performance was eventually approved in November 1947, its final vendetta scene was disallowed, and the Act III conflict between En'ya Hangan and Moronao and scene of Hangan's suicide was heavily compromised (p. 101, n. 119). See also Barbara Thornbury. 'Restoring an Imagined Past: The National Theatre and the Question of Authenticity in *Kabuki*' in *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19(1), 2002, pp. 161-183.

Asano and Kira also reflected undercurrents of tension between Edo and the Western provinces.<sup>6</sup> One avenue for knowledge lay in the representation of actual events through the medium of *jidaimono*, dramatic interpretations in which contemporary events were represented in the guise of earlier historical incidents. The plot of the opening act of *Chūshingura* and the stage identities Kō no Moronao (for Kira) and En'ya Hangan (for Asano) were thus drawn from the 14th century events of the epic narrative of *Taiheike*.<sup>7</sup> Variations on this *jidaimono* model have been retained to the present day.<sup>8</sup>

The mature *Chūshingura bunraku* script was composed around 1748 by Takeda Izumo (1691-1756), Miyoshi Shōraku (1696?-1772?) and Namiki Sōsuke (Senryū, 1695-1751). Its narrative begins in late March 1338,<sup>9</sup> at the Hachiman Shrine at Tsurugaoka on the Kamakura coast. The *kōke* Kō no Moronao offends the novice court official En'ya Hangan, who retaliates, and is subsequently sentenced to take his own life. His death leaves his retainers without a master: they have become *rōnin* or 'wave men.' Under the leadership of Ōboshi Yuranosuke 47 of the retainers pledge to avenge their master. The labyrinthine subplots that follow trace the diverse fortunes of each of the protagonists through two years of secrecy and planning. In the final dramatic *uchi-iri* 'vendetta scene' *Gishi yo-uchi* (The Night Attack of the Loyal Samurai) the *rōnin* attack Moronao's mansion, take his life, and withdraw to En'ya Hangan's grave at Sengakuji temple.<sup>10</sup> Inevitably, the *rōnin* must fulfil their own destiny; they perform *seppuku* – a final demonstration of their loyalty and security in the rightness of their actions and of their status as *gishi*, or 'righteous warriors.' The complex narrative has enjoyed immense popularity, in both kabuki and *bunraku* theatres, and more recently

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6 Ryō Kurihara. *Chūshingura no shinjutsu*. Tsuchiura: Jōyō Shinbun Shuppan, 2012, pp. 7-45. Akō lay to the west of Edo, near Kyoto.

7 Paul Varley. *Warriors of Japan: As Portrayed in the War Tales*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994, pp. 212-213. Also Helen Craig McCullough (trans.). *Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan*. Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1979.

8 The first embryonic interpretation of the Akō affair, *Akebono Soga no Youchi* – 'Night Attack at Dawn by the Soga' – couched the events within the context of an earlier play on the popular Soga brothers theme.

9 "...at the end of the second moon of the first year of the Ryakuō era" (1338–1342). Donald Keene (trans.). *Chūshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers); A Puppet Play by Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shoraku and Namiki Senryu*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 29. Summary accounts are contained in David Bell. *Chushingura and the Floating World: The Representation of Kanadehon Chushingura in Ukiyo-e Prints*. Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, Curzon Press, 2001, pp.149–157, and in Aleksandra Görlich (ed.). *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers: the Drama of the 47 Ronin*. Krakow: Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology, 2012, pp. 51–57.

10 At Takanawa in Minato-ku.

in at least 91 film versions.<sup>11</sup> Twentieth century theatrical reconstructions have been subject to censorship, revision or fragmentation.<sup>12</sup>

Chūshingura's stage appeal was enhanced by the popularity of its *katakiuchi* vendetta story genre. Tales of revenge, often based on events from earlier, less orderly times, appealed widely to Genroku era audiences. The certain presence of violent episodes and 'just' outcomes guaranteed their appeal, and offered ample opportunity for theatrical invention and melodramatic stage scenes. The saga's Byzantine complexities, embracing scenes and sub-plots of love stories, brothel world dissipation, court splendour, intrigue, familial loyalty and violent conflict, offered sufficient interest to entertain audiences throughout its lengthy performances.<sup>13</sup> They employed an almost infinite range of theatrical inventions, special effects, and interweaving dramatic episodes, music, chant/narration and dance: Chūshingura was an impressive spectacle. Most importantly, they provided opportunities for the *ad lib* inventions through which actors developed their own distinctive interpretations of roles and promoted their creative genius to theatre audiences and fans.

Chūshingura's themes were very much of their time: despite much contemporary controversy around the historical events,<sup>14</sup> the play's central motifs of honour, duty, sacrifice and *on*, or obligation of debt, promoted important values for Edo audiences. In their demonstration of filial piety, service and unconditional loyalty the *rōnin* were simply fulfilling the social obligations of their position.<sup>15</sup> Their exemplary significance is made explicit in the play's title: *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, sometimes read as 'A Copybook of Loyal Retainers.' *Kana* refers to the *kana* syllabary; one of its 47 syllables is assigned to each of the *rōnin*, narrated as they step from their boats at the beginning of the night attack. *Tehon* (ie. *dehon*) or copybook refers to the copybook mode of learning. *Chū* means loyalty. Thus the actions of the faithful samurai form an

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- 11 Isolde Standish. 'Chūshingura and the Japanese Studio System' in *Japan Forum*, 17(1), 2005, p. 70. Even a relatively orthodox version like Hiroshi Inagaki's (1905-1980) 1962 production omits the first two acts and many of the conventional subplots. Hiroshi Inagaki, director, *Chūshingura: The Loyal Samurai*, Toho Co. Ltd., 1962.
  - 12 James Brandon. *Chūshingura Studies in the Kabuki and Puppet Theatre*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1982.
  - 13 Presented in their entirety, its 11 Acts could take a formidable 11 hours to perform.
  - 14 Controversy centred on the question of the rightness of the *rōnin*'s actions. It challenged their failure to follow appropriate protocols (Joseph Dautremer. 'The Vendetta or Legal Revenge in Japan' in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 13, 1885, pp. 82-89 in Stephen Turnbull. *The Samurai Tradition*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000, pp. 121-128. It also questioned the legitimacy of the vendetta, citing the only record of the actual event, the words Asano cried as he attacked Kira in court: "*Kono aida no ikon oboetaru ka. – Do you remember the occasion for my grudge?*" to argue Asano's guilt and Kira's innocence, and to find their actions illegal and unethical. Henry D. Smith II. 'The Capacity of Chūshingura: Three Hundred Years of Chūshingura' in *Monumenta Nipponica*. 58(1), 2003, p. 3.
  - 15 Ian Buruma. *A Japanese Mirror: Heroes and Villains of Japanese Culture*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1984, p. 150.

exemplary ‘copybook’ of loyalty, presented as an idealised role model for young men of the Tokugawa period.<sup>16</sup>

The kabuki theatre played the central role in popularising Chūshingura and in crystallising the narrative we are familiar with today. Its bombastic *aragoto* ‘rough stuff’ theatricality, high colour, extravagance of gesture and dramatic versatility found correspondingly colourful audiences, enthusiastic and thirsty for novelty. By the 19th century, the theme had found a parallel popularity in the popular *ukiyo-e* graphic art of the day. *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and the kabuki theatre were both generated from the same ‘floating world’ cultural sensibilities of Edo. Kabuki provided ample inspiration for *ukiyo-e* artists – a dramatic subject matter quite consistent in its aesthetic sensibility with the graphic form. The work of *ukiyo-e* artists, on the other hand, complemented that of the theatre: print series promoted each theatre’s dramatic season, and contributed significantly to the growing popularity of each of its actors. The complex promotional networks of kabuki and *ukiyo-e* developed a ‘star’ system that has been sustained into the 21st century.<sup>17</sup>

Earlier *ukiyo-e* theatre illustrations had concentrated on its characters, in distinctive poses or episodes. Artists focused on reproducing something of the experience of the theatre through the representation of its striking *mie* ‘frozen’ poses and the generation of a spatial tension that paralleled the dramatic arrangements of the stage. Facial features were anonymous, actor identities usually indicated by the distinctive *mon* ‘emblem’ associated with their school, or by selected moments from celebrated performances. Recognizable descriptions of actors, with identifiable facial features, described in close-up and three-quarter views were developed later. Earlier artists also focused their attention on the reconstruction of scenes from the dramatic narrative of the play, often in series of single sheet prints approximating the sequence of acts of the stage presentation. They developed graphic devices that related to the conventional arrangements of the stage, its three-stage foreground, middleground, background structure, or the rectilinear structural principal against which the dynamic diagonals and sweeping curves of the actors’ movements could be emphasized. Specific scenes took place in established contextual settings: thus the Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gū shrine, with its great ginkgo<sup>18</sup> in the foreground, and the Kamakura coastline and the

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16 Admonitions to feudal loyalty and filial piety (*kō*) were widely expounded during the Tokugawa era in texts like *The Imagawa Letter* that promoted “...the cardinal virtues of human-heartedness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and good faith” epitomized in the actions of the *rōnin*. *The Imagawa Letter*, more correctly *Articles of Admonition by Imagawa Ryōshun to His Son Nakaaki*, seems to have been written by Ryōshun (Imagawa Sadayo, 1325-1420) around 1412. It remained popular to Meiji times, republished at least 220 times during the Tokugawa era. Carl Steenstrup, ‘The Imagawa Letter: A Muromachi Warrior’s Code of Conduct Which Became a Tokugawa Schoolbook’ in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 3(28), 1973, pp. 295-316.

17 Standish, 2005, pp. 78-79.

18 Sometimes referred to as *kakure-ichō*, or ‘hiding ginkgo.’ Kamiya Michinori. *Fukaku Aruku – Kamakura Shiseki Sansaku*. Kamakura: Kamakura Shunshūsha, Vol. 1, 2008, pp. 116-117.

distinctive form of Fuji in the background, constituted a conventional pictorial setting for events from Act I. The development of the serial print form helped to facilitate the maintenance of pictorial continuity. The demand for increasingly comprehensive representations of the narrative led to the adoption of multi-narrative compositions, in which a larger tableau might represent the principal action, while smaller scenes set to one side or in the background showed peripheral events from the same Act.<sup>19</sup>

The Chūshingura theme held a singular appeal for Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1864/5). Like many Utagawa studio artists, Kunisada was very much a *kabuki-e* ‘kabuki picture’ specialist. By the time he and other Utagawa school artists like Kuniyoshi (1797-1862) or Kunichika (1835-1900) were in their prime, popular audiences for *ukiyo-e* were demanding a different emphasis in their pictures. Convincing realism rather than highly conventional stylization made for more believable images, pictures that were able to contain more information about the characters than was revealed in a theatrical moment. The actor/character portrait form also enabled artists to develop an intimate synthesis between the dramatic aesthetics of both theatrical and pictorial media. They adopted the conventional devices of *jitsuroku* ‘true accounts,’<sup>20</sup> including textual information in poetic or biographical notes contained in background or cartouche areas of the composition to enhance their apparent authenticity. Detailed images presented recognizable physiognomies of each actor. The increasingly popular *okubi-e* ‘big-head picture’ close-up views allowed artists to represent the expressive temperament or disposition of each character and actor. This pictorial realism was consistent with kabuki injunctions to naturalness of dialogue, or *monomane*, ‘dramatic imitation,’ in the service of realism on the stage.<sup>21</sup> For artists developing these dual-function actor/character portraits in series, a new problem was generated: that of maintaining a degree of narrative continuity through each sequence of separate, individually focused images, while also sustaining visual interest through the maintenance of rhythmic or dynamic tensions within and between each composition.

For Utagawa Kunisada the seeds of these practices were sown in his early life and training. As a young man Kunisada had been apprenticed into the studio of Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769-1825). As a trainee artist he was obliged to work in ways closely consistent with the house style of his master. Toyokuni’s own significant contribution to *ukiyo-e* had been in forging a shift of emphasis in kabuki images to recognizable individualized portraits of actors. Within his workshop, he ensured consistency in the representation of each actor’s features by having his students draw from *tehon*

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19 Bell, 2001, p. 73-75.

20 In kabuki ‘real (*jitsu*) stuff (*goto*)’ described realistic role portrayals. Amy Newland. *The Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005, Vol. II, p. 449.

21 For actors these qualities were realized through the *jigai* style of realistic acting and the craft of *haragei*, or ‘becoming the character.’ *Haragei*, ‘identification with or becoming the character’ is a conflation of *hara* – ‘belly, guts, abdomen, pluck, spirit’ – and *gei* – ‘craft, art, acting.’ Jean-Jacques Tschudin. ‘Danjūrō’s *katsureki-geki* (realistic theatre) and the Meiji “Theatre Reform” movement’ in *Japan Forum*, 11(1), 1999, pp. 83-94.

copybook images, albums of *nigao*, or ‘true likeness’ images of individual actors. It was as an independent artist, as Kunisada I, and later as Toyokuni III, that Kunisada, while sustaining these characteristics of his Utagawa school learning, introduced characteristics of his own – a more dramatic sense of movement and figural interaction, more expressive facial features and gestures, and a colourful and decorative idiom in keeping with the media affordances<sup>22</sup> and fashionable trends of his own age.

The heroic actions, stage dynamics and extravagant gestures of Chūshingura provided Kunisada abundant material for his serial projects. Between 1810 and 1865 he illustrated the theme more than 30 times in series of *uki-e* ‘perspective’ views, actor portraits, *mitate-e* ‘parody pictures,’ historical and narrative accounts, images of the play’s characters and *okubi-e* actor/character portraits.<sup>23</sup> *E kyodai chūshingura* (Illustration of Chūshingura, published around 1840 by Sanoya Kihei) presented full length *bijin-ga* ‘beautiful-woman-picture’ figures, each set in front of a different Chūshingura scene in the upper pictorial field; two closely related Chūshingura series published between 1847 and 1850, *Chuyu gishin-roku, dai ichi* (Story of Loyal, Prominent and Faithful Samurai) and *Chuyu gishin-den, maki no ni* (Biographies of Loyal and Valiant Retainers), present narrative scenes of each act of the play, with perspective style compositions consistent with the spatial arrangements of the theatre; and each triptych of the Chūshingura set published by Shimizuya Tsunejiro in 1852 features half-length portraits of three actors in role, identified with a selected act of the play. Additionally, 93 double-*ōban* diptych pairs of single-figure actor prints were published between 1818 and 1842; numerous single-sheet single figure prints from 1837<sup>24</sup> through to 1854; several series of multi-figure compositions in complex narrative settings under the title *Kanadehon Chūshingura* were published in 1835, 1830-43, 1840-43, and 1847-48; and *Seichū Ōboshi ichidai-hanashi* (The Life of Ōboshi the Loyal, 1847), presented 36 portraits of different kabuki actors as Ōboshi Yuranosuke.

### Kunisada’s *Seichū gishi-den* – The Faithful Samurai

*Seichū gishi-den*, Kunisada’s last great serial project, was to pursue yet another direction, assuming a *jitsuroku* ‘authentic account’ authority in portraits of actors in the roles of each historical figure. For this production, Kunisada set his representations of *rōnin* during the climactic night attack of the play to celebrate their valiant heroism in the final execution of their mission. He draws on the conventional means of his Utagawa school *kabuki-e* and *musha-e* ‘warrior print’ specialisations to emphasise the sincerity, commitment, and

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22 By the time Kunisada was designing the *Seichū gishi den* series these media affordances had been augmented with the introduction of European sourced synthetic dyes.

23 Horst Graebner. *The Kunisada Project*, <http://www.kunisada.de/Kunisada-Chushingura/series/901/chush-1864-2-0.htm> accessed November 4, 2014. Graebner illustrates c. 4,500 prints representing c. 1100 identified series on the *Kunisada Project* website.

24 The 1837 series linked to a production that opened Nakamura Theatre 10th day of 8th month Tempō 10.

dynamic fervor of each figure in spatial structures of exaggerated asymmetries, and tense arrangements of clashing diagonals and sweeping curves, but also breaks new ground in the development of clearly individuated portraits of unprecedented expressive power. This project was to synthesise Kunisada's own ideas about pictorial representation in the portrait print medium with complementary paradigms for realistic representation on the stage. The actor/*rōnin* combination was to prove an ideal vehicle for this project, if also a substantial challenge to his inventive powers, and these portraits stand today as some of the most intense insights into the characters, values and motives of one of the great vendetta tales in Japanese history and literature.

Kunisada began work on this late series of *Seichū gishi-den* in the 3rd month of 1864. An index sheet for the complete series published later (Plate 1) lists 62 single-sheet *nishiki-e* polychrome woodblock prints besides the catalogue sheet itself. These include 48 portraits of the faithful samurai, and a further 14 prints of other protagonists from the tale. Each print is in the vertical *ōban* format – approximately 49.5x36.5 cm. Most are signed *nanajūkyū-sai Toyokuni hitsu* 'drawn by Toyokuni at the age of seventy-nine,'<sup>25</sup> and carry the red Utagawa school *toshidama* seal. The publisher is Horinoya Tasuke,<sup>26</sup> and the engraver's seal reads Yakuda Horicho.<sup>27</sup> The prints carry *aratame* ('examined') and date censor seals for the 3rd, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th lunar months of 1864 (Bunkū 4), and for the 1st month of 1865. The series must have been popular. The final 14 prints listed in the index bear the series title *Seichū gishi-den no uchi* (Stories of the Faithful Samurai Extended), and feature actors in the roles of other protagonists from the Chūshingura narrative. Six of these works maintain the Toyokuni III signature of the *rōnin* portraits, and nine are signed by Kunisada's pupils, Kunimaru (1794-1829; 3 compositions), Kunitoku (1808-1876; 2), Kunitoki (1808-1876; 3) and Kunisada II (1823-1880; 1). Their signatures bear the prefix *ōju*, 'by special request,' suggesting they were invited to contribute designs to augment Kunisada's own compositions in an extended development of the original series.<sup>28</sup>

The index cover sheet also functions as a 'register' of the loyal retainers, listing each of the samurai by their original historical names, rather than those adapted for the stage, together with the names of actors in their role, in a format that alludes to the list of signatures of their original vendetta pledge. The additional portraits of

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25 In the later stages of his career, from 1844, Kunisada adopted the name of his teacher, signing his works as Toyokuni (ie. Toyokuni III).

26 Though both Graebner, 2014, and Chelsea Foxwell ('Body, Site, and Memory: Some Observations on Chūshingura in *Nishiki-e*' in Görlich, ed. 2012, pp. 34-44) suggest the publisher of the series as Daikokuya Kinzaburō, the publisher's seal on each of the portrait sheets is clearly identified by other sources as Horinoya Tasuke; see Newland, volume II, pp. 565, 571.

27 Graebner, 2014.

28 Graebner, 2014. Though note, Graebner lists the final 14 works listed in the series index as a separate subsequent series, distinguished by its title, *Seichū gishi-den no uchi*. Their inclusion in the series index suggests they were composed as an extension on the original project however.



Plate 1. Utagawa Kunisada, index page for the series *Seichū gishi-den*, *The Faithful Samurai*. Woodblock print, *ōban* (49.5x36.5cm), undated.

the other protagonists are identified by their stage, rather than historical, names. By Kunisada's time the 'register of the loyal samurai' had itself become a conventional form functioning similarly to, and conforming to the conventions of, the *banzuke* block-printed lists of actors in theatrical performances.<sup>29</sup> This sheet includes other allusions to the Chūshingura story. The list echoes the narration of the heroes' names as they embark on the final stage of their mission. The narrow image in the upper part of the composition sets the scene for the portraits, illustrating a view from Sengakuji, where the *rōnin* are buried, across Shinagawa Bay. This scene's dusk setting establishes a graphic link to the dark night-setting backgrounds of the portraits. The distinctive circular Ōboshi *futatsudomoe* double-comma *mon* is repeated through each cloud-like layer below and in the title margin. Subtle suggestions, of blood in the red, and of twilight in the blue-black, hint at the inevitable end of the mission. This arrangement also establishes some precedent for the subsequent compositions. The cloud-like layers, the red, yellow and blue colours, and the *futatsudomoe mon* recur through the title and narrative cartouches in all of the portrait compositions, establishing one of the threads of continuity that tie the sequence into a cohesive group.

Though completed very late in his life, this *Seichu gishi-den* series presented Kunisada with some interesting challenges, and there are, throughout the sequence of portraits, some interesting consistencies, in the highly decorative and complex arrangements of colour and pattern for example, and in the corresponding finesse in block cutting and printing. There are also continuities of theme and setting. Each of the *rōnin* is represented at night, against a dark inky blue-black background. This sets the scene quite precisely during the climactic conclusion of the vendetta, the late-night final attack on Moronao's mansion. That the *rōnin* are represented precisely at the time of the attack is confirmed more explicitly in the way the majority of members of the league are represented, caught in the midst of violent struggle against Moronao's retainers inside the mansion itself. They are seen slashing across the pictorial space with *katana* swords, thrusting halberds, or swinging giant mattocks. In a couple of instances, like the portraits of Kaiga Yuzaemon or Hazama Jujirō, we see the weapons, though not the identities, of the defending forces. Throughout the sequence of portraits the viewer is left in little doubt as to the extremity of the violence, or the sheer determination that has driven the *rōnin*'s actions.

The project confronted Kunisada with a complex problem: that of combining recognizable representations of different actors with individuated impressions of specific historical figures in the same compositions, while also conveying the resolution and sense of mission of the faithful *rōnin*. Thus what is essentially a double-portrait composition (Plate 2) represents the actor Sawamura Sōjurō III (1753-1801) and the central hero Ōishi Kuranosuke. Here and in the subsequent *rōnin* portraits, adopting the original name of the historical figure from the vendetta that inspired the play is consistent with the works' pictorial and narrative claims to historical authenticity. Kuranosuke is

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29 See Bell, 2001, p. 107. *Banzuke* are a familiar medium today for publishing *sumo* tournament draws.



Plate 2. Utagawa Kunisada, *The Actor Yoshitaka Sawamura Sōjurō III as [I] Ōishi Kuranosuke Fujiwarano Yoshio, The Chief Retainer*, age 45, from the series *Seichū gishi-den*. Woodblock print, ōban (49.5x36.5 cm), 11th month, 1864 (Bunkyū 4).

immediately identifiable in this composition by the *futatsudomoe mon*<sup>30</sup> adorning his headgear. The decorative wave emblem on a blood-red ground below this refers to his station as *rōnin*, or ‘wave-man.’ His status within the group is emphasized by his steadfast pose, the gravitas of his facial expression, and his rich costume. Kunisada’s focus on named historical individuals rather than the *jidaimono* stage characters, and his novel inclusion of pictorial and textual details of their ages, specific roles or contributions, family matters, statements, duties or stipends, informed new appreciations of each individual that again endorsed a sense of authenticity of the account, and engaged and sustained viewers’ interest through the 6 month publication period.

Like other representations, by Andō Hiroshige (1797-1858) in 1836, 1842-1846, and 1849-1850,<sup>31</sup> for example, and in Kunisada’s own striking *Chuyu gishin-roku dai ichi* and *Chuyu gishin-den maki no ni* ‘biographies’ of 1847-1850,<sup>32</sup> Kunisada usually adopted the standard kabuki costume for retainers in *jidaimono* presentations: the *kamishimo* combination of *hakama* loose trousers and *kataginu* wing-shouldered ‘jumper,’ worn over a *kimono*.<sup>33</sup> Kuranosuke was conventionally shown in sober spotted light and charcoal grey outer garments over a black kimono or in close colour or pattern variations on this theme. The Act 7 brothel scene and the Act 11 climax were the only occasions for variation. Here, consistent with the night attack setting, Kuranosuke is depicted wearing the distinctive black and white *hikeshibanten* coat worn by the *rōnin* in the rest of this series.<sup>34</sup> The striking designs of these *hikeshibanten* subsequently provide a repeated motif that unifies these portraits into a cohesive group. The *kabuto* ‘military helmet’ and its *futatsudomoe mon* set on an understated gold *kuwagata* ‘horn-shaped’ *datemono* ‘crest’<sup>35</sup> emphasise Kuranosuke’s leadership and warrior status in this final event. The multiple layers and rich colour in the other garments also reflect contemporary tastes for the decorative enjoyed by Kunisada’s audiences in 1864 rather than the humbler dress actually worn by the *rōnin* during the attack.<sup>36</sup>

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30 *Futatsudomoe*: *mon* of double interlocking comma shapes.

31 Görlich, 2012, pp. 122; 136; 147.

32 Graebner, 2014.

33 Ruth Shaver. *Kabuki Costume*. Rutland, Vermont, and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E Tuttle Company, Inc., 1966, p. 133.

34 These are the short, padded winter *hanten*, or more specifically *hikeshibanten*, sturdy coats worn by firemen (*hikeshi*).

35 Shaver, 1966, p. 133.

36 Garments, including *hikeshibanten*, and weapons from the *rōnin*’s final act, survive today in the museum at Sengakuji; their austerity reflects the humble circumstances under which they undertook their mission.

### Conformity and innovation in Kunisada's late works

In other ways, these are unconventional representations. In the first place, although tradition has it that there were 47 faithful *rōnin*, of whom, Kanpei already being dead, only 46 took part in the night attack; the sequence usually includes the 46 samurai who performed *seppuku* after the night attack. As Donald Keene notes, though the generally accepted number of participants in the night attack was 46, the *bunraku* script he translates names only 45.<sup>37</sup> In Utagawa Kuniyoshi's (1798-1861) 1847-1848 *Seichū gishi den* series of 51 prints, 48 *rōnin* are included, each identified by their conventional dramatic narrative name. They include Hayano Kanpei Tsuneyo,<sup>38</sup> together with one further 'honorary supporter,' Jinzaburō, a retainer of Shikamatsu Kansu.<sup>39</sup> Kuniyoshi includes images titled *Kōno Musashi no Kami Moronao cowering in fear* and *En'ya Hangan Takasada in a threatening stance*.<sup>40</sup> Kunisada has also included 48 *rōnin* in the first two groups listed in his series index. He includes Kayano Sanpei Shigezane (stage name: Hayano Kanpei Tsuneyo). Following the death of his mother Kanpei was required to remain at home to care for his father. Torn between duty to his parent and loyalty to the league he was driven to perform *seppuku*. Though unable to join the others on the night attack his loyalty stood as an example to them all. His portrait, depicting him at the moment of his death, is the one work published in 1865, and is known in two variant versions.<sup>41</sup> Unusually, Kunisada's series also includes a portrait of Terasaka Kichiemon Nobuyuki, who Ōishi Kuranosuke had instructed to live on to document the events of the vendetta. This inclusion enhances the suggestion of 'authentic account.'

By using the original names of the *rōnin* Kunisada emphasizes the historical event, again enhancing the aura of authenticity of his accounts. The difference was slim in any case; there is little between Ōboshi Yuranosuke and Ōishi Kuranosuke. The break from convention in naming the *rōnin* reflects a mid-19th century relaxation of government restrictions on naming the protagonists; the shift was limited however – Kunisada's retention of the *Taiheike* names and characterisations for Asano and Kira even in this liberal account reflects the maintenance of these restrictions for figures of more elevated status. Kuniyoshi's more orthodox series provides a useful counterpoint for appreciating Kunisada's other innovations in *kabuki-e* representation here. Both artists do maintain several features in common: both assume the authority of *jitsuroku* authenticity, including textual commentary on each of the *rōnin* to that end; both illustrate a specific contribution of each figure to the events of the night attack; and

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37 Keene, 1971, pp. 171-172.

38 Weinberg, 2000, pp. 132-133.

39 Weinberg, 2000, pp. 140-141. Like Kunisada, Kuniyoshi composed many versions on the theme – Pearl lists 19 Chūshingura series designed by Kuniyoshi between 1830 and 1857, plus a further collection of miscellaneous prints on the subject. William Pearl. *Kuniyoshi Project* at [www.kuniyoshiproject.com/Main – Chushingura.htm](http://www.kuniyoshiproject.com/Main-Chushingura.htm) accessed 4th November 2014.

40 Weinberg, 2000, pp. 114-117.

41 Graebner, 2014.

both include conventional iconographies for each figure (*hikeshibanten*, snow-covered pine branch, or lantern, for example). For each of his compositions however, Kuniyoshi adopts a full-length figure format, on a plain white ground, that finds precedent in earlier Utagawa school full-figure *kabuki-e* and *musha-e* compositions. The result, in Kuniyoshi's constructions, is an exaggeration of figural energy and movement, albeit at some loss of pictorial cohesion and facial detail. To achieve a convincing lifelike energy in his own bust portraits, Kunisada has constructed a sequence of different, but equally dynamic, tight-knit oppositions of contrasting angles, edges and curves of limbs, torsos or weapons in compositions whose complex juxtapositions of surfaces of intense colour and pattern occupy the whole surface of the pictorial support.

The result is the construction of some of the most tightly forged compositions of his oeuvre that maintains a convincing sense of lifelike vigour and movement, and combines it with an elevation of expressive intensity that shifts the pictorial object from the description of historical figure or stage character to one of psychological representation. Kunisada's synthesis of tight-knit energy with the *okubi-e* format informs the representation of facial expressions of determination, panic, rage, sacrifice, and unswerving commitment of each character consistent with the theatrical representations of the kabuki stage itself. The result is the hybrid synthesis of Utagawa school realism of physiognomy and expression with the theatricality of kabuki theatre convention in a sequence of portraits of intense psychological disposition. The realistically differentiated portrayal of each of the actors, together with the assumption (however accurate) of authenticity in the accounts of the *rōnin* guaranteed the commercial success that allowed Kunisada to complete the series as planned, and for the development of an extended programme in the last three months of publication.

Kunisada's portrait of Sawamura Sōjūro as Kuranosuke thus clearly describes the sobriety, determination and gravitas of the great hero of Chūshingura. As the leading retainer of the Akō household, the responsibility, first for the safety, wellbeing and honour of his master,<sup>42</sup> and subsequently for leading the vendetta, fell primarily to Kuranosuke. It was a role he was prepared for, having been carefully groomed by his father Yawata Rokurō, the former head retainer at Akō.<sup>43</sup> Kuranosuke's status in the mission is confirmed here by his steadfast posture, the tenacity reflected in his solid, unmoving pose, his stare piercing away from the viewer, and beyond the pictorial frame, as if into the future towards the completion of the mission. At the same time Kunisada has embraced a more subtly sensitive dimension into Kuranosuke's facial expression, a very human sense of pathos and frailty. The ambivalence of stance and expression reflects the tensions between rightness and guilt informing the vendetta, and a sense of the courageous resignation to the fate awaiting the *rōnin*. The commentary in the larger cartouche leaves no doubt as to the rightness of his actions:

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42 The controversy surrounding contemporary responses to the Akō event was generated, in part at least, by Kuranosuke's failure in this sense, due to his absence during the early events.

43 Keene, 1971, p. 73.

After leaving Akō he used every strategy to avenge his lord's death and vindicate his honour.

His loyalty and duty are known to all.

“At Sengaku-ji: How delightful it is! / I rid my spirit of all concerns / I dispose of this body / Covering the moon of this floating world / There are no clouds whatever.”<sup>44</sup>

Seen beside the Kuranosuke composition, Kunisada's representation of the actor Suketakaya Takasuke III as Fuwa Kazuemon Masatane (Plate 3) demonstrates the clearly individuated characterisations in this series. The smooth, slim profile of Fuwa Kazuemon reflects his relative youth (34) at the time of the night attack. In other portraits Kunisada goes to some lengths to differentiate between extremes of slim-faced youthful innocence (the 16 year old Ōishi Chikara Yoshikane), bloated pale skin, greying hair and aging dissolution (Kō no Moronao), wretched despair (Amakawaya Osono), imposing bulk, strength and anger (Horibe Yasuhei Taketsune, aged 34, enhanced with the frightening addition of red *kumadori* make up), and the lined faces, wrinkled eyes and grimacing mouths, and grey hair of older figures like Hazama Kihei Mitsunobu (69) or Horibe Yahei Akizane (77). While the static structure of the Kuranosuke composition emphasizes a sense of immovable resolution; the subtle description of a pink-flushed face, the glaring eyes, set jaw, and part-open mouth of Kazuemon's expression are captured at a single moment of time, framed against the striking dynamic of contrasting movements in his torso, arms and swords and the blade of an attacker. The contrast between this still moment in time and the chaos surrounding it emphasizes a sense of intense concentration under pressure that offer testimony to his unswerving commitment to the task.

The textual cartouches establish graphic and poetic continuities through the series, maintained through repetitions in size, shape, and arrangement, and in their coloured background patterns and cursive calligraphy. Each also serves to add narrative detail to enhance the assumption of authenticity of their account, augmenting the viewer's knowledge of each figure, their backgrounds, roles or duties. This evidence of 'factual' information revealed about each figure affords intimate insights into 'actual' lives, reinforcing the apparent legitimacy of these accounts while also enhancing viewers' understandings of the broader and recurrent motives of loyalty, valour, sacrifice and vengeance that underpin their mission. These textual and geometric continuities are complemented by distinctive pictorial differences in each plate. Just as the age, physiognomy and expression of the facial representations are clearly differentiated, most of the characters also carry some tangible indicator of their role in the play – a particular weapon, *katana* or *naginata* for example, a drum or whistle, rope ladder or

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44 The verse purports to be Kuranosuke's death poem. I appreciate the contributions of the anonymous reader, Professor Kondo of Gifu University, Mr Matsuda of Gifu City Womens' College and Mr Masaharu Hashimoto of Dunedin to my appreciations of the text content of these works.



Plate 3. Utagawa Kunisada, *The Actor Suketakaya Takasuke III as [ta] Fuwa Kazuemon Masatane*, age 34, from the series *Seichū gishi-den*. Woodblock print, ōban (49.5x36.5cm), 9th month of 1864.

explosive. In many instances, as in the inclusion of a flying brazier in the portrait of Onadera Hanemon, this is consistent with conventional representations like Utagawa Kuniyoshi's 1847-1848 full figure composition. Other images confirm the place and time of the attack with the simple addition of a motif like a moat or snow-covered bough.

Consistent repetitions in format, colour, setting and motif also serve to maintain serial continuity. One of the most distinctive motifs contributing to the cohesion of the series is that of the *hikeshibanten* jackets worn by the *rōnin* during the night attack. The bold white hiragana script inscription on the back identified each individual. Coincidentally, their distinctive design also enhanced the sense of unity between prints (and implicitly between figures) during this final stage of their mission. The dogtooth design introduced in the portrait of Ōishi Kuranosuke is strikingly clear in the capes of his followers. These powerful patterns reflect their determination to exact their revenge at any time, day or night. Here also, however, the striking juxtapositions of these strong geometric arrangements help generate the sense of dynamic within each individual composition, and, when the pictures are arranged in sequence, in a dynamic continuity flowing through the whole sequence of portraits. The result is a graphic, formal generation of pictorial violence entirely consistent with that of the final act of the play. The sense of graphic or structural rhythm is a recurrent theme in Chinese and Japanese painting, dating back to the late 5th century axiom of the Chinese scholar painter Xie He that the rhythmic essence of painting should mirror the universal rhythms of life.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, the actions of the *rōnin* can only end in their death.

These rhythmic structural interactions are emphasized further by the contrasting angles of the sweeping, thrusting, linear emphases of the weapons. Within each composition the hard edges and angles of blade or lance shaft contrasts strongly with the curves of limbs and clothing. Straight lines are juxtaposed against curves, edges or contours against surfaces, light against dark, pattern against flat colour. The dynamic movement this generates is emphasized by their juxtaposition against the formal rectilinear shapes of the cartouches that contain titles, names and narratives. Each new composition of the sequence reconfirms the chaotic speed and violence of the event.

Kunisada's representation of actors is unusual in other, more surprising ways also. Series like these were conventionally commissioned to promote specific kabuki performances within the highly competitive climate of Edo's theatre community. Coincidentally, by Kunisada's time individual actor portraits played an important role in promoting actors within an equally competitive 'star' system. This series is unusual because it seems to be performing neither function; first, because no performance of Chūshingura appears to have been presented during 1864 or 1865; second, because, the actors represented in each portrait were no longer living. Sawamura Sōjūro III (1753-1801) had died 63 years before this series was published. Similarly, the actor

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45 Xie He (Hsieh Ho), fl. CE 490. 'Ch'i-yün Sheng-tung' = 'atmosphere alive, or lifelike.' Most English translations transpose rhythm for atmosphere, as Laurence Binyon: 'Rhythmic Vitality, a Spiritual Rhythm expressed in the movement of life.' Lin Yutang. *The Chinese Theory of Art: Translations From the Masters of Chinese Art*. London: Panther Books, 1967, pp. 48-50.

Suketakaya Takasuke III (1802-1853) had died 11 years earlier.<sup>46</sup> In a practical sense, representing actors in celebrated roles from the past allowed Kunisada to focus on the imaginative construction of the individual historical figures, without compromising the professional sensitivities of living actors. Actors from earlier years retained their popularity for later audiences. The ever-popular Chūshingura theme provided a popular vehicle for series of famous actors – most would have appeared in it at some stage, often in more than one role – and the reputations of most would have been built on their imaginative contributions and novel interpretations in each performance. The theme found precedence in Kunisada's earlier oeuvre. An early series of *Ōtari kyogen no uchi* (Great Performances; 1815-1816) celebrated great actors of the early 19th century in signature or especially celebrated roles – Ichikawa Danjūrō VII as Kan Shōjō for example; Bandō Mitsugorō III as Kajiwara Genta; Iwai Hanshirō V as yaoya Oshichi; Matsumoto Kōshirō V as Banzuin Chōbei; Onoe Matsusuke II as Rokusaburō; Nakamura Utaemon III as Yojiro.<sup>47</sup> Kunisada explored the theme again in 1823, in *Tosei oshi-e hagoita atari kyogen no uchi* (Great Performances: Contemporary Pressed-Cloth Battledores) and subsequently in his 1847-1848 series *Seichū Oboshi ichidai hanashi* (Life of Loyal Oboshi).

Perhaps more importantly, however, it seems that in capitalising on the coinventional practice of melding character with actor in these portraits, Kunisada was developing a pictorial series that could commemorate both the actual historical events and their literary reconstructions. Rather poignantly (given the close proximity of his own death) he was paying tribute to the acts of popular heroes from the past, while also acknowledging and honouring the ways great kabuki performers had made the stage roles their own, and in doing so contributed to the maintenance of the popular mythologies around them through the Edo period. In this sense the *Seichū gishi-den* project assumes the significance occupied by the memorial portrait as a discrete conventional *ukiyo-e* genre.

## Conclusion

In several ways, Kunisada's *Seichū gishi-den* marks a turning point in the development of the *ukiyo-e* portrait. In one sense, his project follows a conventional pathway. Kunisada's designs adopt the established subject categories of *kabuki-e* and *musha-e*, the *okubi-e* close-up portrait format, and the popular taste for colour, pattern and lively surface,

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46 Kabuki 21. *Suketakaya Takasuke III* at [www.kabuki21.com/takasuke3.php](http://www.kabuki21.com/takasuke3.php) accessed November 12th 2014. Suketakaya had assumed the name Takasuke III from round 1852, in the last two years of his life. He is well represented in earlier prints by Kunisada from 1830, 1832, 1833, 1835, 1840, 1847, 1850, 1851, and 1853. He appeared, for example, playing 11 separate roles in a Chūshingura production at Kawarazakiza in 5/1830; in 7 roles, as En'ya Hangan, Hayano Kampei, Hasegawa Sonokichi, Amakawayu Gihei, Yajibei, Kisuke, Teraoka Heiemon, and Tonase, in a production at the Moritaza theatre in 1835; under name Takasuke III for first time in 10/1852; and he was subsequently represented in the role of Yuranosuke by Kunisada in a 1853 *shini-e* 'memorial print,' or 'death picture.'

47 Graebner, 2014.

consistent with clearly established Utagawa school practices for the representation of both character and actor portraits. In his adoption of the woodblock print medium, he was able to work within clearly established affordances and constraints, and to capitalize on both its wide currency as a popular, cheap and accessible art form, and its close traditional associations with the portrayal of character, event, and the dramatic tension and narrative moment of the kabuki stage itself:

Precisely because of its ability to collapse stage performance, historical artifacts, and textual accounts into a single two-dimensional image, the Chūshingura woodblock print was from the beginning a form of cultural expression that enhanced and interpreted theatrical performance rather than simply reflecting it.<sup>48</sup>

In other ways, however, Kunisada's last great project was to explore new ways of addressing a popular taste for realism in woodblock print representations. While adopting the conventional form of the actor/character portrait, Kunisada broke new ground in developing sustained programme of graphic innovation within closely defined spatial and technical parameters. Sustaining his audience's attentions through an extended sequence of pictorial arrangements within a single closely defined theme required the crystallisation of a systematic procedure for pictorial development. The apparent success indicated by the 11th hour extension to the series confirms the popular success this process sustained. In a sense, Kunisada's series also provided both his own public, and viewers today, with a privileged insight into the creative process of the woodblock print designer, an appreciation of the ways a regenerative and developmental process could forge an inventive pathway between conformity and innovation.

Perhaps more importantly for his own public, Kunisada's procedure was to contribute to his significant innovations in the development of the psychological portrait. These final images manifest in pictorial form the intimate melding of historical figure, actor identity, dramatic character, and the dramatic and realism of *haragei*, the actor's complete identification with the actions and expressive mien of the character he is playing, realised in tour-de-force woodblock print representations. Through his skillful melding of the close-up format and the tightly framed spatial problem it generated, a taste for *jitsuroku* realism, and the adoption of both historical and theatre subjects from the past, Kunisada was able to develop evocative portraits of convincing psychological intensity. He was thus able to forge a finely tuned psychological tension between conventional associations with the actions and exemplary character of the *rōnin*, and the conditioning force of each actor's interpretation on the roles, events and themes of both the narrative. In doing so, Kunisada was able to provoke new insights in his public's collective imaginative appreciations and historical memories of the events and the significance they still held. For his public today, the project provokes something of a re-evaluation of Kunisada's contribution to the *ukiyo-e* genre. Though his prints have

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48 Foxwell, 2012, p. 45.

conventionally been thought to represent the late decay of the form,<sup>49</sup> the representational detail, finely moderated psychological subtleties and fine craftsmanship evident in these works can now be appreciated as a key force underpinning contemporary trends to realism in *ukiyo-e* illustration. These trends found their immediate roots in Utagawa school fidelity to the theatrical conventions of the stage. They found deeper roots in *Yamato-e* 'Japanese pictures' and the local, everyday genre scenes of Iwasa Matabei (1578-1650). For both his contemporary and modern audiences however, these final images of his career constitute memorials both to the heroes of Chūshingura and to the great actors who had shaped the public perceptions of the *rōnin*. Kunisada's last great portraits of the *rōnin* offer exemplary reminders of the significance of the Chūshingura ethos for all, for their own generation, and perhaps also for today.

### Biographical Note

David Bell is an Associate Professor at the University of Otago College of Education in Dunedin, New Zealand. He teaches in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in teacher education, specialising in the visual arts, art history and education theory, and also works in the field of Japanese visual culture. His research interests embrace pedagogies for aesthetic learning, Japanese art history and aesthetics, and museums as sites for learning between cultures.

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49 In earlier accounts of *ukiyo-e*, the achievement of the Utagawa school artists like Kunisada fell into a period of decadence in Edo art. Their work was described by Michener as "a source of positive infection in which every skill calculated to destroy an art was taught." James A. Michener. *The Floating World*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1954, p. 187.