

---

Research Notes

---

**Interculturality ‘of and ‘in’ Coxinga:  
China through the Lens of Edo-period Theater**

VIATTE HEMMI Chloe<sup>1)\*</sup>

**【Abstract】**

With his play *The Battles of Coxinga* (1715), Chikamatsu Monzaemon drew on historical material to forge the golden legend of the historical figure Zheng Chenggong. For his artistic project, he distorted historical events and gave them an unexpected afterlife. The staged truth orchestrated by the playwright fascinated contemporary audiences, allowing us to explore the Edo mindset and gain insight into how “Sino–Japan” relations were imaginatively represented on the stages of Osaka and Edo, and even in the festivals of Iwate or Shikoku. Chikamatsu’s dramaturgy flourished in the gaps of history and occasionally achieved an aura of authority. This study examines what the work reveals about the imagination of mid-Edo Japan when reflecting on the Chinese continent. What does it tell us about Sino-Japanese relations in the early eighteenth century? What form of intercultural engagement is at play in the playwright’s work? We argue that highlighting Japanese virtues does not amount to anti-Chinese prejudice; rather, the play emphasizes values that transcend narrow national and ethnic boundaries.

**Key words:** Coxinga, Edo-period Theater, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Intercultural engagement, Sino-Japanese relations

---

研究ノート

---

「国性爺合戦」における〈の〉と〈における〉の異文化性——  
江戸演劇を通じた中国の表象

逸見ヴィアートクロエ<sup>1)\*</sup>

**【要 旨】**

近松門左衛門は1715年の戯曲「国性爺合戦」において、歴史的な事象を素材としつつ、鄭成功という人物の伝説的イメージを創出した。彼の芸術的営為は、歴史的な事実を再構成し、あるいは歪曲することによって、当該人物に予期せぬ後世の名声を与える契機となったのである。作家によって演出された表象としての「真実」は、同時代の観客を魅了し、江戸中期の文化精神を体現するものとして、大阪・江戸にとどまらず、岩手や四国の祭礼においても広く受容された。その過程には、当時の「日中関係」に関する文化的ヴィジョンを読み取ることができる。近松の戯曲は、歴史の空白を埋めるかたちで展開され、ときにその表象は権威を帯びるに至った。かかる作品を精査することにより、江戸中期、日本が中国大陸について想像的関心を抱き始めた時期の精神的断片を捉えることが可能となる。本稿の問いは、この戯曲が18世紀初頭の日中関係をいかなる視座から描き出しているのか、また劇作家による異文化的表象がどのように作用しているのかという点にある。そして結論として、日本的価値の顕彰は単なる反中国的な人種主義に還元されるのではなく、むしろ国家的・民族的境界を超えた普遍的価値の擁護として理解されうることを示したい。

キーワード：国性爺、異文化間交流、江戸演劇、近松門左衛門、日中関係

---

<sup>1)</sup> Faculty of International Liberal Arts, Juntendo University (Email: v-chloe@juntendo.ac.jp)

[Received on September 16, 2025] [Accepted on December 22, 2025]

“Ordinarily, those who study literature approach it as a cognitive object, as material for historical or interpretative inquiry. Here, however, I propose a shift in perspective: to consider what happens when a certain intimacy emerges between literature and its audience, when the reader abandons herself to the work.” (Thomas Pavel, inaugural lecture, *How to Listen to Literature*, Collège de France, 2005)

## Introduction

With Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s *The Battles of Coxinga* (1715), we are not dealing with didactic or moralizing literature. The renowned playwright does, of course, draw upon a romanticized version of a chapter in Northeast Asian history. His theatrical script recounts the golden legend of a historical figure, yet audiences—both past and present—are drawn into what Anthony Grafton would call “false history” as Chikamatsu’s conjectural narrative deeply reshapes the perception of the historical figure of Coxinga in Japan. Originally written for the puppet stage, the play dramatizes the exploits of Coxinga. Chikamatsu appropriates historical material from China, reshaping it for his artistic project, and in doing so rescues it from oblivion, transferring it into a Japanese cultural framework and granting it an unforeseen afterlife.

From its very first performances, *The Battles of Coxinga* (*Kokusen’ya Kassen* in Japanese) enjoyed immense success. This “productive falsehood,” which so clearly resonated with its public, appears to have fulfilled a deep cultural need. The façade of truth orchestrated by Chikamatsu fascinated his contemporaries. If the work “points beyond itself” (in Hegel’s sense), it immerses us in the spirit of Edo and discloses a particular vision of “China–Japan relations” as they were celebrated on the stages of Osaka and Edo, and even in the festivals of Iwate and Shikoku.

Chikamatsu’s play flourished in the gaps of history,

filling voids and at times creating an authority of its own: the literary text rescued the historical figure from obscurity and re-endowed him with significance. By examining the play’s impact on its own time, we may better understand how it shaped the reception of a non-Japanese historical episode during an era when Tokugawa Japan, after the closure of the country in the 1650s, had officially turned away from the outside world. Following Thomas Pavel’s invitation to “listen” to literature, this essay seeks to abandon itself to Chikamatsu’s text in order to uncover how it was received and cherished, and to illuminate the conversation it fostered between stage and spectators.

The process of identification here operates through a double displacement: first, a gap arises between the “I” of the audience and their lived experience; second, a resonance is established between the audience’s multiple “I”s and the fictional characters. For Pavel, the meaning of literature is “entrusted to our care.” Its power lies in what he calls the “ostentatious transfiguration of the human,” which enables different “selves” to recognize themselves within it.

Thus, through Chikamatsu’s brush, how did Edo society receive this historical fable of a hybrid figure—half Chinese, half Japanese—who altered the political balance of seventeenth-century China and paved the way for the emergence of a distinctive Taiwanese identity? This essay examines *The Battles of Coxinga* as a text that captures fragments of Edo-period imaginings of the Chinese continent.

A gifted librettist, Chikamatsu Monzaemon never claimed to be a historian. In recounting the adventures of Zheng Chenggong (1624–1662), known in Japan as Coxinga, he was writing at a moment when the archipelago had closed its doors, yet memories and anxieties concerning the continental neighbor persisted. The transition from Ming to Qing in China had profound repercussions across Northeast Asia, ushering in a new civilizational order that resonated

in both Korea and Japan. As Shimazaki (2015) has noted, this dynastic shift helped reconfigure socio-cultural norms on both sides of the Japan Sea.

What, then, does this play tell us about Sino-Japanese relations at the beginning of the eighteenth century? What kind of “intercultural” dynamics are at work in Chikamatsu’s dramaturgy? I suggest that the play’s emphasis on Japanese virtues should not be reduced to anti-Chinese prejudice. Rather, it constitutes an appeal to values that transcend narrow national frameworks—an intercultural vision articulated through the medium of theater.

### 1. Sources

Chikamatsu Monzaemon is thought to have conceived his new play following the success of *Kokusen’ya Tegara Nikki*, written in 1700 and performed in January 1701 by the Dewa-za troupe (Nagatomo 1971, 29–30; Yamaguchi, 1972, 73, 236–38). The author of this earlier drama, Nishiki Bunryū (Yamamura by birth, active 1691–1721), worked with some of the foremost theaters of the period, including Dewa-za, Toyotake-za, and Takemoto-za in Osaka. Several of his plays were staged at the Takemoto-za in 1702—the very venue where Chikamatsu would later premiere his most celebrated works. Bunryū’s productions may well have sparked Chikamatsu’s early successes of the eighteenth century, for we find narrative parallels in *The Battles of Coxinga* as well as *A Courtesan’s Soul within Incense Smoke*, Chikamatsu seems to have recognized the dramatic potential of Bunryū’s plot, while departing significantly from his intertext. He retained two key characters: the valiant Coxinga, and Bunryū’s fictional heroine Sendara, whom Chikamatsu reshaped and renamed Sendan, transforming her into a Chinese princess.

Beyond this, Chikamatsu appears to have aimed at a more historically faithful representation than his predecessor. To enrich the realism of his narrative, he

drew upon unofficial chronicles as well as Nishikawa Joken’s *Reflections on Trade and Communication with the Civilized and the Barbarous* (*Ka’i tsū shōkō*, 1695), the first comprehensive work of geography written in Japan. Nishikawa (1648–1724), a Nagasaki-born scholar, described the geography, climate, and commercial goods of Japan’s trading partners, including China and the Netherlands. Chikamatsu also seems to have consulted Nishikawa’s *Nagasaki Night Tales*, a collection that provided material for his reworking of the minister Go Sankei—modeled after the historical Wu Sangui (1612–1678), though strikingly transformed. While Wu Sangui had in fact aided the Manchus in establishing the Qing dynasty, Chikamatsu recast him as a loyal retainer.

Another crucial source was *Record of the Ming–Qing Conflicts* (*Minshin Tōki*, 1661), an eleven-volume history written by the Confucian scholar Ukai Sekisai (1615–1664)—though erroneously attributed to Maezono Jinzaemon by Keene (Keene, 1951, 76). Works of this kind, which today would fall under the label of “nonfiction,” enjoyed great popularity among Japan’s educated elites. A publisher’s catalogue from 1696 lists the *Minshin Tōki* at 13 monme, nearly a third of a servant’s annual salary during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Tham, 2023). From this text Chikamatsu borrowed episodes such as military campaigns, the famous encounter of the heron and the clam (Viatte, 2025), and the game of go, which he reconfigured by replacing immortal figures with ancient emperors. He also created the treacherous character Ri Tōten, based loosely on the rebel leader Li Zicheng (1606–1645), who had lost an eye in battle in 1642. Chikamatsu dramatized this detail into an extravagant opening scene: Ri Tōten gouges out his own eye to prove his loyalty.

This spectacular self-enucleation immediately recasts a wounded soldier into a duplicitous strategist. The gesture is at once grotesque and rhetorically



Figure 1. Ri Tōten gouges out his eye. Print from *Kokusen'ya Kassen*, by Kitagawa Yukimaru (text, calligraphy) and Utagawa Kunitora (illustrations), published by Yamamoto Heikichi, 1834 (courtesy of Tenjikirōjin).

effective: by sacrificing an eye, Ri Tōten feigns sincerity and reliability. Chikamatsu further fused elements of Li Zicheng with traits of Wu Zixu (d. 484 BCE), the legendary strategist associated with Sun Tzu, who, according to tradition, requested

postmortem enucleation so that his eyes might witness the vindication of his foresight. In Chikamatsu's logic, if Ri Tōten is to be a consummate Chinese strategist, he must be capable of the same gesture as Wu Zixu. This syllogistic reasoning justifies the transformation of historical fact into a dramaturgical and narrative necessity.

As Shakespeare's Richard III has forever shaped the popular image of the king as avaricious, murderous, and even monstrous, so too does Chikamatsu's Ri Tōten exemplify the rewriting of history in service of theater. Factual distortion is not accidental but deliberate, heightening the villain's duplicity and advancing the plot. In merging historical figures, Chikamatsu engages in what might be termed "conceptual realism"—a mode that, by combining recognizable details with imaginative liberties, produces characters that feel both culturally plausible and theatrically compelling.

Drawing on theories of proper names from Searle and Wittgenstein (Pavel, 1975, 168), one might argue that Chikamatsu exploits the plasticity of names: once redefined in fiction, they acquire new force. His audience was led to believe in Ri Tōten precisely because the figure was "logically" Chinese, built from a network of culturally familiar references. Moreover, the cultural distance of the character facilitated belief: spectators could accept the distortion of foreign history more readily than that of their own. Within Chikamatsu's finely wrought framework, factual counter-truths metamorphose into literary truths.

Historical Figures	Conceptual Realism in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's <i>The Battles of Coxinga</i>
Li Ziheng, the leader of a peasant rebellion and briefly an emperor, is blinded by an arrow in battle.	Ri Tōten, the Qing traitor allied with the Tartars, is a shrewd strategist who is willing to blind himself to demonstrate his loyalty.
Wu Zixu, a Chinese strategist, requested enucleation to show how trustworthy and reliable he was.	

Figure 2. Historical figures and their literary avatars: the case of Ri Tōten

### 1.2 Conceptual Realism in Chikamatsu’s Theater

This liberty with historical fact exemplifies Chikamatsu’s conception of theater itself. Though he left no systematic treatise, his views are articulated in the preface he wrote for *Naniwa Miyage* (1738), a work by his friend Hozumi Ikan (1692–1769), a Confucian scholar and occasional consultant to the Takemoto troupe. In this dialogue-form preface, Chikamatsu responds to Hozumi’s claim that modern audiences demand factual reasoning and will no longer tolerate artifice. Against this, Chikamatsu insists:

*Jōruri* depicts reality as it is, yet for the sake of art, it also presents elements that may not exist in reality. As one source notes, “Art is a delicate membrane interposed between the real and the fictional.” Contemporary audiences tend to favor realism, appreciating when the real is accurately represented. (...) [because] an actor portraying a notable (*karō*) must reproduce gestures and speech. But should the actor forgo makeup, appear bald, and keep an unkempt beard just because the real person does not wear makeup? Would the audience accept this? This illustrates the interstitial membrane between reality and fiction: a space that is simultaneously real and “a-real,” where audience pleasure is found. Whether rendering a character in performance or carving it in wood, the artist must faithfully capture form while exercising creative liberties. Similarly, a playwright must follow the source story while taking imaginative freedom; it is precisely this balance that captivates and delights the audience (*Naniwa*, 164–196, translation by the author).

Chikamatsu thus distinguishes four modes: the fiction (*uso*), surface realism (*nama-mi*), conceptual realism (*kyōkō*), and nonfiction (*jitsu*). Fiction may lack authenticity, surface realism lacks spirit, and plain fact fails to move the heart. Excessive realism

would strip away aesthetic pleasure. Rather, it is in the “membrane,” the interstice between fact and fiction, that audiences find delight. Only conceptual realism, in his view, can truly captivate audiences. By channeling factual details into narrative frameworks that evoke emotion without overdetermining it, Chikamatsu creates “possible worlds.” His theater occupies the diaphragm between history and the marvelous, he balances fact and invention in order to guide spectators toward both meaning and genuine emotion. Cultural alterity itself becomes a fertile ground for such dramaturgical play.

### 1.3 How could the playwright engage with a predominantly intercultural subject during Japan’s sakoku period?

Some scholars have suggested that the key to Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s fascination with this episode—drawn from Sinicized history and rooted in Kyūshū—may lie in the ten-year period about which historical sources remain silent. Little is known of his activities in his twenties: he is recorded as a samurai’s son and later reappears as an established playwright around age thirty. In his book *Chikamatsu Haruo* (b. 1924), a descendant of the playwright, argues that his ancestor likely had close contact with Hirado and Kyūshū more broadly and during his youth, and may even have engaged in illicit trade, including salt commerce with the continent, despite the restrictions of *sakoku* (Chikamatsu H., 2003, 55). According to Chikamatsu Haruo, his ancestor, the young Chikamatsu may have resided at Gonshō-ji, a Tendai temple in present-day Shiga (about 100 km north of Nagasaki and 60 km from Hirado), which sheltered Europeans and Ming Chinese exiles. There, he is said to have become familiar with Spanish language and literature, while also acquiring skills in navigation and knowledge of Chinese history and classical texts (*ibid.*, 60). Because shogunal troops could not enter the temple, it offered an ideal refuge

for Christians, Sephardic Jews, and other foreigners unable or unwilling to leave Japan, granting Chikamatsu direct access to continental witnesses. In 2004, a tomb attributed to Chikamatsu Monzaemon was discovered within the temple grounds (KKK, 2020, 10).

In 1675, Monzaemon was called to serve the lord of Akō. While in his service, he reportedly participated in the salt trade from his base in Nagato (present-day Yamaguchi), which would have enabled him to engage with ships of the Matsuura clan at Hirado, as well as with fleets from the Ryūkyū Islands (ibid., 68). Chinese flotillas continued to arrive in Nagasaki, and by 1688 over 193 Chinese ships, each carrying more than fifty sailors, had docked at the newly established “Chinese Residence” (*Tōjin yashiki*), following this peak in traffic. First- and second-hand information on Chinese culture and politics would have been readily accessible. Some scholars even suggest that Chikamatsu may have traveled to what is now Taiwan (KKK, 2020, 19-21), possibly encountering Tagawa Shichizaemon (1626–96, the brother of the historical figure Coxinga) during a pilgrimage to Ise in 1706 (Takano, 1934, vol. II, 445). Shichizaemon, then in his sixties, would have been well-positioned for such a journey. Takano further posits that Chikamatsu met a Ryukyuan man in Osaka in 1714, drawing inspiration from his accounts and attire for his play. Maritime excursions to Naha and Shuri Castle may also have informed Chikamatsu’s depiction of the fifth act of *The Battles of Coxinga* (ibid., 181). Although some questions remain unresolved, scholars agree that even without direct contact with witnesses or historical sites, Chikamatsu accessed literary and historical sources to craft his own narrative. He drew on recent East Asian history to create an innovative interpretation that resonated with contemporary audiences. In doing so, he forged an intercultural “literary field,” governed by its own rules yet anchored in socio-historical reality, reflect-

ing both the curiosities and expectations of early eighteenth-century Japan.

Thus, the depiction of the Chinese “Otherness” in his work was not merely a product of imagination or creative fantasy. Chikamatsu, who may have engaged directly with Chinese thought and life, deliberately manipulated reality to serve his dramaturgical logic. Intercultural elements enriched his artistic project while allowing him to shape the text with precision, maximizing its dramatic impact. The protagonist of *The Battles of Coxinga* exemplifies these complex cultural negotiations.

#### 1.4 The Transmutation of Coxinga

Born of the union between Zheng Zhilong, a Chinese pirate, and O-Matsu, the daughter of a Kyushu samurai, Zhèng Chénggōng—known as Watōnai or Coxinga (Kokusen’ya)—is the intercultural figure par excellence. To describe him in his youth, Chikamatsu forges the name “Watōnai,” which literally means “the one who is (born) between China and Japan.” Whereas the historical Zheng Zhilong had left Japan at the age of seven, the playwright accentuates the Japanese side of his hero. In a gesture of assimilation and cultural rapprochement, Chikamatsu allows Watōnai to live in Hirado until the age of twenty and even gives him a Japanese wife. Exoticism, therefore, is not the primary engine of the character’s construction.

Chikamatsu also plays deliberately with orthography. In Japanese, “Coxinga” is rendered as Kokusen’ya. In the play, however, the name is written with the characters 国性爺 (*koku* “country” – *sen* “nature/sex” – *ya* “old man”), whereas the historical figure’s name was written 国姓爺 (*koku* “country” – *sen* “surname” – *ya* “old man”). By shifting from “surname” to “nature/sex,” Chikamatsu signals his departure from strict historical fidelity: the fictional dimension of his project is fully assumed, the duplicity of enunciation embraced. Rather than

exploiting the exoticism of a foreign figure already known in Japan, Chikamatsu reinforces Watōnai’s bicultural identity. He “Japanizes” him so that audiences might more readily attach themselves to his adventures.

As a character familiar with both cultural worlds, Watōnai functions as a mediator of values between two poles. Even his name is a playful signal of cultural parentage. More than a merely “intercultural” or “bicultural” figure, Coxinga stands at the crossroads of Japan, a certain vision of China, history itself, and the literary imagination. If fiction constitutes a world of its own, then Coxinga inhabits its margins, navigating several continents simultaneously.

Chikamatsu’s Coxinga differs markedly from the historical Zheng Chénggōng, whose posthumous influence in Japan was far more modest than the cult he acquired overseas. As Chih-Hua Kao has shown, Zheng’s worship in Taiwan developed into a vast popular religion: today, between 64 and over 100 temples are dedicated to him, alongside some 50 commemorative sites. Elevated to demi-god, he is credited with miracles, such as conjuring a spring

by striking the ground with his sword, or producing a shoal of fish to feed his starving troops (Kao, 2007, 20). The historical Zheng family also stood at the intersection of Chinese, Japanese, and maritime politics. Zheng Zhilong, Coxinga’s father, secured military support from the shogunate in the 1630s in exchange for expanding maritime trade. Even after the *sakoku* edicts of 1645, Coxinga’s mother obtained a special exemption to leave Japan and rejoin her family abroad. Yet ties soon frayed. Coxinga’s son eventually attacked two Satsuma vessels, effectively severing the earlier alliance. As Ōba Osamu and William C. Hedberg have noted, the Zhengs also clashed with Qing authorities due to their vast maritime networks (Hedberg, 2019). In 1661, the Qing issued the *qianjie* edict “coastal evacuation”, forbidding Chinese subjects from traveling overseas or trading with the Zhengs, and ordering coastal populations to move inland so as to deprive the family of local support (Fogel et al., 2023). The edict was repealed only in 1683, after the Qing conquest of Taiwan, when the dynasty, secure in its dominance, shifted to a policy of *zhanhai* (maritime

Character in the Play (国性爺)	Historical Figure (国姓爺)
Born under the name Watōnai. His Ja-panese mother plays an important role, though never named.	Born July 14, 1624 in Hirado (Kyushu) as Fu-kumatsu, to a Chinese father (Zheng Zhilong) and Ja-panese mother (Tagawa O-Matsu).
Watōnai has a Japanese wife named Komutsu.	In China, Zhèng Chénggōng’s principal wife was Lady Dong, along with several concubines.
Watōnai remains in Japan (Hirado) until the age of 20.	Zhèng Chénggōng left Japan at age 7. (Nishikawa Joken, 1648–1724, claimed that he stayed until 17; Chikamatsu’s contemporaries may well have accepted this version.)
Go Sankei, minister loyal to the Ming, and his wife assist Princess Sendan in fleeing to Hirado.	The historical Wu Sangui (Go Sankei) in fact aided the Manchus in founding the Qing dynasty.
Coxinga’s mother commits suicide out of loyalty to her Chinese daughter-in-law, who also sacrifices herself.	Zhèng Chénggōng’s mother, pursued by Qing troops, committed suicide to escape capture.
Coxinga defeats the troops of Dattankoku (a Qing general).	Coxinga is ultimately defeated by Qing forces.
His father, ashamed of his uselessness, at-tempts to fight the Qing alone; Kokusen’ya raises an army to support him and wins a victory.	His father defects; Zhèng Chénggōng fights on the opposing side, and his actions lead to his father’s execution.
The last Ming emperor reigned for 7 years.	The last Ming emperor reigned for nearly 16 years.

Figure 3. The Historical Figure and his Literary Avatar: Coxinga

expansion). Zheng emerges as a figure who unsettles boundaries, whose national belonging is persistently ambiguous.

Zheng's influence on Japan was not limited to the literary imagination. The flourishing of Imari porcelain, for instance, is partly attributable to his maritime networks: despite Japan's closure, Ming artisans fleeing China were able to settle in Kyushu and, using kaolin deposits discovered in Arita in 1616, develop new porcelain techniques. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company was supplying Europe with blue-and-white porcelains shipped from Imari and Hirado, later from Dejima (KKK, 2020, 11–12).

Thus, beyond the political and cultural appropriations that marked his legacy, Zheng Chénggōng also embodies the disjunction of “birth” from “homeland.” As both exile and liberator, revered in Taiwan yet never entirely “Chinese” nor “Japanese,” he incarnates the fluidity of belonging. Under the banner of the intercultural, he defends values and allegiances of his choosing—at times even against those of his own father.

## 2. Listening to The Battles of Coxinga

Thomas Pavel notes that the meaning of a literary work is “entrusted to our care” (Pavel, 2006); readers, spectators, and society as a whole bear responsibility for interpreting the text. In 1715, the play achieved phenomenal success. Its immediate legacy was primarily literary: a year after Chikamatsu's piece, his rival Ki no Kaion (1663–1742) wrote *Keisei Kokusen'ya*, seeking to capitalize on the enthusiasm generated by Chikamatsu's work by transposing the story into the world of courtesans (*keisei*) for the Toyotake-za troupe. Chikamatsu himself attempted to expand his play through two adaptations, which failed to attract audiences who clearly preferred the proto-world he had originally created. Other literary works followed, including the novel *Kokusen'ya*

*Michō Taiheiki* by Ejima Kiseki (1667–1736), published in 1717.

More unusually, Kitani Hōgin (1877–1950) reports a noh play written by Hara Kanchiku in 1756, representing a rare instance of a noh libretto derived from *jōruri* (Matsuda, 2000, 49). Typically, it is the reverse that occurs; for example, Chikamatsu frequently drew on noh repertoire for works such as *Momijigari* or *Shutendō-ji Makura-no-Koto-no-Ha* (1707). Here, however, the noh does not precede the *jōruri*—it transposes it. The author appears to have adapted Scene I of Act II, set on the Hirado beach known as “Along the Shore” (Kitani, 1923, vol. III, 106). The noh libretto literally cites a line from the exposition scene, marking the first entrance of Watōnai in Chikamatsu's play:

As they looked about, they would see the seagulls cutting their seals in the sand, and the bay plovers had flocked together on the islands off the shore (Keene, 1951, 114).

The couple then collects seashells (Viatte, 2025) and eventually reaches the boat carrying Sendan, the Chinese princess. *The Battles of Coxinga* appears to be the only *jōruri* play that inspired a direct adaptation into noh. Yet the influence of the play extended beyond the fictional stage, leaving its mark on Japanese cultural life. The narrative was transplanted outside the literary sphere, as we will discuss later; first, however, it is important to examine scene by scene the role of exoticism and interculturality in Chikamatsu's source play.

### 2.1 The Play

This five-act, twelve-scene play opens with a depiction of the Ming court. Chikamatsu Monzaemon here signs his first work set in a foreign country. In the text, three different terms are used to refer to China. Donald Keene notes that each term denotes a

distinct dimension: *Kara* emphasizes the land itself, its customs, and its material culture; *Tō* refers to the country in general; and *Morokoshi* reinforces the sense of a distant, strange, and exotic realm (Keene, 1951, 7). But how are these “Chinas” and their “Chinese” characters represented? This section demonstrates, scene after scene, that the author defended the thesis of positive interculturality in his play rather than criticizing continental culture.

### **Act I:**

The opening act of *The Battles of Coxinga* establishes the cultural and political framework within which Chikamatsu situates his transnational hero. From the outset, the play signals its departure from the familiar Japanese setting: the very first scene unfolds at the Ming court in Nanjing in the fifth lunar month of 1644, a moment of dynastic crisis. Chikamatsu chooses a foreign court as his point of departure to introduce a dramaturgical experiment—his first full-length work set outside Japan—that obliges the audience to negotiate with alterity.

#### **Act I Scene 1: At the Ming Court in Nanking**

The central figures are the last Ming emperor (Shisōretsu) and his consort, awaiting the birth of the heir to a doomed dynasty. The loyal minister Go Sankei embodies rectitude, while his wife Ryūkakun, newly delivered of a child, becomes a wet nurse to the imperial infant. Their virtue is sharply contrasted with the opportunism of Ri Tōten, who bargains away the empire’s honor in exchange for grain, and with the arrogance of the Tartar emissary Bairoku, who demands the emperor’s sister as tribute. The grotesque gesture of Ri Tōten—gouging out his own eye to prove loyalty—becomes a symbol of political corruption, a parody of self-sacrifice that masks treason. The scene is not only political but also cultural. Chikamatsu underscores the plurality of civilizational lineages: China is credited with rites,

music, and Confucian teaching; India with the Buddhist doctrine of causality; and Japan with the Shinto path of sincerity. When described by Go Sankei, the Manchus (here called Dattan) are cast as foils, associated with brute force, appetite, and superficial luxury. The contrast delineates a hierarchy of cultures, where Japan and China share refined traditions, while the Tartars embody excess and barbarity. Thus, from the very first tableau, the stage is set for a confrontation in which cultural identity is as decisive as military power.

#### **Act 1, Scene 2: In Princess Sendan’s apartments**

The emperor, impressed by Ri Tōten’s self-sacrifice, decides to reward him by marrying off his young sister, the beautiful Sendan. Although she refused once, Sendan is coerced through cunning: the emperor arranges a staged battle in which 200 court ladies wield either plum or cherry branches. Alarmed by this strange spectacle, Go Sankei arrives clad in armor. Upon understanding the situation, he reproaches the emperor for his extravagances and poor governance, as well as for the exile of Tei Shiryū (Ikkan, the father of Coxinga), a righteous and honest man sent unjustly to Hirado. Skilled in interpreting signs and deciphering hidden meanings in characters, Go Sankei warns that Ri Tōten is not a traitor; by plucking out his eye, he instead proves to the Tartars that he belongs to them, enabling them to act. The emperor rebukes Go Sankei, yet the envoy returns to the palace with his soldiers. Outnumbered, the Ming forces cannot withstand the assault. Go Sankei orders Ryūkakun to bring the princess to safety. He and his men manage to escort the imperial couple to escape, but they are pursued. The emperor is killed, and his head is severed as a trophy for the King. Go Sankei recovers the imperial regalia from the emperor’s lifeless body and flees with his newborn and the empress.

Cultural landscape emerges: In Japan, human

relations are guided by poetry, which softens manners and social conduct. In contrast, China, though familiar with the poetic arts, employs them merely as a tool of Cupid. Here, the Ming emperor's stratagem forces his sister into marriage despite her resistance. Throughout the play, the motif of "cunning" is decisive in characterizing cultures and their dynamics of power.

### Act I Scene 3: On the coast at Kaidō

The third scene intensifies the tragic dimension. Pursued by Qing arquebusiers, the empress is mortally wounded. In an act of radical loyalty, Go Sankei cuts open her body to rescue the infant heir, replacing the corpse with that of his own child to deceive the enemy. This inversion simultaneously reaffirms loyalty and evokes Japanese tropes of self-negation and substitution. Meanwhile, Ryūkakun defends the princess Sendan, invoking both Buddhist and Shinto deities to ensure her passage to Japan where the exiled father of Coxinga awaits. At this juncture, cultural boundaries blur. Ryūkakun is presented as a model of bravery and devotion for women in both China and Japan. As a Chinese woman, she embodies courage and self-sacrifice, proving herself worthy of the finest Japanese warriors. Her portrayal highlights the dramaturgical interplay between cultures: although she belongs to a foreign land, her virtues resonate with Japanese ideals of heroism and loyalty. Even as she cannot entirely restrain her tears, her character bridges cultural boundaries, allowing audiences to admire and empathize with her courage across national and aesthetic lines. Chikamatsu positions her as a bridge between Chinese and Japanese ideals of loyalty, allowing the audience to recognize familiar values in foreign characters.

### Act II, Scene 1: On the Beach at Hirado, Kyūshū

The scene opens on a beach in Hirado, Kyūshū,

where Watōnai, accompanied by his wife Komutsu, is gathering shellfish. He witnesses a giant clam clamping down on the beak of a seabird, each creature locked in a struggle for survival. From this observation of nature, Watōnai derives a principle of military strategy: to provoke conflict between two adversaries, then seize the opportunity when both are weakened. He resolves to apply this lesson to the struggle against the Tartars who threaten the Ming dynasty. The arrival of Princess Sendan by boat shifts the dramatic focus from the natural to the political and intercultural. Sendan, speaks in Chinese and recounts the plight of her people. Though her words are initially incomprehensible, Watōnai recalls his father's teachings and attempts to mediate communication. Komutsu, by contrast, responds first with mockery, ridiculing the foreign sounds. Yet the play dramatizes the ethical imperative to resist such facile scorn: Watōnai enjoins his wife to temper her jealousy, he embodies the possibility of translation and understanding across linguistic barriers.

The passage reveals Chikamatsu's sophisticated use of sound. Donald Keene dismissed Sendan's lines as nonsensical syllables, yet closer analysis suggests that they echo the dhāraṇī of the *Sutra of Great Compassion (Daihizammai darani)*, chanted in Japanese Buddhist liturgy. One can observe numerous similarities between her line (I quote: "namu kyara chon nō tora yaa ya...") and the opening of the dharani from the *Sutra of Great Compassion*, chanted during morning rites, which reads: "Namu kara tan no tora ya ya". Chikamatsu appears to have drawn upon the sonorities of mantra recitation—what Kūkai famously translated as *shingon* ("true words")—to create an approximation of Chinese speech. In this light, Sendan's "Chinese" is less gibberish than a theatrical invocation of the transcendent power of sacred sound. This wordplay also allows the first scene of Act I to create a moment of

playful complicity with the audience “listening” to the play.

Komutsu’s initial mockery thus transforms into an effort at imitation: she repeats fragments of Sendan’s utterance, not to deride but to empathize. In this moment, the scene suggests that compassion and affective resonance can overcome linguistic and cultural divides. The rivalry between the Chinese princess and the Japanese wife gradually softens into solidarity, as both women remain behind together while Watōnai departs for China. When Chikamatsu alludes to two texts depicting women torn by the duty of bidding farewell, he emphasizes the shared sensibilities of the two cultures. In the Chinese legend, the wife climbs to the top of a mountain and becomes immobile, turning into stone as she waits for her husband’s return. In the Japanese counterpart, he references the legendary Ōtohihime, who watched her husband depart for the Korean campaign and waved her stole for a long time in farewell.

Thematically, the scene destabilizes Sinocentric geography. China is described as lying “a thousand leagues to the west of Japan’s great waves”, a displacement that repositions the Middle Kingdom at the margins. This Copernican reversal, enabled by the Ming collapse, reframes East Asia with Japan at its center. Watōnai himself embodies this synthesis: he claims mastery not only of Chinese classics, taught by his father, but also of the *Taiheiki*, a Japanese chronicle of war. Yet beyond textual erudition, he privileges the direct lessons of nature—here, the struggle of clam and bird—as the source of true strategic wisdom. Cultivation, the play suggests, lies not in allegiance to any single canon but in the discerning application of common sense (Viatte, 2025).

Finally, divine legitimation confirms Watōnai’s mission. The gods of Sumiyoshi appear in his mother’s dream, foretelling victory in distant western lands.

The Japanese *kami* thus intervene on the continental stage, extending their power across the seas. In this interplay of strategy, cross-cultural encounter, and divine sanction, the beach at Hirado becomes the threshold between Japan and China, nature and text, local identity and universal aspiration.

## **Act II, Scene 2: The Bamboo Forest of a Thousand Leagues**

Upon their arrival in China, Watōnai and his companions learn from Ikkan that his daughter Kinshōjo has married a powerful warlord, General Kanki, who might prove a valuable ally. The group decides to divide their efforts. Watōnai, accompanied by his mother, passes through the dense bamboo forest of Senri, where they encounter a ferocious tiger, cornered by hunters. Watōnai refuses to rely on his sword and wrestles with the beast barehanded, guided by his mother’s admonition that his body is a sacred gift from the *kami*. Through physical strength and the power of a talisman from Ise Shrine, he subdues the tiger, which then submits and carries his mother on its back.

The episode dramatizes the fusion of human courage and divine sanction. The amulet of Amaterasu Ōmikami—the sun goddess and supreme Shinto deity—extends its protective efficacy even on continental soil. The tiger, emblem of raw and foreign nature, is subdued not merely by force but by the spiritual authority of Japan’s *kami*. The scene thus affirms that Japan’s sacred power transcends geographical boundaries: even in the heart of China, the river Isuzu’s “mysterious force” (which stands for Ise sanctuary) compels obedience. Watōnai’s declaration that “a country’s greatness is not measured by its size” underscores this symbolic reversal: the small archipelago demonstrates a potency equal to or greater than the vast continent.

The narrative then shifts from the natural to the political. When confronted by Tartar troops, Watōnai

refuses to surrender the tiger. Yet rather than fighting to annihilation, he offers the enemy soldiers the possibility of transformation. Disenchanted with Tartar rule, they accept his invitation to defect. Their integration is staged ritually: their heads are shaved, but their bodies remain Chinese; their names are adapted into Japanese forms, yet often with playful markers of foreignness (e.g., “Cambodia-emon,” “Siam-tarō,” “England-bei,” “Bornéo-gorō,” “Djakarta-bei”). This hybridization resists the logic of total assimilation. Cultural borders prove porous, identities negotiable, and belonging a matter of voluntary choice rather than immutable essence.

By contrast, the animal realm resists accommodation. The foxes of the bamboo grove, depicted as deceptive and hostile, symbolize the dangers of enchantment and misrecognition. Whereas humans are shown capable of solidarity across political divides, animals embody suspicion and estrangement. Chikamatsu thereby distinguishes between the natural world, where divine intervention can redirect even bestial forces, and the human sphere, where dialogue and shared interest enable reconciliation. Ultimately, the scene illustrates a model of interculturality grounded in flexibility and consent. Soldiers cross allegiances without erasing their past identities, and even a tiger can accept to be “converted” through divine charisma. Chikamatsu stages not an insurmountable clash of civilizations but the possibility of integration, guided by Watōnai’s charisma and the transcendent protection of the Japanese kami. In the bamboo grove, martial valor, divine intervention, and intercultural negotiation converge, reaffirming the play’s central message that national boundaries do not foreclose solidarity, and that Japan’s spiritual authority can foster unity beyond its shores.

### **Act III, Scene 1: The Castle of Lions. Outside the Great Gate**

Outside the castle gates, Watōnai is reunited with

his father, Ikkan. They seek a private audience with General Kanki, but the general is absent and the guards demand that they leave. At this point Kinshōjo, Ikkan’s daughter and Watōnai’s half-sister, intervenes. Having overheard the commotion, she requests that the strangers identify themselves and verifies her father’s identity with a portrait. Yet the edict of the Great King of Tartary forbids all foreigners from entering any fortress. As a compromise, Kinshōjo secures permission for Watōnai’s mother to enter—on condition that she be bound like a criminal. If negotiations with Kanki succeed, a white dye will be poured into the moat; if they fail, the dye will be red.

The scene dramatizes the precarious balance between kinship and suspicion under conditions of political surveillance. Kinshōjo embodies filial devotion, but her agency is constrained by Tartar law. The symbolism of the dyes condenses the stakes of negotiation: honor and survival depend on subtle signals in a world where appearances dictate reality.

Cultural proximity is underscored repeatedly. “On a map, Japan and China appear so close,” remarks the narrator. For Kinshōjo, the knowledge that her father resides in Japan renders the archipelago emotionally near, regardless of geographical distance. Chikamatsu develops this motif through metaphors of kinship: “Though father and son may hasten along divergent paths, they do not stray, for both follow the true way.” Watōnai, assimilated to Japan itself, represents the moral center from which values radiate.

Yet gendered differences complicate the picture. Kinshōjo, though virtuous, is portrayed as inherently fragile “because she is a Chinese woman,” while Watōnai and Ikkan, aligned with Japanese warrior values, are shown as masters of self-control, incapable of yielding to tears. Once again, Chikamatsu stages national difference through gendered embodiment:

Japanese resilience is contrasted with Chinese emotional vulnerability.

The obstacle to understanding lies less in Sino-Japanese difference than in the obstruction of the Tartars, who sow war and prohibit openness. Suspicion of the “foreigner,” rather than cultural divergence itself, is the true barrier. Watōnai therefore rejects blood ties as the sole basis of allegiance. What matters, he insists, is adherence to shared values “Can we rely on you or not?” His stance echoes an ethic of voluntary commitment that transcends lineage.

Watōnai’s mother adds a counterpoint: individuals cannot wholly escape the social and national identities ascribed to them by others. One must account for the representations that circulate in the public sphere. Accepting to be bound like a criminal, she declares, “Japan may be a small country, but its men and women never abandon a noble cause.” Submission to appearances, she suggests, can be strategic, provided it safeguards a higher mission. In this negotiation between inner conviction and outward conformity, women articulate the voice of social customs.

### **Act III, Scene 2: Inside Kanki’s Residence. Red Dye in the River (Beni-nagashi)**

As servants bustle to prepare a meal worthy of Watōnai’s mother, Kanki returns with news of his promotion: he now commands 100,000 cavalry. Kinshōjo pleads with him to support Watōnai. Torn between loyalty to the Tartars and fidelity to his wife’s family, Kanki hesitates. To preserve his honor, he resolves to kill his wife, but Watōnai’s mother intervenes, preventing both Kinshōjo’s death and the suspicion that she herself might have abetted it. Yet Kinshōjo, despairing of reconciliation, sacrifices herself. Standing on the parapet, Watōnai sees red dye spreading through the moat—not a signal, but the blood of his sister’s suicide. Her death compels

Kanki to ally with Watōnai. In a gesture of symbolic rebirth, Kanki confers upon him a new name, Kokusen’ya (Coxinga), which will carry renown. Watōnai’s mother, proud yet resolute, chooses to follow Kinshōjo in death to preserve her honor, urging Coxinga to show no mercy in the coming battle. Both women breathe their last together, while Watōnai and Kanki reaffirm their determination to destroy the Tartars.

Here, intercultural proximity is emphasized through motifs of resemblance and mutual recognition. Watōnai’s mother immediately embraces Kinshōjo as her daughter, and no interpreter is deemed necessary: “the song of the thrush is the same in China and Japan.” Physical similarities are noted—“the same eyes and noses”—while distinctions are relegated to external forms such as hairstyle and dress. Differences appear temporal or superficial, not essential. Even cultural stereotypes tend toward admiration: a Chinese maid dreams of being reborn Japanese, since Yamato is famed as the land of tranquility and kindness.

At the same time, intercultural misunderstandings punctuate the dialogue. When the mother requests a simple rice ball, the Japanese term *musubi* is misheard by the Chinese servants, who imagine it refers to a class of sumo wrestlers. The comic misinterpretation highlights the pitfalls of cross-cultural exchange: stereotypes may lead to errors, but they are laughable rather than threatening. Kinshōjo’s sacrifice, however, infuses the comedy with tragic weight. Her blood becomes the “red dye” that unites divided families and reconciles competing allegiances. The women, through death, embody the ultimate self-effacement for the sake of honor and solidarity. Meanwhile, the men inherit a new political order, sealed by intercultural alliance and symbolized in the renaming of Watōnai as Coxinga.

Chikamatsu thus crafts a complex tableau: cultural resemblances foster mutual recognition, misinter-

pretations generate humor, and women's deaths consecrate the male alliance. The result is a drama in which intercultural solidarity emerges not by erasing differences but by negotiating its tragicomic dimensions.

#### **Act IV, Scene 1: Before the Sumiyoshi Shrine at Matsura**

In Japan, Komutsu learns that Coxinga has succeeded in persuading Kanki, has been granted the name Kokusen'ya, and now commands an army. Overjoyed by this news, she goes to pray at the Sumiyoshi Shrine, dedicated to the sea god, in Matsuura. After offering her devotions, she begins to practice with a large wooden sword. Soon becoming proficient, she proposes to Princess Sendan that they embark together on a ship bound for China.

#### **Act IV, Scene 2: The Journey (michiyuki) of The Princess Sendan From Hirado to China**

Upon arriving at the port, they encounter a young fisherman with an oddly archaic hairstyle and ask him to take them aboard his boat. He agrees, and they set sail. During the voyage, he explains the geography to them and speaks of the surrounding islands. Through his supernatural powers, they arrive in China in a short span of time. The young man then reveals himself to be the "son of the sea, the *kami* of Sumiyoshi." Interwoven destinies and the protection of the *kami*: the Japanese woman wears a Chinese comb in her hair, while the Chinese woman adorns herself with a Japanese comb. Yamato and China thus intertwine, each highlighting and complementing the other.

#### **Act IV, Scene 3: The Mountain of the Nine Immortals**

For two years, Go Sankei has lived as a fugitive in remote regions to avoid Ri Tōten's agents while

completing the education of the young prince. Along the way, he climbs the "Mountain of the Nine Immortals." Carrying the prince to the summit exhausts him. There he encounters two old men engaged in a game of go. When Go Sankei questions them, they explain that this board is more than a game: it is the stage upon which the fate of the world is being played out, the clash of yin and yang. The 361 squares correspond to the 361 days of the lunar year.

Fascinated, Go Sankei realizes that the progress of Coxinga's battles is being revealed before his eyes. When he declares his wish to join him, the two old men explain that what he is witnessing is in fact taking place hundreds of leagues away, and that more than five years have already elapsed while he has been absorbed in watching the game. They then reveal their identities: the first venerable elder is the founder of the Ming dynasty, and the second his trusted counselor. The two then vanish.

Go Sankei now discovers that a long beard has grown on his face, and that the young prince, now seven years old, has reached the age of voice change. Suddenly Ikkan arrives with Princess Sendan. They recount their adventures to one another and realize that the mountain is teeming with enemies. In desperation, they implore the venerable figures for aid. A bridge of clouds then forms, allowing them to escape. When the enemy soldiers attempt to pursue them, the bridge is swept away by the wind, casting them into the abyss. Bairoku, who has survived, is struck down by Go Sankei with a crushing blow to the head. The small group then sets out to join Coxinga.

Cultural Substitutions: In Coxinga's speech, Chikamatsu replaces Japanese toponyms with Chinese ones while quoting a passage from the noh play *Ataka*. The message of the noh scene can be abstracted from a Japanese framework without the metaphor losing its force. The geographic setting

matters less than the idea of barriers lowering to let the hero pass. Thus, instead of Yoshitsune and Benkei bringing offerings to the Tōdai-ji, here it is a matter of raising funds for the celestial palace of Tai chen. When recounting Coxinga's battles, Chikamatsu is not rigorous in his use of Chinese toponyms: once again, conceptual realism takes precedence over topographical precision.

The Japanese art of combat (the Yoshitsune method) consists in striking first—taking the enemy by surprise—and crushing him. (The Japanese also possess hand grenades, a technological advantage.) Supported by the *kami*, they can traverse vast distances on a bridge of clouds; there is no need for “Chinese strategies,” since the enemy is annihilated to the last. (Already in Japanese history, Tadanobu had triumphed at Yoshino.) Whereas earlier *jōruri* often served Buddhist proselytization, with characters aided by bodhisattvas, in *The Battles of Coxinga* it is the Shinto deities who intervene as protectors and saviors, on three distinct occasions. With Chikamatsu's theatre, the device of the *deus ex machina* undergoes a striking transformation.

#### **Act V, Scene 1: The Battle of Nanking. Coxinga's camp in Dragon-horse Fields**

Coxinga's men are encamped before Nanking — the final battle is imminent. Coxinga consults with Kanki and Go Sankei on the best strategy to defeat the Great King, Ri Tōten, and their forces. Go Sankei recommends filling bamboo tubes with honey, hornets, and gunpowder. The plan is for Coxinga's army to stage a feigned retreat and then hurl these traps at the greedy Tartars, who would rush to seize them; the soldiers would then be forced to flee from the swarms of hornets, and if they attempted to burn the traps, they would explode and blow them to pieces. Kanki suggests leaving poisoned food on the battlefield so that the enemy might perish without the need for direct combat. Coxinga,

however, recalling his mother's injunction, insists on a frontal and honorable attack, with Komutsu as general leading her Japanese-style troops. Coxinga also reveals that he devised his strategy with the assistance of his wife. Yet the princess Sendan interrupts with the news that she has just received a message from Ikkan: he has resolved to commit an honorable suicide by launching a solitary attack on Nanjing. Coxinga therefore gives the order to commence the assault.

The scene juxtaposes different mentalities and strategies. Coxinga's camp is also said to be under the protection of the goddess Amaterasu. Komutsu dons an armor that blends Japanese and Chinese elements: she shaves the crown of her head in the Japanese fashion while wearing Chinese brocade dyed in a distinctly Japanese shade of blue. The Tartars ultimately lose the war through their gluttony and lack of discernment. Rather than portraying a rivalry between Chinese and Japanese cultures, the play emphasizes the condemnation of incivility. Chinese generals devise cunning and elaborate stratagems — poison, traps, explosives — whereas Coxinga, as the embodiment of Japanese martial ethos, champions open and honorable combat free of artifice. His words move the Chinese leaders to tears, and he thanks Amaterasu for his victories, claiming that because he was born on Japanese soil, she grants him the divine power to strike terror into the Tartars. The Tartars thus come to acknowledge the superiority of the Japanese in archery and in military arts more broadly, where technical skill prevails over brute force.

#### **Act V, Scene 2: The tartar Camp. Coxinga's Victory**

Ikkan arrives at Nanjing and challenges Ri Tōten. The Great King orders his capture. Surrounded, Ikkan is beaten, seized, and bound. Soon thereafter, Coxinga launches his assault. Even unarmed, he

manages to defeat his adversaries. Yet Ri Tōten and the Great King of Tartary appear on horseback, and Ikkan is bound to the shield of the traitor. As his father is taken hostage, Coxinga refuses to attack. Go Sankei and Kanki rush forward, offering their lives in exchange for Coxinga's. In the meantime, Coxinga rescues his father and substitutes Ri Tōten in his place. The King receives numerous lashes, while Ri Tōten is punished more drastically: Coxinga beheads him, while Go Sankei and Kanki sever his arms. The emperor Eiryaku ascends the throne, and order is restored. As Donald Keene translates:

Then they all wished the Emperor Eiryaku a reign of thousand years, and expressed their hopes for the long peace and tranquility of the country, and they prayed that by the blessing of prosperity for the nation and the people, prosperity filled without end by the divine virtue, military virtue and illustrious virtue of the sovereign of Great Japan, the five grains would continue to yield in abundance for ever and ever and ever (Keene, 1951, 160).

Thus, the Tartars are undone by clichés linked to their vices: they fight on horseback, whereas the Japanese excel in swordsmanship; Ri Tōten ridicules the practice of *seppuku*, misunderstanding its meaning and function. Ikkan, by contrast, admires his wife's willingness to embrace suicide and would not wish to tarnish Japan's glory by cowardice. Ultimately, the cunning of Go Sankei and Kanki enables Coxinga to reverse the situation in his favor. The final prosperity of the young emperor's reign is placed under the sign of Japan's virtues.

## 2.2 Cross-cultural Minds in the Praise of Japaneseness

As the sequential analysis of the play has shown, whether it is Kinshōjō, the Chinese half-sister who possesses the nobility to commit suicide, the loyal

Ming minister Go Sankei who sacrifices his own son to save the imperial prince, or even the general Kanki who becomes an unwavering supporter of Coxinga — all these protagonists, though “Chinese by birth,” are not disparaged. The only Chinese character consistently devalued in the play is the caricatured figure of Ri Tōten, allied with the Qing, for he embodies treachery. The following table summarizes the traits of the principal characters in *The Battles of Coxinga*:

Notably, apart from Watōnai himself, the only Japanese characters in the play are women. Both Coxinga's wife and mother stand out for their spirit, strength of character, sense of honor, and capacity for empathy. They fear neither combat nor death. Ready to sacrifice themselves, they are able to guide Watōnai and stiffen his resolve whenever he hesitates. Both in life and after her suicide, his mother remains a guiding voice, reminding him that the kami accompany him and that his mission must prevail above all else. Komutsu, by donning armor, shaving her head in the Japanese style, and becoming a strategist at her husband's side, appears as Watōnai's double. By the end of the play she is nearly masculinized; yet in her first appearance — the erotic beach scene at Hirado (Viatte, 2025) — she embodies the full force of her femininity, daring to ask for one last night with her husband before he sails for China. Even when confronted by the presence of the beautiful Sendan, she manages to channel her attachment to her husband into becoming his most loyal ally. Japan, in this play, is given a female face: valiant and powerful.

In Chikamatsu's dramaturgy, the young and courageous Watōnai (alias Kokusen'ya) serves a broader cause. Mixed in origin, and in the absence of any other male Japanese characters, he also stands as the paragon of the archipelago's cultural values. The kami live within him, and he is steeped in Japanese classics and cultural references. Neither

National affiliation	Japan (Yamato, Tsukushi)	Cross-cultural	Ming (Kara, Tō, Morokoshi)	Qing (Tartars / Dattan)	
Women	Komutsu, Japanese wife of Watōnai: spirited, brave, jealous, devoted, strong-willed, masculine. (A double of Watōnai, sometimes compared to the young Yoshitsune.)				
	Watōnai’s mother: wise, brave, devoted.				
			Ryūkakun, wife of Go Sankei: brave, devoted.		
			Sendan, Chinese princess: docile, beautiful, passive.		
			Kinshōjō, half-sister of Watōnai: respectful of customs, brave, caring.		
Men	Watōnai: spirited, powerful, loyal, cunning, respectful.				
			Ikkan, father of Watōnai: spirited, loyal.		
			Go Sankei, minister: loyal, cunning, devoted.		
			Kanki, general: cunning, devoted.		
			Ri Tōten, Qing collaborator: disloyal, crafty, deceitful, cruel.		
		<- Soldiers : disillusioned, greedy, gluttonous. Soldiers : devoted, convinced.			
				Bairoku: greedy.	

Figure 4. Character traits of the principal figures

his Chinese nor his Japanese heritage impedes his actions. He knows that Japan is a small country, but he also knows that the stakes lie elsewhere. The play’s deployment of cultural hybridity is never merely rhetorical. At several points in the text, Chinese and Japanese cultures respect, complement, and engage with one another. Watōnai himself, through the protection of the Japanese kami, enables his allies to prevail. This ethos of Japaneseness provides an image that not only convinces the audience but also secures their trust and adherence. The public projects itself less onto the character than onto the values he embodies. Without Coxinga’s bravery, a certain vision of China would collapse under the Tartars, and Japan’s glory would be tarnished. After the combat with the tiger, even Qing soldiers are able to rally to Watōnai, undergoing a symbolic metamorphosis.

No cultural sphere is hermetically sealed: each

welcomes those who embrace and lay claim to it. The *kami* thus extend their virtue to the restoration of the Ming. Their efficacy is globalized and universalized. The play highlights the values embodied by its characters, and Japan itself emerges as the true protagonist. The struggle lies in defending and illustrating values (with courage and devotion functioning as a passport) and in cultivating adherence to a shared spirit that transcends cultural and historical boundaries. The chief adversary is not the Chinese “elder brother,” but a form of simplistic “barbarity.” History would prove Chikamatsu wrong, as the Qing ultimately triumphed; but within the play, the future belongs to the most “civilized,” those blessed by the kami and cloaked in honor. The work makes a deliberate choice to embody the “absence of positive values” in the Tartars.

### 2.3. What Kind of Ethnocentrism Is at Work?

Chikamatsu places in the mouths of certain characters explicit critiques or affirmations of cultural traits in order to characterize situations or fellow protagonists. What cultural patterns — a concept elaborated in the wake of Boas by Ruth Benedict — shape the behavior of these characters? And what image of Japan, magnified, did Chikamatsu's contemporaries relish seeing on stage?

Here Chikamatsu diverges from earlier *jōruri* plays, in which Amida or Jizō bodhisattvas played central roles in the unfolding of the plot (Viatte, 2014). Before the urbanization of theatrical practice, plays were frequently performed — well into the seventeenth century — as vehicles of proselytism. Storytellers and chanters retold legends that exalted a particular Buddhist divinity venerated at a given temple. Chikamatsu innovates by offering the protection of *kami* to his heroes as they confront adversity, even though they are far removed from the land where Shinto is rooted. The *kokugaku* studies of Hirata Atsutane, Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769), and Motoori Norinaga had not yet left their mark on Japanese thought; in 1715, Chikamatsu was not proposing to replace Buddhist ideological supremacy with a return to an unadulterated Shinto pantheon.

The Japan advanced in the play nonetheless bears affinities with aspects of *kodō*, the “Way of Antiquity” developed by Keichū (1640–1701), who sought to anchor Japanese identity in a pre-Buddhist, pre-Confucian era and argued that its superiority derived from the originality of a cultural ethos rooted in Shinto. Yet, when Chikamatsu composed *The Battles of Coxinga*, Motoori had not yet codified his theory of *mono no aware*, privileging emotional communion over continental rationalism and moralization. In the play, Amaterasu, goddess of the sun, or Sumiyoshi, god of the seas and martial protector of Japan intervene because they are invoked by

characters in need. They help those who call upon them. But as Watōnai proclaims in Act II, Scene 1: “Good or bad fortune depends on individuals, not on the stars.” The gods may help, but ultimately each must seize their own destiny.

The *kami* also serve as messengers, sending dreams or signs to warn or to announce. They act as benevolent auxiliaries rather than as the originators of martial spirit, and certainly without supremacist intent. They listen to hearts, and respond to petitions. The true catalyst for Watōnai's decision to battle the Qing is not divine inspiration, but his observation on the beach at Hirado of the struggle between a clam and a seabird. Likewise, when Komutsu takes up weapons, she does so recalling the exercises she once watched her husband perform. Observation is central: the gods do not incite combat. When Komutsu realizes she can break a branch with her staff, she interprets it as a sign that the time has come to depart for China. Upon reaching the shore, it is Sendan who addresses the figure later revealed to be Sumiyoshi. He grants her request. Ironically, Sumiyoshi asks whether she is leaving Japan to join a lover — precisely the suspicion and fear of Coxinga's possible love for Sendan that had provoked the quarrel between Watōnai and Komutsu earlier in Act II.

Chikamatsu underscores this irony further by citing the noh play *Haru Rakuten* by Zeami, just before his characters set sail. That play, likewise situated on the Matsuura shore, features Sumiyoshi as poet-warrior who sends the Chinese poet Bai Juyi (*Haru Rakuten*, 772–847) back to his homeland, defending Japan against continental literary influence. Sumiyoshi is thus a defender of Japanese poetry. In *The Battles of Coxinga*, Sendan the Chinese princess may return home, but symbolically her departure also constitutes a cultural victory for Japan. Komutsu's relief in launching the voyage is palpable.

The *papier-mâché* Japan presented to the eager

eyes of Edo spectators is thus “a country gentle to women, a country of strong women.” In Act III, when Coxinga’s mother arrives at the Shishi castle, a group of Chinese ladies-in-waiting observe her. One sighs: “If I were to be born a woman, I would wish to be born Japanese. Do you know why? Because they say Japan is the Land of Great Tranquility. And what does that mean? It is not a gentle country, the ideal place for a woman?” Japan is likewise a land gentle even to wild animals: Coxinga refuses to confront the tiger with an unfair advantage, proposing instead to wrestle it barehanded. In the end, it is the protective talisman from Ise, shrine of Amaterasu, that transforms the tiger into an ally. Yet in the background, Japan is not immune from critique. In his essay *The Journey to Kanhasshū Tsunagiuma*, Kubori Hiroaki argues that in his later years Chikamatsu infused his plays with critiques of contemporary administration, a trend that began in the Shōtoku era (1711–1716) and became increasingly pronounced. The celebration of overseas intervention and the lure of travel beyond Japan in *The Battles of Coxinga* stand in counterpoint to a Japan that remained closed within its borders.

If in 1715 Japan had harbored doubts about its cultural strength, the play reassured its audiences by suggesting that, without animosity, the Japanese spirit possessed the authority not only to impress but also to assist neighboring societies. More than a stage success, Chikamatsu’s work left a lasting imprint on Japanese cultural forms. It spread contagiously into folk practices and ritual dances. To play or dance “Coxinga” within a communal ritual was to appropriate its charisma and claim its grandeur. While many dances that we will examine below reprise themes from the play, they rarely retain the name Kokusen’ya, honored though it is in the title. Instead, Watōnai is most often evoked, Chikamatsu’s explicitly coined name emphasizing youth and hybridity. The intercultural dimension of the

protagonist is foregrounded: the figure “between China and Japan” is integrated into traditional Japanese arts to serve the superiority of Japanese kami. The merging of these dances proves the importance and the impact of the play, their quick but lasting success shows that the cultural scheme of *The Battle of Coxinga* is a key to understanding eighteenth century Japan as the play contributes to reshape and enrich Edo cultural standards.

In its most anecdotal adaptation, one may cite the *tora-ken*, a hand-game derived from *jan-ken* that flourished in pleasure quarters and continues as a variant of “rock-paper-scissors.” To the chant of *tora-tora* (“tiger-tiger”), players hide behind a screen and mime either Watōnai, the tiger, or an old woman. Watōnai defeats the tiger, the tiger defeats the old woman, and the old woman defeats Watōnai.

Come all, take a peek into the thickets of Senri.

Watōnai, with his golden headband, has captured a wild beast.

Tiger, tiiiger, tiiiger, tiger x3.

This *tora-ken* hand-game, whose origins lie in Chikamatsu’s play, was illustrated in the *Illustrated Collection of Hand-Game Tournaments (Kensarae sumai-zue, 1809)*, with artwork by Shokosai Hanbei (active 1795–1807), text by Gojaku and Girō, and published by Kawachiya Tasuke (Osaka), calligraphy by Kōzō.

When Taiwan (Formosa) became Japanese in 1895, Admiral Kabayama Sukenori (1837–1922), appointed governor of the island, rededicated an existing shrine as Shinto and arranged for Coxinga to be venerated there as a kami, thereby justifying Japan’s dominion over the territory. Though later reconverted to Confucian worship, it remains the only Shinto shrine to have existed overseas. Around the same period, Iwaya Sazanami’s children’s book series was expanded to include a volume on



Figure 5. The “tora-tora” hand-game traces its origin to Chikamatsu’s play

Watōnai, as Japanese imperialism mobilized the figure to enlarge its national pantheon of heroes. Yet well before the throes of imperial expansion, Akisato Ritō in his *Pictorial guide to scenic spots in Kyoto* (*Shūi Miyako Meisho Zue* 1787, p. 105) already suggested that Kokusen’ya had been venerated in a Kyoto shrine. In any case, Watōnai features among the twelve *kagura* dances performed at the Tsutsukawa Festival of the Kamiyama Shrine in Sugano (Kyoto).

The Act II tiger scene clearly made a powerful impression, enriching the patrimony of traditional folk arts by introducing *tora-mai* (tiger dances) directly inspired by the play. If *shishi-mai* (lion dances), imported or adapted from China, had been performed in Japan since at least the seventh century, *tora-mai* — featuring one or two dancers per tiger, with a wooden tiger head worn or handheld for choreographic mobility — entered the ancestral

repertoire directly through Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s dramaturgy.

### 3. Contagious Theater

Adapted from the stage, the danced motif of tiger hunting spread widely, not only throughout the Sanriku region but also to Kanagawa, Shizuoka, and Kagawa. I have identified fifteen traditional dances whose themes can be directly traced to *The Battles of Coxinga* by Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Among these, three (in Kanagawa, Shikoku, and Iwate) reproduce, in choreography and in the spirit of *jōruri*, the story of Watōnai and his confrontation with the tiger. Six others (in Iwate and Shizuoka) diverge from the original, sometimes even erasing Watōnai from the dance (as in three examples in Iwate) or attributing to him colors and features distinct from those in the play. Moreover, in some instances, the animal subdued by the dancer is no longer a tiger but a *shishi* (lion), as seen in three dances from Shikoku, Kyoto, and Nagano.

#### 3.1. Tora-mai dances transplanted from Chikamatsu’s play, staging one or several tigers opposed to Watōnai

##### 3.1.1 Tora-mai of Kanagawa

The dance Yokosuka no tora-mai has been designated an intangible cultural property of Kanagawa Prefecture. It exists in two variants, since the two preservation associations (based in Nobi-Nakamura and Nishi-Uraga) have each been recognized as national intangible cultural heritage, though each site maintains its own stylistic features. Uraga, a strategic port for maritime transport in the Edo period, housed the magistrate’s office overlooking Tokyo Bay. According to local tradition, the tiger dance was first performed in 1720, when the magistrate’s office was relocated from Shimoda in Shizuoka Prefecture. Still performed in Hamachō, in Nishi-Uraga at Yokosuka, this dance provides

invaluable testimony to the afterlife of Chikamatsu’s play. It allows us to see which motifs most resonated with contemporary audiences. At the beginning of the performance, music resounds, Watōnai rises, striking the ground, and proclaims: “During this tiger hunt, I wish to see a dance, I wish to see a dance.” He dances to the shamisen and flute, while children dressed as Chinese, led by a “great Chinese,” perform supple movements. The audience first hears, “When the sacred wind of Ise blows, the port of Uraga fills with boats”—this line is followed by two series of nonsensical syllables, echoing Chikamatsu’s technique of imitating Chinese through dharani-like sounds: first “*Regêru kanron ôsu en en butsu butsu*,” then “*Chachâra, chachâra, chinkara kenburi, okeken keraken*”.

In this striking artistic plasticity, the scene is explicitly transplanted, but the toponymic reference is localized: Uraga replaces Hirado. The Kanagawa performers thus appropriate the episode to promote their own locality. The pseudo-Chinese refrains, though not identical to those in Chikamatsu’s text, operate on the same principle. The inclusion of *butsu-butsu* (evoking Buddhism) suggests the enduring presence of dharani-like utterances, even when reshaped. Moreover, the fusion of elements implies that the arrival of Princess Sendan in Act II had left a strong enough impression to be integrated into the tiger-hunt episode. The result is an exotic but ornamental dance, more celebratory than caricatural. When the tiger appears, the Chinese dancers withdraw. Watōnai rises, seizes the tiger’s head, and brandishes in his right hand a talisman from the Kano Shrine: “*Arya, arya, thanks be to the all-powerful deity Kano, the tiger has submitted with ease. Regain your courage and strength!*” The tiger retreats, and the dance concludes. Here again, the episode is appropriated not in service of a macro-cultural nationalism but rather to celebrate the local tutelary deity of Yokosuka. If Shinto is

invoked, it is not in the register of national ideology but of intimate, localized identity.

Notably, both versions (Nobi and Nishi-Uraga) are performed during the local shrine festival, with the stage design deliberately reproducing the spatial codes of kabuki theaters: a painted backdrop of a mountain, stairways descending like a *hanamichi*, and an entryway leading backstage. Musicians are positioned stage left, concealed, as was common in early eighteenth-century theaters. Such staging suggests that by borrowing theatrical decorum, performers sought to enhance the effect of authenticity. The transposition does not seek to recall the historical Zheng Chenggong but remains under the authority of the literary Watōnai.

A silent black-and-white film (35 mm, approximately 10 minutes) documents a performance of the “Uraga Tiger Dance” given in August 1933, shortly before Uraga’s incorporation into Yokosuka. This recording, apparently commissioned by the Shōnan Electric Railway (now Keikyū), coincided with the line’s extension, which attracted summer visitors to the Otsu coast. A contemporary article in the Yokohama Boeki Shimpo (now Kanagawa Shimbun, August 8th 1933) noted that children had trained intensely since spring and that this revival, after seven years of dormancy, deeply impressed the large audience. Digitized in 2012, the film underscores how the dance became a marker of Yokosuka’s cultural originality, deployed to enhance local prestige and attract tourism. The exoticism, once external, is here reversed: the intercultural legacy is repurposed as local heritage.

### 3.1.2 Tora-mai of Shikoku (Kagawa)

At Higashi-Kagawa, during the harvest festival, the tiger dance is performed at Shirotori Shrine by the Matsushita Torahai Association. The performance takes place on makeshift stages, where Watōnai’s costume recalls kabuki aesthetics: a red *goro* jacket



Figure 6. Print by Toyohara Kunichika depicting Ichikawa Danjūrō VII as Watōnai *The One Hundred Roles of Ichikawa Danjuro: Watōnai*, 1893. (courtesy of Toshidama Gallery ) & Print by Jukodo Yoshikuni depicting actor Ichikawa Ebijuro as Watōnai, 1824 (courtesy of Tokyo Fuji Art museum).

and short trousers studded with gold motifs (*kinbyō-uchi*), a violet *dōtera* jacket patterned with anchor ropes (*ikari-zuna*), and an oversized fan emblazoned with the Japanese *hinomaru*. Chinese-style costumes for *Kinkōjo* and *Kanki* added to the exotic appeal for Edo audiences. The use of children as performers, painted in kabuki-inspired makeup, further enhanced the playfulness of this adaptation. The iconography of Watōnai's costume (as in Utagawa Kunisada's prints of Ichikawa Danjūrō VII) and his makeup (*kumadori*) reveals the interplay between kabuki stylization and ritual dance. The progressive intensification of Watōnai's red *kumadori* (from *mukimi* to *ippon* to *suji*) corresponds to the narrative arc: from initiation, to combat against the tiger, to ultimate catharsis. The *ippon* makeup, associated with strength and cunning, eventually came to be nicknamed "the



Figure 7. *Kumadori* makeup for the role of Watōnai, by Hasegawa Sadanobu III, from the series *Kabuki Kumadori Hyakumenshū*, personal collection

Watōnai.” Thus, traits once specific to Chikamatsu’s protagonist became general aesthetic markers within kabuki tradition.

### 3.1.3 Tora-mai of Sanriku (Iwate)

The Tōhoku region must not be forgotten: here, tiger dances inspired by Chikamatsu proliferated. In Iwate, the wealthy shipowner Kirikiri Zenbei (third of the Suketomo line) is said to have introduced the tiger dance to Yamada shortly after seeing *The Battles of Coxinga* in 1715. From there, the practice spread to nearby coastal towns in Kamaishi, Ōtsuchi and inland to Tōno. Today, five associations continue the tradition. Some reproduce the tiger-hunt scene faithfully; others emphasize the dynamism of tiger dances stripped of their Chikamatsu-derived features. The Kirikiri and Ando tiger dances were designated municipal intangible cultural properties in 1999, while others (Mukoi-gawara, Rikuchū Benten, and Shiroyama) were revived postwar or in the 1980s.

It is worth recalling that the tiger, which was not native to Japan, was known through continental legends as capable of traversing a thousand *ri* without effort. Like the dragon, it was associated with wind control and protection of seafarers. Even

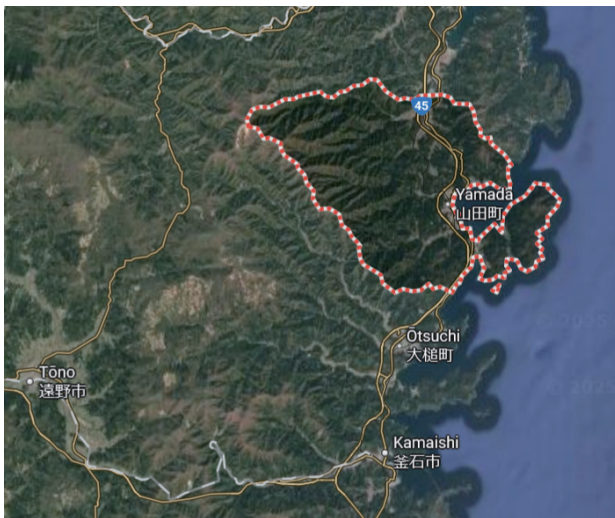


Figure 8. Map showing Iwate localities around Yamada that adopted the Watōnai tiger dance

prior to Chikamatsu’s play, tiger dances were performed as rituals for household safety, agricultural abundance, commercial prosperity, and successful fishing. The tiger of *The Battles of Coxinga* thus reinforced beliefs already embedded in Japanese folklore. Its double exoticism—both continental and theatrical—nourished the traditional repertoire. In Iwate, however, the kabuki dimension has been muted, leaving the cultic dimension in sharper relief.

## 3.2. Tora-mai Dances derived from Chikamatsu’s play, in which Watōnai has lost his typical kabuki attributes

### 3.2.1 Iwate, Ōtsuchi: Kirikiri Tora-mai Kōchū

The Kirikiri tora-mai kōchū, performed at the shrine dedicated to Amaterasu-no-Mikoto during the Tenjin-sai festival and at Kichijō-ji temple (linked to the Maekawa family), has been designated a municipal intangible cultural property. A Chinese-like figure is present, while Watōnai appears wearing a sort of *eboshi* hat and a *hakama* devoid of kabuki ornamentation. He brandishes a protective *fuda* and wears makeup resembling the *ippon* style mentioned above. Ōtsuchi belonged to the Nanbu domain; in its southern part, at Ōfunato, there existed an acrobatic dance, Kado-naka-gumi tora-mai (URP, n.d.), originally a *shishi-mai*. The success of Chikamatsu’s play appears to have contaminated these pre-existing lion dances, giving rise to a renewed *tora-mai* tradition.

### 3.2.2 Sanriku, Iwate: Yamada-machi Sakaida Tora-mai

At Sakaida, a dance staging five tigers precedes the entrance of Watōnai, stripped of kabuki attributes. He confronts one of the tigers and succeeds in pacifying it. His makeup is closer to simple face-painting than to kabuki’s *kumadori*, and his costume does not reproduce the theater’s classical features.

### 3.2.3 Sanriku, Iwate: Kamaishi Katagishi Tora-mai

Of the five *tora-mai* recorded in Kamaishi, one derives from Chikamatsu's play. An inscription on the great drum preserved at Katagishi indicates that the instrument, associated with the dance, dates to the Bunka era (1804–18), proving the existence of this dance as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Classified as a municipal intangible cultural property in 1998, it is distinguished by its energetic movements, expressing the tiger's power, and by rapid rhythms. Initially, one tiger (later two), each operated by two adult dancers with a head-carrier, appears alongside four youths with lances and a *hinomaru*-decorated fan. Watōnai, Japanized and marginalized, remains as a residual element, while the emphasis clearly falls on the tiger figure.

In the twenty-first century, however, crises have weakened the tradition: the 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the tiger head, drums, and accessories; the COVID-19 pandemic limited the festival to its most essential rituals; and demographic decline reduced the pool of performers. At the point of possible extinction, the preservation society mobilized to safeguard what it called its "regional treasure." The resumption of the Watōnai dance is scheduled for 2025.

### 3.2.4 Sanriku, Iwate: Ando Tora-mai

Here, Watōnai is played by a child, while the tiger requires two dancers with a carried head. The staging includes "Chinese" guards, a group of girls bearing a *hinomaru*-decorated fan, wooden *fuda*, and bamboo props. This tiger dance derives from the Yamada-chō Ōsawa version mentioned earlier and is thought to have been transmitted during the Tenpō era (1830–44) under the influence of the Kamaishi Katagishi dance. Children representing Chinese soldiers wear conical hats inspired by Qing military headdresses.

Since 1990, the preservation association has

sought to disseminate these dances more broadly, training pupils from the Ando primary school and the surrounding area. It is worth stressing the new educational role of these dances: incorporated into school programs, they now function as tools of identity formation and intergenerational cohesion. What began as a folkloric offshoot of Chikamatsu's play has become a medium of community-building.

### 3.2.5 Iwate: Nezaki Hashigo Tora-mai

In Tōno, the tiger submits less to Watōnai, who leads the dance, than to the acrobat who, like an Edo-era firefighter, captivates audiences with spectacular feats on ladders, recalling popular fairground entertainments.

### 3.2.6 Shizuoka: Kamo Koina Tora-mai

Here, a single tiger is manipulated by two adolescent dancers. Watōnai makes the pacifying gesture of an open palm, as if holding an object, but his hand is empty: the Ise *fuda* is absent. Online descriptions present Watōnai as *kanjin* ("Chinese"), as though he had lost both his hybrid identity and his link to Shinto. Similarly, in the *tora-mai* of Shiroyama (Iwate), Mukai-gawara (Iwate), and Nishiki-chō (Iwate), Watōnai is referenced but does not appear choreographically.

## 3.3. Shishi-mai Dances adapted from the play

### 3.3.1 Kagawa (Shikoku): Zentsūji-machi

At the festival dedicated to Kūkai, held at the Kamakura Gonroku Kagemasa Shrine in Zainokami (Zentsū-ji), Watōnai is danced without a tiger: instead, a black lion (*shishi*), manipulated by two dancers with a carried head, confronts him. Watōnai, performed by an adult, retains a kabuki-like appearance. The scene also includes an old man of distinctly Japanese appearance, who seems to represent Ikkan, the Chinese father of the hero—whereas in the play, it is his Japanese mother who provides him with the

protective fuda. In this version, the paper fuda invokes the Great Shrine of Ise. The troupe was invited to perform at Hirado in 2024 for the 400th anniversary of Coxinga’s birth.

### 3.3.2 Kyoto: Sugano Kamiyama

At Sugano, Watōnai is the last of twelve *kagura* dances performed during the local festival. The role, played by an adult with kabuki-like appearance, faces a two-person *shishi*, accompanied by a narrator and assistants. These aides emphasize theatricality by managing the first rapid costume change (underscoring ties with kabuki performance) and supporting Watōnai in the final lift, when he triumphantly rides the lion. Unexpectedly, when the *shishi* enters, Watōnai and the narrator emerge from beneath the cloth forming its body. Their lines resemble strings of meaningless syllables, as if the sinicization of language had been absorbed and rearticulated by Watōnai himself. The dancer also performs the kabuki step *tobi roppō* (a one-legged bounding step). Again, the raised hand is present, but the *fuda* is absent. The dance appears to have been perpetuated in form but severed from its interpretive substratum. Its hermetic message slips away from the audience.

### 3.4. Shishi-mai Dances where Watōnai’s costume is not marked by kabuki folklore

#### 3.4.1 Nagano: Suzakashi-Shiono, Shishi-kyōgen “Watōnai”

At the Kamihira Shrine festival, the Watōnai playlet concludes the festivities. Nearly ten performers manipulate a large *shishi* opposing a protagonist who shows little of kabuki style.

The performance alternates between dance and dialogue:

Chorus: Who goes there, riding the Dattan?

Watōnai: Here I am. Born in Bizen, on the shores of Hirado Bay, son of the venerable Ikkan, I am called

Watōnai. Only water can quench fire. Humanity grows through the blessings of heaven and earth. All things are transformed: a stone requires a hammer, wood an axe, slander my action. Those who wish to move, move; those who wish to fly, fly. In the bamboo grove of Senri, rocks, stones—you, four-footed one, go! I too shall cross the clouds, cross the sky, and cut off heads. Then I shall be renowned across the Korean peninsula. Such is my choice, such is my path.

After subduing and mounting the *shishi*:

Chorus: Calm your heart, lower your guard (your sword).

Watōnai: All is well, all is well, I am at my best. Now I will confront the Tartar king. To Shinano, to seize the great river.

Chorus: Row on, the boat sails smoothly—*yoichin, yoichin, yoichin*.

Watōnai: I cross Kyushu, now Iki, already Tsushima, then the Three Koreas.

Chorus: What a crossing!

Watōnai: I shall establish camp at Cape Ausu, defeat the Tartar king, decapitate Ri Tōten, and restore the Ming.

Chorus: Oh joy, oh gratitude! These bones truly belong to the valiant Watōnai (Hurrah)! (*Taishū geinō shiryōshū sei*, vol. 2)

Here again, a form of *michiyuki no bun* highlights regional toponyms. Chikamatsu’s text is rearranged and condensed. More than an adaptation of a single scene, this playlet functions as a digest of the entire narrative, presenting a sweeping panorama of the source text. Watōnai raises his hand but does not brandish a *fuda*.

This overview demonstrates the impact of Chikamatsu’s play on its audiences and its afterlife within traditional dance. With or without the tiger, with or



Figure 9. Sketch of the different Watōnai dances (drawings by the author)

without reference to *jōruri* costumes, these “Watōnai” dances often grafted themselves onto pre-existing *shishi-mai*, not to supplant them but to give them renewed momentum. The play was acculturated to different local contexts, each preserving or erasing emblematic traits, either emphasizing or muting its intercultural dimension, but often reasserting it as a component of local identity.

Although I lack space here, it is worth noting that Chikamatsu’s play also strongly influenced float processions, notably in Iwate (Morioka festival, perhaps since 1720?), Aomori (Hachinohe), Aichi (Toyohashi), Yamagata (since 1755), and closer to Edo/Tokyo, at Hachiōji. These parades often arose

during times of famine, when large-scale kabuki scenes provided particularly compelling themes. Once again, the radical impact of theater on Edo culture and its folkloric legacy becomes evident.

### Conclusion

When Chikamatsu Monzaemon sought to capitalize on the popularity of the theme by creating two sequels, they failed to meet with success: neither *The Sequel to The Battles of Coxinga (Kokusen’ya Gonichi Kassen, 1717)*, with its sharper critique of political governance, *The Chinese Ship: A Modern Coxinga (Tōsen-banashi Ima Kokusen’ya, 1722)* won the favor of audiences.



Figure 10. Posters for artistic events held in Hirado in 2024, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the birth of the historical figure Coxinga

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate that the “China” staged in Chikamatsu’s play is neither monolithic nor constructed as a simple foil. Rather, the dramatist foregrounds civilizational and ideological values, rather than nationalist oppositions between cultures. Ethnicity matters less than the scale of values embodied by individuals. Even in later dance adaptations, explicit stigmatization of China is virtually absent. Admittedly, the paradoxical figure of Watōnai also gratified Japanese audiences, who recognized in him the bold hero overcoming adversity in service of his chosen cause. Yet there is no singular “China” here; if there is a figure of repulsion, it lies rather in those designated as “barbarians,” whose lack of refinement and of an honor code is presented as their essential weakness. While one effect of the play is the attribution of a shared cultural identity to the Qing and their allies, they are not defined through an immutable communal essence. What we find is less a form of cultural

racism than a narrative actantial structure. In Greimasian terms, the “opponent” is one of the six necessary actants (Hébert, 2007). The Qing characters play this adversarial role, not as representatives of a real-world group, but as dramatic functions essential to the progression of the hero’s quest. Their exaggerated characterization simplifies the audience’s reception of the drama, while their lack of freedom to defect or shift sides underscores their status as figures of dramaturgical necessity rather than sociological reality. Positive and negative values alike may thus be mobilized across ethnic boundaries—intercultural and transethnic.

Much has been written about the nationalism of this play. Yet a closer reading reveals that, while the author does flatter his public, he never constructs a peremptory cultural adversary, nor posits insurmountable cultural barriers. The narrative also accords a central role to the *kami*: as we have seen, their function is treated with remarkable plasticity, and in

subsequent dance adaptations the “divine” is far from monolithic. A century later, *kokugaku* and *kodō* thinkers would reframe this relation in identitarian terms, in the service of imperial ideology. Yet in *The Battles of Coxinga*, despite a few ironic asides, these same *kami* readily serve the Ming restoration project. Indeed, the play would even inspire the creation of the only overseas Shinto shrine established beyond the Japanese “center.”

Continental culture is not exempt from sarcasm—Komutsu, for instance, bursts into tears of laughter on first hearing the Chinese language. Yet such differences are not insurmountable; the play is less concerned with race than with ways of living and thinking. Chinese soldiers, in their very difference, can nevertheless join the “camp of civilization.” The faults condemned are treachery, futile cunning, and a materialistic hedonism lacking higher principle. Each cultural tradition has its own classics and its own value, but above all, one must avoid retreating uncritically behind tradition (Viatte, 2025).

Even the name *Watōnai* may be read as *wakaranai*, “the one who does not know.” This doubt, this questioning gaze that does not hesitate to challenge tradition and to form judgments from nature itself, armed only with common sense, instinct, and unvarnished observation—remains the surest weapon of the man of virtue.

This model of the “modern” intercultural and transcultural hero, embodied in Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s theater, captivated his contemporaries and left a lasting imprint on the imagination. As I have suggested, it also gave rise to “new” Japanese traditions, each of which selected and reworked traits according to its own micro-context. Nonetheless, this character, rooted in multiple traditions, continues to speak to twenty-first-century audiences, for whom issues of identity and cultural belonging remain highly relevant.

## References

- Chen, F. (2018). Loyalist, patriot, or colonizer? The three faces of Zheng Chenggong in Meiji Japan and late Qing China. *Journal of Modern Chinese History, 12(1), Special Issue: Cross-Boundary Practices in Modern China*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2018.1466507>.
- Chih-Hua, K. (2002). Nihonjin no kanten kara mita Teiseikō no imēji [The image of Zheng Chenggong as seen by the Japanese]. *Chūnichi Bunka*, n.d. Taipei: Chūgoku Bunka Daigaku Nichi-kenkyū-jō.
- Chih-Hua, K. (2003). Hirado field work ni tsuite no omaegaki [Memorandum on fieldwork in Hirado]. *Chūnichi Bunka*, 22. Taipei: Chūgoku Bunka Daigaku Nichi-kenkyū-jō.
- Chih-Hua, K. (2007a). Kaigai no Teiseikōbyō to Teiseikō shinkō ni tsuite [Overseas Zheng Chenggong temples and the Zheng Chenggong cult in vogue abroad]. *Shūkyō-jihō*, 177–179.
- Chih-Hua, K. (2007b). New perspectives on the study of Ming history in the era of globalization. *Proceedings of the Symposium on Exiles from the Homeland and Popular Deification: The Formation and Development of the Cult of Zheng Chenggong*. <https://share.google/eupQxUQvyA1MKvwI2>.
- Chikamatsu, H. (2003). *Kuden kaikin Chikamatsu Monzaemon shinjitsu* [The truth about Chikamatsu Monzaemon after the lifting of the ban on secret transmission]. Tokyo: Chūōkōron Shinsha.
- Fogel, J. A., & Fraleigh, M. (2023). *Sino-Japanese reflections: Literary and cultural interactions between China and Japan in early modernity*. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hébert, L. (2007). *Dispositifs pour l'analyse des textes et des images*. Limoges: Presses de l'Université de Limoges.
- Hébert, L. (2006). The actantial model. In L. Hébert

- (Ed.), *Signo*. Rimouski (Québec). <http://www.signosemio.com/greimas/modele-actantiel.asp>
- Hedberg, W. C. (2019). *The Japanese discovery of Chinese fiction: The Water Margin and the making of a national canon*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hozumi, I. (1738/2016). *Naniwa miyage hottan: Chikamatsu Monzaemon no kyojitsu himakuron* [Preface to Souvenirs of Naniwa: The theory of realism in the art of Chikamatsu Monzaemon]. Tokyo: Hōbundo.
- Keene, D. (1951). *The Battles of Coxinga: Chikamatsu's puppet play, its background and importance*. London: Taylor's Foreign Press
- Kitani, H. (1923). Introduction to *Kokusen'ya kassen*. In *Dai-Chikamatsu Zenshū*, vol. 3.
- KKK, Hirado, Kokusen'ya no Kai. (2020). *Shashinten "Kokusen'ya" to "Kokusen'ya"* [Photo exhibition: "Kokusen'ya" and "Kokusen'ya"]. Nakano Regional Community Development Council, Kokusen'ya Memorial Museum.
- Kubori, H. (2011). *The journey to Kanhasshū Tsunagiuma*. <https://share.google/4OROFCoz83ZAD4FGf>.
- Matsuda, T. (2000). Chikamatsu *Kokusen'ya kassen chakusō-kō* [Reflections on Chikamatsu's *Battles of Coxinga*]. *Nishō Gakusha Daigaku Ronshū*, 43, 39–51.
- Nagatomo, C. (1971). Nishiki Bunryū kōbungaku kenkyū [Historical research on the literature of Nishiki Bunryū]. *Osaka Shiritsu Daigaku Kokugo Kokubungaku Kenkyū-shitsu*, 12, 22–35.
- Nishikawa, J. (1928). *Ka'i tsūshō-kō* [Reflections on trade and communication with the civilized and the barbarian]. Tokyo: Takimoto Nihon Keizai Daiten.
- Ōba, O. (1984). *Edo jidai ni okeru Chūgoku juyō no kenkyū* [Studies on the reception of China during the Edo period]. Kyoto: Dōhōsha.
- Pavel, T. G. (1975). Possible worlds in literary semantics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34(2), 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.2307/430073>.
- Pavel, T. G. (2006). *How to listen to literature?* 2005-2006 opening lecture at Collège de France. <https://www.college-de-france.fr/en/news/listen-to-thomas-pavel-lectures-how-to-listen-to-literature>. (*Comment écouter la littérature*. Paris: Fayard, 2006.)
- Shimazaki, S. (2015). Fantastic histories: *The Battles of Coxinga* and the preservation of Ming in Japan. *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 9(1), 17–53.
- Takano, M. (1934). *Chikamatsu jidaimono no sandanme ni tsuite*. *Bungaku* [About Chikamatsu's historic plays' third act], 2. Tokyo.
- Tham C. The transnational historiography of a dynastic transition: Writing the Ming-Qing transition in seventeenth-century China, Korea, and Japan. *Modern Asian Studies*. 2023; 57(3): 776-807. doi:10.1017/S0026749X22000245.
- Torigoe, B. (1998). *Kabuki, bunraku*. Tokyo: Iwanami Kōza. (Especially Vol. 8).
- Uruga Tiger Dance [Silent film]. (1933). Japan: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LOtE5alOk4>]
- URP. (n.d.). Hanshin toramai no tanjō: Hisai chi geinō no bunkateki miryakaku no kakuchō [The birth of the Hanshin tiger dance: Expanding the cultural context of disaster-stricken performing arts]. *Sentan-teki toshi kenkyū shirīzu*, 29.
- Viatte, C. (2025). Du texte à la scène – L'érotisme chez Chikamatsu Monzaemon : la figure du coquillage [From text to stage: Eroticism in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's works—the trope of the seashell]. *CETIC Cahiers d'Études Interculturelles*, 12, 5–32.
- Viatte, C. (2014). Du texte à la scène, le théâtre de

marionnettes en mutation. Donner à voir *Amida no munewari* (1614) ”[From text to stage, puppet theater in transition: Staging *Amida no munewari* (1614) in the 21st century]. *Cipango*, 21. <https://journals.openedition.org/cipango/>

2318.

Yamaguchi, G. (1972–1973). *Kokusen'ya kassen no beni-sagashi ni tsuite* [On the “Beni-nagashi” scene in *The Battles of Coxinga*]. *Edo Bungaku Kenkyū*. Tokyo: Chūō Kōron-sha.