

The “Forty-Seven Rōnin” Incident as History and Myth

21H.154, Session 13

New Samurai?



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Samurai Evolution

- Away from land to cities
 - From warriors to salaried bureaucrats
 - Rise of warrior ideology: later called *bushidō* ('Way of the Warrior'); Yamaga Sokō (1622-1685)
 - Place within the Tokugawa social order ('SPAM')
 - Separating samurai from the rest

Hierarchy and Status

- S (amurai)
- P (peasants)
- A (artisans)
- M (merchants)



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Hierarchy and Status



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Akō Incident as History

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Akō Incident

- A.k.a., “Akō Vendetta,” “47 Rōnin Incident”
- April 22, 1701: Asano Takumi-no-kami Naganori vs. Kira Kōzuke-no-suke Yoshinaka
- January 31, 1703: 47 former Asano retainers led by Ōishi Kura-no-suke Yoshio attack Kira’s Edo residence



A Quintessential Samurai Story

- Legend vs. history
- Well known in the West: Ruth Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946)
- Countless retelling in Japan
 - First performance two weeks after the vendetta
 - *Kabuki*, film, tv, comics

Akō Incident as History

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History vs. Legend

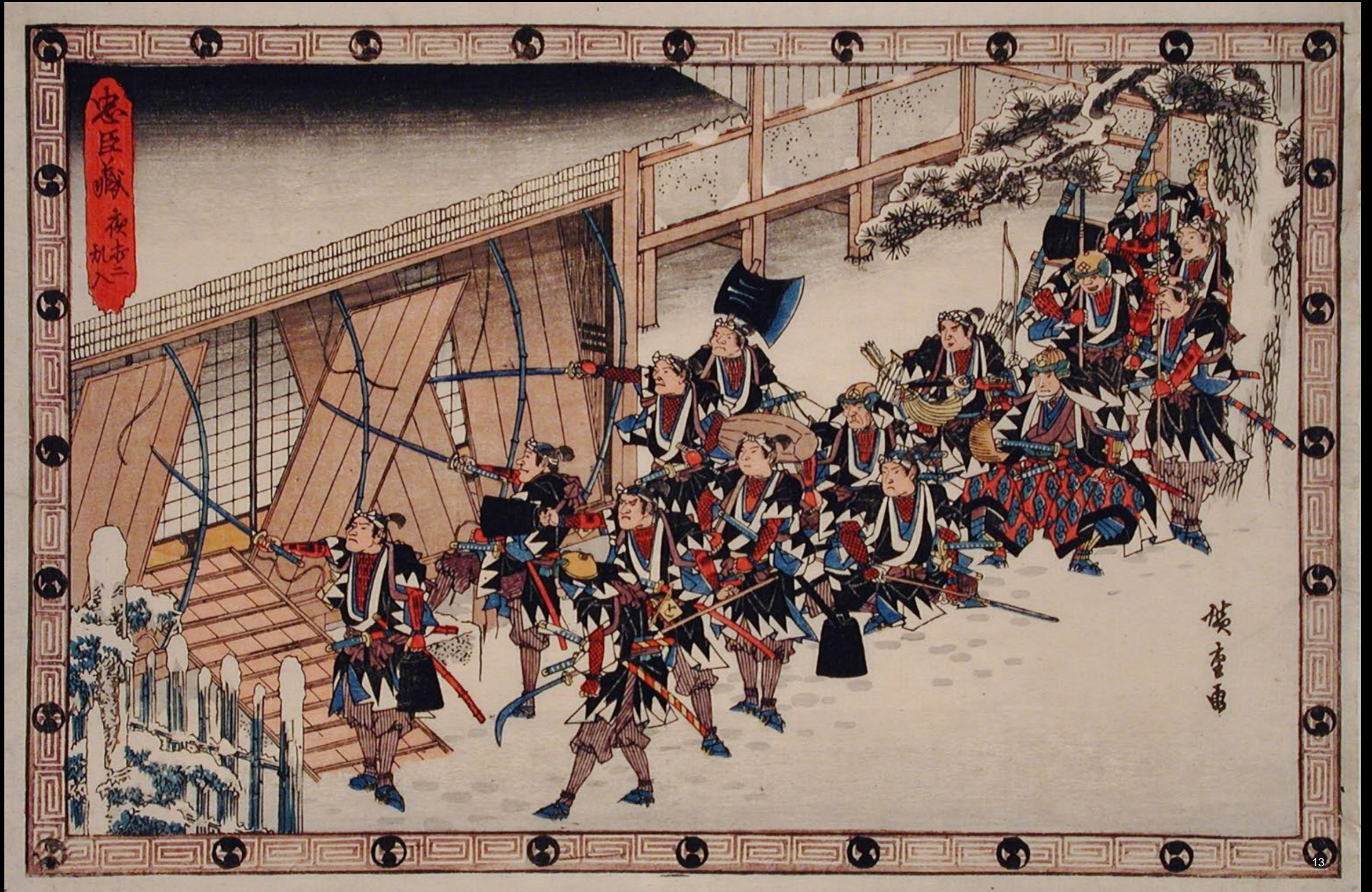
- 1701: surprise attack from behind
- Attack at noon, execution after 6pm
- Asano motive unclear; not so heroic?
- Maybe Kira was a better ruler

History vs. Legend

- No record of revenge request
- Immediate goal: seek Akō restoration
- Hierarchy within the 47
 - Ōishi Kuranosuke's \$\$\$ attachment to the house (*o-ie*) of Asano
 - #47 Terasaka Kichiemon, foot soldier
 - 1703: only 47 out of 500+ retainers
- No records of between 1701 and 1703

Guilty?

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