

Cast and Crew

Kazuo HASEGAWA (OISHI Kuranosuke)

Born on February 27, 1908 and trained as a Kabuki actor from a young age, Kazuo became one of the biggest leading men in Japanese film history.

After signing with Shochiku Studios and making his film debut in 1927's *Myotoboshi*, Kazuo appeared in over 120 films over the next ten years and worked extensively with many of Japan's most prominent directors, including Teinosuke KINUGASA, Masahiro MAKINO, and Kunio WATANABE. At the end of the 1930s, he left Shochiku and signed with Toho Studios where he was cast as a romantic lead in several wartime romances.

Returning to his roots in 1942, Kazuo, along with the actress Isuzu YAMADA (*Throne of Blood*, *Yojimbo*), established the Shin Engi-za theater group. In 1948, the same year that Kazuo signed with Daiei Studios, Shin Engi-za began producing their own films.

Over the next 15 years at Daiei, Kazuo experienced his greatest success. He attained international recognition as the star of the 1953 film, *Jigokumon* (*Gate of Hell*), which not only won the best film at the Cannes Film Festival, but also won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. A year later he starred as the doomed lover in Kenji MIZOGUCHI's *Chikamatsu monogatari*, one of the few Mizoguchi films seen outside of Japan during the director's lifetime.

After his final two films in 1963, *Revenge of a Kabuki Actor* and *Edo mujo*, he left film and concentrated on stage work. In 1965, he was awarded the *Shiju-hosho* (Order of the Purple Ribbon), given to a person meritorious in the field of art and science.

His crowning achievement came in 1984 when he was presented with the *Kokumin Eiyō shō* (National Merit Award). The award, given to individuals in various fields such as sports, entertainment and art, has only been bestowed to 15 people, including one other actor (*Kiyoshi ATSUMI*, from the *Tora-san* series), and is one of the most highly-regarded decorations in Japan.

He died on April 6, 1984, leaving behind a library of 301 film appearances spanning over five decades.

Shintaro KATSU (AKAGAKI Genzo)

Shintaro, originally born Toshio OKUMURA, was born November 29, 1931. Nicknamed *Katsu-shin*, he was a very prolific actor, but also a singer, producer, and director. Beginning with his first film in 1955, *Bara ikutabika*, Shintaro appeared in over 100 films, and along with Raizo ICHIKAWA, was one of Daiei Studios top stars during Japan's golden age of filmmaking. His most famous role is, of course, *Zatoichi* the blind swordsman, whom he played in 25 separate movies between 1962 and 1973. In 1989, he starred in and directed the 26th film, and then reprised the role in four seasons of a *Zatoichi* television series.

Shintaro founded *Katsu Productions* when Daiei Studios closed, and produced several great films, including the *Lone Wolf & Cub* series which starred his older brother Tomisaburo WAKAYAMA.

He died of pharyngeal cancer on June 21, 1997 at the age of 65. Known for his love of alcohol and cigarettes, in his last few years *Katsu-shin* spent increasing amounts of time in the hospital, only to be seen lighting up cigars at press conferences held to announce his recovery. Two days after his death, five thousand people attended his memorial service at a Tokyo Temple.

Raizo ICHIKAWA (ASANO Takuminokami)

Raizo was born August 29, 1931 in Kyoto, Japan, and had a highly successful film career in mostly period dramas, however his roles as *ISHIKAWA Goemon* in the *Shinobi no Mono* film series and the nihilistic samurai *NEMURI Kyoshiro* in the *Sleepy Eyes of Death* films catapulted him to true stardom.

Appearing in over 150 films, Raizo worked with legendary directors Kenji MIZOGUCHI, Kon ICHIKAWA, Kenji MISUMI, and Teinosuke KINUGAWA, and also co-starred with Shintaro KATSU (*Zatoichi*) in at least a dozen features. During his 15 year career he worked exclusively for the Daiei Motion Picture Company, and, along

with Shintaro, was one of the studio's top box-office draws.

His romantic presence garnered him legions of female and male fans, and earned him the nickname of the "Japanese James Dean." He died of cancer on July 17, 1969, at the young age of 37, cutting short what would have been an even more brilliant career.

Within two years of his death, Daiei, one of the five biggest studios in Japan, went bankrupt.

Raizo's awards include the 1958 Blue Ribbon Award for Best Actor in Enjo (1958), as well as the Kinema Junpo Awards for Best Actor in Enjo (1958) and The Wife of Seishu Hanaoka (1967).

Koji TSURUTA (OKANO Kin'emon)

Koji TSURUTA was born December 6, 1924, and has had a very long and successful film career. Known as Toshiro MIFUNE's acting rival in Japan (he co-starred in 17 films with Mifune), Koji was a famous actor who appeared in over 250 films. He is best known to Western audiences as MIYAMOTO Musashi's (Mifune) rival, SASAKI Kojiro, in Hiroshi INAGAKI's Samurai 3: Duel at Ganryu Island. As a testament to his star power in Japan, he received top billing in the film over Mifune who was already an international star. However, before Koji became a screen legend he was known as one of postwar-Japan's most famous singers and had a multitude of hits. Even at age 46, Koji topped the charts with the single, "A Life full of Wounds" (1970), a song about being an old man in the modern world.

When he succumbed to lung cancer on June 16, 1987, at the age of 63, he was buried with the Imperial Navy flag on his coffin, a commemoration to his service in the Navy at the end of WWII. He won a posthumous award for his career achievement from the Japanese Academy in 1988.

Osamu TAKIZAWA (Kira KOZUKENOSUKE)

Osamu Takizawa was a Japanese actor born in Ushigome, Tokyo, Japan, on November 13, 1906. Though his most notable role may have been in Kon Ichikawa's Fires on the Plain (Nobi), he is also well-known for his numerous roles in almost 70 films, including: The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari), Subterranean Heat (Chinetsu), Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo, and Kaidan. The prolific actor died on June 22, 2000, from pneumonia.

Takashi SHIMURA (Otake JYUBEI)

Born on March 12, 1905, in Ikuno, Japan, Takashi Shimura was one of Japan's greatest actors of the 20th century, and a descendent of the samurai warrior class. Following University training, Shimura founded a theatre company, Shichigatsu-za, and in 1930, he joined a professional company, Kindai-za. Four years later he signed with the Kinema Shinko film studio and found a niche playing various samurai roles before signing a long-term contract with Toho Studios in 1943. For the next four decades, he appeared in an average of six Toho films a year, and by the time of his death, had starred in over 200 feature films.

Second only to Toshiro Mifune, the versatile Takashi Shimura was the actor most closely associated with Akira KUROSAWA in the public mind, appearing in numerous lead roles including Kambei, the lead samurai of Seven Samurai, the woodcutter in Rashomon, the sick bureaucrat Watanabe in Ikiru, the detective in Stray Dog, and the doctor of Drunken Angel. Also, Shimura appeared in Kurosawa's debut film, Sanshiro Sugata (1943) as well as many others, including Yojimbo, Sanjuro, Red Beard, High and Low, The Hidden Fortress, Throne of Blood, The Idiot, and The Quiet Duel. In fact, he appeared in 19 Kurosawa films, more than Mifune or any other regular Kurosawa actor. Outside of his work with Kurosawa, Shimura may be best known for his roles in Japanese monster movies, including the scientist Kyohei YAMANE in the first two Godzilla films. Shimura died from emphysema at the age of 76, on February 11, 1982.

Ayako WAKAO (Osuzu)

Born November 8, 1933, Ayako has appeared in over 100 films and won a handful of Best Actress awards.

During the 50s and 60s, she starred alongside Daiei's most famous actors in many of the studios biggest movies, including 20 films from maverick director Yasuzo MASUMURA. Her most prestigious appearance came as Kayo in Yasujiro OZU's 1959 classic Ukigusa (Floating Weeds).

After two films in the early 1970s (Zatoichi meets Yojimbo, Tora-sans' Shattered Romance), she took a break from filmmaking to devote more time to her family. Her most recent film in 2005, Haru no Yuki (Spring Snow), was nominated for nine awards from the Japanese Academy. She was also the winner of several other awards, including the Blue Ribbon Awards for Best Actress in Seisaku no tsuma (1965), Nami kage (1965), Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru (1961), Onna wa nido umareru (1961), and Konki (1961), as well as the Kinema Junpo Awards for Best Actress in Nureta futari (1968), Tsumiki no hako (1968), Fushin no toki (1968), Seisaku no tsuma (1965), Nami kage (1965), Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru (1961), and Onna wa nido umareru (1961). In addition, she received the Mainichi Film Concours Tanaka Kinuyo Award for her lifetime achievement, in 2006.

Machiko KYO (Orui)

Machiko Kyo was born Yano Motoko, on March 25, 1924, in Osaka, and is a legendary Japanese actress who appeared in several big films of the 1950s. She received critical acclaim for her work in two of the greatest Japanese films of the 20th century, Kurosawa's Rashomon, and Mizoguchi's Ugetsu. Before joining the Daiei film company in 1949, Machiko trained as a dancer, and danced at the OSSK (Shouchiku, Shoujo Kageki of Osaka).

Machiko found film success in a variety of roles, including a non-Japanese film called The Teahouse of the August Moon, where she played a young geisha named Lotus Blossom, and appeared opposite Marlon Brando and Glenn Ford. For her role, she was nominated for a Golden Globe, a great feat for an Asian actress at the time. In 1995, she was given a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Japanese Academy. She also won the Kinema Junpo Award for Best Actress in Amai ase (1964) and won the Mainichi Film Concours Awards for Best Actress in Amai ase (1964), Itsuwareru seiso (1951), and Rashomon (1950).

Now in her eighties, Machiko continues to perform in traditional Japanese theatrical productions put on by the famous producer Fukuko ISHII.

Fujiko YAMAMOTO (Yosen'in, Asano's wife)

Born December 11, 1931, the beautiful Fujiko won the first annual Miss Japan in 1950 and went on to become one of Daiei Studios most familiar faces. Appearing in over 50 films throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the two-time award-winning actress co-starred with Raizo ICHIKAWA on 17 films and another 14 films with her Loyal 47 Ronin co-star Kazuo HASEGAWA. Her last film appearance was the title role in Shiro TOYODA's 1963 film, Yushu heiya (Madame Aki). Since then, she's been very active in TV and theater, and continues performing to this day.

Fujiko won the Blue Ribbon Award for Best Actress in Shirasagi (1958) and for Higanbana (1958), as well as the Kinema Junpo Award for Best Actress in Jokyo (1960) and Bokuto kidan (1960).

Chikage AWASHIMA (Riku, Oishi's wife)

Born Keiko Nakagawa on February 24, 1924, in Tokyo, Chikage Awashima has acted since the 1950s, appearing in such films as The Human Condition I (Ningen no joken I), Early Spring (Soshun), and Early Summer (Bakushu). Chikage won the Blue Ribbon Awards for Best Actress in Meoto zenzai (1955) and for Tenya wanya (1950), as well as the Mainichi Film Concours Best Actress awards for Hotarubi (1958) and Iwashigumo (1958).

Kunio WATANABE (Director, Co-writer)

Born on June 3, 1899, Kunio Watanabe was an extremely prolific filmmaker who is only recently becoming more well-known outside of Japan, perhaps due to his legacy as a "master of speed filming." What typically took other film directors a minimum of 30-45 days of shooting, Watanabe was able to accomplish in one week, without sacrificing quality. One of his master techniques was called Nakanuki--a single camera set-up whereby he would shoot one actor's dialogue at a time without other actors' cues.

One of his films, Meiji tenno to nichiro daisenso (Emperor Meiji and the Great Russo-Japanese War) achieved record-breaking revenue at the time, and many of his other films brought huge revenue success to the major film studios he attached himself to. For instance, The Loyal 47 Ronin was the top box office generator in 1958.

With Shin-Toho (Toho's subsidiary company at one point) in particular, he shot 12 films in 1956 alone, singlehandedly ensuring the financial future of the film studio and earning him the nickname "Emperor Watanabe". Besides *The Loyal 47 Ronin*, he directed over 400 high-quality and sensational films during his career, including *Ambush at Iga Pass* (*Iga no suigetsu*), *Lady Sanshiro* (*Onna Sanshiro*), and *Dawn of Judo* (*Sugata Sanshiro*). In 1958, the year of *The Loyal 47 Ronin's* production, Kunio Watanabe was the winner of the Blue Ribbon Awards Most Popular Award.

One of the most successful filmmakers in Japan, his legacy is well remembered, and AnimEigo is proud to release one of his best films. They pulled out all the stops for *The Loyal 47 Ronin*, building many luxurious sets, including an open set for the Kira estate which measured over 2000 tsubo (71,170 sq. ft), as well as huge sets for the Hall of pine, Ako castle, and the teahouse. An extremely flexible and adaptive director, he was quickly able to overcome any obstacle. For instance, on the first day of shooting, he arrived prepared to shoot one of the most important scenes of the film, the assault on Kira's mansion, only to find that the set was much larger than he had expected! He quickly reworked his entire storyboard and still managed to complete the scene by 3pm that day. Among all other *Chushingura* films, Watanabe's is widely regarded as the best, and despite its epic scope and large cast and crew, he shot it in only 35 days. He passed away on November 5, 1981.

Masaichi NAGATA (Producer)

Masaichi Nagata was born on January 21, 1906, in Kyoto City, Japan. He was the original founder and president of Daiei, and also executed The Five-Company Agreement (*Gosha Kyotei*), which consolidated the 10 major Japanese film studios into only five.

Besides *Chushingura*, he produced almost 140 films, including *Rashomon*, *Ugetsu*, *Sansho the Bailiff*, *Fires on the Plain*, *Floating Weeds*, *Revenge of a Kabuki Actor*, *Shinobi no Mono 2&3*, eight *Zatoichi* films, and six *Gamera* films.

Ichiro SAITO (Composer)

Ichiro Saito is a prolific film composer who was born in 1909 and died in 1979. Over his 33-year career, he scored over 140 films, including *Ugetsu*, five *Sleepy Eyes of Death* films, four *Zatoichi* films, and one *Shinobi no mono* film (#7).

Saito won the Mainichi Film Concours Best Film Score Award for *Himitsu*, *Saikaku ichidai onna*, *Inazuma*, and *Okaasan*, all in 1952.

Other 47 Ronin Films

The story of the 47 Ronin has been made into a motion picture over 80 times, a testament to its timeless themes of honor and duty. Some of the more notable versions include:

Chushingura 1/47 (TV 2001 dir. Shunsaku KAWAMO)
Shijushichinin no shikaku (1994 dir. Kon ICHIKAWA)
Chushingura gaiden yotsuya kaidan (1994 dir. Kinji FUKASAKU)
Ako-Jo danzetsu (1978 dir. Kinji FUKASAKU)
Chushingura - Hana no maki yuki no maki (1962 dir. Hiroshi INAGAKI)
Chushingura: ouka no maki, kikka no maki (1959 dir. Sadaji MATSUDA)
Chushingura (1958 dir. Kunio WATANABE)
Dai chushingura (1957 dir. Tatsuyasu OSONE)
Genroku chushingura (1941 dir. Kenji MIZOGUCHI)
Chushingura zenpen (1939 dir. Kajiro YAMAMOTO)
Chushingura (1934 dir. Daisuke ITO)
Chushingura - Zempen: Akahokyo no maki (1932 dir. Teinosuke KINUGASA)
Jutsuroku Chushingura - Ten no maki, Chi no maki, Jin no maki (1926 dir. Shozo MAKINO)
Chushingura (1912 dir. Shozo MAKINO)
Chushingura (1907 dir. Ryo KONISHI)

As of January 2009, however, to the best of our knowledge, only four versions of this epic have had official releases in North America. These are:

Genroku chushingura (The 47 Ronin) (1941)

This 241 minute take on the tale of the 47 Ronin was directed by Kenji MIZOGUCHI, and was commissioned by the Japanese Ministry of Information in the hope that it would boost morale. However, it was a commercial failure, as it was released just one week before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Though at the time of release, it was considered to be the best researched, and most historically accurate filmed version yet released, most critics considered it far too slow and serious.

Ako-Jo danzetsu (The Fall of Ako Castle/Swords of Vengeance) (1978)

This 159 minute tale of the 47 Ronin was directed by the legendary Kinji FUKASAKU (Battle Royale, Graveyard of Honor) and stars Kinnosuke Yorozyua, Sonny Chiba, and Toshiro Mifune. Apparently this film has a bit more action than other versions, with a 45-minute swordfight scene finale choreographed by Sonny Chiba himself. Fukasaku shot the film with a documentary-like grittiness and depicted the events as Ako's rebellion against the Shogunate government. The film was nominated for Best Cinematography (Yoshio Miyajima) at the 1979 Awards of the Japanese Academy, but didn't win.

Chushingura - Hana no maki yuki no maki (Chushingura) (1962)

The retelling of the 47 Ronin by Hiroshi INAGAKI (Samurai Trilogy) weighs in at just over three hours. One of the first successful Chushingura films shot in color, its timeless strengths lie in its gorgeous cinematography and fine acting.

Shijushichinin no shikaku (Kon Ichikawa's 47 Ronin) (1994)

AnimEigo decided to release this version of the 47 Ronin not just because it was directed by a master director, Kon ICHIKAWA (The Burmese Harp, Fires on the Plain), and features an all-star cast headed by Ken TAKAKURA, but because it presents a unique perspective on the story, focusing not only on the assault, but also on the behind-the-scenes preparation for the 47 Ronin's revenge, a longer battle of espionage, finance, and propaganda. In addition to the above, there's talk in Hollywood to remake the 47 Ronin tale into a 2010 epic blockbuster starring Keanu Reeves.

To this list, we are proud to now add "The Loyal 47 Ronin."

About Daiei's Loyal 47 Ronin (1958)

The saga of the 47 Ronin has, of course, been retold countless times in many types of media, including TV series, books, theatre, Kabuki, Johruri (traditional puppet shows), manga, anime, and so on... With over 80 feature film versions alone to choose from, AnimEigo chose this version of the 47 Ronin because it's the best one produced by Daiei film studio (one of the most successful film studios at the time in Japan), and it's made in the typical style of Japan's golden age of filmmaking.

A more middle-of-the-road classic adaptation which focuses more on the loyalty of the ronin, it contains an all-star Daiei cast, with the best actors available at the time. The Loyal 47 Ronin was also the number one revenue earner in the Japanese box-office in 1958. It's AnimEigo's belief that any fan of the Chushingura story shouldn't miss this version as the standard of 47 Ronin films. Also, it's a perfect learning tool to understand what Bushido and the loyalty of samurai is all about.

Chushingura

The fictional account of the 47 Ronin's tale of revenge is known as Chushingura, and has been told and retold in almost all forms of media. There have been at least 22 different television series, 10 of which were produced in the last 10 years, and almost as many feature films devoted to the subject, and they're often shown in the month of December to commemorate the event. Themes from the tale have shown up in art and pop culture even in the West, including but not limited to: Ninja Scroll, Ronin, "The Simpsons", "Legends of the Hidden Temple", and The Tokaido Road.

Chushingura is the shortened name of KANADEHON CHUSHINGURA, which is the name of one of the most

popular acts of Kabuki and Jyoruri (traditional puppet show). This show has consistently filled theatres since its introduction in 1748. Kanadehon refers to the Kana (Iroha kana, an older version of the Japanese syllabic alphabet) which has 47 characters, just like the 47 Ronin, and Chushingura came from a combination of the words Chushin (loyalty) and Kura (warehouse), which means "warehouse full of loyalty." The kanji characters can also be read in a different way, as: Loyal (Oishi) Kura (nosuke)--the leader of the 47 Ronin.

The tale of the 47 Ronin is by a wide margin the most popular story in Japanese history, and is described by some as the country's "national legend". Its lasting resonance in the hearts of the Japanese can be attributed to the timeless appeal of the samurai code of honor, known as bushido. This true story of vengeance is recognized as emblematic of the loyalty, sacrifice, persistence, and honor which all should make prominent in their daily lives, samurai or not. The popularity of the 47 Ronin saga was especially fueled during the Meiji period of Japanese history, when many citizens longed for a return to their cultural roots.

Forty-Seven Ronin (AKA Forty-Seven Samurai, Ako Vendetta, Ako Wandering Samurai, or Genroku Ako Incident)

Though the actual details of the 47 Ronin have been filtered through 300 years of history, here is a summary of the events that transpired, as compiled from Wikipedia's large range of historical sources:

In 1701 the ruling shogun, TOKUGAWA Tsunayoshi, selected ASANO Takuminokami as one of two Daimyo charged with organizing an extravagant reception for Imperial Envoys who were visiting Edo. A rude and arrogant official named KIRA Kozukenosuke was responsible for instructing the Daimyo in the necessary court etiquette, but his manner of teaching was harsh and insulting, and would apparently send any self-respecting Daimyo into a murderous rage. While his powerful position in the hierarchy of the Shogunate made Kira "untouchable" enough that the other Daimyo settled for bribing him instead of killing him, Asano could not bring himself to practice such restraint. After numerous insults, the previously stoic Asano snapped, slicing at Kira's face with a sword, and earning himself an order to commit seppuku, because not only did he cause a minor wound to a high official and some slight property damage, but any form of violence was strictly forbidden within the walls of Edo castle, and even drawing a sword was a grave offense. The news of Asano's unjust seppuku reached his principal counsellor, OISHI Kuranosuke, and the rest of his men, and they were incensed to hear the corrupt official had gone unpunished.

Of the over three hundred men that had been employed by Asano, forty-seven banded together, swearing a secret oath to avenge their Lord, no matter what, even though they knew they faced certain death as a reward for doing so. However, Kira was not as stupid as he was cruel, and surrounded himself with impenetrable defenses designed to defeat any sort of attack. He also sent spies to keep an eye on Oishi and the rest of Asano's former retainers, so they were forced to wait for their chance. The ronin dispersed and became tradesmen or monks, nursing their dreams of vengeance for over a year. Some of the ronin even managed to gain access to Kira's house over time, one of them going so far as to marry the builder's daughter in order to obtain its plans.

By the end of 1702, Kira began to relax, convinced he was free from danger, and the 47 Ronin were ready for their assault. They gathered at a secret meeting place in Edo to renew their oaths, and early in the morning of December 14, during a heavy snowfall, they attacked Kira's mansion. Their carefully constructed plan split the group into two, with half attacking the front gate, and the other attacking the back. They were held off at the front gate, but Oishi's party broke into the back of the house, subduing all of Kira's men (16 killed, 22 wounded). The cowardly target of their attack was eventually found cowering in a hidden courtyard. Oishi respectfully addressed Kira and notified him of his impending death in the name of honor, offering him the same sword that Asano had used to kill himself. Unsurprisingly, no matter how much they urged him, Kira made no attempts to commit seppuku, instead remaining crouched, speechless and trembling like a pathetic worm. They eventually pinned down the sad little man, relieved him of his life and his head, and carried the latter to Asano's tomb. They laid his head and the dagger before the grave, offered prayers at the temple, and gave the rest of their money to the abbot before turning themselves in to meet their fate. Forty-six of the ronin did so on February 4, 1703 (TERASAKA Kichiemon was pardoned, possibly on account of his youth, and eventually lived to the ripe age of seventy-eight).

OKADO Denpachiro (1658-1723)

OKADO Denpachiro, a.k.a. OKADO Shigetomo, was the superintendent officer (Metsuke) of the Genroku-Akko

incident, and was the vice coroner in attendance at ASANO Takumi no Kami's seppuku. He wrote about those incidents in detail in his book Okado Hikki (Okado Memo).

Although some criticism exists as to whether he embellished his own good nature in his writings, many of the incidents described in this memo have served as the basis for this film and many other 47 ronin adaptations. Some specific details of the memo include:

- 1) Asano asked Okado about Kira's situation and he gently said "He is an old man, he will not be around long".
- 2) He was against Asano's seppuku taking place in the garden, as it would have been extremely dishonorable to a Daimyo like Asano.
- 3) He gave permission to Asano's vassal KATAOKA Gengozaemon to visit Asano before his seppuku.
- 4) He quoted the final poem written by Asano.

In this film, Okado was treated like any other hero who gave the Asano clan full support throughout their plan of vengeance, from assisting Asano in the beginning to the last scene where he diverts the 47 Ronin's march to Asano's graveyard over to a separate bridge.

Program Notes

"Councilor! Councilor!"

From the beginning of the film, when the vassals rush in to alert Oishi, he is referred to as "Councilor." The "Councilor" in this case is the man that runs the castle in the Daimyo's stead while the Daimyo is away. He's the "keeper of the castle," entrusted with the castle's defense as well as business and political affairs.

"Stop fretting, Gengoemon. Kira Kozuke no Suke holds the fourth rank at court."

"Kozuke no Suke" is Kira's title, not his name. Kira holds a higher court rank than Asano even though Asano is a Daimyo and he is not. Basically, there were multiple types of hierarchies in Edo Period Japan, and you had to know your place in all of them. In the court rank hierarchy, Asano is lower-grade junior fifth rank and Kira is upper-grade junior fourth rank. Since the first rank is the highest, Kozuke's rank trumps Asano's rank on this scale.

"Edo Mansion of the Asano Clan"

This "city residence" is a residence maintained by the Daimyo in Edo, where they lived when their presence was required in the capital, away from their fiefs.

"This is about a ceremony to welcome both the Imperial Envoy, Great Councilor Yanagiwara, and Mid-Councilor Seikan'in."

The imperial envoy is someone the Emperor sent out to deliver letters to the Shogun or to do ceremonial stuff such as visiting outlying temples, etc. in his stead. Daimyo were appointed to host these expeditions, and even if the envoy was technically of lower status than the chosen Daimyo, on these trips the envoy was to be treated AS THE EMPEROR, so any slight against the envoy was considered a slight against the Emperor himself. Hence why the Daimyo might be given etiquette lessons, etc. and why it was so important to get everything right.

"Lord Tsuchiya Sagami no Kami is the presiding Elder this month."

Tsuchiya Sagami no Kami was a member of the Council of Elders. Generally, only one Elder was "on duty" in a given month, and the entire Council only assembled for important meetings or urgent matters.

"The Imperial Envoys have reached the Nakasuzume Gate!"

As all tourists to Japan learn, each palace and temple has many gates with varying orientations and significance. The Nakasuzume Gate was one of the gates of Edo Palace.

"His honored mother, Lady Keishoin, is eager to visit with them and inquire after their health."

Lady Keishoin is concubine to the previous Shogun, Iemitsu, and mother of the current Shogun, Tsunayoshi.

“I, Metsuke Okado Denpachiro, am making a formal inquiry.”

A metsuke is a shogunate inspector who investigated important crimes involving “hatamoto” and “gokenin,” including corruption and treason. A hatamoto is a samurai leader who has a lower ranking than a Daimyo and less than a 10,000 koku fief, but who still has direct access to the Shogun. A gokenin is an even lower-ranked samurai leader who has less than a 10,000 koku fief but who does NOT have direct access to the Shogun.

Another inspector job is called “Ometsuke” (great inspector) and is much higher-ranked than the metsuke. Their job is a shogunate inspector of Daimyo, Kouke (someone like Kira, a hatamoto but from a much more established family), and Imperial members. In this film, Okado (the metsuke) was the vice coroner of Asano's seppuku, but the head coroner and Ometsuke was Shimousa no kami (a.k.a. SHODA Yasutoshi), who insisted that Asano's seppuku take place in the garden.

“The wind carries away the cherry blossoms... yet I grieve more... for the passing of spring itself.”

During Asano's seppuku, someone is singing the poem Okado received, which is Asano's death poem, written as a farewell to this world. Such poems are a samurai custom. This particular poem is famous, and its meaning is still discussed by Japanese Chushingura fans and history buffs to this day. It's commonly held to express his regret not at his own death, but at being unable to settle the score with Kira before he departed.

“The Kira household is being moved from Sukiyabashi to Honjyoo.”

“Honjyoo” is a part of what is now called Sumida-ku (Sumida ward) in Tokyo (The current address of Kira's estate is Ryogoku 3 chome, Sumida-Ku, but the address has changed over time). The basic point here is that the Shogun has ordered Kira to move from Sukiyabashi (right next to Edo Castle) to Honjyo, which is roughly 2 miles away, and more or less on the outskirts of town.

“Nanbuzaka, Residence of Yozen'in (Aguri, widow of Lord Asano)”

“Yozen'in” is Aguri. She cut her hair and became a Buddhist nun after her husband's death, so Yozen'in is her nun's name.

“Guy who's “it”, guy who's “it”, come toward the clapping!”

This is literally what the geisha are singing while surrounding an intoxicated Oishi. This is a standard game for dissolute men, since it involves being able to “accidentally” touch women while blindfolded.

“I am Sekine Yajiro, a ronin of Echigo.”

Echigo would have been approximately where Niigata Prefecture is today, and also includes the island which was the old Sado province.

“I'm going to buy the freedom of that ‘dirty harlot.’”

In other words, the prostitutes can't leave their place of employment unless they pay a ransom (essentially, buy themselves out of servitude to their employer). Usually this would never happen unless a customer bought their freedom. Oishi is saying that he's so taken with this high-class prostitute that he's going to pay a lot of money to get her out of the whorehouse and set her up somewhere as his mistress.

“I cannot leave our late Lord's memorial tablet here so I'm taking it with me.”

The “memorial tablet” the little tablet on which the deceased's name is inscribed. You put it on the altar in your home and you pay your respects to it there.

“Tablet: ‘Worldly name: Oishi Kuranosuke’”

The reason for the “worldly name” on the tablet is because what’s supposed to go on these tablets is the posthumous Buddhist name given by the priest after the person’s death. Kuranosuke has already forfeited his life for the sake of his revenge, so he’s made himself a memorial tablet to symbolize this “death.” But since of course he’s not six feet under yet, no priest can give him his death name, so he has only his pre-death name to write on it.

“We’ll let the winds from Mt. Fuji clear the smoke in our hearts and see the moon over Kiyomigaseki.”

This is the Noh song the Soga brothers sing in the play “Kosode Soga.” It’s very thematically appropriate because the brothers sing it as their goodbye to their loved mother before going off to get revenge for the death of their fathersomething they know will lead to their own deaths. They dance to the song, so Kuranosuke is doubtless doing that dance.

“This express letter from Kyoto says they’ll be splitting into five groups and coming to Edo.”

Fun fact: “Express” letters between Edo and Kyoto in those days took approximately one week.

“This Room: Kakimi Gorobei, Steward to the Konoe.”

This is a sign that the innkeeper put up to show which guest was in that room. The sign is the whole reason for this conflict, because the vassal of the actual Kakimi Gorobei sees the sign and is less than amused that someone else is using his name.

“That’s the night that Sir Yamaoka was killed.”

In case there’s any confusion on who Yamaoka is, it’s Okahei’s family name. Okahei is his given name.

“Hey, Okano. Haven’t you gotten the estate plans from Suzu yet?”

In case this doesn’t become clear later, the reason Suzu has access to the plans is because her dad is Kira’s carpenter.

“Emoshichi journeys here with his mother in tow.”

Since Emoshichi’s father had died by this time and there was no other son to take care of his mother and sisters, Emoshichi was forced to travel around looking for someone to take them in so that he could go to Edo and join the raid. History is twisted a bit for this movie and Emoshichi seemingly ends up taking Mom to Edo with him. According to Japanese Wikipedia, it’s fairly common for Chushingura movies to make her commit suicide, but she and Emoshichi’s sisters actually stayed in Osaka and lived on long after the raid.

“The ronin of Ako are concerned that Lord Kira might take refuge at our master’s family home of Yonezawa.”

Kira’s son had been adopted in infancy/toddlerhood by a different clan on Kira’s wife’s side, which is why he has a different “family home” than Kira.

“Even if Oishi is in Edo, he won’t walk into such a trap, only to die a dog’s death!”

The literal phrase used here is “inu ji ni”, which means to die a dog’s death (or to die in vain).

“That Oishi’s no big rock, he’s a small pebble.”

This is a pun lost in translation. Oishi’s name means “big rock,” so Kinta is saying he’s more of a little pebble.

“It’s bad luck to say that! You’re talking like you’re already a ghost.”

Literally, “You sound like a buddha [or the Buddha].” In Japanese, you can refer to any dead person as a hotoke-sama (Buddha) without any particular religious implication. So the point is that Akagaki realizes that she is more right than she knowsfor all practical intents and purposes, he is dead.

“Well, when the time comes, I hate dumplings and bean-paste buns, so leave me sake for an offering, okay?”

It's traditional to make offerings to the dead. The foods he mentions are typical offerings.

“He gave it to me, along with his own pill case.”

These pill cases, or “inro,” were items you normally wouldn't give others, because they tended to be personalized, often with the family crest. Inro were also used to carry identity seals, and consisted of a stack of tiny, nested boxes that could be made out of a variety of materials, including wood, ivory, bone, and lacquer. Because traditional Japanese garb lacked pockets, these types of small objects were often carried by hanging them from the obi (sash).

“Those are Yamaga-school war drums! The ronin of Ako are assaulting us!”

The Yamaga-school is not a school like a building; it's a school of thought. It's the same as how Kenshin's swordfighting style is “Mitsurugi School.”

“The Statement of the Vassals of Asano Takumi no Kami”

This is an actual document that the ronin left behind in real life. It basically stated that they were justified in their vengeance, though it made no mention of most of the events depicted in this movie (Many of which are known to be historically impossible). The original historical document is translated as below, and a copy was found on each of the 47 men:

“Last year, in the third month, Asano Takumi no Kami, upon the occasion of the entertainment of the Imperial ambassador, was driven, by the force of circumstances, to attack and wound my Lord Kotsuke no Suke in the castle, in order to avenge an insult offered to him. Having done this without considering the dignity of the place, and having thus disregarded all rules of propriety, he was condemned to hara-kiri, and his property and castle of Ako were forfeited to the State, and were delivered up by his retainers to the officers deputed by the Shogun to receive them. After this his followers were all dispersed. At the time of the quarrel the high officials present prevented Asano Takumi no Kami from carrying out his intention of killing his enemy, my Lord Kotsuke no Suke. So Asano Takumi no Kami died without having avenged himself, and this was more than his retainers could endure. It is impossible to remain under the same heaven with the enemy of lord or father; for this reason we have dared to declare enmity against a personage of so exalted rank. This day we shall attack Kira Kotsuke no Suke, in order to finish the deed of vengeance which was begun by our dead lord. If any honourable person should find our bodies after death, he is respectfully requested to open and read this document.

15th year of Genroku. 12th month.

Signed, OISHI KURANOSUKE, Retainer of Asano Takumi no Kami, and forty-six others.”

In addition, the ronin posted a placard on the outside of the mansion during the night of the attack, which read:

“We, the ronin serving Asano Takumi no Kami, this night will break into the mansion of Kira Kotsuke no Suke to avenge our master. Please be assured that we are neither robbers nor ruffians and no harm will befall the neighboring property.”

“Now, end your life.” “Coward! Goodbye, then!”

To clarify just in case, Oishi wants Kira to honorably commit seppuku (just like Asano did), but his resistance proves his cowardice.

“Over 40 Ako ronin from Banshu raided Kira's mansion and successfully slew their enemy!”

Banshu, also known as Harima, was an Edo Period province of Japan that included Ako. Its capital was Himeji and it was also the home of the samurai Miyamoto Musashi, who wrote The Book of Five Rings.