

***“Love suicides”: A Strategic Response for Class Exclusion in the Edo Period,
Japan (1600-1868)
(A Case Study of Chikamatsu’s Two Puppet Plays: “Love Suicides at Sonezaki”
and “Love Suicides at Amijima”)***

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Abstract

The Japanese puppet theatre probably was professionally shaped in form, performance regulations, and inventions during the 17th. This theatre could be considered one of the special products of the Edo period in which there is a perfect combination among three different elements: storytellers, a shamisen musician, and puppeteers. Under the rule of the Tokugawa family, this stage had been strictly censored and controlled due to being considered a dangerous, unofficial art form. Chikamatsu was the foremost playwright of popular Japanese drama. He devoted his life to puppet theater with more than one hundred plays written for both *jidaimono* and *sewamono*. In this paper, by analyzing Chikamatsu's two plays “Love Suicides at Sonezaki” (1703) and “Love Suicide at Amijima (1721), we would like to resolve two following questions: *Why is this topic could be considered a strategic response to class exclusion?* and *How could this topic be related to the contemporary dominant ideology?* The major content of this paper focuses on this struggle for class exclusion in many different aspects: The creation of Japanese Puppet Theatre, the preservation of dignity and human rights by committing suicides and especially the profound conflict between *Ninjo* and *Giri* as a special way to resist the social orders as well as moral standards in the Edo period.

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1. Introduction of Japanese puppet theater and Chikamatsu's plays

1.1. Japanese puppet theatre

The Japanese puppet theatre is also called by other names: Joruri and Banraku. The former comes from a romantic love story between a real woman named Joruri and an ancient Japanese hero. Their love story was popularized broadly by 16th-century storytellers who orally circulated it and was accompanied by a shamisen, a musical instrument with its origins in China. Gradually, this term was attached to a way of performance in which reciters would chant a certain story along with a shamisen. Many researchers have suggested that this kind of drama probably was professionally shaped in form, performance regulations, and inventions during the 17th century (Scott). However, its origin could be traced back to the twelfth or sooner when there were several amateur wandering artists who entertained by-passers by controlling wooden puppets on the streets. Gradually, the Japanese puppet theatre's regulations and components had been changing in many aspects: the material, structure and number of puppets, the position of reciters, Shamisen musician and puppeteers, etc. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the Japanese puppet theatre could be considered one of the special products of the Edo period, 1603- 1868, in which there was a perfect combination among three different elements: storytellers whose task was to chant the story, a shamisen musician who beautified the reciter's voice, and puppeteers who harmoniously control wooden puppets in order to illustrate a given story. Under the rule of the Tokugawa family, this stage had been strictly censored and controlled due to being considered one of the most dangerous, unofficial art forms. The main audiences were merchants- the richest but lowest class. Sometimes, samurais would come to these performances. During this period, a daily performance normally lasted all day long, and each act of a play had its own artistic independence.

In the artistic landscape of Edo era, Osaka, Japan could be considered the hometown of puppet drama because this city not only had the first professional stage established in 1685 named Takemoto, but also its Joruri was famous for their performance standards that would be used for Japanese puppet theatre in the later times. There are two kinds of plays: historical plays (*jidaimono*) and domestic ones (*sewamono*). The former mentions the life of upper classes and normally praises the achievements of Japanese or Chinese heroes in the past. The latter focus on powerless people in which merchants and lowest-ranking courtesans are main characters. In the Edo era, the second plays normally were performed at the end of the day as a complement part of performance time.

1.2. Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725) and his puppet plays

Chikamatsu was a "Japanese Shakespeare", the "god of writers" (Gerstle, XV), and the foremost playwright of popular Japanese drama. He first wrote many plays for a Kyoto Kabuki theatre. In the year 1685, he moved to Osaka and became a chief playwright for his best friend's Takemoto-za theatre. Thereafter, Chikamatsu devoted his life to puppet theater with more than one hundred plays written for both *jidaimono* and *sewamono*. He wrote twenty-four domestic plays, in which seven plays concerned "love suicides".

“The Love Suicides at Sonezaki” was first performed on April 6th, 1703, based on the real-life accident of a young couple who committed suicide. The main characters are Tokubei, a clerk in an oil shop, and Ohatsu, a prostitute. The hero refuses his arranged marriage, and makes a plan to ransom his lover, Ohatsu. However, he is cheated by his close friend and becomes bankrupt. Hopelessly, Tokubei and Ohatsu decide to commit suicide with the belief that they might be reunited in the Pure Land. This is the first domestic play that was performed in the Japanese Puppet theater. This is a first *Jurori* love-suicide play.

“The Love Suicides at Amijima” was first performed on January 3rd, 1721 and is a Chikamatsu’ masterpiece. This play was also based on the true story of the suicides at Amijima on November 13rd, 1720. The content of this work focuses on a love affair of Jihei, a paper merchant and Koharu, a low-ranking courtesan in Osaka. The male character marries and has two children. He loves Koharu so much that he is ready to abandon his family to commit suicide with his lover. First, this plan fails due to the interference of his parents-in-law and brother-in-law. Osan, his wife also writes a letter to Koharu convincing her to prevent Jihei from committing suicide. Jihei breaks up with his lover although he cannot forget this woman. Knowing that Koharu is going to kill herself, Jihei’s wife gives him all money she has and encourages Jihei to ransom this prostitute. After gaining freedom, instead of coming her lover’s house, Koharu comes along with Jihei to their death place. They believe that happiness could only exist in the Western Paradises, at the merit of Buddha. There is not a place on this earth for their love.

2. Japanese Puppet Theatre was born to symbolically escape class exclusion

One could refer to the Edo era, Japan as a "closed country" in both denotation and connotation. This was a special period, for the country was governed by two rulers: the Japanese emperor and the Shogun. On one hand, Japan restricted the trade relationship with foreign countries, banned Christianity, and limited contact with the Dutch. On the other hand, the policy of the Japanese government was focused on internal resource-oriented development in order to create a national identity that carried high Japanese values. Since Tokugawa Ieyasu unified Japanese regions and became the supreme Shogun whose castle was located in Edo, an alternate attendance was set up. This was a military, political policy that required more than 250 war lords to regularly move from their local castles to Edo and return in order to serve the Shogun's commands through two centuries (1600-1868). Actually, this political, military task was aimed at establishing and emphasizing the subordinate- dominate position between daimyo and the shogun in the Japanese power hierarchy. To do this, the procession would have to play the dual important roles: a political-military task and a ritualistic performance. On the one hand, alternate attendance was the way by which the Shogun could reduce and suppress the abilities of war-making or collusion among the daimyo. Instead of allowing them to stay stable in their local castles and thus requiring the Shogun to move around country to demonstrate his authority as was done by many other rulers in other countries, the Japanese Shogun remained in Edo and made more than 250 daimyo move in orbit around him (Vaporis). Theoretically, retainers remained in Edo to support their warlords in serving the Shogun (protecting the Shogun’s castle, preventing fire or other disasters, etc.). Nevertheless, Vaporis shows that “most retainers working for the domain in Edo found that their duties were

not terribly demanding, occupying them only a limited number of times a month, and often for only a part of the day (...) on average, eight days a month and no more than thirteen” (Vaporis, p. 179). In addition, except for the daimyo’s family and long-term retainers, the short-time people merely dwelled in Edo without families. They seemed to have a lot of free time to relax or to do what they were interested in. To entertain, retainers normally gathered into small groups to play games, drink wine, compose poetry, hold a tea ceremony, etc. Certainly, they also went out to eat in restaurants, to watch some plays in the contemporary theatres such as kabuki, Noh, or puppet theatre. The needs of this class strongly motivated the development of entertainment services. They became the customer and patron of these activities that required them to be continuously refined in order to attract as many consumers as possible. In addition under the Tokugawa government, society was divided into four classes: Samurai were in the first rank, followed by the farmers; Artisans belonged to the third position, and merchants were on the lowest place of the social ladder. This was a hierarchy that was by no means changed. Below these four castes were two classes of outcasts, called the Polluted Ones and the Inhuman. One of the paramount principles of the Edo era was “knowing one’s place” (Nishiyama). This required that those who belonged to a given class would have to obey what was codified for their position in every aspect: clothes, house decoration, rituals, behavior, etc. Since class was hereditary, one could not change his social status but had to uncritically accept the moral standards as well as social norms. Any violation, falling below or going above one’s station, was strictly prohibited. In general, in Confucianism- based society, for men, getting married was to retain the familial clan, and what was so-called the instinctive feelings or sexual gratification would not be counted as part of their duty in life. Thus, the shogunate government had to provide them another pleasure space that could help them to resolve the confusion between their duty and desire and to fulfill what they were not allowed in their real life as well. For the merchant class, despite being the lowest class, they were the richest one and their financial power gradually increased so unimaginably that samurais or even the Shogun could become their debtors. Nevertheless, the strict regulation of the social hierarchy allowed them by no means to get out of their politically destined class, but they could only invest in luxury clothes and spend their money in pleasure- provided places. The major reason is that these places might help them to symbolically convert their position or at least, to have the sense of value. With money, they could be kings of the floating world and totally enjoy that imaginative status with courtesans whose position was outside of the social ranking but who were truly queens of the play world.

To meet the need for entertainment, at that time, many artistic-commercial units were born: Kabuki theatres, pleasure quarters, and *Jurori* theatres that provided entertainment services for both retainers and merchants. They did not belong to the official artistic forms which were patronized by the Shogunate government. On the contrary, these units were run by private owners and their decisive task was profit-maximization by attracting as many spectators as possible. That was the pleasure world in which customers could buy their satisfaction by money and the quality of each service totally depended on the customers’ financial ability: “The rich merchants could buy the favors of the most beautiful women of the day, and a host of lesser courtesans awaited the call of less affluent men” (Keene, p. 10). Thus, high competition was an undeniable characteristic of Edo cultural business. To meet this requirement, Kabuki theatres, *Jurori* theatres, gay quarters and other artistic forms were required to understand the taste as well as the need for entertainment of their

customer. Although the alternate attendance caused the relatively equal development in almost every region in Japan, there were also several areas which had been exceptionally evolving over two hundred years due to their own geographical or political advantages. We could count here four main typical cities of Edo period: Edo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Nagasaki, in which the first three cities were metropolises. Each owned its own cultural characteristics. The core artistic products of Edo city were woodblock prints and illustrated books. These genres perfectly met the taste of merchants, artisans, lower-level samurai and visitors as well. Especially, the later played an important role in identification this area, thus, it could be called *Edoe* (Edo pictures) or *Azuma nishikie* (Eastern brocade pictures) (Guth, p. 90). Taking advantage of low price, fast production and the ability to depict Edo's lives in detail, the woodblock prints predictably bloomed and adapted with the needs of customers over time in many aspects: color (from three or four colors to a dozen ones), subjects (women with their children, courtesans, Kabuki's actors, famous landmarks, Chinese heroes, Japanese history, etc.). Kyoto was a capital of the former era since the eighth century and lost its political, military role under the Tokugawa era. Nevertheless, this city still was one of the Edo period's cultural centers with its own characteristics which were constituted in the length of history. According to the Guth's analysis, the first and foremost noteworthy feature of Kyoto culture is the refined and sophisticated nature that had a tight connection with luxury arts and crafts, such as painting, printed-book design, calligraphy, ceramic, lacquer, and textiles. Osaka was compared to "kitchen of nation" because this area had a seaport that facilitated the distribution of various kinds of goods over different region of Japan. Gradually, Osaka became a commercial center with half a million people in which a community of merchants, bankers and manufacturers were the basic force in the contemporary population. This specific feature "fostered the growth of a culture with a distinctly mercantile character" (Guth, p. 127) which was combined with seeking for "satisfaction in the pleasure of the material world in Osaka (Guth, p.130). This led the development of some following cultural productions: the licensed pleasure quarter, woodblock prints, illustrated books, but, the most important contribution was establishing the puppet theatre whose customers were mainly merchants who could spend their all day long in this place for the sake of relaxation. That is to say, "the rise of the puppet theatre itself is one important example of the merchant class developing its own entertainments" (Scott, p.75).

In addition, the existence of licensed pleasure quarters could be considered a unique cultural- political phenomena in the Edo era. The main character of this world was the courtesan working in a complex, varied structure with a solid hierarchy, from *tayu*-highest courtesans to *mise-joro*, common prostitutes. There was a conclusive comment about these pleasure theaters: "The courtesans of Kyoto's Shimabara were the most beautiful, those of the Yoshiwara the most spirited, and those of Nagasaki's Maruyama the best dressed, while Osaka's Shinmachi was unmatched in the splendor of its decor" (Cited according to Guth, p.29). On one hand, they became a symbol of the floating world- the world of physical beauty and everlasting but impermanent mental, sexual gratifications that could not be achieved without money. On the other hand, people, no matter if they had a chance to visit these special districts or not, shared their common curiosity for women who earned their living by selling their artistic skills, and bodies as well. What was their secret code? What did they think about? How could they forsake their instinctual needs for their career? etc. All these questions became an endlessly creative inspiration for many amateur artists.

Especially, they took form as one of the most popular characters in *ukyo-e*. When becoming the literary figures of *Jurori*, these women immediately met the taste of contemporary audiences.

Another thing that should be unforgettable is that, their living motto regarding a special thought of *Ukiyo*(*) which look at life as a transient state and emphasizes seeking pleasure in the present moment. Thus, Japanese, in the Edo period, would like to know what was updated, sensational news that happened all over Japan. In fact, as a result of alternate attendance, Japan was a nation of people on the move (Guth) due to the construction of a land route, and waterways serving many political, and military requirements. No matter in which class they were ranked, individuals travelled to other areas for sightseeing, patron- seeking, culture- expanding, worship, etc. Adapting well with the newly developed circumstances, *Yomiuri* was born as an early form of newspaper by which vendors would collect the “hot news”, and then print them onto the woodblock and sell them by singing about what had just happened (Groemer). By doing this, the habit of updating the newest events became part of the *chonindo* (the life style of urbanization in the Edo period). This is probably a convincing reason that we could conclude that Chikamatsu was truly sensible in meeting well the fashion of contemporary life because, according to the historical records, "his twenty-four contemporary-life works are remarkable for their focus on real incidents of love suicide, murder, adultery, and other crimes involving ordinary men and women who faced tragic endings" (C. Andrew Gerstle, p.432). Especially, two of his plays were written merely a few months after the real double suicides occurred. Thus, it is undeniable that Chikamatsu first wrote these plays under the pleasure of seeking the new creative topics for *Takemoto* theatre. The merchants and prostitutes who became his main characters were not random but a purposeful choice. His new topic belonged to repertoire of the massed- produced culture that tended to maximize profits by emphasizing every seasonal, short-lived, but sensational news item. He truly felt his audience “in his bones” (Hall), and understood their needs as well as their special tastes in order to calculate what should be innovated and implemented.

It seemed to be necessary to notice that at the mentioned time, the theatre-goers of *Jurori* had less fascination for the historical plays. Evidently, in 1710, Takemoto theatre had to face the danger of bankruptcy for the first time due to another puppet theatre in Osaka and the rate of customers, mainly merchants, dramatically decreased (Kanemitsu). At that time, Chikamatsu was working in Takemoto theatre as a chief playwright. His high demanding career was not only to compose enough plays for daily performance but also to attract as many customers as possible to the puppet theatre to provide financial security for the *Takemoto-za* theatre's existence. Choosing a topic of romantic but hopeless love affair between a poor merchant and lowest courtesan tended to be rational because it well met the pre-existing curiosity regarding women in the floating world who were famous for being practical and money-worshipping. Beyond any imaginations, there was a prostitute daring to sacrifice herself for love. This story, clearly, promised a lot of interesting, and amusing details. Moreover, her partner was a normal merchant, totally different from what were known in the previous puppet performance. Theater-goers who were fed up with the familiar, historical heroes suddenly found interest in the new theme, especially as this topic was related to an object of their class, a merchant living in poverty. Clearly, in this aspect, "love suicides" plays were "individual art, existing within a literate

commercial culture" (Hall 1964, p. 59) because these plays were first composed as cultural goods aimed to earning money by serving its major audiences' taste. It was exactly what Chikamatsu had foreseen, after performing "the love suicides at Sonezaki", audiences came back to *Takemoto-za* with a high rate and as a result, this theatre could escape bankruptcy and it remained alive for a long time.

3. "Love suicides" as the unique way to preserve one's dignity

When Chikamatsu chose the topic of love suicides, he did not mean to astonish his main audiences, the merchants because the contents of these stories were already known. The title itself, "The love suicides at..." can evoke nothing new and their plots are extremely simple. Everything seemed to be completed. As Keene suggests: "The developments in the plots of his play were often known in advance from the scandal sheets sold in the wake of interesting double suicides" (Keene, p.16). Nevertheless, these love suicides plays still elicited strong attraction from its contemporary theater-goers, mainly merchants, because of many different explanations. Firstly, these theatre-goers could easily mirror their real lives in dramatic actions as well as the fates of characters. Jihei, Tokubei are dealers in Osaka and they have been facing financial difficulties. Basically, they lack the confidence of wealthy merchants. Instead, they are invaded by worries of bankruptcy or unemployment. From the beginning to the end of these plays, money is their obsession. Tokubei works as a clerk in his uncle's soy shop. Because of refusing his arranged marriage, he has to ask for financial help from many other resources and, finally, he is fired and is warned by his master: "I'll chase you from Osaka and never let you set foot here again". Jihei's paper shop comes from the generous support of his parent-in-law and during *The Love Suicide of Amijima*, his family cannot stop facing obstacles of necessary monthly payments. Even, in an emergency, his wife, Osan has to sell most of her clothes to pay the bills. The aforementioned challenges are not simply an artistic creation but truly reflect what had happened to merchants on a daily basis. Chikamatsu's age was perfectly positioned in the Genroku period (1688-1703). According to several scholars, this was a severe time in which the Shogun applied many harsh laws in order to decrease the financial role of merchants, especially reducing the amount of money in circulation that brought this class' businesses to the verge of bankruptcy. Committing suicides due to the ruin of their commerce was not uncommon in that day. Hence, receiving these plays, this main contemporary audiences could find out a lively reflection of their circumstances. Of course, as Hall suggests, a popular artist would never faithfully duplicate the real life but twist it by his own artistic talents. In these two plays, we hardly discover any clues relating to his criticism toward social, and political systems of Edo period. Instead of showing the ills of the age, he focuses on the particular grief of each class, trader and courtesan as well as tracing their own mistakes. Moreover, Chikamatsu put his heroes into pitiful circumstances. Both of them are orphans and have to rely on their relatives to exist. Needless to say that they are very lonely. In the aspect of artistic creation, these details could bring a necessary artistic effect which provokes sympathy from theatre-goers, helps to totally erase any traces of political relevance, and pushes the story into the individual scale. This creation is a good way to avoid the Shogunate government's censorship because, in fact, in dominant ideology, the puppet theatre, along with Kabuki theatre and pleasure quarters were dangerous, rebellious areas that should be strictly controlled, limited in order to protect the moral standards as well as social orders. The content associated with the life of merchants could only be traced back by

enthusiastic response of the puppet theatre in the day. These plays did not only play a crucial role to attract puppet theatre's viewers back but also contributed to alarming growth of the suicide rate in the day. So many had occurred that the Shogun eventually enacted the special law that banned the title "Shinju" (committing suicide) in puppet theatres' advertisements in 1723 (Kanemitsu).

Besides the reason of hopeless love, maleprotagonistsend their lives for their self-esteem and dignity. It is not random when both Jihei and Kotobei are humiliated in public. Instead of getting some sympathy, rumors relating to their moral violations are largely spread by passers-by who witnessed their shameful situations. Tokubei blindly lends his best friend his entire fortune that would be used to repay his arranged marriage's dowry and ransom his lover, Ohatsu, eventually, Kuheiji, his debtor not only refutes this amount of money but also accuses Tokubei of cheating: "you're trying to extort money from me that makes you a worse criminal than a forger" (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*). Unstoppably, this cheater and his loudmouthed companions insist that Tokubei stole his seal and cooks up this story because he has run out of money and needs to earn it at any cost. As a result, this villain insults the hero and at the same time beats him without any emotion. Being provided with reliable evidence, all witnesses truly believe that Tokubei plots this dirty plan. Finding it is impossible to clear suspicion, this man cannot do anything else but "he strikes the ground and gnashes his teeth, clenches his fists and moans". Finally, Tokubei swears he would commit suicide to prove his innocence: "without it [money] tomorrow, the twenty-first, I'd have to kill myself (...) There's no point in my talking this way. Before three days have passed, I, Tokubei, will make amends by showing all Osaka the purity at the bottom of my heart" (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*). In the next scene, when he meets his lover, Ohatsu, this decision will be enhanced by a solid announcement coming from the mouth of his lover: "He's been tricked, but he has no choice but to kill himself". Clearly, what causes this male character to commit suicide is, partly, his hopeless love affair and partly is associated with his honor. If he is still alive, there is no way to convert what happened and purify his moral glory. In *The Love Suicides at Amijima*, although having no villain, Jihei is humiliated as well, and, especially, being pushed into the shameful situation twice. The first one is the time he comes to the brothel and intends to end his life and his lover's as well. This plan fails because he randomly hears the conversation of the prostitute and her guest in which Koharu pretends to betray Jihei and refuses the wish of double suicides. Furiously, Jihei throws his short knife into the room with hope of killing "that rotten she-fox". Consequently, his arms are tied up to the latticework by Koharu's guest, a samurai. He bitterly sees the shadow of this woman and her guest entering the inner room while "his body beset by suffering as he tastes a living shame worse than a dog's". The second humiliation happens when Jihei gets to know that Tahei, another merchant, is going to redeem Koharu's contract and take her for his concubine. If this is true, Osaka residents will definitely conclude that Jihei is not able to be a patron for this prostitute due to his finances. Like Jihei's confession, this must be the most shameful event for a man of honor because he does not have the financial ability to remain his preexisting relationship with his chosen courtesan in the pleasure quarter: "He'll [Tahei] spread the word around Osaka that my business has come to a standstill and I'm hard pressed for money. I'll meet with contemptuous stares from the wholesalers. I'll be dishonored. My heart is broken and my body burns with shame. What a disgrace! How maddening" (*The Love Suicides at Amijima*).

Once one's dignity is destroyed, this means that this man will no longer be accepted as a respectful member of his community. Being shamed is a synonym with being expelled or dead. This discipline not only originates in the Chinese Confucianism that was faithfully adopted by the Shoguns but also crucially comes from the samurai codes that were strictly imposed into establishing the contemporary social order. Through more than two hundred years of operation of alternate attendance, the culture of the highest class deeply affected all aspects of Japanese culture. Moreover, although having many privileges of the highest-ranking force, Samurai-as the military force had not many things to do in the time of peace. Insufficient income plus other needs led them to be in debt. To earn their living, they became teachers for rich merchants or commoners to lecture what were considered the elite values, such as composing poetry, painting, writing calligraphy, arranging flowers, steeping tea. By doing this, samurai's artistic knowledge, skills as well as their core values could be largely diffused across class lines. One of the foremost disciplines of this class is that a true samurai has to "keep death in mind all times (...) you will also fulfill the ways of loyalty and familial duty. You will also avoid myriad evils and calamities, you will be physically sound and healthy, and you will live a long life. What is more, your character will improve and your virtue will grow" (Daidoji, p.3). Like a cherry blossom that easily is carried by the wind, a brave warrior must be willing to kill himself for a sake of honor. Thus, his death is not the end but is a special way to keep his reputation alive forever in future generations. For a samurai, an admirable death has much more value than a shameful life. Hence, according to contemporary social norms, the best decision of both Jihei and Tokubei is committing suicide and it undoubtedly has a tight relation to Bushido (The code of samurai). They have no other choice once losing their social reputation. At this point, their action of killing themselves and their lovers tends to be affected by Hara-kiri, an important rite in which a warrior will cut his belly to protect his dignity. Again, we can recognize here the personal creation of Chikamatsu. Instead of cutting their stomachs, our heroes choose another way: cut their lovers' throats then kill themselves in the same method (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*) or by hanging from a tree (*The Love Suicides at Amijima*). In fact, these scenes are not different from bloody murders that might intensely impact viewers: "he tries to steady his weakening resolve, but still he trembles, and when he thrusts, the point misses. Twice or thrice the flashing blade deflects this way and that until a cry tells it has struck her throat (...) he thrusts and twists the razor in his throat, until it seems the handle or the blade must snap. His eyes grow dim, and his last painful breath is drawn away at its appointed hour" (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*) or "He thrusts in the saving sword. Stabbed, she falls backwards, despite his staying hand, and struggles in terrible pain. The point of the blade has missed her windpipe, and these are the final tortures before she can die (...) He pulls the ash to him and fastens the noose around his neck" (*The Love Suicides at Amijima*). These details perhaps duplicate what had happened in the real suicide of couples on which Chikamatsu's plays were based, but, probably these details belong to the author's artistic convention that aims to astonish his contemporary theatre-goers. For these couples, committing suicides is not merely to finish their secular lives but a special ritual by which they could achieve their eternal happiness and become "models of true love" (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*). To gain this wish, they would have to keep their corpses together in an aesthetic gesture: "it would be unfortunate if because of the pain we are to suffer people said that we looked ugly in death" (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*). By cutting one's throat or hanging on the tree, their death might please the eyes of witnesses because their body would not be dreadfully torn.

Clearly, there is a perfect combination between the Edo period's social, and moral norms and personal artistic creations of Chikamatsu. His audiences, therefore, could easily share their consent that was based on the Japanese common idea of preserving honor to the decision of committing suicide and, in the same time, be marveled by flexible practices of this ritual.

4. "Love Suicides" for being granted a salvation in the Western paradise and indirectly refusal of the contemporary social order

In the relationship with Confucianism and Shintoism, Buddhism had an important role affecting many different aspects of Japanese culture in the Edo period. The psychological, religious system and the methods of practices of Buddhism were imported into Japan by the diplomatic relation between this country and China from 4th to 10th century. As a hybrid religion, Buddhism was learned and applied according to Japanese sects: Nembutsu, Zen, ... in which Nembutsu could be considered the most popular one. The followers of this sect think that this life is only one of countless lives that individuals have in the endless circle of human existence. What we must suffer in our present life is nothing else but the effects of what we had done in the previous one. In turn, every action in this life could become a cause of happiness or grief in our next incarnation. Nothing existing in this cosmos does not have its own destiny. The people we meet, the places we come to, the sorrows we experience, etc tend to be mysteriously arranged by a tight relation between what is so-called *Cause* and *Effect*. Especially, needless to follow some strict rules or hard practices, Nembutsu emphasizes the power of Amida (Buddha) in salvation. By chanting the invocation "*NamuAmidaButsu*", people who strongly believe in this Buddhist deity could be released and reborn in the Pure Land. Before committing suicides, Jihei-Coharu and Tokubei- Ohatsu murmur "*NamuAmidaButsu*" with their strong hope that "may we be reborn on the same lotus". Belief in salvation helps to push out the dark, scary veil of death. For these lovers, departing this sorrowful world, there is no horrible Hell but a bright, warm and peaceful Western Paradise waiting ahead: "They exchange glances and cry out for joy, happy that they are to die- a painful, heart-rending sight. The life left them now is as brief as sparks that fly from blocks of flint" (*The Love Suicides at Sonejaki*) Despite trembling, they successfully conquer their moment of death in order to realize that their final time comes:

Let's pretend that Umeda bridge

Is the bridge the magpies built

Across the Milky Way, and make a vow

To be husband and wife stars for eternity (The Love Suicides at Sonejaki)

And, somewhere, in reality or just in their dreams, crows- the birds announce the time of farewell- seem to be crying. In the ears of couples, their sounds have cherishing sweet and meaningful lyrics: "beloved", "beloved" (The Love Suicides at Amijima). The road leading them to the death place, at this point, is not simply geographical but conventional one that symbolize for their holy journey departing this secular world to the internal land. This helps us to explain why Jihei and Koharu have to cross many bridges before reaching their assigned place: Tenjin bridge, Green Bridge, Shell Bridge, Oe Bridge, Little Naniwa Bridge, Finairi Bridge, Horikawa Bridge, Temma Bridge, Kyo Bridge, Onari Bridge. Ten bridges evoke a long, harsh trip for salvation but those who have a strong belief in the merit of Buddha would reach their enlightened destination because the final bridge named Onari also means "to become a Buddha" (Keene, p. 204). Thus, for contemporary audiences, listening to reciters

chanting these words, they could easily find a common religious faith that had already been absorbed in the deepest stage of their spirits. They did not only amuse themselves by artistic, entertaining pleasures brought by drama's actions but also provoked a custom of making pilgrimages practiced in their real lives. Stating this, we should not forget that, from the tenth century, going to some holy places was one of the most popular activities. The endless flow of moving, visiting shrines, temples or pagodas became a necessary part of their daily lives. The routes of pilgrimage, thus, were extremely developed, especially in eighteenth century. As Brownstein shows: "By the late half of the eighteenth century, Edo had 26 routes, Kyoto 16, and Nagoya 9. Osaka, however, had the greatest number, with 35: 13 routes connected 3 or more Shinto Shrines, and 15 routes connected 7 or more Buddhist temples. There were also 6 routes associated with the founders of sects, and even 1 connecting the 7 cemeteries in Osaka" (Brownstein, p. 9). Clearly, in the farewell scenes, Chikamatsu skillfully intertwined two totally different spheres- Love and Religion- in a perfect harmony that reduced the sorrow of committing suicide, and, at the same time, awakened what is so-called "a strange discovery but already being experienced."

5. "Love suicides" and the struggle of *Ninjo* against *Giri*

Chikamatsu confessed that: " I was born into a hereditary family of samurai but left the martial profession. I served in personal attendance on the nobility but never obtained the least court rank. I drifted in the market place but learned nothing of trade" (Keene, p. 2). By this modern confession, the playwright admits that despite his efforts, he fell from the honorably social position, and through his life, he seemed to be a misfit in any categories: neither merchant nor noble, nor warrior. He retreated to his family's shrine and became a playwright for kabuki theatre in Kyoto, and finally spent the rest of his life writing for the Osaka puppet theatre- the artistic areas tended to be considered rebellious ones according to the Shoguns' thought. Generally speaking, in the social category of the Edo period, Chikamatsu could be ranked into a force of amateur artists who had their high self- cultivation, and, self- awareness but did not belong to the orthodox list and were not patronized by the Shoguns. From this fact, it might not be overstated when claimed that Chikamatsu wrote his domestic plays from a subordinate position and the voice of his non-historical characters represented powerless people's in Edo period, particularly, merchants and courtesans. In turn, his major audiences, merchants, seemed to find not only the true images of their contemporary lives but also their own grief, desires and even confusion between what they were socially required to enact and what they wished to have. That is along-term struggle between *Giri* and *Ninjo*. *Giri* are the responsibilities under which people would have to obey to be a social subject; *Ninjo* are the natural instincts that tend to threaten moral standards and social stabilities. Tokugawa rulers adopted Neo-Confucianism to maintain their centralized feudal system through two centuries. Accordingly, what were so-called desire and passion could only exist in the world of play and easily be bought by money. In the "true life," people were required to accomplish their familiar and social tasks. This is one of political- cultural strategies that were enacted by the Shogunate government in order to protect its "hegemony" (Gramsci). In other words, as Fiske suggests: "It is a homogenizing, centralizing, integrating force that attempts to maintain semiotic and social power at the centre" (Fiske, 1987, P. 570).

In the Edo period, each class or a kind of people has their own *Giri*, or unescapable duties. Merchants would have to be diligent, sensible and necessarily spend their total energy to establish their professional reputations that could remain over generations. Along with the foundations of their own career, getting married to have sons was the foremost task to remain a clan. Thus, being a spouse did not mean they would be their soul-mates and share their sexual gratifications. Marriage and sexual relation could by no mean be homogenous. Especially, for women, there were two completely different lists: women of households and women of pleasure quarters. The former was required to take care of their family as loyal wives and moral mothers. No matter how much pain, misery they had to suffer, the happiness and dignity of their husbands (probably of their children) would be priorities. In "The Love Suicides at Amijama", Osan, Jihei's wife is a perfect representation for this model. Despite being aware of the love affair and suicide plan of her husband and his lover, Osan still protects him in front of her mother and brother. She even unreluctantly gives Jihei the precious money that should be used for the upcoming bills and enthusiastically convinces him to ransom the prostitute whom he loves so much. When her father feels so pitiful for his daughter that he requires her to divorce Jihei, Osan still tries to beg this man allowing her to stay with her faithless mate for her belief: "I'd be glad to rip the nails from my fingers and toes, to do anything which might serve my husband". The series of actions of this protagonist, undeniably, is suitable with Confucianism-based social norms. The counterpart of this standard woman is the courtesan in pleasure quarters. Their most important task is to provide their customers various satisfactions by their artistic knowledge, physical beauty, and in-bed skills. This is a special world that helps the contemporary men to balance their lives by complementing what they need for their instinctive passions. In the dominant ideologies, all material and human desires could not be valued in remaining within the social orders and moral standards. Thus, they would be easily bought by money. Courtesans, no matter which category they are, never belonged to human beings. This also means that they lacked honor or other necessary features because they would be willing to sell their bodies for any men in order to earn money. For these women, love never exists. When a courtesan fell in love with a man, she would have to be ready for her tragic consequence. These are "normal reality or common sense (...) in active form of experience and consciousness" (Williams) (Cited according to Jame Lull. Hegemony. p. 34) that aims at "a willing agreement by people to be governed by principles, rules and laws they believe operate in their best interests, even though in actual practice they may not. Social consent can be a more effective means of control than coercion or force" (Jame Lull, p. 34). The above helps us to prove that *Giri* was praised because it supported the contemporary dominant ideology while *Ninjo* was banned as a rebellious, threatened sphere in the Edo period. This discipline was strictly applied in order to preserve an absolute authority of the Tokugaw. Accordingly, "the people" would have to uncritically obey *Giri* unless they want to be expelled from their communities. Thus, fighting for *Ninjo* is not simply to achieve what is truly instinctive requirements but first and foremost is to protect their human rights, to re-construct the identity of powerless people in relation to dominant forces, the Shoguns with their political, cultural, ideological system.

To express a struggle of *Giri* and *Ninjo*, Chikamatsu put his characters into the whirlwind of hopeless and unacceptable love affairs through which the inner world of our heroes and heroines would be profoundly explored. During these plays, these protagonists are ceaselessly tormented by a fire of love. Jihei abandons his family to

spend most of his time in a brothel where his lover works. Tokubei laments because of his lack of money to redeem his courtesan. To push the dramatic conflict into the highest stage, Chikamatsu drives his heroes to face their familiar duties and orders them to make a final decision. At this point, a series of other characters coming from the web of kinship becomes conventions for *Giri*, or in the other words, representations for contemporary dominant ideology. Tokubei's master, also is his uncle, chooses his wife's niece for our hero as his future mate without consulting Tokubei because, for this old man, an arranged marriage is traditionally, and culturally rational. Especially, the selected girl comes from a rich family, so, a wedding will be an auspicious initiation for Tokubei's ascension (The Love suicides at Sonezaki). Unlike this soy dealer, Jihei in "The Love Suicides at Amijima" is a married man with two lovely children, and his cousin for his wife, and his aunt for his mother-in-law. His life and job are tightly tied in these bloodrelationships. Hence, undoubtedly, Jihei's *Giri* is to develop his paper shop and keep his family a happy one. At this point, we should remember that, if these heroes continue to obediently practice what they are socially required to do, their dignity would not be damaged although they come to brothels frequently to see prostitutes. Maintaining a life in these two worlds was seen as normal thing for men in the Edo period. Every warning occurs when a man abandons his legal family as well as his career to love a given courtesan. Clearly, Jihei and Tokubei are considered in danger because they are ready to sacrifice what they have in order to live with their lovers. Tokubei renounces his arranged marriage and travels over many provinces to borrow money without hesitation in order to ransom Ohatsu and repay his wedding dowry. Jihei, more infatuated, leaves his shop in danger of bankruptcy, and forsakes his offspring to commit suicide with a prostitute, Koharu, who infatuates him completely in body and spirit. Clearly, for these male protagonists, at the beginning of the plays, they decide to live for the sake of passion because without it, they could be merely senseless creatures. In the other words, love brings them meanings and motivations for their lives. After his last meeting with Koharu, Jihei only sleeps to forget his sorrow and betrayed love. Obviously, in these plays, people of duty hardly find their true happiness. Moreover, by depicting how much love torments them, the author seems to express that these lowest class still have human emotions and they dare to die for what they cherish as well as for what makes them feel truly meaningful. What caused contemporary audiences to keep returning to the Takemoto puppet theatre was probably their empathy with Chikamatsu's non-historical characters because merchants could realize their emotions in what Jihei, Tokubei and the others had been suffering. If so, the discourse of the author matched the discourse of his theatre-goers very well.

For Ohatsu and Koharu, despite earning their living by providing their guests sexual pleasures, they still are human beings who have the seven emotional stages according to oriental opinion (love, sadness, happiness, anger, shame, desire,...). They sell either their beauty or body for money but they also know what love is. They have no reluctance to commit suicides in order to live forever with those who are more important and more precious than these courtesans' lives. It is not random when in these plays, Chikamatsu lets his female protagonists actively make the final decisions in many sensitive situations. When Tokubei weeps so much that he is "lost in tears" for his bad luck, Ohatsu bravely supports him with a strong belief coming from the bottom of her sincere heart: "Tokubei and I have been intimate for years. We've told each other our inner secrets. He hasn't a particle of deceit in him, the poor boy. His

generosity has been his undoing. He's been tricked, but he hasn't the evidence to prove it" (The Love Suicides at Sonezaki). In addition, although, it was commonly thought at this time that "a prostitute's business is to deceive men" (The Love Suicides at Amijima), the "Japanese Shakespeare" demonstrates that they are honorable women as well. Koharu dares to die for her love but she also is willing to endure many misunderstanding humiliations of her lover when she accepts to be called a "sneak thief", "weasel! Vixen!". In his bitterness, Jihei even "kicks her sharply on her forehead". In fact, she pretends taking advantage of Jihei because Osan's begging for preventing her husband's life from committing suicide. Especially, compliments for this courtesan are uttered from the mouth of Jihei's wife: "could such a noble-hearted woman violate her promise(...)?". With these words, the social barrier tends to be erased. There is not distinction between who an honorable woman is and who the despicable prostitute is. They are both respectable because of their faithfulness and sacrifices. Choosing to commit suicide, these heroes and heroines express their strong attitudes toward the Shogunate government's disciplines. By death, they tend to prove that: "In this world we could not stay together, in the next and through each successive world to come until the end of time we shall be husband and wife" (The Love Suicides at Amijima). This also means that love and living with those who love each other faithfully which seemed to be normal, became impossible under the harshly, inhumanly moral and social codes in the Edo era. By her death, Koharu wishes "If I can save living creatures at will when once I mount a lotus calyx in Paradise and become a Buddha, I want to protect women of my profession, so that never again will there be love suicides" (The Love Suicides at Amijima). This sentence seems to imply an assertion of human rights for those who were seen as non-human and that their inferior fates were taken for granted. Clearly, by these puppet plays, Chikamatsu contributes to a necessary identification of subordinate people in relation to the Shogun's dominant discourses. Hence, as a form of popular art, in Edo period, the Japanese puppet theatre could be seen as one belonging to a counter-culture in which a "struggle for meaning" (Fiske, p.331) had been attained.

Nowadays, many "love suicide" plays of Chikamatsu are considered masterpieces of Japanese Puppet theatre as well as literature. For Western readers/ viewers who are not familiar with Japanese culture in the Edo period, praising suicide seems to be incomprehensible. The others who are haunted by the comparison: "Japanese Shakespeare" also could be disappointed by absolute differences between these two fabulous playwrights. The roles, values and meanings of "The Love Suicides at Sonezaki" and "The Love Suicides at Amijima" might be only reasonably criticized when we place them in the cultural landscapes of the Edo period in which the puppet theatre was a form of popular art existing in commercial culture, and this stage was aimed at the special tastes of its major audiences, merchants, who were the richest but lowest on the social ladder of the Edo era.

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(*) Ukiyo: The floating world first appeared around 1665 in a collection of stories, *Ukiyomonogatari* (Tales of the Floating World) , by AsaiRyoi
The Floating World as a water metaphor carries ancient associations of freedom and pleasure (...) was not a low-culture ideal. It derived both from indigenous aristocratic traditions and from the Chinese scholar-official or literati ideal of the cultivated amateur (According to Guth)

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