A Study of the Period Drama Film *Kōchiyama Sōshun* (1):
The Historical and Film Industry Context

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In 1936, at a time when *bungei eiga* or cinematic adaptations of literary works (rather than stage plays) were very popular, Yamanaka Sadao made the movie *Kōchiyama Sōshun* based on “Kōchiyama,” one act of the Kabuki play *Kumo ni magō Ueno no hatsuhana* (Lost in the Clouds, the First Flowers of Ueno).

The historical character Kōchiyama Sōshun had already been portrayed in a 1934 film. Entitled *Nagurareta Kōchiyama* (Kōchiyama Beaten), this was a talkie directed by Kinugasa Teinosuke, who also wrote the screenplay, adapting and retitling Kuga Naojirō’s *Nagurareta Sōshun* (Sōshun Beaten), a novel about the characters of the same Kabuki piece, “Kōchiyama.”

In contrast to Kinugasa’s movie, which was adapted from a novel and was thus a *bungei eiga*, the version that Yamanaka wrote and directed was based on the Kabuki play, part of the repertory of the Zenshinza troupe, and could be seen as translating a Kabuki drama directly to the screen. Yamanaka’s plot diverges from that of the play, and he has also altered the roles of certain characters, creating his own interpretation of the story. But the film maintains the humane heroism, driven by genuine compassion, that characterizes the bogus priest Kōchiyama in the original Kabuki drama.

In this paper, I discuss how the Kabuki piece was rendered cinematically, beginning by placing *Kōchiyama Sōshun* in its historical and film industry context.