The story of *Youchi Soga* and many other plays with this theme was a popular subject for kabuki audiences and a *Sogamono* was performed in every theatre at the start of the year. In 1175 Kudo Saemon Suketsune had his cousin Sukemichi assassinated in order to gain an inheritance. Eighteen years later, in 1193, Sukemichi’s two sons Juro Sukenari and Goro Tokimune revenged themselves by killing Suketsune in the course of a hunting party on Mount Fuji. Juro was killed in the fight but Goro was taken prisoner. What follows is the crux of the play’s tragedy for Japanese audiences. Although the shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo sympathised with the brothers' loyalty and was inclined to pardon Goro, he was persuaded by Suketsune’s son to execute him. The conflict between the duty of the sons and the authority of the state remains a vital key to understanding both *bushido* (the way of the samurai) and the feudal system of the shogunate.

Soga Goro is played by an Aragoto (rough style) actor wearing the type of Kumadori makeup called “Mukimi.” This fierce red make up makes Goro instantly recognisable.

*Illustrated, Nakamura Shikan IV as Soga Goro, by Kuniyada. 1860*