

Site of the *Matsu no Oroka* Corridor

The Honmaru Goten palace complex once covered much of the *honmaru* main compound of Edo Castle. This was the site of a corridor known as the *Matsu no Oroka*, the “Great Pine Corridor,” after the pine trees painted on its sliding doors. The corridor was approximately 55 metres in length and 4 metres wide, and linked the large Formal Reception Room to the *Shiro-shoin*, the shogun’s reception room. This was the stage for the *Ako Jiken*, a famous incident that is the basis for the *Chushingura*, a subject perennially popular in Japanese theatre, puppetry, fiction, and film. In 1701, Asano (1667–1701), a feudal lord of Ako, attacked and wounded Kira (1641–1702), one of the masters of ceremonies, in this corridor. For this crime, Asano was ordered to commit suicide. One year later, forty-seven of his retainers—now *ronin*, masterless samurai—killed Kira in revenge. The shogunate was of two minds as to whether the *ronin* should be punished for murder or admired for their loyalty. By way of compromise, the masterless samurai were ordered to commit ritual suicide, an honourable death, rather than be executed.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Detail from *Matsu no Oroka Sliding Door Picture* (Tokyo National Museum)

Detail from woodblock print of Kabuki play *Kanadehon Chushingura* (National Theatre of Japan)