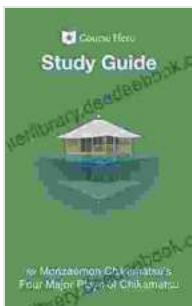


# A Comprehensive Study Guide for Understanding Monzaemon Chikamatsu's Four Major Plays

Monzaemon Chikamatsu (1653-1725), widely known as Chikamatsu Monzaemon, was a towering figure in Japanese literature, particularly renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to the kabuki theater. Chikamatsu's prolific career spanned approximately 30 years, during which he penned over 100 plays, many of which have become timeless classics of Japanese theater. Among his vast oeuvre, four plays stand out as his most significant and influential works, collectively known as the "Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu."

This comprehensive study guide provides an in-depth exploration of each of Chikamatsu's Four Major Plays, offering insightful analysis, plot summaries, character descriptions, and historical context to enhance your understanding and appreciation of these enduring masterpieces.



## Study Guide for Monzaemon Chikamatsu's Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu by Ahmet Zappa

★★★★☆ 4.9 out of 5

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# 1. Love Suicides at Sonezaki (1703)

## Plot Summary



Love Suicides at Sonezaki is a poignant and heart-wrenching tragedy that recounts the ill-fated love between Tokubei, a traveling merchant, and Ohatsu, a courtesan from the Sonezaki pleasure district. Their forbidden romance blossoms amidst the vibrant and bustling world of Osaka's floating

world, but their happiness is short-lived. Social norms, financial constraints, and familial obligations conspire against their love, ultimately driving them to a tragic end.

## **Character Analysis**

\* **Tokubei:** A kind-hearted and honorable traveling merchant who falls deeply in love with Ohatsu. Despite his sincere intentions, Tokubei is bound by the social conventions of his time, which forbid him from pursuing a relationship with a woman of Ohatsu's status. \* **Ohatsu:** A beautiful and compassionate courtesan who has been sold into prostitution by her father to pay off his debts. Ohatsu yearns for a life of love and freedom, but she is trapped by her circumstances and societal expectations.

## **Historical Context**

Love Suicides at Sonezaki was written during the Genroku era (1688-1704), a period of great economic prosperity and cultural flourishing in Japan. However, the era was also marked by rigid social hierarchies and a strong emphasis on tradition, both of which played a significant role in shaping the tragic events of the play.

## **2. The Battles of Coxinga (1715)**

### **Plot Summary**



The Battles of Coxinga is an epic historical drama that recounts the real-life Siege of Taiwan by the Ming loyalist Koxinga (Zheng Chenggong) in the mid-17th century. The play revolves around the clash between the Dutch East India Company and Koxinga's forces, as well as the personal conflicts and sacrifices of those involved in the war.

### **Character Analysis**

\* **Koxinga:** A legendary military leader and Ming loyalist who seeks to avenge his father's death and restore the Ming dynasty. Koxinga's unwavering determination and strategic prowess are matched by his deep sense of loyalty and his willingness to sacrifice everything for his cause. \*

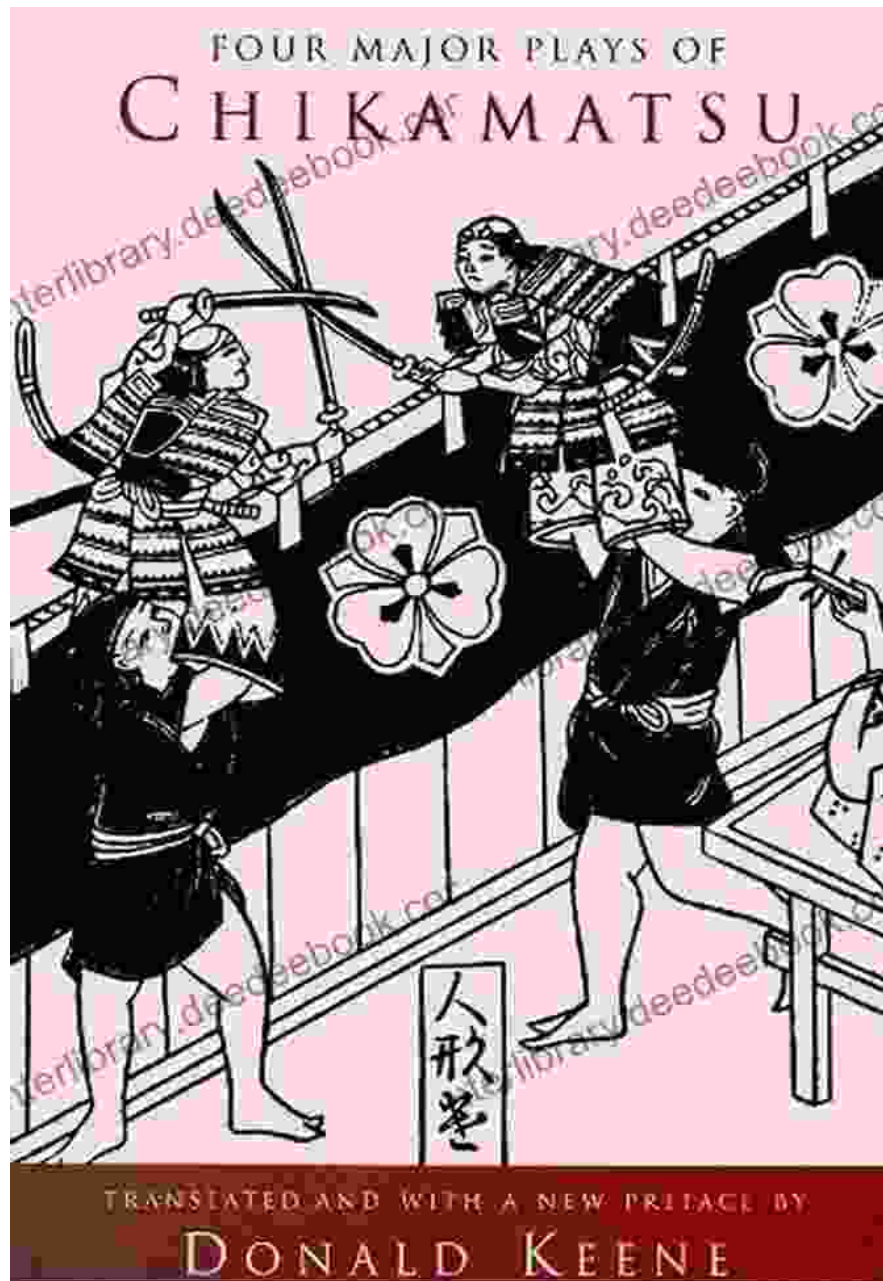
**Maria:** A Dutch woman who finds herself caught in the crossfire of the war. Maria's intelligence and compassion provide a contrasting perspective on the brutality of the conflict, and her ultimate decision to leave everything behind underscores the play's themes of love, loss, and the human cost of war.

## **Historical Context**

The Battles of Coxinga is set against the backdrop of the complex political and military landscape of 17th-century East Asia. The Ming dynasty, which had ruled China for centuries, was nearing its end, while the Qing dynasty was rising in the north. Simultaneously, European powers were vying for dominance in Southeast Asia, leading to conflicts such as the Siege of Taiwan.

## **3. The Subscription List (1718)**

### **Plot Summary**



The Subscription List is a intricate and multifaceted drama that explores the themes of love, duty, and social class through the story of a group of traveling entertainers who become involved in a complex web of relationships. The play delves into the psychological and emotional complexities of the characters, showcasing the fragility of human connections and the challenges of navigating societal expectations.

## **Character Analysis**

\* **Oshichi:** A young and beautiful temple servant who falls in love with a traveling performer named Kandayu. Oshichi's unwavering devotion and selflessness are tested by the obstacles she faces, including her father's disapproval and Kandayu's past relationship with another woman. \*

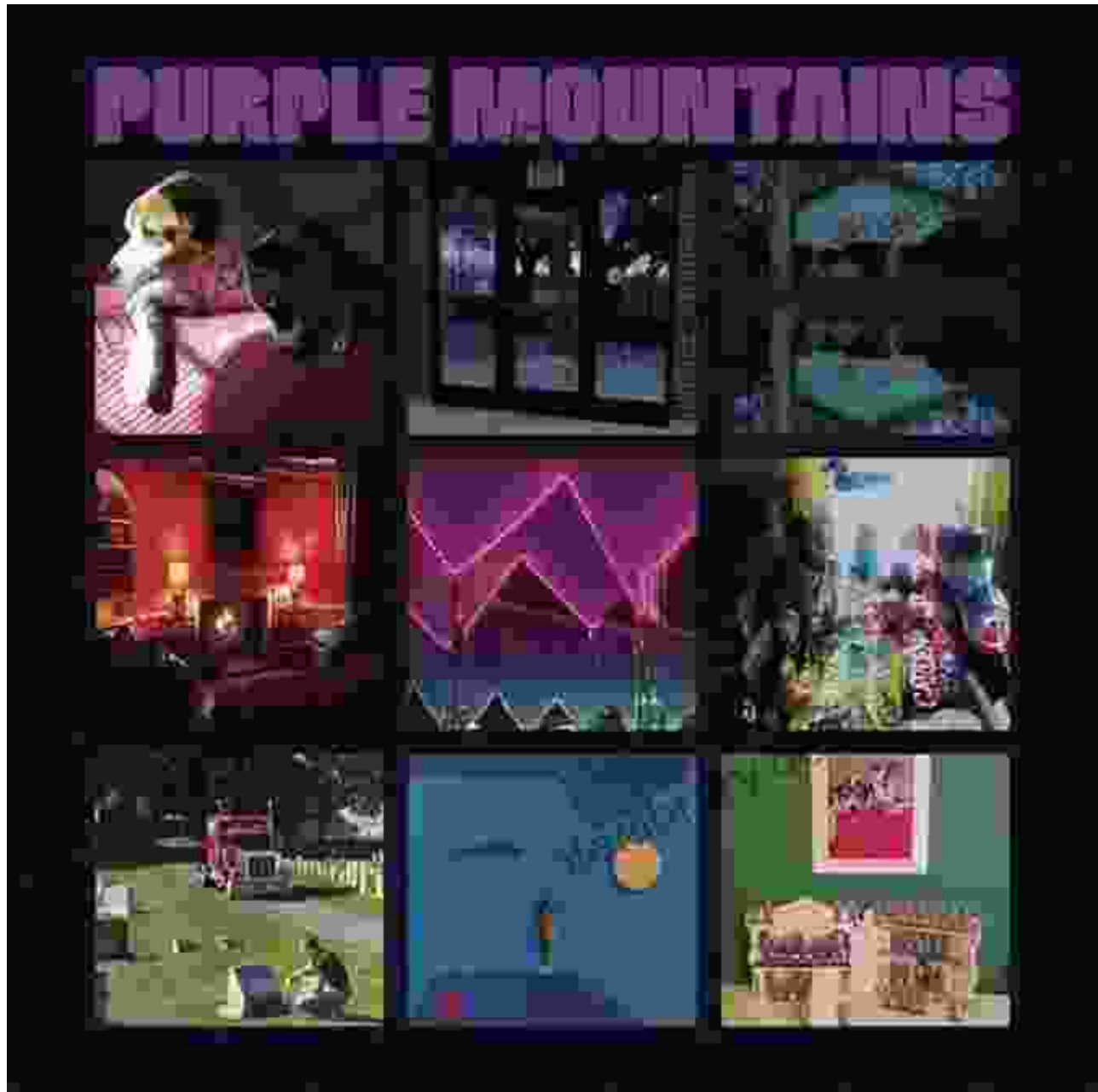
**Kandayu:** A talented and charismatic performer who is caught between his love for Oshichi and his obligations to his long-time lover, Okaru. Kandayu's character is a study in contradictions, as he struggles to reconcile his desires with his sense of duty and responsibility.

## **Historical Context**

The Subscription List was written during the Kyoho era (1716-1736), a time of relative peace and economic stability in Japan. However, the play reflects the changing social dynamics of the period, particularly the rise of the merchant class and the increased mobility of the population, both of which had a significant impact on the lives and relationships of ordinary people.

## **4. The Love of the Purple Mountain (1719)**

### **Plot Summary**



The Love of the Purple Mountain is a romantic tragedy that tells the tale of an impossible love between a samurai, Hikoshichiro, and a courtesan, Agemaki. Set in the vibrant and colorful world of the Yoshiwara pleasure district, the play follows the star-crossed lovers as they navigate the prejudices of society and their own personal demons.

### **Character Analysis**



\* **Hikoshichiro:** A young and passionate samurai who falls head over heels in love with Agemaki. Hikoshichiro's unwavering devotion to Agemaki is matched by his fierce loyalty to his master, creating an inner conflict that ultimately leads to his tragic demise. \* **Agemaki:** A beautiful and talented courtesan who yearns for a life beyond the confines of the pleasure district. Agemaki's intelligence, wit, and independent spirit set her apart from other courtesans, but her social status prevents her from pursuing a relationship with Hikoshichiro.

## Historical Context

The Love of the Purple Mountain was written during a period of significant social and cultural change in Japan. The growing influence of the merchant class and the rise of popular culture challenged traditional values and norms, creating a backdrop against which the play's themes of love, duty, and social inequality resonate deeply.

Monzaemon Chikamatsu's Four Major Plays are a testament to his enduring legacy as one of the greatest playwrights in Japanese history. These plays have captivated audiences for centuries with their timeless themes, complex characters, and insights into the human condition. Through this study guide, you have gained a comprehensive understanding of each play's plot, characters, and historical context, providing you with a solid foundation for further exploration and appreciation of Chikamatsu's masterpieces.

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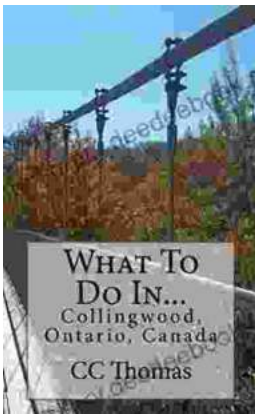
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