

Tsūen, A Tea-shop Master (Kyogen)

A travelling monk visits Uji on his way to the southern capital. Noticing that a bowl of tea is offered, as if in memory of some person, at a tea-shop at the foot of the Uji Bridge, he asks a villager what it means. The villager explains that it is the anniversary of the death of the tea-shop master.

In due course the ghost of the tea-shop master appears and reproduces the scene in which he busily serves tea to 300 pilgrims visiting Uji. When all the business is over, he cuts the bowl and the bamboo-spoon into pieces, and spreading a round fan over the ground, dies as a result of his efforts in serving tea. The language describing the busy tea service, followed by his death, skillfully parodies that used in “Yorimasa,” and Yorimasa’s suicide.

Yorimasa

The source of “Yorimasa” is in *The Tale of the Heike*. In a time when Taira-no Kiyomori (1118-81) lorded it in Kyoto, Minamoto-no Yorimasa (1104-80), also known as Genzanmi Yorimasa, revolted against him, in support of the unfortunate Prince Takakura (1151-80), to overthrow the Heike regime. But he and his army were defeated and he killed himself at Byōdōin temple.

A traveling monk, on his way to the southern capital Nara, visits Uji, the noted resort area outside Kyoto. An old man appears before him, and points out to him the scenic spots of Uji—Kawashima, Kojimagasaki, Asahiyama, and Byōdōin temple. Curiously enough, the old man explained these places, citing old *waka* poems, and leaves the impression of being a highly cultured person. He disappears, telling the monk that he is the ghost of Minamoto-no Yorimasa, a military aristocrat and poet.

Later in the evening while the monk is sleeping on the lawn, Yorimasa appears clad in armour, and begins to narrate how he fought against the Heike army with the Uji River between, how he made the bridge useless by ripping off the boards of the roadway, thereby keeping the enemy back on the other side, to help Prince Takakura flee towards the south. His confederate, Shōmyōhossi, fights bravely, but a young and daring enemy warrior, Ashikaga Matatarō Tadatsuna, turns the scale against him, and eventually Yorimasa, defeated, kills himself upon the fan he spreads on the lawn at Byōdōin temple.

This is an *asura* piece, dealing with an aged warrior and poet, whose narration of his battle over the Uji River demonstrates the high art of rhetorical delivery.

(Note) The beautiful villas of aristocrats in Kawashima and Kojimagasaki are praised in *The Tale of Genji* and *Masukagami*; and Asahiyama is mentioned in *Shinkokinwakashu* and *Sankashu*.

(Takao Saijo)