

***Kinuta* (The Fulling Block)**

Kinuta is an example of the “revengeful ghost” type of Noh play. It deals with the inordinate love of a wife for her husband both in life and after death.

The heroine of the play is the wife of a feudal lord of Kyushu, the Lord of Ashiya. He has been up to Miyako for three years for the purpose of bringing a lawsuit, and his wife is left alone, longing for his return. Feeling uneasy about his wife at home, he sends the family maid back with a message to his wife that he is unable to return until the end of the year. She is grieved at the news and speaks a few words of regret and reproach to the young messenger, as she suffers from the apprehension that he might have changed his mind. Yet the thought that she might soon meet him revives her hope. In the stillness of the autumn night, she hears far-away sounds of women beating cloth on a cloth-block for producing a high luster. She remembers the ancient tale of Sobu, who, as envoy at a faraway region, beat cloth at night in the hope that the sounds would carry his love and tenderness to his wife and children left at home. She starts beating cloth. The sounds of beating cloth, the night wind, the sorrowful voices, and the chirping of insects intensify her loneliness and grief, and build up the atmosphere of poetic beauty.

But to her sorrow and bitterness, another messenger arrives to say that her husband is unable to fulfil his promise of returning at the end of the year. Her remaining hope is crushed; she mistakenly believes herself abandoned, becomes ill and eventually dies.

Hearing of her death, the Lord of Ashiya hurries home. He laments the death of his wife and regrets his ungratefulness towards her. He performs at home a birch-bow ritual to call up his wife’s spirit in order to express his apology. His wife appears as a ghost and unburdens herself to him of all her complaints, but at the same time describes the torments of Hell she deserves, because she died of jealousy and resentment. Soon, however, the chanting of the Lotus Sutra transforms her agony and grief into knowledge and enlightenment, and released from sufferings, she finds eternal rest.

(Takao Saijo)