

Sakka, the Thief

The master of the house living in the countryside is expected to hold a linked-verse poetry meeting at his home. As he knows no one who could chair the poetic meeting satisfactorily, he wants to invite his uncle living in the capital and orders his servant, Tarokaja, to go and bring him down to the country. Tarokaja hastens to the capital, but not having obtained his address from his master, is obliged to ask about the whereabouts of the uncle on the streets. Among those who hears him is the “notorious Sakka” (*sakka* meaning “thief”), who pays close attention to Tarokaja’s words and behaviour and presents himself as the uncle he is looking for. Tarokaja is so pleased and without losing a moment brings him home to his master. But the master harbours some suspicion about him from the circumstances under which he was found, and peeps at him from behind a screen to find that he is a total stranger. So he wants to send the stranger back having entertained him with food and drinks. Ordered by the master, Tarokaja begins entertaining him, but as he lacks the sophistication of the city, the master is embarrassed that his manners and speech will be somewhat detrimental to the family name. So he instructs his servant to follow him closely in both speech and manners, and entertains the stranger himself. Tarokaja, as instructed, repeats exactly what his master says and mimics his behaviour, but with such naivety and obtuseness, that it ends up being highly amusing.

Ama, the Diver

Minister Fusazaki (681-737), son of Fujiwara no Fuhito (659- 720), comes down from Miyako to a fishing village of Shido, Sanuki Province (present-day Sanuki City in Kagawa Prefecture), in order to perform religious rites for the repose of his dead mother. There appears a diver, and in compliance with his request, she tells a tale of how the priceless gem was lost and regained—the gem which was among the three invaluable gifts to the Kofukuji-temple at Nara from the Empress of Kao-tsu, the founder of the T’ang dynasty in China. (Kao-tsu being Koso in Japanese, and the Empress is the sister of Lord Tankai [Fuhito]). The diver recounts that, while on its way to the temple, it was unfortunately stolen off the coast of Shido by the Dragon King, and the King enshrined it in the tower of his palace at the bottom of the sea. In order to recover the gem, she continues, Lord Tankai came down to the seaside village, and lived with a lowly diver girl, who in course of time gave birth to a boy. He asked for her assistance in regaining the gem, promising that her son should be his heir. So, wrapping round her waist a rope a thousand fathoms long, she plunged deep into the ocean, visited the Dragon Palace and took the gem successfully from the tower to bring it up to the surface, but sadly in the process she had cut herself deep below the breast to conceal the gem inside the wound which proved fatal. At this point in the narrative, Minister Fusazaki reveals that he is her son, and the diver herself reveals that she is the ghost of his mother.

Later in the second half, while Minister Fusazaki is holding a religious ceremony for the repose of her spirit, the diver appears before him as the Dragon Woman with a sutra scroll in her left hand and, while dancing, tells that she has attained the Buddha’s promise of Heaven by chanting the Lotus Sutra, and that the Shidoji-temple was built at this place, making it a holy spot for Buddhism Teaching.

Usually in the second half, the *nochishite* hands a scroll of Sutra to the *kokata* and performs a quick dance; but in today’s special traditional performance, the *nochishite* dances keeping the scroll inside kimono on her breast.

(Takao Saijo)