

Dai Nankō (大楠公)

A Historic Drama in One Act and Three Scenes

by Nukada Roppuku (額田六福¹)

translated by Glenn Shaw²

CULTURAL NIPPON, 1939, Winter, p. 95–115³

This historic drama was written by Mr. Nukada-Roppuku in 1936, at the special request of *Nippon Bunka Renmei*, to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the death of Lord Kusunoki-Masashige.

Kusunoki-Masashige (楠木正成; 1294–1336),⁴ now worshipped as Dai-Nankō, or the Great Lord Nan (*Nan* being the Sinico-Japanese pronunciation of the ideograph “楠” with which the family name Kusunoki meaning Camphor Tree, is written) was at first only a local chieftain living in the Province of Kawachi near Mt. Kongō (金剛山), the highest of the peaks in the low range of mountains east of Osaka. His great devotion to the Emperor has made him the symbol of loyalty in Japan, and his extraordinary knowledge of strategy has further endeared him to the Japanese soldier. He is constantly brought before the people today, and this drama by a modern playwright vividly conveys the reverence all Japanese feel for him. A little historical background will help toward an understanding of it.



Abb. 1: Roppuku Nukada (ca. 1928).

The Emperor Go-Daigo was driven out of Kyōto by the Regent Hōjō-Takatoki (北条高時) in 1331 and fled to Mt. Kasagi (笠置

¹ 1890–1948. VIAF: 30946947. Zur Person <https://ja.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=&oldid=65419568>

² Glenn William Shaw (1886–1961. GND: 172371775). Amerikanischer Sprachlehrer an der Kōtō-gakkō in Osaka (vermutlich mit Hermann Bohner bekannt), daher *Osaka sketches* 浪華の足; Tokyo 1929 (Hokseidō). Von demselben in diesem Verlag außerdem als Übers.: Akutagawa Ryunosuke; *Tales Grotesque and Curious*; Tokyo 1935, ²1938. *Three plays*; Tokyo 1935, darin “Lord Dewa,” “Chink Okichi” d. i. übs. Yamamoto Yuzo (1887–1974) 女人哀詞 / 唐人お吉物語 und “Crown of Life.” Weiterhin *Contemporary Japanese Literature: A Foreigner’s View*; PACIFIC AFFAIRS, Vol. 8 (1935), S. 292–301, DOI: 10.2307/2751472.

³ 1933 – Sept. 1941, 4 p. a. (ZDB-ID: 426358-3). Diese Zeitschrift war das ans Ausland gerichtete Sprachrohr der faschistoiden Organisation *Nippon Bunka Renmei* („Japanischer Kulturbund“, 日本文化聯盟, später umbenannt zu 日本文化中央聯盟 *Nihon Bunka Chūō Renmei*. des „Tennoismus“-Ideologen Fujisawa Chikao (藤沢親雄, 1893–1962). Für seine inländische Propaganda gab es noch die *Daitō-Bunka-Kyokai* (大東文化協會, engl.: “Great Oriental Culture Society”). Vgl. zur Person Anmerkungen in https://bohnerbiographie.zenwort.de/bw_daten/Rez_FujisawaCh_JapOrientalPhilos_Pippon-NOAG.djvu

⁴ cf.: https://im-tee-raume.zenwort.de/zw2_htm/zw2_bio.html#MASA

山) not far from Nara. There he appealed to Masashige and appointed him the defender of his cause. Masashige raised an army, built the castles of Akasaka and Chihaya near the rapidly fortified Mt. Kongō and launched a campaign against the Hōjō. After Nitta-Yoshisada (新田義貞), the other great loyalist of the period, had in 1333 taken Kamakura, the Hōjō capital in the east, Masashige, for his services in the west, was made lord of the three provinces of Settsu, Kawachi and Izumi, with the title of *Kawachi-no-kami*.



Abb. 2: Haupthalle (社殿) des Minatogawa-Schreins (2016).

In 1335 Yoshisada went east again to fight Ashikaga-Takauji (足利尊氏), who had started a revolt, and Masashige remained in the west as before to defend Kyōto, the capital. But Yoshisada lost a battle at Hakone, and Masashige, trying to stop Takauji in his advance on Kyōto, was defeated at Uji, so that in 1336 the Emperor Go-Daigo had to flee to Mt. Hiei, the monastery-crowned peak to the north of his capital. But he was soon brought back again after

Yoshisada had raised larger forces and driven Takauji out.

Takauji then went to Kyushu and came back with a tremendous army. A council of courtiers in Kyōto decided against the advice of the soldier Masashige to have the Emperor again go to Mt. Hiei and destroy Takauji by cutting his supply lines after allowing him to install his cumbersome army in Kyōto, and on the recommendation of one of them, the Emperor ordered Masashige, with Yoshisada, to offer resistance at Hyōgo, today a part of the big port city of Kobe.

Knowing that he was going to defeat and certain death, Masashige loyally obeyed and marched to Hyōgo with a mere handful of men, stopping on the way at Sakurai, a little post station on the Tokaidō, to part with Masatsura (1326–48), his ten-year-old son and send him back to Kawachi to live for his Emperor. At Hyōgo, sadly wounded after a desperate struggle, Masashige, with expressions of undying loyalty on his lips, took his own life in a farmhouse where today stands the Minatogawa Shrine (湊川神社).⁵ This shrine to Masashige was built in 1871 after the Restoration, the first order of the third rank which had been conferred on him by the Emperor immediately after his death being then changed to the second order of the first rank. It is the famous parting at Sakurai and the oft-sung demonstration of supreme loyalty at Hyōgo that are presented in this drama. – The Editor.

⁵ 3 Chome-1-1 Tamondori, Chuo, Kobe, Hyōgo 650-0015; <http://www.minatogawajinja.or.jp>

Dai Nankō

Act I

Scenes

1. Sakurai.
2. The seashore below Mt. Ege in Hyōgo.
3. A house in Minatogawa village.

Dramatis Personae

Kusunoki Masashige, (楠木正成) aged 43.

Kusunoki Masatsura, (正行) his son aged 12.

Kusunoki Masauji, (正氏) aged 33 his younger brother.

Kusunoki Masasue, (正季) aged 30 his younger brother.

Yao-no-betto-Kenko, (八尾別富顯考) aged 60 in priestly robes.

Chikudō-Maru, (竹童丸) aged 17.

Shiki-Uemon, (志貴右衛門) aged about 30.

Kikuchi-Shichiro-Takeyoshi, (菊池七郎武吉) aged 34 or 35.

Ashikaga-Naoyoshi, (足利直義)

Kodera-Tōbee, (小寺藤兵衛) his retainer.

Kotachi-Rokurōemon, (小達六郎右衛門) his retainer.

- Many soldiers of the Imperial army.
- Soldiers of Ashikagas army.
- Seven or eight village children.

Scene 1

Sakurai

[A level stage with an old pine in the center. Clumps of pines here and there to right and left. Among them a camp marked by curtains bearing the chrysanthemum-and-water crest.⁶ Entrances through the curtains right and left. Under the old pine, a platform of wooden shields for Masashige. A little in front of it a seat for Masatsura. In the distance beyond the camp curtains, the mountains of Settsu Province. Evening of the twenty-fourth day of the fifth Month of the first year of Engen (1336).

As the curtain opens, seven or eight children some seven or eight years old come in from the left exchanging blows with bamboos and sticks and stage a fight for a few minutes. Then as they come to hard grips, Masauji and Masasue come in from the right and stop them. They are both in armour, with the noblemen's hats called eboshi on their heads.]

MASAUJI, (*gently*): Here, here, this is the general's headquarters. You mustn't make a disturbance here.

FIRST CHILD: [(obediently)] No Sir. The fight got so hot that we'd come in before we knew it. Please excuse us.

MASASUE, (*patting him on the head*): Um. You're very well mannered, aren't you? Are you the general?

FIRST CHILD: Yes Sir. I'm the general of the government forces.

MASAUJI: Oh. Are you the general of the government forces? You're a great man, aren't you?

SECOND CHILD: No, that's not so. I'm the general of the government forces.

MASASUE: Ha, ha, ha, ha! Are you on the government side, too? But if that's so, you're wrong to be fighting each other.

FIRST CHILD: No, he's a rebel.

SECOND CHILD: What are you talking about? You're the rebel yourself.

FIRST CHILD: What!

SECOND CHILD: What [*They grab each other.*]

MASAUJI, (*stopping them*): All right, all right. I see, I see. You're all in the government army. But as this good uncle here says, it's disgraceful for you to be fighting each other. You'd better make up and go home good friends. The sun's about to sink. Your mother must be waiting for you.



Abb. 3: Samurai armour with eboshi cap.

⁶ S. 9. Cf. 岡田謙 (*1906); *Japanese family crests*; Tokyo 1941 (Japanese Government Railways). [Anon.]; *An illustrated encyclopedia of Japanese family crests*; Tokyo 2001 (Graphic-sha); ISBN 4889960708. Huffman, Jeff;

FIRST CHILD: Thanks. Then we'll be good friends.

SECOND CHILD: Yes. Let's go and drive the wild dogs out of the mountains over there. Samurai-Sama, sayonara.

MASASUE: Hurry up and grow big and join the real government forces. [*The children go out left. The two warriors watch them go with smiles on their faces.*]

MASAUJI: Cute, aren't they? Saying they're both loyalists –

MASASUE: Children's words are like the words of the Gods. How sincerely angry the other one was when he was called a rebel.

MASAUJI: He wanted to be a loyalist. Dislike of being a rebel seems to be a natural feeling men are born with. But as they grow to manhood, they're blinded by all sorts of avarice. Still when they become rebels, however glorious and showy their positions, their childhood consciences persist down in the bottoms of their hearts, and they must suffer secretly day and night.

MASASUE: In comparison, men who have been able to grow up with their childhood hearts unchanged as we have are lucky for all their poverty, aren't they?

MASAUJI: Of course they are. But this is all the result of the teachings of our brother Masashige. We're lucky to have such an elder brother.

MASASUE: And we'd like to die hearing him say he has good younger brothers, wouldn't we?

MASAUJI: The day for that will soon come. [*Looks off right.*] But brother seems a little late.

MASASUE: It seems late because we're waiting for him. Masatsura, too, will soon be here. [*They go off back left.*]

CHORUS: [*to lute music*]. So then Kusunoki-Masashige, Lord of Kawachi, receives the Imperial command to chastise the traitor Takauji and, at the head of over six thousand men, arrives at leafy eve at the post-station of Sakurai.

[*A blast on a conch-shell. Kusunoki-Masashige comes in right, his banner bearing the characters Hi-Ri-Ho-Ken-Ten (Wrong-Right-Law-Authority-Heaven) fluttering in the May-time breeze. Shiki-Uemon, his retainer, and other warriors come in after him with bows and big swords wrapped in cloth instead of scabbards. Masauji, Masasue and several other warriors come in from the left to welcome them.*]

MASAUJI: Brother, we're glad you've come.

MASASUE: Though the plan was to stop at Kayano tonight, we knew that Masatsura would soon be along, too, and made camp here anyway.

MASASHIGE: Thanks for looking after things so well. I'm fortunate to have such a good brother.

MASAUJI: We're eager to be called good brothers. Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*Looks at Masasue and smiles.*]

MASASHIGE: I'm sorry. But really I was born to a happy lot. I'm favoured with the majestic order of my Emperor and I have such good brothers as you and many faithful and courageous followers.

SHIKI-UEMON: And six good children.

MASASHIGE, (*nodding*): Good children are the treasures of a house, the treasures of a country. You can't have too many. But Masatsura is just twelve now. I worry a lot about what will become of him.

SHIKI-UEMON: Why should you? The bead-tree is fragrant from the cotyledon. Even now he's keeping splendid watch over Chihaya Castle as your deputy.

MASASHIGE: That's because Yao-no-bettō and you men of mine take good care of him. [*Changing his mood.*] But he ought to be here before long now.

SHIKI-UEMON: I'll go and keep a lookout for him. [*As he rises to go, the clatter of a horse's hoofs and the feet of a running man are heard off stage left, and a soldier rushes in.*]

SOLDIER: I report.

MASAUJI: What is it?

SOLDIER: Five or six hundred mounted men – I don't know whose – are crossing the Yodo River from Minase and riding this way at full speed.

MASASUE: What, five or six hundred men coming here? [*Thinking.*] No allies would be coming at this time, and yet they can't be enemies; but whoever they may be, care is the first requisite. Uemon, go and see.

SHIKI-UEMON: Yes Sir! [*Runs out left.*]

CHORUS: As they wonder whether it is friend or foe, Shiki-Uemon comes running back in high spirits waving his arms and prancing.

SHIKI-UEMON: My lord, it's Wako. Wako has come.

MASASHIGE: What, Masatsura has come –

SHIKI-UEMON: Yes, Yao-no-bettō and the whole six hundred men and more have come with him. [*Before he has finished, Masatsura and Yao-no-betto-Kenko come running in from the left. A little behind them, two soldiers enter with Masatsura's armour chest.*]

MASATSURA: Father, I've come.

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO: Lord Masashige, we've come.

MASASHIGE: Thanks for coming so far. But I've just heard that you have over six hundred men with you. If so, they must include every single man left at Chihaya.

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO, (*nods*): I understand that the coming fight, unlike those that have gone before, is to be a desperate one.

MASATSURA: I'm twelve this year. I've mastered all the tactics of Sonshi and Goshi.⁷ I won't be a hindrance if I go to the field with you. [(Pointing to his armour chest.)] I've had my armour brought, as you see.

MASASHIGE, (*nodding*): That's a brave attitude. I praise you without hesitation. But I can't let you go to Hyōgo. You must go back to Kawachi now.

CHORUS: Masatsura is dumbfounded by his words.

MASATSURA: What Sir? Then was your letter saying to come to Sakurai not sent that you might take me with you to the battlefield?

MASASHIGE: No. [*Looking round at his men.*] As I told you in my letter, the Ashikaga brothers have defeated and forced to follow them Shikoku and Kyushu districts and, with two million men, are advancing steadily on the capital by land and sea. Our forces consist of Nitta-Dono's⁸ over sixty thousand mounted men and my seven thousand. However hard we fight, the battle is already lost.

MASATSURA, (*moving forward unconsciously*): Please. Victory is not determined by numbers. Of course it would be in such a place as the Hyōgo coast, devoid of strategic features, but there are certainly other tricks.

MASASHIGE, (*smiling*): Do you understand that?

MASATSURA: Yes Sir. I may be mistaken, but – if I were doing it, I shouldn't go to Hyōgo.

MASASHIGE: H'm. [*Thinking.*] But if we don't block them there, they'll pour into the capital in an avalanche. Then what'll become of the Emperor?

MASATSURA: I'm not worthy to speak of the Emperor, but I should memorialize him to go to Mt. Hiei again as he did early in the spring. Then we'd leave the Nitta forces to guard him and all go back home to Kawachi.

MASASUE: H'm, it seems a good plan all right, but to run off home does sound a little cowardly.

MASATSURA: That can't be said in this case.

MASAUJI: Then what would you do?

⁷ 吳子 (Ch. *Wúzi*), 3. Jh. v. u. Z. ⁸ Nitta Yoshisada (新田義貞); 1301–38.

MASATSURA: Since the rebel army that occupied the capital would be mostly from the West, they would have to send their army supplies by boat up the Yodo River or on pack horses up this highway. It's only a day's march from Mt. Kongo here, so we'd make a sudden attack and seize them all. Then the rebels in the capital would naturally be starved out and run straggling away just as the besiegers did once from Chihaya. It's clearer than a light before the eyes that if the Nitta and Kusunoki armies seized that opportunity and advanced upon them together, they would destroy them utterly.

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO, (*clapping his hands*): My lord, did you hear that? Masauji-Dono and Masasue-Dono, I raised Wako. I may well be proud, may I not?

MASASUE: Yes. Though I'm his uncle, I'm ashamed. [*Looking at Masashige.*] But whatever may be said of us, you, brother, should have been able to think of a plan as simple as that. Shouldn't he, Masauji?

MASAUJI: Yes. [*To Masashige.*] What really happened at the council at the palace yesterday? What did you reply to the Imperial question?

MASASHIGE, (*with solemn quiet*): What Masatsura has just said.

MASATSURA: What!

MASASHIGE: It's too late to carry out any other plan now.

MASAUJI: Then why do you go to Hyōgo to fight a hopeless battle? Who opposed your plan?

MASASHIGE: It's not a good thing to name him, but you won't be satisfied unless I do. Lord Bōmon-Saisho-Kiyotada.

MASASUE: What did that rascally noble say?

MASASHIGE: Since the Emperor went to Mt. Hiei only in the second month, to go again this year would lessen the Imperial dignity. Above all, it would be outrageous to abandon the capital before striking a blow. In the past, small government armies have often beaten great armies. And now we're sure to win through the Emperor's august virtue, he says. The Emperor adopted his views and at once commanded me to leave for Hyōgo.

MASATSURA: But – but, if a general is away from his castle, he may disobey even the Imperial command. Even if you go back to Kawachi now, you certainly won't be disloyal.

MASAUJI: Yes, yes. By all means do. If somebody must go to Hyōgo, please send me. I'll declare myself Kusunoki-Hangan-Masashige and die a glorious death in battle for you.

MASASUE: Send me too.

MASASHIGE, (*ashamed of his tears*): Thanks. This is not your first kind offer. I'm certainly fortunate to have such good brothers. But after all, I must go down to Hyōgo.

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO: But isn't it just like committing suicide to go to a battle that you know all along you can't win?

MASASHIGE, (*nods*): Just so. I go seeking my place to die. [*Firm-looking around at them.*] Which by itself you won't understand. Recently I've been pondering earnestly on the state of the world today. As you say, even if I now went back to Kawachi, I'd not be strictly disloyal. But even if I did and destroyed the Ashikaga, in the world as it is today, a second Takauji would soon be born. If I destroyed him, the next traitor would appear. Men's hearts are slack and fish the way of loyalty has been cast aside. It's just like the guts of a stale

MASATSURA: So if you throw them out, the maggots and flies won't breed any more, will they?

MASASHIGE: If it was nothing more than the guts of a fish, we could throw them out. We could burn them up. But if everybody is like that from the lords who attend on the Emperor and the warriors down to the townsmen and peasants, what's to be done? Even if we here and now cut down twenty or thirty thousand rebels, it won't help a bit. My enemy is not only Takauji and Naoyoshi. It's the invisible malevolence hidden far far back in men's hearts. I fight against that malevolence. I fight against the multiform evils that not only breed now but will go on breeding for three hundred, five

hundred, a thousand years from now, nay as long as Nippon endures.

MASAUJI: I understand exactly how you feel. But how does your going to Hyōgo now fit in?

MASASHIGE: Don't you understand yet? You see, the order to act on the false advice of Bōmon-Saishō and go to Hyōgo is an Imperial order. Do you see? [*Emphatically.*] You see, it's the Emperor's order. A true Japanese is ready to go through fire and water in response to an Imperial order. While knowing that I should go elsewhere, I want to engrave in the hearts of the people alive in the world today and of the thousands and millions to be born hereafter the fact that a man died gladly, yes gladly in response to his Emperor's command. [*To Masatsura.*] How about it? Do you understand?

MASATSURA, (*nods*): So – so I want go to Hyōgo with you. I want to die with you, father and son, for the Emperor.

MASASHIGE: Well said. That's a splendid resolve. The day for that will likely come. But it's not today.

MASATSURA: Then is it utterly impossible for me to go with you?

MASASHIGE, (*nods*): After I die in battle, the whole land will doubtless fall to Takauji. Though I say it with reverence, the Emperor will be driven out of the capital and probably never be able to come back again. Then the only people able to give his heart some slight solace will be the members of the Kusunoki family still left alive.

MASATSURA: Yes.

MASASHIGE: But you mustn't suppose that the enemy will attack you only with bow and arrow. They may try to win your friendship with high office, piles of gold and silver, or broad lands. Much more to be feared is such an enemy than an enemy with a million bows. A gem, though shattered, never changes its whiteness, a bamboo, though scorched, never loses its joints. Ponder well your father's teachings and never neglect loyalty. Do you understand?

CHORUS: To these injunctions, storming reason, exhausting words and leaving nothing to be said, Masatsura prostrates himself with an affirmative exclamation.

MASATSURA: I'm overwhelmed with shame. My illusions have been dispelled by your words. I'll go back to Kawachi at once. And I'll obey well your instructions, foster and train your surviving retain-ers, and set the chrysanthemum-and-water flag waving again at Mt. Kongo.

CHORUS: Nevertheless when after their years together he thinks now of parting forever with the father he loves, he is held back as if by an invisible hand. [*Masatsura starts to rise and hesitates.*]

CHORUS: Masashige, moved by the same thoughts, as he realizes that he is now parting for the last time with the dear child he has lovingly trained, day and night, for ten full years and two, is filled with gloom and, dauntless warrior though he is, moved to tears in spite of himself, and not a dry sleeve remains among all those about him. [*Masashige is lost in thought. They all wipe their eyes. Then Masashige takes a volume from the bosom of his garment.*]

MASASHIGE: Well, I too, was taken off my guard. It's grown rather late. We must hurry to get to Kayano for the night. And Masatsura, you'd better get across the Yodo before it's dark. Here is a keepsake by which to remember this day. Take it home and show it to your mother too.

MASATSURA: I'm most grateful. [*Raises the book to his head.*] It's the Sanryaku, isn't it?

MASASHIGE: Yes. It's that rare book on tactics. I've always carried it on my person. Whenever I've been confused or felt negligent, I've always been encouraged or instructed by it. You too, hereafter, whenever you're at a loss what to do about something or puzzled how to make a decision, open this book and read.

MASATSURA: I'm greatly obliged. I'll carry it next to my heart in remembrance of you. [*Puts the book in his bosom.*] Well then, father, and uncles I'll be going now.

MASAUJI: Yes, take care of yourself.

MASASUE: Be kind to your men. They're your hands and feet.

MASASHIGE: I'm glad. Your uncle Masasue has given you good advice. You mustn't go about insisting on your own way just because you're the master. [To Kenko.] Though I hate to put laborious duties on you at your age, I beg you to watch over him.

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO, (*shaking his head*): No, that's hard. Whatever Masatsura does, I'm going to Hyōgo with you.

MASASHIGE: Why, when even Masatsura has agreed, why do you insist on such unreasonableness. I've come with seven thousand men, but I mean to take only seven hundred even of them and send the rest back to Kawachi with Masatsura.

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO: Then please put me in with the seven hundred. [*Looking at him intently.*] I know it's unreasonable. But I'm over sixty now. I haven't much longer to live. Please let me at least perform my last service for my country.

MASASHIGE, (*though nodding approval*): I understand well how you feel. But Masashige and his brothers and the others are enough to die fighting at Hyōgo. Please live on and be father and teacher to Masatsura and the other children for me. I beg it with both hands to the ground.

CHORUS: As in utter humility he begs in the name of Heaven—

YAO-NO-BETTO-KENKO, (*bursts out crying*): I was wrong. I was wrong. I said that I wanted to throw my life away on the field of battle because I had not long to live, but the truth is I was not without a desire for fame. But from now on I'll put myself aside and educate Masatsura with all my heart. Come, Wako, let's be off.

MASATSURA: Yes Sir.

CHORUS: He bows politely in farewell and quietly rises and starts to walk away, but overcome by natural emotion, utters a cry and abandons himself to grief on his father's knees. [*Masatsura gets up and starts to leave, but suddenly assailed by grief, runs back to his father and, clinging to his knees, gives himself up to tears.*]

CHORUS: Masashige suddenly draws back –

MASASHIGE: What! Cowardly Masatsura! Where have you flung the manliness of a minute ago? Listen! A lioness, three days after the birth of her whelp, throws it into a bottomless gorge to try its strength. Then the whelp, destined to be the king of the animals, springs back from half way down and refuses to die. If even a beast can do that, how much more should a man, the lord of creation, be ashamed to fall behind a lion.

CHORUS: Changing from a gentle father, he thunders angrily like the king of the devils. Masatsura comes to himself with a start.

MASATSURA: I'm ashamed. I forgot myself in the excess of my grief. But I won't cry any more. The lion's whelp Masatsura will surely spring back from halfway down and climb the steepest of precipices back up to his lion parent.

MASASHIGE: And when that lion parent is no more?

MASATSURA: He'll go back to the old den. And leading the animal world, he'll kill with his fangs the bad beasts and poisonous snakes that harm the world. Farewell. [*Bowing with perfect composure, Masatsura goes out left without a glance behind him. Kenko and the rest of his party follow.*]

MASAUJI, (*looking after him*): He's a brave fellow. He went without a look behind.

MASASUE: Flow firm his step! He treads the earth resolutely. He's indeed our brother's son.

MASASHIGE, (*smiles*): Then let us be going too. Unfurl the banners. Blow the conch-shell. Masasue.

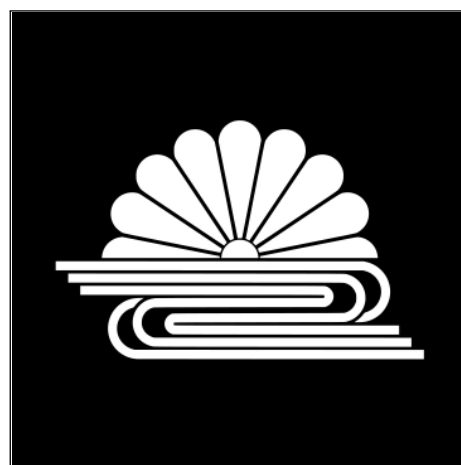


Abb. 4: Masashige's Kiku-ichi (菊水)
"chrysanthemum-and-water" crest.

Yes. [*Masasue unfurls the chrysanthemum-and-water flag and the standard, bearing the words Evil-Right-Law-Authority-Heaven. Masauji blows a conch-shell. The stage revolves in the dark.*]

Scene 2

The shore below Mt. Ege at Hyōgo

[*Hyōgo, the seashore below Mt. Ege. The stage is level. Pine groves here and there. At the back, the sea covered everywhere with vessels of war. As the sound of the conch-shell in Scene 1 dies out, wargongs sound. Shouting in the distance. Immediately begins brisk lute music.*]

CHORUS: Now with the moon of the twenty-fifth day of the fifth Month, the rebel Ashikaga-Takauji, at the head of over a million mounted men rolls over Hyōgo beach. The waiting Imperial forces, Nitta-Yoshisada's more than twenty thousand mounted men and Kusunoki-Masashige's seven hundred, though inconsiderable in number, bear swords so tempered in loyalty that one equals a thousand, ten mounted men put to flight ten thousand, and with telling strokes, mow them down till the blood flows in rivers and the corpses pile up into mountains and it seems that the famous rebel fighters lose heart in their attack.

[*At this point several tens of stray arrows fly in from right and left, and Masasue from the right and Masauji from the left come in fighting a score or more of men. After a mighty encounter, they drive the enemy off left. War-gongs again. And from the right, shouting "Wait, you coward!" Masashige runs in furiously after the fleeing rebel general, Naoyoshi. Masashige is already wounded in several places.*]

MASASHIGE: How far do you mean to run? Kusunoki-Hangan waits on you by Imperial command, so quickly hand over your head and make amends for your iniquitous disloyalty.

ASHIKAGA-NAOYOSHI: Don't talk, Masashige. If you have an Imperial command, I have an authorization from the Retired Emperor.

MASASHIGE: Hold your tongue. There are no two suns in Heaven and no two sovereigns on earth. If you're really not iniquitous, fight me squarely.

ASHIKAGA-NAOYOSHI: At your word. [*They draw their swords and fight furiously. Naoyoshi is pressed harder and harder and already on the verge of defeat when from the right Koderā-Tōbee and Kotachi-Rokurō, two of his retainers, come in and block Masashige.*]

KODERA-TŌBEE: It's disgraceful for one who should be in full command of the attackers from the rear to be fighting with his own hands.

KOTACHI-ROKURŌEMON: We two will handle him. Go quickly back to headquarters.

ASHIKAGA-NAOYOSHI: Um. Two of you, are there? I leave him to you. [*Runs off left without more ado.*]

MASASHIGE, (*enraged*): You louts, don't bother me. Stand aside, stand aside I [*Quickly cuts them down and is about to go in pursuit of Naoyoshi when Masauji and Masasue come in from the left. They are already wounded.*]

MASAUJI: Oh, brother!

MASASHIGE: Is that you, Masauji. I thought we'd never be able to meet again, but here we are, aren't we?

MASASUE: Seven times separated and seven times met.

MASASHIGE: We won't be separated again. But how is the battle going?

MASAUJI: Unfortunately we've suffered a complete defeat. Yoshisada-Dono retreated to Nishinomiya. The once fleeing rebels, encouraged by this, are about to rush in on us like a tidal wave, in full force from land and sea.

MASASHIGE: And how about my men? How many of them are left alive?

MASAUJI: In sixteen engagements since the hour of the dragon this morning, they have mercilessly harassed that vast army, but being neither stone nor iron, they have gradually fallen fighting till but seventy-three remain.

MASASHIGE: Seventy-three. [*Smiles.*] There are more alive than I thought.

MASASUE: With that many left, we can easily break through one side and get away.

MASASHIGE: No, that's wrong. As I said at Sakurai, I've chosen this village for my last resting place. In the battle fought all day today, the enemy has probably come to know our skill. However many we kill now, it will be but a useless taking of life. There is nothing left to do now but calmly kill ourselves. [*Standing on tiptoe and looking off right.*] Oh, there's a house over there. It looks strangely peaceful, having been neither burned by fire nor destroyed by missiles in the midst of this fierce battle. That will be a suitable place in which to end our lives. [*Masashige starts off. Then from the left Kishi-Uemon rushes in after an Ashikaga standard bearer and, cutting him down, seizes his flag.*]

SHIKI-UEMON, *lifting it up high*): Ashikaga-Samanokami-Naoyoshi, commander of the rear attackers, has handed over his flag like this and surrendered to Kusunoki-Hangan. If you don't like it, let's see you come on and take it back! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! [*They all roar with laughter. The stage revolves in the dark.*]

Scene 3

A House in the Village of Minatogawa

[*A farmhouse on the Minato River. A thatched house, with a veranda. In the midst of fires started by the soldiers, it has miraculously escaped all harm, and late blooming azaleas are blossoming in the hedge. The time is immediately after the events in Scene 2. On the veranda, Masashige, Masauji and Masasue to right and left of him, and the other devoted followers are quietly taking off their swords and armour. A note or two of a cuckoo, and quiet music.*]

CHORUS: The cuckoo, alas, reminiscent of spitting blood! But Kusunoki-Masashige, since, having scattered as he desired the great enemy army, this world has not the least interest for him, enters a lowly country cot in the evening to hurry with his companions on death's journey.

MASASHIGE, *(as if to himself)*): Cut in eleven places. Anyway with these I needn't be ashamed whoever sees my corpse. Masauji, how about you?

MASAUJI: Thirteen, counting the arrow wounds.

MASASUE: I have only nine, but not one in the back.

MASAUJI: They say Shiki-Uemon has eighteen wounds. He's a regular demon for fighting. Any enemy who met him was out of luck. Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*They laugh. Shiki-Uemon enters from the left.*]

SHIKI-UEMON: What are you laughing at?

MASAUJI: Is that you, Uemon? Things seem to have suddenly grown quiet. What's the enemy doing?

SHIKI-UEMON: It looked until a while ago as if they were about to attack, but perhaps frightened by our performance since morning, they've now fallen back four or five cho and only taken precautions, and not a soul of them has attacked.

MASAUJI: Ha, ha, ha, ha! Burned by the soup and blowing the salad describes them exactly.

MASASUE: It's a case of the dead Komei putting the living Chu-tatsu to flight, is it? The cursed cowards

MASASHIGE: But thanks to that, we're able to sit down and calmly end our lives. [*Looks off left.*] No, I'm wrong. Look there! A single rider with his horse in a lather is galloping toward us.

MASASUE: Yes. Though an enemy, he's a fine hero. Come, I'll give him a last demonstration of my

proWess. [*Starts to put his armour on again.*]

MASAUJI: Wait, wait! He's waving something. Isn't he the bearer of a flag of truce? Don't be hasty!

CHORUS: With every one of them on his guard, Suga-Ikinokami, retainer to Takauji, comes in decorously: [*respectfully*]. I believe I have the honour of saluting Lord Masashige. On the order of my lord, Takauji, I, Suga-Ikinokami, have hastened here with a message.

MASASHIGE, (*returning his politeness*): You are very courteous. And what is your message?

IKI: My lord Takauji says your performance since this morning has been remarkable. So since the victory is virtually settled, escape with your life and go back to your province.

MASASHIGE: What, does he tell Masashige to go back alive? What bond of friendship is there to make Takauji-Dono value Masashige's life? He can't easily forget the intimacy between old friends who rode side by side to battle back in the Kemmu days, or today's performance. And Lord Naoyoshi added that it would be a shame to return such a famous general in cold blood to the soil of such an out-of-the-way place as this.

MASASHIGE: What, is that a message from Naoyoshi-Dono? [*Looks around at the others and laughs.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*Correcting his attitude.*] Then I give you my answer. I'm indebted for your kind message. But if Masashige wanted to escape alive, it is needless to say that, though surrounded by millions of mounted men, he'd cut his way through them more easily than through a sheet of Yoshino paper.

IKI: Ya –

MASASHIGE: But since you've been so thoughtful, I ask your favour for one boy. Please pass him through the lines safely. [*Looks off right and calls.*] Chikudō, Chikudō!

CHIKUDŌ-MARU, (*comes in. He is an energetic youth of seventeen. He has one wound.*): Did you call me, Sir?

MASASHIGE: How old are you?

CHIKUDŌ-MARU: Seventeen.

MASASHIGE: Is that so? At that, I thank you for performing deeds for me beyond the skill of grown men. Does your wound hurt?

CHIKUDŌ-MARU, (*embarrassed*): I have only one. But as Masasue-Sama said, it's not in my back.

MASASHIGE: That's all the better. And now I have something to ask of you. Will you do it?

CHIKUDŌ-MARU: Yes Sir. If my lord says the word, I'll plunge into fire or water.

MASASHIGE: Thanks. Then please go back to Kawachi with Suga-Dono here.

CHIKUDŌ-MARU: What? What did you say?

MASASHIGE: This armour is the armour I've worn up to the time of my death in battle now. Please put it on and go and give it to Masatsura. And tell them all how today's battle went.

CHIKUDŌ-MARU: Yes Sir. I understand well. But I don't like this errand.

MASASHIGE: What are you saying?

CHIKUDŌ-MARU: I'm an orphan with neither father nor mother. And every moment since I came to know anything, I've been by your side and grown up looking on you as my father and mother both. How can I turn my back on my great obligations and go home, deserting you now in your last moments? Please send somebody else. And take me with you to the other world. [*Weeps.*]

MASASHIGE, (*embarrassed by unbidden tears*): Your attitude makes me glad, but you are not going only to report on the battle. I want you when your wounds are well, to serve Masatsura and spend all this loyalty on him. The others are old and full of wounds. Your wound is slight, and you're young. I'm not looking down on you as a coward and sending you back. Listen, do you understand?

CHIKUDŌ-MARU: I understand. [*Wiping his tears.*] I understand perfectly. And I'll go at once to Kawachi.

MASASHIGE: Will you? When you get to Chihaya, please tell Masatsura and the friends of these men here how today's brave battle went. [*To Ikinokami.*] Iki-Dono, I ask this favour.

IKI: [*holding back his tears*]. Yes, Sir. I guarantee his safe return with my life. [*He goes out left with Chikudō. A cuckoo cries twice.*]

MASASHIGE, (*looking up*): A cuckoo, wasn't it?

MASAUJI: Yes. They say it hunts for its little ones, crying eight thousand and eight times a day and finally spits blood.

MASASHIGE: That's what they say, isn't it? [*Meditates. Then comes back to himself.*] No, to think of foolish things is shameful. [*Looking round at the others.*] You're all ready, are you?

MASASUE: We'll go with you at any time. Masauji, we stab each other.

MASAUJI: Ready. [*They place their swords against each other's chests.*]

MASASHIGE: Just wait. They say that men prolong their lives with their last thoughts. Is there nothing in this world you leave with regret?

MASASUE: There is, of course. Would that I might be reborn seven times and fight the rebels seven times.

MASAUJI: Serve your country seven times? These are good words. And you, Masashige?

MASASHIGE: Not to speak of seven, I'd like to be born five hundred times and destroy all the enemies of the Emperor. This is truly a greedy prayer, but Emma-Daio will probably grant it. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

CHORUS: Sitting up straight, they all make obeisance toward the distant seat of the Emperor.

MASASHIGE: Farewell. [*Cuts open his abdomen.*]

[*Masasue and Masauji stab each other. Uemon cuts off his own head and dies.*]

CHORUS: [*rapidly*]. Now Kikuchi-Shichirō-Takeyoshi, at the command of his elder brother Higonokami, is there to observe the battle of Minatogawa, and rather than noticing that the Imperial forces are being defeated, comes round to see how Masashige fares.

KIKUCHI-SHICHIRO-TAKEYOSHI: Kusunoki-Dono! Masashige-Dono! [*Sees Masashige's dead body.*]

Oh, have you speedily taken your life? And your brothers and your whole clan have gone with you to a man. [*Lifting Masashige up.*] Ah, what a noble face! It's bright and without a hint of suffering. This is a fitting end for Japan's magnificent most loyal. Even a glance at this noble corpse must instantly remove all evil thoughts, make the beholder pure and spotless of heart and turn him into a guardian of his country forever. In my great love of you, I accompany you to the other world. [*He quickly takes off his armour, rips open his belly with a short sword and falls. At the same moment, the battle cry of the rebel army breaks in from the left.*]

KIKUCHI-SHICHIRO-TAKEYOSHI: Um. The cry of victory from Ashikaga's army. [*Stretching himself up.*]

Beasts! This is not a cry to celebrate a victorious battle. Don't you know that it is in the end the agonizing shriek of parents killing their children, elder brothers cursing their younger brothers, retainers assassinating their lords, all falling together into hell and burning up in the fierce red flames as retribution for iniquitous disloyalty. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

CHORUS: Gallant and stirring the end!


Curtain



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