

Noh : Uesugi Yozan

(English translation)

By MUNAKATA Kuniyoshi (2017. 1)

UESUGI YOZAN, an 18th century feudal lord of Yonezawa County (now in Yamagata Prefecture) of Japan, is reported most respected by U.S. President John F. Kennedy. The U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Caroline Kennedy, visited Yonezawa City in 2014, and the next year her monument was built near the statue of the feudal lord at Denko-ku-no-Mori Park in the city. This new Noh play was intended to be premiered in Yonezawa while she resided in Tokyo as the Ambassador (2013-17).

Story

An American tourist visits Yonezawa City in Yamagata Prefecture. There he finds a monument of the U. S. Ambassador to Japan, Caroline Kennedy, whose father John F. Kennedy most respected UESUGI YOZAN. Uesugi was a feudal lord of the County of Yonezawa who rose to power at the age of 17. At that time, the people in the county were suffering from severe taxes and poverty. However, YOZAN finally saved them economically and spiritually. While the visitor is learning the feudal lord's greatness from a local citizen, the ghost of YOZAN appears and repeats his famous poem "Nasebanaru" (Translation: Do and you can.) After telling them, "Don't forget both: the ideal as well as the present," the ghost disappears.

Time: The present
Place: Yonezawa City
Season: Spring
Genre: The Fourth

Shite: The ghost of Uesugi Yozan

Waki: An American tourist

Ai-Kyogen: A local citizen of Yonezawa

Ji-utai: Chorus (3 persons, sitting behind the musicians)

Hayashi: Musicians (fue, ko-tsuzumi, oh-tsuzumi, taiko)

Koken: Stage assistants

[**Waki**, a tourist from America appears.]

Waki: I am a tourist from America. President Kennedy once said that he most respected Japanese Feudal Lord Uesugi Yozan. I therefore this

time intend to visit Yonezawa, his county in Yamagata Prefecture.

Ji-utaï: Passing Fukushima in Northern Japan, / Who named Yamagata
the handsome mountains, / Where snow still remains bright and clear? /
I have already arrived at Yonezawa.

Waki: Now I am already at Yonezawa City. This must be Uesugi Shrine
related to Uesugi Yozan. And here is the park “Denkoku no Mori.” I
wonder what this monument is.

[*Ai-kyogen*, a local citizen appears.]

Ai: This monument is of Ms. Caroline Kennedy, the U.S. Ambassador to
Japan. She kindly visited Yonezawa at the Autumn Festival in 2014.
Seeing the statue of Lord Yozan, she said her father most respected this
Japanese feudal Lord and she gave us a message. So people here
constructed this monument with her words in 2015. Look, her English
is also carved here.

Waki: Her English is also inscribed? “President Kennedy admired the man
whose festival we celebrate. Uesugi Yozan was a man who inspired
generations with his devotion to his people,...and his belief in the power
of each person to make this world a better place.” I see this was the
teaching of Yozan. And lastly here is inscribed “Nasebanaru”. What is
it?

Ai: It is the famous *waka* poem of Lord Yozan, which all Japanese know. It
reads: *Naseba naru, Nasaneba naranu nanigotomo, Naranuwa hitono
Nasanu narikeri.*” It simply means: “Do and you can.” I remember
President Kennedy in his Inaugural Address said, “Ask not what your
country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

Waki: Yes, that is what Yozan said.

Ai: I wonder how President Kennedy knew Lord Yozan.

Waki: All Americans who were interested in Japan read “Representative
Men of Japan” by Kanzo UCHIMURA. President Theodore Roosevelt
also read the book, knew the greatness of Yozan, and arbitrated
between Japan and Russia toward the end of their war.

Ai: As its return, Tokyo Mayor Yukio OZAKI sent Washington D.C. three
thousand young cherry trees, now known as Potomac Cherries.

Waki: Yes, they are the symbol of friendship between Japan and the U.S.
Now, will you please tell me about Yozan more in detail?

Ai: Well, Yozan is the name he himself named after retirement. It is now over two hundred years ago: it was in the middle of Edo Period. Well then, let me tell you about the life of Yozan from his birth.

Ji-utai: It was in 1751. A boy was born at the Edo residence of Lord Takanabe of Miyazaki in Kyushu. The boy's grandmother was a daughter of the former Chief of Yonezawa, and the boy was adopted at the age of nine by the Lord of Yonezawa named Uesugi. At sixteen he was named Harunori as an adult, and the next year at the age of seventeen he succeeded the feudal Lord of Yonezawa. He then made a *waka* poem: Succeeding the Chief of this county, / I shall never forget / I am a father and a mother of this clan people.

Waki: Only at the age of seventeen, he determined that he would be a father and a mother of the clan people?

Ji-utai: Yes. At that time Harunori was at his residence in Edo, now Tokyo, and he heard that Yonezawa was just before breakdown financially. So, in order to save the people there, he delivered "The Great Order of Economy." And he requested the samurai warriors to think of the ways to reform, and that they should be immediately carried out. They were: postponing of all yearly festivals and religious events; and prohibition of all luxurious life: as in meals, allowing soup and one dish only; and in clothing, allowing only cotton stuffs.

These should be applied for all people in Yonezawa including samurai and the Chief himself.

Also banned are all conventionalism and formalities. The number of followers to processions to and from Edo Tokugawa government was decreased. All reformations should be based on love and reliance. And this principle must be reflected on all economic activities. Harunori himself reduced his allowances to one eighth, and the number of maids at his Edo residence to one sixth.

Samurai also should be engaged in agricultural and productive industries, which, however, met strong objections and direct and indirect anti-movements by samurais who were accustomed to luxury, pride and arrogance over other classes of people, for the age was of strict caste system: samurai highest, then farmers, and manufacturers, and the lowest merchants.

People also resisted, saying, "In Yonezawa, we have Yonezawa

conventional customs and practices.” So, Harunori, in order to destroy the walls of such ways of thinking, started to found a new school, himself all funded. He also encouraged opening information and discussions and he respected their result and resolutions.

The reformation was so great and unprecedented that it often met difficult situations. In spite of that, the reformation was successful, for the Chief believed that even if high rank samurais were against reformation, people must support his ideas and principles, and people are the treasures of the county.

When days of drought lasted so long that the harvest resulted poor, Harunori himself prayed for the rain-fall for three days and nights, and miraculously it rained.

Waki: He was not a Christian, and he prayed to God?

Ai: Yes. He studied the teachings of Confucius even while he was a child, and then had become a pupil of Hosoi Heishu, a famous Confucianist.

Ji-uta: Hosoi Heishu, an eclectic philosopher, compromising or harmonizing good teachings of existing thoughts, philosophies and religions, unprejudiced. He respected deeds and activities, saying, “Virtue comes from eyes, not from ears. So, do and show.” So, Harunori himself did and showed, based on this principle of virtue. His meals were soup and one dish only; his clothing was all of cotton stuff.

His whole life was of simplicity and economy and praying to God and Buddha also for the success of reconstructions and revival of the land for the peace and happiness of his people.

Waki: I now understand how UCHIMURA Kanzo, a Christian, respected UESUGI Yozan. Yozan was a believer in God, having such a lofty and noble spirit. He was really a great hero.

Ji-uta: Having confirmed the success of his reformation, financial revival of the feudal government, and the peaceful life of the county people, he decided to retire at the age of 35, leaving acting principles or rules for his successors: namely, the county is not for the ruler; the people are not for the ruler; and the ruler is for the people. Yonezawa people called these principles “Denkoku no Ji” or their Constitutions.

Harunori changed his name to YOZAN at the age of 52, adopting it from the name of the nearby mountain “Haku-Yozan”(White Yozan), wishing to see people’s peaceful and happy life from the top of the mountain.

[Entrance music and the *Shite*, the ghost of Yozan, appears.]

Shite: What a joy! How delighted I am! Yes; do and we can. *Naseba naru. Nasaneba naranu Nanigotomo.* (Without doing, nothing can be done.)
Naranuwa hitono Nasanu narikeri. (What cannot be done cannot be done without doing it.)

Ji-utaï: Heaven helps those who help themselves. Self-help brings other-helps.

Shite: I am here this time to tell you about the lessons of the “Great Famine of Tenmei.”

Ji-utaï: It was in the 3rd, 5th, and 6th years of Tenmei. Mainland of Japan from north to south moaned and groaned, suffering from damages from severe cold weather, heavy rains, and flood of rivers. All crops and farm products were flooded. The Chief then ordered officials severely, and gently to the people, that they should have nobody to starve to death.

Shite: All measures were taken, and I was at a loss.

Ji-utaï: All measures were taken, and he was at a loss. He prayed to God, fasting days and nights, and three days and nights after, suddenly a roll of thunder roared and the heavy rains stopped. Then an intense heat came and crops came back to life, bringing the people to life, getting out of crises. How joyful the people were! They believed that their Chief’s faithful prayers were understood by God, so nobody starved.

Shite: Let all sufferers be accepted from neighboring lands.

Ji-utaï: The joy at that time we shall never forget. Do your best and leave the rest to Heaven.

Shite: You must not idealize me. The people always expect a new leader to appear for the people.

Ji-utaï: You have the Constitution in Yonezawa. But, do not depend on the words, but enliven its spirit. Even if deceived, do not deceive others.

Shite: One single seed of fire

Ji-utaï: Can change the world. **[*Shite* dances.]**

Shite: One single seed of fire

Ji-utaï: Can change the world.

Shite: In Okitama in Michinoku (Deep north),

Ji-utaï: In Okitama in Michinoku, it could; the government was based on the principle of virtue.

Shite: For the happiness of the people! Now all over the world!

Ji-utai: For the happiness of the people! Now all over the world!

Shite: *Nasebanaru*. (Do and you can.)

Ji-utai: *Naseba naru, Nasaneba naranu, Nanigotomo*, (Do and you can.

Without doing, you can't. You can't do anything without doing.)

Naranu-wa Hitono Nasanu narikeri. (You can't do without doing.)

[*Shite* moves toward the *hashigakari*.]

Ji-utai: The teachings of Uesugi since Kenshin, the former Lord of Uesugi, were humanity, morality, the way of *man*, as well as economy: the ideal and the real. Both never forget! So saying, the ghost of Lord Yozan, toward the top of Mt. Haku-Yozan, has disappeared; its sight has disappeared toward the mountain.