
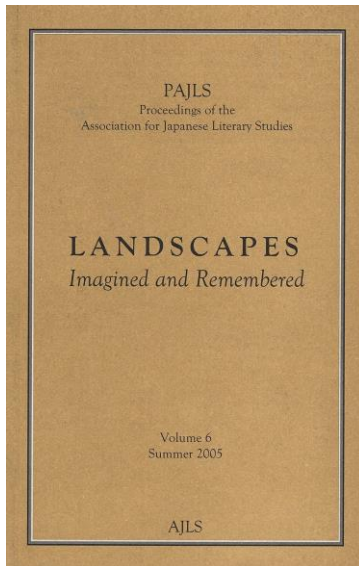


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Landscape in Noh”

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## **Taema: Intersections between Seasonal and Ritual Landscape in Noh**

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In strict compliance with the medieval Japanese poetic paradigm, many noh plays – especially those by Zeami – are highly “season-conscious,” as they elaborately depict the seasons within which their stories evolve. Yet, what is the season of the Pure Land, the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha, which transcends the temporal, spatial, and social orders of this world? This paper will examine how such an “a-seasonal” realm can be represented in noh through the example of Zeami’s play, *Taema* 当麻.<sup>1</sup> In the following argument, I will pay special attention to how the theatrical devices of noh, the latest “media” at the time, are employed for the purpose of creating the illusion of a trans-temporal Pure Land in three dimensions.

The play centers on the famous *Taima mandara* 当麻曼荼羅, the Pure Land Mandala of the Taima temple in Yamato, which even today surprises visitors with its enormous scale (4m x 4m).<sup>2</sup> The main image is a depiction of the Pure Land, with Amida Buddha and the bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi seated at the center, surrounded by numerous smaller figures of other bodhisattvas. Jeweled palaces and flying heavenly beings are visible in the upper part. The lower half reveals jeweled trees and a jeweled pond with lotus flowers, from which the enlightened dead are reborn as bodhisattvas. On a stage at the bottom, bodhisattvas and *dōji* 童子 (deities in the form of children) are dancing and performing music.

From around the late twelfth century, in line with the growing popularity of Pure Land beliefs, this mandala became the object of ardent worship. Innumerable painted or woodblock-printed replicas were produced in various sizes and distributed across the country, often accompanied by oral narration and explanation (*etoki* 絵解き or *mandara kōsetsu* 曼荼羅講説).

The mandala explanation not only gave an account of the images in the mandala but also retold the legend of its creation, the so-called “Princess Chūjō legend.”<sup>3</sup> The earliest and most representative pictorial version of this

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<sup>1</sup> In his treatise *Go'on* 五音 (The Five Sounds), Zeami cites part of *Taema* without attributing it to another author, suggesting that he himself composed it.

<sup>2</sup> Historically, both *Taema* and *Taima* were used interchangeably as the temple’s name. In this paper, following current custom, I refer to the temple as “Taima” and to the noh play as “Taema.”

<sup>3</sup> For the development of the legends regarding the Taima Mandala, see Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985) and Kawahara Yoshio 河原由雄, “Taima mandara engi no seiritu to sono shūhen” 当麻曼荼羅縁起

legend, *Kōmyō-ji Taima mandara engi emaki* 光明寺当麻曼荼羅縁起絵巻 (picture scroll of the legendary histories of Taima temple, now in the possession of Kōmyō-ji), was created in the mid-thirteenth century. In this version, a daughter of the Yokohagi minister (*Yokohagi no otodo* 横佩大臣), who devotes herself wholeheartedly to Buddhist practices, makes one thousand copies of the *Shōsan Jōdo kyō* 称赞浄土經 (Sūtra in Praise of the Pure Land). In her youth, the heroine takes the tonsure and vows not to leave the temple's gate until she sees the "real figure" of Amida Buddha (*shōjin no mida* 生身の弥陀). Five days later, a nun arrives and tells her to gather one hundred bunches of lotus. When the princess completes the order, the nun – the same one as before but this time referred to as a *keni* 化尼 (apparitional nun) – reappears and spins the lotus into yarn, which she then dyes with five colors using water from a newly dug well. That night, a beautiful *kenyo* 化女 (apparitional woman) appears, weaves the dyed yarn into a huge mandala, and disappears. The apparitional nun then explains the image of the Pure Land woven in the mandala to the princess and reveals that she is the Amida Buddha and the apparitional woman was the bodhisattva Kannon. Later, when the princess is on her deathbed, Amida Buddha and a procession of bodhisattvas descend to welcome her into the Pure Land.

Throughout the Muromachi period, this legend, along with the mandala itself, acquired nationwide popularity and generated many additional episodes and details, especially regarding the princess' tragic childhood under her cruel stepmother.<sup>4</sup> As a result of such developments, her name came to be established as Princess Chūjō (Chūjōhime 中将姫). These later legends were also made into picture scrolls and picture books, the ending scene of which is always the *raigōzu* 来迎図, the brilliant procession of Amida Buddha and the bodhisattvas descending to her deathbed. Naturally enough, the legend was soon incorporated into a Buddhist ritual called *mukae-kō* 迎講 (or *gōkō*), in which monks and believers wearing bodhisattva masks and costumes represent this welcoming procession. Even to this day, on April 14, which is believed to be the date of Princess Chūjō's death, the ceremony takes place annually at Taima temple, as the three-dimensional representation of her rebirth into the Pure Land.

In other words, through a diverse range of media the Taima mandala became the source for almost every kind of Pure Land representation; not only was it the representative pictorial image of the Pure Land used in oral explanation, but the story of its production was also closely related to two- and three-dimensional representations of the Buddha and bodhisattvas'

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の成立とその周辺 in *Taima mandara engi, Chigo Kannon engi* 当麻曼荼羅縁起・稚児観音縁起, ed. Komatsu Shigemi 小松茂美, *Nihon emaki taisei* 日本絵巻大成, vol. 24 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1979), 93-126.

<sup>4</sup> A legend about her childhood was made into another noh play, *Hibariyama* 雲雀山.

welcoming procession. Zeami, the innovator of another new medium at that time – noh – borrowed this subject for his play *Taema*.

At first sight, the Princess Chūjō legend seems highly suitable for adaptation as a noh play. The legend's basic structure is curiously similar to that of *mugen nō* (dream noh), in which the incarnation of a supernatural being appears twice in front of a living person and performs a miracle on its second visit. However, *Taema* de-emphasizes the “noh-like” storyline of this legend and focuses instead on representing the image of the Pure Land itself. In other words, the play's main interest lies in what is depicted in the mandala, rather than in the story of how the mandala was made.

In the first act of the play, traveling monks meet two women at Taima temple. The women praise the name of Buddha and relate to the monks how Amida Buddha visited Princess Chūjō. Then, before disappearing in a cloud, the women reveal that they are the incarnations of the apparitional nun and woman from the legend. In the second act, while the monks are still in the same place, Princess Chūjō, who is now the bodhisattva of song and dance (*kabu no bosatsu* 歌舞の菩薩), appears and gives them the *Sūtra in Praise of the Pure Land*, performs a dance, and disappears at dawn.

Contrary to the standard dream noh structure, in this play, each act has a different *shite* (protagonist). Moreover, the identities of the play's protagonists are ambiguous, due to deviations from their roles in the original legend. In the legend, it is Princess Chūjō who is devoted to reciting the name of Buddha, while the apparitional nun and woman – that is, Amida Buddha and Kannon – show the image of the Pure Land in the form of a mandala and through Buddhist teaching. But in the play, the incarnations of the apparitional nun and woman praise the name of Buddha in the first act; in the second act, Princess Chūjō hands the monks the sūtras and reveals to them what the Pure Land is like by means of dance. In other words, in *Taema*, Princess Chūjō and the two women swap roles. Since the legend itself was extremely popular, such a twist must have originally created confusion about the identity of the play's characters. As Kiyota Hiroshi points out, moreover, in many manuscript copies of the play handed down in *shimogakari* lineage schools, the *waki* (in this case, the principal monk) makes the following remark at the beginning of the second act: “Then it was Princess Chūjō, appearing in front of us transiently.”<sup>5</sup> Since the two women clearly state at the end of the first act that they themselves are the incarnations of the apparitional nun and woman, the monk's remark is completely inconsistent; it must have been added by later generations, partly due to noh's tendency to standardize the traveling monks' speeches, but also due to the ambiguity in the text itself, which encourages such confusion about the identities of its protagonists.

<sup>5</sup> Seida Hiroshi 清田弘, “Tokushū ‘Taema’ utai to butai,” 特集『当麻』：謡と舞台 *Kanze* 44: 6 (June 1977), 29.

Because of this ambiguity, the storyline of the original legend tends to be de-emphasized in the play. In fact, the core of the legend, that is, the miraculous creation of the mandala, is hardly touched upon. In describing the surrounding scenery to the monks, the nun refers to the well from which water was taken to dye the lotus yarn as well as to the cherry tree on which the dyed yarn was hung. However, she does not go further into the details of the mandala-weaving story; rather, as the following excerpt shows, the scene soon dissolves into a depiction of the Pure Land:

ワキ：さてまたこれなる花桜 常の色には変はりつつ これ  
もゆゑある宝樹と見えたり  
ツレ：げによく御覧じ分けられたり あれこそ蓮の糸を染め  
て  
シテ：懸けて乾されし桜木の 花も心のあるゆゑに 蓮の色  
に咲くとも言へり  
ワキ：なかなかなるべしもとよりも 草木国土成仏の 色香  
に染める花心の  
シテ：法の潤ひ種添へて  
ワキ：濁りに染まぬ蓮の糸を  
シテ：濯ぎて清めし人の心の  
ワキ：迷ひを乾すは  
シテ：ひざくらの  
地謡：色はえて 懸けし蓮のいとぎくら 懸けし蓮の糸桜  
花の錦の経緯に 雲のたえまに晴れ曇る 雪も緑も紅  
も ただひと声の誘はんや 西吹く秋の風ならん 西  
吹く秋の風ならん

WAKI (*the traveling monk*) By the way, the flowers of this cherry tree have an unusual color. I suppose it must be a “jeweled tree” with some history of its own.

TSURE (*the woman*) You are quite observant; that is the very tree on which the dyed lotus yarn was –

SHITE (*the nun*) hung and dried. Since even the cherry flowers have spirits that may respond to the Buddhist teaching, they are said to bloom in the color of lotus flowers.

WAKI Indeed, it should be thus, for even plants and the earth can attain Buddhahood. These flowers, dyed with the blessing of Buddhahood,

SHITE being showered with the Buddhist teaching, and holding a source of enlightenment in themselves,

WAKI once dried the lotus yarn, which, impervious to muddy water,  
 SHITE has been rinsed and purified.  
 WAKI The delusion in human hearts should be also purified and dried,  
 SHITE and hung by this cherry tree of red flowers;  
 CHORUS the weeping branches of the cherry tree, the weeping branches of the cherry tree, on which were once hung the lotus yarn with shining colors, are the weft and warp of a flower brocade. So are the snow, the red and the green in Taima temple, which are partially in shadow and partially in sunlight<sup>6</sup> from a parting of the clouds – are they blown together at the call of Buddha’s name? Or is it by the autumn wind blowing westward,<sup>7</sup> by the autumn wind blowing westward.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of this scene, the monk compares a real tree to the *hōju* 宝樹 (jeweled tree), that is, the tree in the Pure Land. In the choral section, the cherry blossoms swaying in the breeze are compared to “the weft and warp of a flower brocade” – the brocade of the Pure Land Mandala. This extended metaphor then takes in other natural elements of the scenery surrounding Taima temple, such as green leaves, red flowers and leaves, and white snow. All of these elements are blown, mixed, and woven together, as if a “weft and warp,” by the westerly wind, which may also be “the call of Buddha’s name.” In this way, instead of narrating “how the mandala was created,” the background scenery is viewed as the Pure Land itself, as depicted in the mandala.

To be precise, the original text is more complicated and nuanced than my tentative translation shows. What is compared to “the weft and warp of brocade” is not necessarily merely the cherry branches; this could also mean the lotus yarn, which was once hung on them. In other words, here, both the past, when the lotus yarn was hanging from the cherry tree, and the present, when the blooming cherry branches are swaying, are juxtaposed against the scenery in the Pure Land Mandala.

Such a fusion of past and present creates a sense of being beyond time, just as the Pure Land is immutable and transcends the temporality of this world. In addition, this trans-temporality is reinforced by the deliberate fusion

<sup>6</sup> *Shimogakari* texts read *madara-naru* まだらなる (speckled) instead of *harekumoru* 晴れ曇る (partially in shadow and partially in sunlight), thus playing on *madara* and *mandara*.

<sup>7</sup> Behind this association of the autumn wind with the west lies the yin-yang cosmology in which autumn corresponds to the western direction.

<sup>8</sup> *Yōkyokushū chū* 謡曲集：中, ed. Itō Masayoshi 伊藤正義, *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei* 新潮日本古典集成, vol. 73, (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1986), 273-74. All translations from the play are mine.

of various seasonal terms: flower, snow, and autumn wind. Itō Masayoshi, in his annotation to the play, understands the *kurenai* 紅 (red) in the chorus section as solely referring to red maple leaves, since the previous phrase *harekumoru* 晴れ曇る (partially in shadow and partially in sunlight) was deeply associated with *shigure* 時雨 (autumn rain), which is in turn closely associated with *momiji* 紅葉 (red maple leaves) in medieval poetics.<sup>9</sup> But immediately before this chorus section, the color of the cherry blossoms is also described as *hi* 緋 (red) and therefore the redness in the garden of Taima temple should also be taken as suggesting that of the cherry flowers. In short, the “red” here simultaneously conveys two seasons: spring and autumn.

This mixture of seasons is not restricted to the above passage; rather, the seasonal confusion pervades the whole play. As Miyake Akiko points out, unlike most of Zeami’s plays, *Taema* rarely provides extended descriptions of season-specific scenery.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the scene in the present, in which the monks encounter the incarnations of deities, is set in spring, but the scene from the past, in which Princess Chūjō encounters the buddha and the bodhisattva, occurs in autumn. Although the seasonal references in each scene are rather scarce, it is enough to create a sense of confusion as to when the entire play is taking place.

This construction of the illusion of a trans-temporal Pure Land is not limited to onstage space; it also involves offstage space, the space actually surrounding the audience. As Michael Issacharoff argues, in theater, when a character refers to the space on stage, it is generally supposed that there should be a referent, a physical entity to which the character refers.<sup>11</sup> If the referent is missing or does not match the signified – for example, when a character refers to an absent object, such as a house, or to a fan as a basket – the audience “sees” objects (a house, a basket) where nothing is present. This ability of theater language to change the audience’s perception of actual space is all the more powerful in noh theater. Since its onstage space is physically minimized, the audience members inevitably develop the habit of altering their perception of onstage space, and even of offstage space, in compliance with the cues of theater language. For example, in *Taema*, when the natural surrounding scenery is referred to by the chorus or by the characters, the spectators in Zeami’s time, who sat in the open air, might easily have associated these words with actual trees, flowers, or clouds around them. The superimposition of the Pure Land onto the natural scenery in *Taema* thus would have created an illusion for the open-air audience members that they were actually in the eternal Pure Land, transcending the seasonal.

<sup>9</sup> *Yōkyokushū chū*, ed. Itō Masayoshi, 274.

<sup>10</sup> Miyake Akiko 三宅晶子, *Kabunō no kakuritsu to tenkai* 歌舞能の確立と展開 (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2001), 383.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

After creating this illusion as the basic backdrop of the play, *Taema* proceeds to the telling of a scene from the past. Yet what is recounted is not the second visit of the apparitional nun, but her first one, from which every possible association with mandala-making is strangely omitted. In the legend, the function of the nun's first visit is simply to instruct Princess Chūjō to gather the lotuses. In *Taema*'s retelling, by contrast, the nun refers neither to the lotuses nor to her future second visit. The entire focus lies in the miracle of Amida Buddha's appearing to Princess Chūjō, in response to her earnest recitation of the Buddha's name. In this scene, Princess Chūjō repeatedly expresses her joy at seeing the "real" Amida Buddha, a joy which is usually permitted only to those reborn in the Pure Land.

To reinforce the illusion of being in the Pure Land and of the appearance of Amida Buddha, *Taema* employs one further device to represent the Pure Land: the bodhisattva's dance in the second act. In traditional visual representations of the Pure Land, the bodhisattvas' dance is one of the very first things that the newly dead see as they enter the Pure Land.<sup>12</sup> In pictures of the procession of Buddha and the bodhisattvas welcoming the newly dead, dancing bodhisattvas are often positioned just after Kannon and Seishi, who lead the procession. In the Pure Land Mandala, too, this bodhisattvas' dance, immediately before the jeweled pond, is one of the most eye-catching features; when believers sit in front of the mandala, the dance stage is right in front of their eyes. Moreover, because the mandala makes use of perspective, the lower the objects are, the closer they look to the viewers. Thereupon, the stage "at the bottom" is actually the most prominent object, jutting out to the spectators. By presenting a dance of a bodhisattva, Zeami completes the three-dimensional illusion of the Pure Land; the audience, which experiences the illusion of being in the Pure Land, is now witnessing the dance of a bodhisattva on the stage, like the newly dead who are reborn from the lotus flower on the jeweled pond.

After the dance, there remains only a short passage, chanted by the chorus:

シテ：後夜の鐘の音

地謡：後夜の鐘の音 鳧鐘の響き 称名の妙音の 見仏聞法の  
いろいろの法事 げにもあまねき 光明遍照 十  
方の衆生を ただ西方に 迎へ行く 御法の舟の 水

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of the tradition of visual and performative representations of the bodhisattvas' dance in the Pure Land, see Takeuchi Akiko 竹内晶子, "Ippen no odorī nenbutsu: gokuraku no buyō to iu keifu ni oite" 一遍の踊念仏：極楽の舞踏という系譜において in *Chūsei Bukkyō no tenkai to sono kiban* 中世仏教の展開とその基盤, ed. Imai Masaharu 今井雅晴 (Tokyo: Ōkura Shuppan, 2002).



馴棹 御法の舟の さを投ぐる間の 夢の 夜はほの  
ぼのとぞ なりにける

SHITE The sound of the bell at dawn,

CHORUS The sound of the bell at dawn, the ring of a small gong in the service, and the graceful voice chanting the name of Buddha – these are the various rituals to visualize Buddha and to listen to his teaching. Ever present is his light shining on us in all directions, and the ship of his teaching carries us ever westward. A fleeting dream, dreamed as a shuttle runs along the weft, has come to an end, as the day begins to dawn.<sup>13</sup>

This passage informs the monk – and the audience – that everything they have been seeing and experiencing is nothing but a dream woven by a running shuttle, a dream dreamed “as a shuttle runs along the weft.” This is not mere rhetoric, given the fact that, as we have seen, the goal of the whole play is to represent the lotus-woven mandala in three dimensions on- and offstage, and to guide the audience toward the illusion of transcending its own immediate spatial and temporal boundaries, of entering an “a-seasonal” realm beyond time.

This “Pure Land,” created through such devices of noh as dance and theatrical language, is three-dimensional, unlike the picture scrolls or an oral story and explanation of the Pure Land Mandala; and Zeami’s work can be performed anywhere, anytime, without large-scale preparation, unlike the Pure Land gardens (*jōdo teien* 浄土庭園), which Heian aristocrats cultivated on their estates at enormous cost. In this way, the play met the religious demands of medieval audiences in a highly effective manner, when the focus of enlightenment efforts was the commoners, rather than the elite in the capital.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Yōkyokushū chū*, ed. Itō Masayoshi, 280.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, according to Yamanaka Reiko’s 山中玲子 research on the extant historical records of *kanjin-nō* 勧進能 (benefit noh performances) during the Muromachi period, *Taema* was the second most frequently performed play. See Yamanaka, *Nō no enshutsu sono keisei to henyō* 能の演出—その形成と変容 (Tokyo: Wakakusa Shobō, 1998), 173.

**A Sense of Place:  
Medieval Visions of Kamakura in the *Heike monogatari* and  
Beyond**