

Noh Jinen Koji 自然居士

(“Jinen the Lay Monk”)

Jinen, a lay monk, is conducting seven days of preaching. On the last day, a young girl brings him a robe so that he will offer prayers for her dead parents. Jinen realizes that the girl has sold herself to slave traders to buy the robe. After the slave traders take her away, he stops his preaching and goes after the girl, finding her on a boat in Lake Biwa. The traders agree to give up the girl if the priest will sing and dance for them. He does so, and the girl freed.

Author: Kan'Ami (1333-1384).

Scene: First, the Unko-ji (Cloud Lodge) Temple in Higashiyama, Kyoto, in the present Kyoto (first half); then at Lake Biwa near Otsu in Omi Province, in the present Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture.

Category: Fourth category miscellaneous (performance variety) play, present-time (genzai) noh in two acts, chû-no-mai (medium dance) piece and kakko (waist drum dance) piece, without taiko stick drum.

Performance practice: Performed by all five schools.

Characters (in order of appearance)

- Ai/Ai-kyôgen (interlude actors): Man at the Gate of Unko-ji Temple.
- Shite (main actor): Jinen the Lay Monk. Mask: acolyte (kasshiki).
- Kokata (child actor): a young girl.
- Waki (secondary actor): a slave merchant.
- Wakizure (accompanying waki actor): another slave merchant.

Synopsis: scene by scene.

1. Ai entrance: The Man at the Gate enters and tells of a lay man named Jinen who has been preaching for seven days at Unko-ji temple. He tells everyone to gather then goes to call Jinen.
2. Shite entrance: Jinen enters and asks for donations for the rebuilding of Unko-ji. He sings of the evening rain at the “Cloud Lodge Temple” and mounting a high seat in order to preach. He declares his reverence to Shakyamuni, the Buddhas of the Three Ages, and to the Bodhisattvas of the Ten Directions.
3. Kokata entrance: During the above passage, a little girl enters carrying a robe and a letter. The Man at the Gate gives these to Jinen, who reads the letter aloud. It asks for prayers for the souls of her parents for which she offers a robe. The chorus sings of the costly robe, how the girl would gladly die to be with her parents, and how Jinen and the entire throng are moved to tears.
4. Waki/Wakizure entrance: Two slave traders enter. The first introduces himself as a trader from the east who has purchased many persons in the capital. Among them was a young girl who begged to leave a while. Since she hasn't returned, they think she might be attending Jinen's preaching, and decide to go have a look.

5. Waki/Ai/Shite exchange: They see the girl and the second trader goes up and grabs her. The Man at the Gate tries to intervene but the first trader brandishes a sword. The Man relents, then reports to Jinen what has happened. Jinen thinks that the men are slave traders and the girl must have sold herself to buy the robe to offer it in exchange for the girl, saying that this is a clear case of good and evil. Jinen announces that the preaching is over and the chorus sings how he must go and save the girl.
6. Scene change: The slave traders sing of putting out a boat on Lake Biwa and Jinen and the chorus sing of having no boat but following behind and telling them to stop in the name of Buddha's Law.
7. Shite/Waki exchange: Jinen calls out to the boat saying he knows they are slave traders. The traders are embarrassed but Jinen uses word play to suggest that he had said something else. Jinen says he is angry that they interrupted his preaching, gives them the robe, and tells how he wades out to the boat to stop it. The main trader is angry at the girl for having caused this and strikes her. Jinen sings that she makes no sound and might be dead, but the trader sings of pulling her to her feet. The chorus describes how she is tied and gagged so her cries cannot escape.
8. Shite/Waki/Wakizure exchange: Jinen tells the child that he will protect her and refuses to leave the boat. The traders decide to give the girl back, but to have some fun with Jinen first. They tell him to dance for them and then they will decide
9. Shite's prelude dance: Jinen knows the traders are trying to embarrass him. He dances the chû-no-mai medium tempo dance.
10. Shite's narrative dance: The trader tells him his dance is short so Jinen decides to dance while relating the origin of boats. The chorus tells how a knight in ancient China saw a spider on a leaf in the water. The knight then built a boat which enabled the emperor to become victorious in battle and bring peace to the realm.
11. Shite's dance: The trader asks Jinen to demonstrate the sasara, a rasp-like musical instrument. Jinen sings of the origins of the sasara from a monk who swept pine needles with the rosary. Jinen says he will use his rosary too. The chorus describes the sound of sasara and a rosary rubbed in prayer, and asks the trader for help.
12. Final dance, conclusion: The trader agrees to free the girl, but he wants Jinen to play the waist drum. Jinen dances the kakko drum dance. The chorus sings of the drum sounding like pounding waves, rumbling rainclouds, and rain. The drumbeats and the sasara sounds are playful words of buddha's perfect wisdom. The chorus describes how Jinen goes to the girl and leads her out of the boat, and how they leave together to return to the capital.
[Richard Emmert]