Taiheiki Vol. 35 Kitano-tsuya monogatari and Emperor Go-Daigo’s Vengeful Ghost

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This presentation will feature Kitano-tsuya monogatari (the Vigil at the Kitano Shrine), which is volume 35 of Taiheiki. At first glance, this volume may appear to have little to do with the storyline of the entire series. However, a closer look will reveal that this is not at all the case. This presentation will demonstrate a method and the significance of exegeting a classical text from the medieval period within its own context.

First, I will present an overview of Kitano-tsuya monogatari. Taiheiki consists of 40 volumes. The slide presentation shows a brief overview of the entire series. Kitano-tsuya monogatari, as mentioned earlier, is volume 35.

Next, I will discuss Kitano-tsuya monogatari. The story takes place at the Kitano Shrine. Images will be shown from the Taiheiki Emaki pictorial scroll from the Edo Period. Images used in the discussion of Taiheiki will also come from this scroll. There are three persons in the upper left corner of the screen. These are the main characters. A person at the lower right (Raii), listening to their tales, will be introduced later. He was mentioned only in the later versions of Taiheiki, but his presence played a significant role for us to understand Kitano-tsuya monogatari.

Most of Kitano-tsuya monogatari is made up of tales told by these three main characters. Of the three, Tonneisha (recluse) used to work for the Kamakura shogunate as a high-ranking official. Unkaku (courtier) has resigned from his position in the Southern Court and now absorbs himself in Chinese literature. Hoshi (priest) serves at the Monzeki Temple (where imperial family members and aristocrats serve as priests) of the Tendai Sect. These three characters talk about, respectively, the thrift and benevolent rule of Japan’s Kamakura period, virtuous rulers and retainers in ancient China, and the idea of karma in Tianzhu.

An argument is made subsequently that samurai warriors prosper, and the

* This is a tentative English version of the speech script of the author for OCU/UIUC symposium communication.
Imperial court falters because of past karma. However, this argument is eventually rejected, holding out hopes for future peace.

*Kitano-tsuya monogatari* is obviously a fiction, even though *Taiheiki* itself is a historical piece, depicting the upheaval of the Northern and Southern Courts. *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* is a self-contained unit that looks unrelated to the overall storyline of the entire series. In fact, a pictorial scroll was produced during the Edo Period based solely on *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* as a standalone piece. Prior studies, too, have often focused on the thoughts developed within this single volume.

However, this presentation will show that *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* has a rightful place within the overall plotline of *Taiheiki*, with its close relationship to the vengeful ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo, who appears in *Taiheiki*.

What needs careful attention is how the story begins. As the slide shows, the opening section indicates that many people are holding a vigil at the Kitano Shrine, that the story takes place during mid- or late-autumn, and that the three characters are composing linked poems known as *renga*. Various information can be gleaned from this.

First, many people are holding a vigil at the Kitano Shrine. The Kitano Shrine attracted many visitors on certain days. From this, it can be surmised that *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* describes an event that took place on one such day. Specifically, this may be the night before one of the festival days that took place on the 25th of each month. The festival, as the left side of the slide shows, falls on the anniversary of the death of Sugawara no Michizane. In fact, *Baishoron*, which was written around the same period as *Taiheiki*, also describes a person visiting a Buddhist temple, attached to the Kitano Shrine on the 25th of each month, a day of supplication. *Baishoron* further says that the temple attracted many visitors on the 25th of each month, as described in *Kitano-tsuya monogatari*. This example shows that the event in *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* took place between the evening of the 24th and the dawn of the 25th of a certain month.

Furthermore, the month in which the event took place can also be determined. The clue is the section of the story that says that the three characters are composing linked poems. In fact, the opening section of *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* includes many poetry expressions that point to the month in which the event took place. For example, the expression “冷キ” can most appropriately be used for August. In addition, this volume also contains such conventional phrases as “月(moon),” “霜(frost),” “松(pines),” and “秋のあはれ(the fleetness of autumn).” It would be reasonable to assume, then, that “冷キ” is also a standard expression for linked poems indicating August. *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* says that the event takes place “after mid-autumn,” an expression that may indicate August in the lunar calendar. Considering all these data, it can be surmised that
the event in *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* takes place on August 24 and 25.

Then, what is the significance of these dates? An article regarding the death of Emperor Go-Daigo provides a clue. The article says that Emperor Go-Daigo died on August 16. Emperor Go-Daigo is one of the most important actors in *Taiheiki*. As explained later, the ghost of the emperor plays a vital role in the storyline of the series. For example, the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo, who appears on volume 34, is also depicted in the *Taiheiki Emaki* pictorial scroll. As one continues to read *Taiheiki*, he or she first notices that the date August 24 is close to the death anniversary of Emperor Go-Daigo. The dates of *Kitano-tsuya monogatari*, therefore, suggest a connection between the event and the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo.

This line of thinking is supported by the structure of the later versions of the same passages. As seen in the pictorial scroll, the latter text depicts a person who secretly listens to the conversation among the three main characters of *Kitano-tsuya monogatari*. This person is a Buddhist monk from Yoshino named Raii. The postscript of the document, seen in the slide, also shows the man’s name. This document, copied for the 33rd anniversary of the death of Emperor Go-Daigo, is said to have been later given to Raii. This indicates that Raii was involved in a Buddhist memorial ceremony for Emperor Go-Daigo. The fact that Raii appears in *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* supports a view that this story is related to the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo.

*Kitano-tsuya monogatari* involves the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo. As discussed earlier, the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo plays a significant role in the storyline of *Taiheiki*. Then, how does *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* relate to the storyline of *Taiheiki*? *Yoshino gobyou shinrei no koto*, volume 34 of the series, provides a clue. In this volume, the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo appears and orders the spirits of his aides to purge the samurai lords of the shogunate. The story subsequently unfolds in accordance with the command of the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo. Peace arrives in the end. Thus, in *Taiheiki*, the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo directs the plot to its end. In *Kitano-tsuya monogatari*, which also relates to the ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo, there is already hope for peace.

Based on the above considerations, the plotline of *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* has been schematized in the next slide. The ghost of Emperor Go-Daigo appears, and, discusses future peace. Then, peace finally arrives. This demonstrates that *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* has a close relationship with the storyline of *Taiheiki*.

Finally, the last slide summarizes the main point of this presentation. *Kitano-tsuya monogatari*, when interpreted in its medieval context, reveals a plotline that may not be immediately apparent to many of us. *Kitano-tsuya monogatari* provides a case study that demonstrates the importance of interpreting classical works in their own context.
The Vigil at the Kitano Shrine,
Taiheiki, Volume (Roll) 35, sec. 8.
Introductory passages

From Iwanami bunko (岩波文庫)