

# Resurrecting the Noh Play *Tsuna* in the Reiwa Era with a Special Performance at the Expo

Date: May 14 (Wed.), 2025

Time: 19:00 to around 20:00

Venue: Pop-Up Stage South at Expo 2025 (Yumeshima)

## **Performance**

19:00 Explanation

Dance: *Tsuchigumo (The Ground Spider)*

Reproduced Noh Play: *Tsuna*

## **Summary**

○Dance: *Tsuchigumo (The Ground Spider)*

One day, late at night, a Buddhist monk comes close to the bed of Minamoto-no-Raiko, who is suffering from an illness. In reality, it is the spirit of a spider disguising itself as a monk. In no time, the spirit casts a spiderweb onto Raiko, but when he draws the priceless sword that he inherited from his ancestors to fight against the spider's spirit, it escapes at once. When Raiko's retainer rushes to his room, Raiko orders him to slay the spider's spirit.

After following the trace of the spider's spirit, the retainer finds an old mound, which he thinks to be the spider's nest. The spider's spirit comes out of the mound and begins battling violently by casting spiderwebs, but it is finally subdued by the retainer.

\* This time, the dance at the climax scene will be performed. Instead of a traditional Noh costume, dancers will wear a *montsuki-hakama* (formal kimono with family crest and traditional trousers).

○Reproduced Noh Play: *Tsuna*

This play is a sequel to *Rashomon*, another Noh play about the fierce battle between Watanabe-no-Tsuna (Tsuna) and Ibaraki-doji, a demon living at Rashomon Gate. In the battle, Tsuna cuts off one of the demon's arms.

In today's program, Tsuna is told that the demon will come to retrieve his severed arm within seven days. Accordingly, Tsuna confines himself in his residence to avoid the demon. On the seventh day, Tsuna's aunt comes to his residence from Takayasu. Although Tsuna refuses to let her come into the house at first, moved by compassion, he finally shows her into the parlor, where they begin drinking sake, and the aunt begins singing and dancing. Then, she asks him to show her the demon's arm. Being unable to refuse her request, Tsuna opens the chest containing the arm, and she grabs it and runs away.

When Tsuna is looking for his aunt, Ibaraki-doji appears and tells Tsuna that he had disguised

himself as Tsuna's aunt. Although Tsuna fights Ibaraki-doji bravely, the demon escapes from him straight away.

## **Description: Tips to Enjoy *Tsuna*, a Noh Play Resurrected in the Reiwa Era**

Yumiko Fukuda (Curator, Yao City Shionjiyama Kofun Site Museum)

### 1 Introduction

Recently, demons have become a fad in Japan. I understand many people outside Japan also enjoy the manga series *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (*Demon Slayer* in English).

In today's program, *Tsuna*, one of the main characters is a demon called Ibaraki-doji. This demon is depicted in Japan's artistic works and classical performing arts, including the Noh play *Rashomon*. Meanwhile, Watanabe-no-Tsuna, a warrior who fights Ibaraki-doji, is depicted as a hero in many stories. I would now like to describe these two characters.

### 2 Ibaraki-doji, a demon depicted in various ways

There are multiple folklores about Ibaraki-doji, and they suggest different locations as his birthplace, such as Ibaraki City in Osaka, Amagasaki City in Hyogo Prefecture, and Nagaoka City in Niigata Prefecture. The demon's character also differs depending on the folklore. Even in Ibaraki City, there are two different interpretations as to the demon's character.

- According to one, Ibaraki-doji was abandoned in the heart of the mountains by his own father since he looked monstrous. Sustaining his life by hunting, he became a demon, but when he heard that his father had fallen ill, Ibaraki-doji hurried to his father's bedside to take care of him. This folklore depicts Ibaraki-doji as a kind demon that fulfills his filial duty.

- According to another folklore, soon after his birth, Ibaraki-doji was abandoned in front of a barber's shop because of his abnormal appearance. The barber and his wife raised the boy, who began to help them at the shop. One day, however, the boy happened to taste human blood and began to deliberately cut customers' cheeks with a shaver to lick the blood. Thrown out of the barber's shop, the boy went deep in the mountains in Tamba and became a follower of Shuten-doji, the general of demons at Mt. Oe.

The folklore of Amagasaki City depicts Ibaraki-doji as a gentle demon filial to his parents, while the story in Nagaoka City describes him as a born villain, who rampages through the capital city together with Shuten-doji. It is so interesting to search for his true character.

### 3 Legendary hero, Watanabe-no-Tsuna

Watanabe-no-Tsuna (953–1025), a warrior in the mid-Heian period, was born in Mida, Musashi Province (now Konosu City, Saitama Prefecture). Since his father died shortly after his birth, he was

raised by his mother's family in Watanabe in Settsu Province (now Chuo Ward, Osaka City). He is known as an expert at martial arts and the founder of Watanabe-to, a group of warriors that governed Oe-no-Mikuriya (the area presently covering Chuo Ward, Osaka City, and the eastern part of Osaka Prefecture). According to several legends, he subdued the spirit of a spider and demons, including Shuten-doji, a demon at Mt. Oe whom he slayed with his master, Minamoto-no-Raiko. This year marks the millennial of his death. There are, however, no trustworthy materials extant today that indicate his achievements.

#### 4 Similarity between *Tsuna* and the epic poem *Beowulf*

While *Tsuna* is a story about Ibaraki-doji, a demon that retrieves one of his arms severed by Watanabe-no-Tsuna at Rashomon Gate, this plot has many points similar to *Beowulf*, an Old English epic poem composed in the 8th century. In *Beowulf*, Grendel, a monster that torments King Hrothgar, is fatally hurt by Beowulf, who tears the monster's arm from its body. The monster's mother attacks the king's residence to retrieve her son's arm. Together with the arm, she takes away Æschere, the king's favored retainer. In *Tsuna*, Ibaraki-doji plays the role of Grendel and its mother, while Watanabe-no-Tsuna plays the role of Beowulf and Æschere. Even though a simple comparison of the two stories should be limited because of the difference in religious backgrounds between the East and the West, it is indeed interesting that the heroes of both epics cut off their enemies' arms.

#### 5 The burial mound of the demon's arm

According to one folklore, Ibaraki-doji's severed arm was buried in Tezuka, a mound in Takayasu in Kawachi Province (which is supposed to be the ancient burial mound at the rear of Tamanooya Shrine in Kodachi, Yao City, Osaka Prefecture). Why was the arm buried in Takayasu? According to the *Taiheiki*, a Japanese historical epic written in the 14th century, Minamoto-no-Raiko's mother, who lived in Takayasu, retrieves the arm by disguising herself as a demon. In fact, however, there is no connection between Raiko's mother and Takayasu. In another story, a demon, in the disguise of Watanabe-no-Tsuna's foster mother, visits him to get the arm. The latter story suggests that the arm was buried in Tezuka because of Tsuna's connection with Takayasu.

Since Tsuna was regarded as a hero, his episodes became popular in his home territory, Oe-no-Mikuriya. People in the region probably began to believe that the demon's arm severed by Tsuna was buried in an ancient burial mound in Takayasu, located in the vicinity of Oe-no-Mikuriya. In Takayasu, however, there are many ancient burial mounds, a fact that leads to the following question: Why was Tezuka selected as a burial mound for the demon's arm? Among various explanations, the one I believe the most probable is as follows: There was a place called Ushinotsuka (牛ノ塚) in the vicinity of Tezuka (手塚). Since the Chinese characters of ushi (牛) and te (手) look similar, people began to call the burial mound in Ushinotsuka "Tezuka," which literally means "mound of an arm." Eventually, people began to believe that Tezuka was the burial mound for the demon's arm.

## 6 Conclusion—Ibaraki-doji loved by citizens—

Today, Ibaraki-doji has become a lovable mascot of Ibaraki City, his birthplace. You can see the mascots in various places across the city. The demon has become so popular that the Ibaraki City Cultural and Childcare Complex has adopted “Oni-kuru,” which means “a demon is coming,” as its nickname. Many citizens love the demon mascots; some even put masks on them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

