

## **A Study of *Twilight Crane* by Kinoshita Junji**

Context: This study was developed for the literature course, “The History and Literature of the Theatre,” offered fall semesters in the English department at the Alliance Academy, Quito, Ecuador. The course objectives include a study of the development of theater from the classical era in Greece to the modern American stage. The course seeks to encourage students to become more knowledgeable members of the audience as well as to prepare future actors with a more adequate understanding of the history of theatre. Works studied in the course include *Oedipus the King*, *Everyman*, *The Second Shepherd’s Play*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Macbeth*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *A Doll’s House*, *Our Town*, *The Matchmaker*, and *The Crucible*.

This study includes the following materials:

1. A student handout with an overview of the history of Japanese theatre and a brief introduction to Kinoshita Junji.
2. A student handout to guide a study of traditional Japanese theatre arts on the Internet
3. A response sheet for the study of traditional Japanese theatre arts on the Internet
4. A student handout to guide the discussion of *Twilight Crane*
5. A response sheet for the discussion of *Twilight Crane*
6. A copy of the folk tale “The Crane Wife”: the woodcutter version
7. A copy of the folk tale “The Crane Wife”: the young man version
8. A resource list

## **An Overview of the History of Japanese Theatre**

Japan has a long and rich tradition of theatrical arts. Several types of plays are unique to Japanese theatre: Noh, kabuki, kyogen, and bunraku. In addition to these classical Japanese forms, modern Japanese theatre has developed through the influence of foreign plays and musicals which are performed in Japanese translation. Plays by Shakespeare as well as Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov and Shaw have been significant in the development of Japanese theatre in the modern era. Additionally, great directors of the early twentieth century such as Meyerhold, Brecht, Reinhardt and Copeau studied the Japanese theatre of Noh and kabuki to expand their skills and technique for theatrical productions in Europe.

The traditional genres of Japanese theatre include **Noh**, **Kyogen**, **Kabuki** and **Bunraku**.

**Noh** is the oldest of these forms of theatre, developing by the twelfth century. Noh combines elements of drama, dance, music, and poetry into a single stage art. Noh actors often perform wearing special masks which represent particular emotions. Noh actors use their visual appearance and pantomime movements to “suggest” rather than “show” the story of the drama, as would be more familiar in the plays of Western narratives. Traditional Noh performances would include one play from each of the following types of Noh stories:

1. the “*kami*” (god) play: presents a sacred story of a Shinto shrine
2. the “*shura mono*” (fighting) play: presents a story of warriors
3. the “*kazura mono*” (wig) play: presents a female protagonist

4. the “*gendai mono*” (present-day) play or the “*kyojo mono*” (mad-woman) play:  
presents either a contemporary, rather than legendary, story or the story of a woman who becomes insane because of the loss of a child or a lover
5. the “*kiri*” (final) play: presents supernatural beings, monsters, or strange beasts in the story

Noh plays are deliberately stylized with elaborate, colorful costumes and reject conventions of “realistic” drama. The texts contain multi-layered allusions to classical Japanese poetry. Noh theatre was a theatre of the shogan’s court.

**Kyogen** is the comic counterpoint to the serious Noh plays. Kyogen plays developed as light-hearted interludes alternating between the performances of the five types of Noh plays. Kyogen emphasizes dialogue. The language of Kyogen is from the second half of the sixteenth century, at the time of its development, and is performed in the ordinary dress of that era. Kyogen pieces are more lively and shorter than Noh dramas. Kyogen actors generally perform without masks.

**Kabuki** is a theatre of the spectacular and the eccentric, employing flamboyant costumes, elaborate make-up and exaggerated body movements. Kabuki plays present Buddhist themes of retributive justice and the impermanence of the world as well as Confucian values of duty and filial piety. Kabuki developed as an alternative entertainment for the commoners (peasants, artisans, and merchants) at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Because of the rigid social hierarchies of that era, the rising merchant class was excluded from the ruling samuri class which patronized the aristocratic Noh theatre. The ruling shogunate banned kabuki from depicting contemporary events on stage; therefore, kabuki developed a tradition called *mitate* or “double

meaning,” which changed the names of contemporary characters and set the action of the plays in the remote past. Another method to avoid censorship was the use of *yatsushi* or “dual identity.” A major character would appear on stage in disguise at first and reveal his true identity at the climax of the play. A characteristic of the performance of kabuki is the use of *mie*, a moment when the principal actor assumes a statuesque pose which briefly pauses the action of the play. Although kabuki originated in the performances of a Shinto priestess and her company of mostly women, in 1629 the government closed all kabuki theatres; when these theatres reopened, only men were allowed to perform any roles, male or female. Male impersonators known as *onnagata* portray all female parts in kabuki plays—a tradition that largely continues today.

**Bunraku** is a puppet theatre that developed at the same time as kabuki. The puppets are about one meter tall and are handled by puppeteers who appear on stage with the puppets, although the dramatic convention is that the audience does not notice the puppeteers. Traditional Japanese musical instruments accompany the performance of bunraku plays. The stories of bunraku and kabuki plays are similar; indeed the two types of dramas became such rivals for the attention of the audiences that in the eighteenth century some felt that the kabuki tradition would die away. In 1683, Monzaemon Chikamatsu, often called the "Shakespeare of Japan," left writing for kabuki theatre to give his attention to bunraku which allowed greater appreciation for the playwright's genius with language. A single narrator recites all the dialogue for each of the puppets during the performance.

**Twilight Crane:** *Twilight Crane* was first performed in Osaka in 1949 with the actress Yasue Yamamoto in the leading role. The play received public and official acclaim, and Kinoshita was awarded the Mainichi Press Drama Prize for his work, whilst in 1950 Miss Yamamoto received the Ministry of Education prize for her acting as Tsu. A major performance was stage at one of the leading Tokyo theaters in 1952, where it was received with even greater enthusiasm than before. (A.C.S, *Playbook: Five Plays for a New Theatre*. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1956, 132)

Kinoshita Junji used both the traditional forms of Japanese theatre as well as the modern influence of foreign theatre for the development of his play *Twilight Crane* in 1949. Kinoshita Junji was a senior dramatist of the post-World War II development of modern Japanese drama, along with dramatists Kishida Kunio and Tanaka Chikao.

Kinoshita describes the difference between traditional Japanese drama and the foreign dramatic arts:

*“There is a great difference in the density of writing in the two forms. In the case of European drama, the speeches are usually written with an ample thread of logical psychology running through them. But in the case of kabuki, there are a great many leaps of a psychological and logical nature within the speaker. It is the art of the actor which create a theatre where such leaps can give satisfaction. And any art that finds such elements essential will naturally be filled with the unexplainable and the surprising”*

(J. Thomas Rimer, *Towards a Modern Japanese Theatre: Kishida Kunio*,  
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, 9).

His play *Twilight Crane* occupies a place in modern Japanese theatre similar to that which Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* has for American audiences.

### **A Study of Japanese Theatre Arts on the Internet**

To understand the theatrical context out of which Kinoshita Junji wrote *Twilight Crane*, it is useful to have greater understanding of the world of Japanese theatre.

As a small group, visit one of the Internet sites for **Noh**, **Kabuki** or **Bunraku** and write down the answers to the questions for that type of theatre. Prepare to give an oral report to the class on your initial impressions of the type of Japanese theatre that your group explores. All of these sites may be found through <[www.japan-guide.com](http://www.japan-guide.com)> by clicking on the "Arts and Crafts" link found there and selecting type of play from the menu.

## **Noh**

This site “Background to Noh-Kyogen” will provide most of the information needing to answer the following questions: < [www.ijnet.or.jp/NOH-KYOGEN/english/english.html](http://www.ijnet.or.jp/NOH-KYOGEN/english/english.html)>.

This site “Noh and Kyogen” provides a synopsis and highlights of a number of Noh plays, <[www.kt.rim.or.jp/~snoo/pieceE.html](http://www.kt.rim.or.jp/~snoo/pieceE.html)>, and provides additional history about this type of theatre.

These sites may also be accessed from the Japan Guide site: <[japan-guide.com/e/e2091.html](http://japan-guide.com/e/e2091.html)>

1. What role did Kannami and his son Zeami play in the development of Noh theatre?
2. What is the main character of a Noh play called?
3. What is the function of the secondary character of a Noh play and what is the character called?
4. What four instruments provide the accompaniment to the Noh plays?
5. What is the function of the Noh mask and which characters will wear a mask in a Noh play?
6. How many designated areas, stations, or entrances exist on the stage of the Noh theatre?
7. Which of the Noh plays would you be most interested in watching?

## **Kabuki**

Visit the site “Ichimura Manjiro Presents Kabuki for Everyone” at

<[www.fix.co.jp/kabuki/kabuki.html](http://www.fix.co.jp/kabuki/kabuki.html)> and use it to answer the following questions about kabuki.

This site may also be accessed from the Japan Guide site: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2090.html>

1. What is the purpose of kabuki make-up?
2. What is the name and time period for the era referred to as “the renaissance” of the culture of the townspeople which encouraged the development of kabuki?
3. Describe the characteristics of the "aragoto” style and characters of kabuki?
4. Describe the characteristics of the “wagoto” style and characters of kabuki.
5. How long has Ichimura Manjiro been performing as a kabuki actor?
6. Explain which of the three kabuki plays presented on this site, *Fuji Musume* (which has a Quicktime clip of kabuki movement), *The Zen Substitute*, or *Ichiriki Teahouse* you would be most interested in seeing.



## **Bunraku**

Visit the site <[osaka.yomiuri.co.jp/bunraku/english/](http://osaka.yomiuri.co.jp/bunraku/english/)> and <[www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/definitions/Bunraku.hist.html](http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/definitions/Bunraku.hist.html)> to answer the following questions about bunraku.

Both of these sites may be accessed from the Japan Guide site: <[www.japan-guide.com/e/e2092.html](http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2092.html)>

1. From what narrative tradition did bunraku plays develop?
2. When were most of the plays in the bunraku repertoire written?
3. What is a *shamisen* and how does the *shamisen* accompanist contribute to the *bunraku* performance?
4. What are the responsibilities of each of the puppeteers?
5. What is the term for the puppet heads used in bunraku theatre?
6. What are two contributions of Chikamatu Monzaemon to the development of bunraku?
7. From the gallery of traditional puppet heads, explain which of the puppet heads do you find most realistic in its depiction of human emotions and explain which head you find most comic?

## A Study of Japanese Theatre Arts on the Internet: Responses

To understand the theatrical context out of which Kinoshita Junji wrote *Twilight Crane*, it is useful to have a greater understanding of the world of Japanese theatre.

As a small group, visit one of the Internet sites for **Noh**, **Kabuki** or **Bunraku** and write down the answers to the questions for that type of theatre. Prepare to give an oral report to the class on your initial impressions of the type of Japanese theatre that your group explores. All of these sites may be found through <[www.japan-guide.com](http://www.japan-guide.com)> by clicking on the “Arts and Crafts” link found there and selecting type of play from the menu.

### Noh

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1. What role did Kan'ami and his son Zeami play in the development of Noh theatre?

Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443) and his father Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333-84) wrote many of the beautiful and exemplary Noh texts, including "Matsukaze" by Kan'ami and "Takasago" by Zeami. Zeami also formulated the principles of the Noh theatre that

guided its performers for many centuries, giving details on how the art should be composed, acted, directed, taught, and produced.

2. What is the main character of a Noh play called?

The main character of a Noh play is called the *shite*.

3. What is the function of the secondary character of a Noh play and what is the character called?

The secondary actor is called the *waki*. The *waki* is often a travelling priest whose questioning of the main character is important in developing the story line.

4. What four instruments provide the accompaniment to the Noh plays?

The instruments consist of a transverse flute (*nohkan*), an hourglass-shaped drum held at the shoulder (*kotsuzumi*), a slightly larger hourglass-shaped drum placed on the lap (*okawa* or *otsuzumi*), and a barrel-shaped drum placed on a small floor stand and played with two sticks (*taiko*).

5. What is the function of the Noh mask and which characters will wear a mask in a Noh play?

These masks are considered objects of superb beauty as well as powerful means of expression. Any character being portrayed which is not a middle-aged man living in the present will wear a mask. Therefore all characters portraying women and old men wear masks as well as supernatural beings such as ghosts, deities, demons, and divine beasts.

6. How many designated areas, stations, or entrances exist on the stage of the Noh theatre?

There are seventeen places noted for the traditional Noh stage.

7. Which of the Noh plays would you be most interested in watching?

Answers will vary from student group to student group, depending on individual preferences.

## **Kabuki**

Visit the site “Ichimura Manjiro Presents Kabuki for Everyone” at

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This site may also be accessed from the Japan Guide site: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2090.html>

1. What is the purpose of kabuki make-up?

The make-up is used to provide an outer expression of the heart; to present the emotional realities of the character.

2. What is the name and time period for the era referred to as “the renaissance” of the culture of the townspeople which encouraged the development of kabuki?

The Genroku period in the last quarter of the 17th century is referred to as a time of renaissance in the arts for the commoners of the merchant and artisan class and saw the development of classical kabuki.

3. Describe the characteristics of the "*aragoto*" style and characters of kabuki?

It is the “rough” style, a bombastic, exaggerated style of acting was often used for characters of superhuman strength. The “*aragoto*” characters had a strong sense of justice and fought against strong villains that advanced their own causes at the cost of those too weak to protect themselves

4. Describe the characteristics of the “*wagoto*” style and characters of kabuki.

It is the “soft” style, with greater refinement and "*wagoto*" characters were often the sons of rich merchants that had fallen in love with beautiful courtesans. Having spent vast amounts of money to visit their lovers, they would be disowned by their families and forced to wear a kimono made of paper.

5. How long has Ichimura Manjiro been performing as a kabuki actor?

He has performed since 1955. He was born in 1949 so he was only a six-year-old child when he began his apprenticeship to this art.

6. Explain which of the three kabuki plays presented on this site, *Fuji Musume* (which has a Quicktime clip of kabuki movement), *The Zen Substitute*, or *Ichiriki Teahouse* you would be most interested in seeing.

Answers will vary from student group to student group, depending on individual preferences.

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1. From what narrative tradition did bunraku plays develop?

Joruri, the stylized narrative form upon which bunraku is based, is thought to have had its beginnings in the 15th century, when blind itinerate entertainers recited the Heike Story to lute (*biwa*) accompaniment.

2. When were most of the plays in the bunraku repertoire written?

Most of these plays date from the eighteenth century.

3. What is a *shamisen* and how does the *shamisen* accompanist contribute to the bunraku performance?

The shamisen is a traditional three-stringed Japanese instrument. The shamisen accompanist plays the musical background and adds the sound effects for the story.

4. What are the responsibilities of each of the puppeteers?

The chief manipulator holds the puppet from the back with his left hand by a special grip in the figure's chest and directs the puppet's right arm with his right hand. The second operator moves the left hand and the third, the legs. As a female doll has no legs as a rule, the third operator moves its skirt in such a way as to create an illusion of moving legs.

5. What is the term for the puppet heads used in bunraku theatre?

The term is *kashira*.

6. What are two contributions of Chikamatu Monzaemon to the development of bunraku?

He added the human elements to the fantastical elements of the older tales. He also created *sewamono*, or plays about the merchant class.

7. From the gallery of traditional puppet heads, explain which of the puppet heads do you find most realistic in its depiction of human emotions and explain which head you find most comic?

Answers will vary from student group to student group, depending on individual preferences.

## Discussion Questions on the Development of *Twilight Crane*

One way of developing a play is to adapt a previously existing story in a theatrical form.

William Shakespeare took various stories from sources and developed them into his plays. His *Romeo and Juliet* comes from his adaptation of a long narrative poem, “The Tragically Historye of Romeus and Iulieta.” He transmutes the crude Elizabethan ballad, “A Merry Jest of Shrewd and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel’s Skin for Her Good Behavior” into his play *The Taming of the Shrew*. In a similar fashion, Kinoshita Junji takes a familiar Japanese folk tale and transforms it with his dramatic vision into *Twilight Crane*. The story *Tsuru no Ongaeshi*, like most folktales, exists in multiple versions. In Japan there are 245 stories of a crane helped or saved by a man. By reading several of these tellings along with Kinoshita’s play, you will be able to make comparisons between the various versions as one method of understanding Kinoshita’s interpretation of the meaning of the folktale. \*["Morel" happens to be the name of an old lame plough horse in the ballad whose skin is used to cover the wife’s wounds from her beating. There is no horse skin in Shakespeare’s play nor does his husband physically beat the wife. The point is that Shakespeare transformed the source materials in his dramatic adaptations.]

After reading the two retellings and *Twilight Crane*, answer the following questions to prepare for a discussion of the play in class. The subtitles were arbitrarily assigned to the two versions of the folk tale: “The Crane Wife and the Young Man” and “The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker.” Both versions are translated from the Japanese title *Tsuru No Ongaeshi* as “The Crane Wife.” *Tsuru* is the word for “crane.” *Ongaeshi* literally means "the obligation to repay a kindness," a debt of honor which is not taken lightly in Japan.



1. What does each version of the crane story present as the character and profession or social status of the man?
2. How does the man happen to rescue the crane in each version?
3. What is the wife's reason for weaving the cloth for her husband?
4. How does the man's character change after the wife weaves the cloth?
5. What prompts the man to violate the wife's request never to view her weaving the cloth?
6. Compare the similarities and differences between the endings of the three versions.
7. How does Kinoshita change the narrative pattern of the folktale in his retelling?
8. What is the significance of beginning the drama with the children and their request to play?
9. With what lines does Kinoshita gradually reveal to the audience that Tsu truly is a crane wife?
10. With whom does Tsu identify Sodo and Unzu?
11. What motivates Sodo and Unzu to speak with Yohyo to get him on their side of the business deal?

12. How does Kinoshita show that Unzu's conscience bothers him?
  
13. What game that the children play comes to symbolize Tsu's relationship with her husband as he changes?
  
14. What does Kinoshita's choice of the season of the year for the setting of the play symbolically suggest?
  
15. What does Kinoshita's choice to allow the children to see the crane flying away first symbolically suggest?
  
16. How does Kinoshita incorporate the Japanese tradition of musical accompaniment in his play?
  
17. How do Kinoshita's stage directions reflect on the traditions of Noh or kabuki theatre?
  
18. What do you believe is Kinoshita's interpretation of the folk tale? How does the lesson of Kinoshita's version go beyond the traditional interpretation of a theme of ingratitude, a story reinforcing the traditional Confucian/Taoist value of duty?

Bonus: To what other stories or tales such as classical Greek myths would you compare the tale of "The Crane Wife?"

## Responses & Class Discussion Guidelines: *Twilight Crane*

1. What does each version of the crane story present as the character and profession or social status of the man?

The Crane Wife and the Young Man: The young man is a kind-hearted, poor anonymous farmer who lives alone.

The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker: The anonymous character is a kindly charcoal maker who lives in a hut several miles from the town. Within the past two years, he has lost his mother.

*Twilight Crane*: Kinoshita gives the man a name, but leaves his profession anonymous, other than to note that Yohyo has been known as a “hard worker,” although he also has a reputation as a somewhat simple and foolish fellow. He has a childlike nature and the capacity for deep love, as suggested by his relationship to both the children and Tsu, prior to the opening of the story. Because of Kinoshita’s development of greed and materialism as a thematic concern, the lack of a profession creates a kind of “Everyman” quality to this character, suggesting that anyone is capable of making the same error.

2. How does the man happen to rescue the crane in each version?

The Crane Wife and the Young Man: While the young man is working, the brilliant white crane crashes to the ground at his feet with an arrow through one wing.

The young man pulls the arrow out, cleans the wound and allows the bird to return to the air.

The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker: While on his way home with a load of wood, the charcoal maker hears the sounds of the bird in distress. He discovers the crane trapped in a snare on the pond. He makes several attempts to set it free before he cuts through the root holding the snare and the crane flies free. He loses his hat in the process.

*Twilight Crane:* Yohyo tells the story to Unzu and Sodo that he once pulled an arrow out of the back of a crane and let it fly away, demonstrating a compassionate heart towards living things in distress. But this action occurs prior to the story of the play.

3. What is the wife's reason for weaving the cloth for her husband?

The Crane Wife and the Young Man: The motivation appears to be generosity. In this version, the beautiful woman appears at his home with a small sack of rice that provides an inexhaustible supply of food. The narrative implies that at some later point the woman requests he build her a weaving room.

The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker: In this version, the woman requests permission to use the loom in the storage room the morning after her arrival. It appears to be part of her grateful response to his rescue.

*Twilight Crane:* From the conversation of Unzu and Sodo, it is apparent that Tsu has been making cloth for Yohyo for some time. Tsu's choice to weave the cloth grew out of the childlike joy that Yohyo had when he first saw it, rather than for its monetary value, reinforcing the tension between the themes of self-sacrificial love and greed that Kinoshita develops.

4. How does the man's character change after the wife weaves the cloth?

The Crane Wife and the Young Man: There is little change. If anything, he reveals the impatience of his character, perhaps consistent with being a young man, in allowing his curiosity to overcome his word.

The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker: In this version there appears to be a growing concern from the man that his wife is overworking herself. He insists that she stay with him after the evening meal and he rubs her shoulders and arms. He even returns to his home early, resolved to ask the choja for more time for his wife to complete the second roll.

*Twilight Crane:* Kinoshita presents the greatest change in character in Yohyo. Prompted by Sodo and Unzu, Yohyo threatens to leave Tsu if she does not weave. He becomes very self-centered, claiming that she has is the one who has become cross, that he does not like her any longer. Their mutual love is being replaced by his desire for more money and the opportunities that money promises.

5. What prompts the man to violate the wife's request never to view her weaving the cloth?

The Crane Wife and the Young Man: In this version after seven days of waiting, the young man's curiosity overcomes his pledge to not observe his wife. He wonders where she could get the thread for weaving when it is apparent that she has none.

The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker: His concern precipitates the calamity. He does hear the clatter of the loom when he returns. He calls to her, but she does not answer so he slides open the door of the storage room where she works and discovers the crane collapsed on the loom.

*Twilight Crane:* The violation comes after Unzu tells him that there is a crane in the weaving room. Yohyo is conscious of his promise to Tsu never to watch her weave, and he calls to her, but she does not respond. Finally he looks. Alarmed at seeing the crane and wanting to find his wife, he goes off in a distracted search for Tsu that lasts an entire day.

6. Compare the similarities and differences between the endings of the three versions.

*The Crane Wife and the Young Man:* The crane tells the young man that she must now leave because he has seen her in her true form. She hands him the cloth to remember her by and leaves.

*The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker:* She announces that she must leave because he has seen her true form. He responds that his wife is her true form. She asks that he wait outside where the sun is setting. He does and turns to see a crane flying away which drops as a final momento the beautiful comb he bought for her.

*Twilight Crane:* After his day of searching for Tsu, Yohyo is discovered finally by Sodo and Unzu face down in the snow, far from home. As they return him to his home, Tsu appears with two final pieces of cloth. His confession of his search for her reveals that he has seen the crane form. She leaves, lamenting the loss of their love and her separation from Yohyo forever. The children return looking for Tsu as at the opening of the play. A child is the first to see the form of the crane flying away. Sodo thinks only of the potential sale of the cloth while Yohyo stumbles after the now distant crane, clutching the cloth that represents her love for him.

All three end with the departure of the crane. In each case, there is a final moment of remembrance left behind. In the folktales, the man is alone. But Kinoshita's final stage image includes the three men and the chorus of children. Because of the greater emotional intensity of Yohyo's search for Tsu, imagining that he has lost her already, her actual departure has greater dramatic effect. It emphasizes the hollowness of materialism and the emptiness of greed against the purity of self-sacrificial love. Kinoshita presents the purity and innocence of the children in contrast to the failure of the adult world to keep faith.

7. How does Kinoshita change the narrative pattern of the folktale in his retelling?

Kinoshita begins with the man and woman already together. The story of her appearance, their marriage, and the gift of the marvelous cloth is related in several moments of dialogue throughout the story. By beginning the story near its conclusion, Kinoshita establishes the sense of happiness which Yohyo and Tsu have shared for some time. The introduction of the greedy friends seeking more cloth all the while planning to cheat Yohyo heightens the theme of materialism and selfishness or self-centeredness which contrasts with the theme of selfless love given by Tsu.

8. What is the significance of beginning the drama with the children and their request to play?

The children become symbols of the innocence and joy that Yohyo will lose by the end of the play. That Tsu goes off with her husband and the children to play suggests that this shared innocent joy and love surpasses even the making of the cloth as an emblem of their love.

9. With what lines does Kinoshita gradually reveal to the audience that Tsu truly is a crane wife?

Unzu's second line reveals that she suddenly appeared and brought wealth to Yohyo, as in the folk tale. Sodo then picks up a feather on the floor of the weaving room before Tsu discovers them. Her behavior causes Sodo to remark that "she looked just like a bird." He mentions the "certain story about a crane who took a liking to a man" and mentions the mysterious story of another villager who spied a woman transforming into a crane in a mountain pool. Unzu's fear that his dishonest financial treatment of Yohyo will be discovered establishes his belief that Tsu is the supernatural crane. Sodo further confirms the story by asking Yohyo if he ever helped a crane. When Tsu plays with the children, the final game selected "bird in the cage" suggests symbolic cage of materialism and greed that now begins to surround her. Her soliloquy reveals that she is the crane. Her soliloquy also touches on the familiar Buddhist theme of the impermanence of things as she laments the changes that come to their love as Yohyo listens to the lies of greed.

10. With whom does Tsu identify Sodo and Unzu?

Tsu calls them people "whose words I cannot understand" who are the equivalent of those who "once wounded me with an arrow." She knows that Yohyo is becoming like them when she cannot hear his demands for more cloth to get more money.

11. What motivates Sodo and Unzu to speak with Yohyo to get him on their side of the business deal?

Unzu's fear that his dishonest dealings will be discovered either by Yohyo or his wife causes them to seek to distract Yohyo with the promise of greater wealth.



12. How does Kinoshita show that Unzu's conscience bothers him?

Unzu tells Yohyo that the cloth will sell for a thousand ryo before Sodo interrupts and reduces it to "hundreds."

13. What game that the children play comes to symbolize Tsu's relationship with her husband as he changes?

The children encircle her to play "bird in the cage," symbolic of the captivity of materialism that can destroy pure love.

14. What does Kinoshita's choice of the season of the year for the setting of the play symbolically suggest?

The winter season suggests that their love is doomed and will not endure till the spring.

15. What does Kinoshita's choice to allow the children to see the crane flying away first symbolically suggest?

Their vision has been unspoiled by the corruption of the adult world's materialism.

16. How does Kinoshita incorporate the Japanese tradition of musical accompaniment in his play?

The children's songs may have an echo of the tradition of the *shamisen* accompanist in *bunraku*, the chorus of eight persons from the Noh tradition, or the *nagauta* and *yoruri* chant from the kabuki plays.

17. How do Kinoshita's stage directions and devices reflect the traditions of Noh or kabuki theatre?

The birdlike stance that Tsu assumes as she is bombarded with the greedy requests that she finds impossible to hear may suggest the stylized movement of Noh or kabuki actors. The device of the poem during Yohyo's frantic search for Tsu may reflect the *jiutai* choral elements of Noh dramas. One of the distinctly modern theatrical choices is that the role of Tsu has been played by a female actor rather than the male impersonators of traditional Japanese theatre.

18. What do you believe is Kinoshita's interpretation of the folk tale? How does the lesson of Kinoshita's version go beyond the traditional interpretation of a theme of ingratitude, a story reinforcing the traditional Confucian/Taoist value of duty?

Kinoshita interprets the folk tale as more than merely the loss of a good through disobedience or a breaking of trust as found in the traditional tellings. Kinoshita intensifies the conflict that selfishness of greed, materialism and even the adult human world have with the selflessness and innocence of love. Tsu's wish that the two of them might continue quietly and peacefully "in the middle of a wide countryside working together and playing with the children" is doomed by that selfish demand for more.

Bonus: To what other stories or tales such as classical Greek myths would you compare the tale of "The Crane Wife"?

Possible parallels to "The Crane Wife" could include parts of the Cupid and Psyche myth as the Psyche's disobedience and the hint of "form-changing" parallels the disobedience

of the man in this story. The Orpheus and Eurydice myth touches on the loss of the beloved through disobedience. Even John Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* captures some of the longing for an idealized life that the Crane Wife captures and suggests values higher than materialism. Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* also concludes with a sense of not having truly appreciated what one has until it is lost and too late as does *Twilight Crane*. It is only when Emily returns as child-adult that she views with wonder what she truly had and cannot now recover.

## **The Crane Wife**

### **The Crane Wife and the Charcoal Maker version**

The man was walking home with a load of wood late in the afternoon on a sunny, early winter day. He liked these days, with snow on the ground but none on the trees -- it was easy to spot the trees and logs that were dry enough to cut and hard enough to make good coals. Even so, his feet were cold and he was happy to be near home. Perhaps the farmers couldn't afford to eat their own rice, but he couldn't remember a charcoal maker spending the night with cold feet.

As he approached the edge of Three-Mile Pond (three miles from town, but only five minutes from his home, maybe eight minutes in the snow) he heard a terrific beating sound accompanied by thin wails. It was a crane, caught in a bit of string some fool had set out to snare a duck. By morning the crane would have beaten itself to death without being of any use to the duck hunter. The man put down his pack, pulled out his knife, and approached the crane with what he considered soothing words. The crane was not soothed and the footing was not good -- after two or three hard wing strokes across his face the man retreated to his pack and got his short saw. A few strokes with that cut through the root around which the snare was looped. In a moment the crane was gone and the man was sitting in the snow with cold feet and cold hands. His hat seemed to be in the pond.

But in eight minutes he was home, and in fifteen his wood was put away and the remains of the morning's fire were hot enough to begin warming his hands and feet and the miso soup which,

with some dried daikon, would be his supper. In fact, he was tired from his struggle with the crane, or perhaps from the day's work, and once warmed he took a short nap.

The sky outside was quite dark by the time he was ready to eat. That was when he heard a knock at the door. It continued, quietly but steadily, until he opened the door to find a young lady he had never seen in town or elsewhere. "I'm so sorry to trouble you when you are busy. I do not know this area well, and I have no place to stay tonight." The man nodded, and closed the door behind her. She crossed to the raised mat area, slipped out of her sandals to step up and, naturally, knelt by the fire to warm her hands. He quickly found a cushion and, although he was not accustomed to plates, he pulled two plates and an extra bowl from the storage room. Ten days earlier he had carried a large load of charcoal into town to sell, and so he did have a little rice and some better pickles he planned to save for the New Year holiday, but his guest seemed happy with the hot miso soup and daikon. In any case, he did not attempt to impress or embarrass her with a feast.

He could not guess her age, except that she was a decade or more younger than himself. And he could see that she was not one to visit a charcoal burner's hut -- in a few minutes he had begun to think of his home as a hut -- except in a grave emergency. She spoke so politely that he could not understand everything she said. Certainly, when he asked where she had come from, the answer was more polite than informative. He did not follow up with questions about her destination. But there were no long silences; as she had journeyed up the river valley, she had been impressed, like himself, by the sun on the snow and the beauty of the pines that could be seen clearly and

individually far across the valley. And she commiserated with the death of his mother two springs ago -- apparently her own parents had passed away not too much earlier.

In fact, it was time for bed before he knew it. This was another embarrassing moment. He spread out his futon for her and pushed aside her protests, while he found something to cover himself with on the other side of the smoldering coals. Then he slept soundly.

He did not awake until sunrise. By that time she had revived the fire and made more miso soup, even taking the time to find mushrooms to give it more substance. After breakfast he offered her directions, and even to walk with her as far as the town.

"This is difficult to say, but I have nowhere to go, and no home to return to. It is an imposition-- a great inconvenience-- I would be very grateful to be able to stay here with you."

And so they were man and wife. That evening he got out the small amount of rice and wine he had been saving and celebrated properly.

She had another request the following morning as he prepared to leave for the forest.

"Your mother's loom is in the storage room. May I use it to learn to weave?"

"Certainly. I'll pull it out where there is space to work. There is not much yarn, but I'll buy more when the next load of charcoal is ready."

"No. Let me work in the storage room. I request that you never come in while I am working."

"Why not?"

"It is my request."

"All right-- I won't"

"Never. It is my request."

The man stacked some boxes to make more space around the loom and then went looking for wood. In three more days the kiln was full, and he started the burn. After several more days, the charcoal was cooled and packed up ready to take into town.

When he was ready to leave, his wife handed him a roll of cloth, wrapped in strong, coarse paper. She asked him to sell it in town and to buy more yarn and some rice if there was money enough for that. He bore his load the two miles into town with careful steps, but a light heart. Once in town he unloaded the bales of charcoal and then sat at the edge of the shop office while the choja counted out some coins. Receiving them, he pulled out the coarse paper bundle.

"My wife is learning to weave. Would this cloth be of use to you?" The choja raised his eyebrows at the word "wife," and raised them higher when the paper was removed and a little of

the cloth was unrolled. The man saw immediately that what he had brought was not the dark blue or grey stuff the people of the town wore and did not use the small, regular patterns his mother had always woven. It was not bright, but the surface of the cloth had a gleam that was almost aglow, and a pattern of pines in the mist. It could not be used for snow trousers or a light robe for a summer evening, but would have to be made into a robe for a fine lady. He dropped his eyes and sipped tea with a mixture of disappointment and amazement.

"I don't know where you got this or what it is worth. It is not cloth for this town, but I'll try to find a buyer. Take this and come back in ten days." The choja started to hand him a gold coin, but realized none of the shops would be able to make change and gave him a bundle of silver instead. And he congratulated the man on his marriage.

The man bought yarn and rice as instructed, and also various roots, persimmons and pickles, and even two small fish. He also bought a comb, carved from a light-colored, close-grained wood with a sweet fragrance, for his wife's long black hair. Then he hurried home, light-hearted again.

Each day when he returned from gathering wood, he would unload his burden and stack the wood in the kiln, then open the door and announce his return. The clacking of the loom would stop, and his wife would rush out to welcome him back. After eating, they would sharpen tools and mend clothes, while he told stories of his boyhood and of the forest, and she told fantastic stories of strange things across the sea or in far parts of Japan. Then they would spread out his thin futon and get a night's rest.



On the tenth day the man's kiln was not yet full or ready to burn, so he walked into town unburdened. The choja offered him a sweet cake with his tea, then gave the man three more pieces of gold. He had taken the cloth to the castle and presented it to the lord, and he asked the man to bring another roll in four days, if possible.

His wife was weaving, as usual, when he returned. On hearing the choja's request, she said she was only halfway through the second roll. Immediately after cleaning up the evening meal, she retired to the storage room with a light, and he listened to the steady swish and clack of the loom until it was time to retire.

Again the next day, she entered the storage room as soon as the morning meal -- miso soup and dried daikon again -- was completed, and in the evening she asked him to prepare the soup so that she could continue working. He did so, but it was clear that the loom was not moving with its earlier steady rhythm. He insisted that she stay with him after the meal, and he rubbed her shoulders and arms until she fell asleep.

Still, she was up early the next day, and already working the loom when he awoke to find some hot rice gruel waiting for him. During the morning he decided that she should wait another ten or twenty days before starting a third roll, and that afternoon he returned early, resolved to ask the choja for more time to finish the second roll. But the loom was silent when he entered the house, and there was no reply when he called out that he had returned. Now he was seriously concerned, and hurriedly opened the sliding door to the storage room.

A finished roll of gleaming brocade, more lovely than the first with a lively pattern of sparrows in bamboo, lay on the floor. But his wife was nowhere to be seen -- in her place an exhausted crane lay sprawled across the loom, its breast and sides plucked nearly bare of the feathers that gave that now gave the roll of cloth its luster. He immediately slid the door shut. As he did, he heard a wail much more mournful than those he heard as he had cut through the root at the side of the pond. A moment later his wife called to him through the door.

"You must never look at me while I am weaving."

"I'm sorry. I was afraid you were hurt."

"I am sorry too. You have seen my true form. Now we must part."

"No! Your true form is my wife. I can't let you go."

"Please wait outside."

"You can't leave me now!"

"Please wait outside. It is my request."

The man stood outside in the snow, looking out across the valley where the setting sun had reddened the sky. In a few minutes he heard the flap of wings behind him and looked back to see

the crane rising above the treetops. But a moment later it swooped down slightly and dropped something from its beak to the cleared area in front of the house, not far from where he stood. The man took a few steps, stooped over, and picked up a comb, carved from a light-colored, close-grained wood with a sweet fragrance, that would always remind him of his wife's long black hair.

The kiln was not quite full, but close enough. He started it burning, then went inside to stare at the ash-covered coals, which were waiting to be revived to warm his hands and heat his evening meal.

Notes: *There is no real justification for translating the title of the story as "The Crane Wife." Think of it as a name rather than a translation. The story is frequently told of an elderly couple rather than a single man as here. Tsuru no Ongaeshi has a meaning more like "The Crane's Repayment for Kindness Received." I don't think there are any other mysteries here -- futon are the warm (and minimally soft) padded things one sleeps on and under (there are two). Daikon is a large white root -- literally a "big radish," but with no bite and suited to preparation in many ways. Miso is, well, fermented bean paste, but much better. And the choja is the town's one rich man. That gives him some political and judicial responsibilities, and considerable social responsibilities. But his main job is to get richer at a rate that will not seem oppressive to the rest of the town and surrounding villages.*

From the website: <[home.clara.net/wabei/xlation/quilt/crane.htm](http://home.clara.net/wabei/xlation/quilt/crane.htm)>

## **Tsuru No Ongaeshi**

### **The Crane Wife and the Young Man version**

Long, long ago in a far off land there lived a young man. One day, while working on his farm, a brilliant white crane came swooping down and crashed to the ground at his feet. The man noticed an arrow pierced through one of its wings. Taking pity on the crane, he pulled out the arrow and cleaned the wound. Thanks to his care the bird was soon able to fly again. The young man sent the crane back to the sky, saying, "Be careful to avoid hunters." The crane circled three times over his head, let out a cry as if in thanks, and then flew away.

As the day grew dark the young man made his way home. When he arrived, he was surprised by the sight of a beautiful woman whom he had never seen before standing at the doorway.

"Welcome home. I am your wife," said the woman. The young man was surprised and said, "I am very poor, and cannot support you." The woman answered, pointing to a small sack, "Don't worry, I have plenty of rice," and began preparing dinner. The young man was puzzled, but the two began a happy life together. And the rice sack, mysteriously, remained full always.

One day the wife asked the young man to build her a weaving room. When it was completed, she said, "You must promise never to peek inside." With that, she shut herself up in the room. The young man waited patiently for her to come out. Finally, after seven days, the sound of the loom stopped and his wife, who had become very thin, stepped out of the room holding the most beautiful cloth he had ever seen. "Take this cloth to the marketplace and it will sell for a high

price," said the wife. The next day the young man brought it to town and, just as she said, it sold for many coins. Happy, he returned home.

The wife then returned to the room and resumed weaving. Curiosity began to overtake the man, who wondered, "How can she weave such beautiful cloth with no thread?" Soon he could stand it no longer and, desperate to know his wife's secret, peeked into the room. To his great shock, his wife was gone. Instead, a crane sat intently at the loom weaving a cloth, plucking out its own feathers for thread.

The bird then noticed the young man peeking in and said, "I am the crane that you saved. I wanted to repay you so I became your wife, but now that you have seen my true form I can stay here no longer." Then, handing the man the finished cloth, it said, "I leave you this to remember me by." The crane then abruptly flew off into the sky and disappeared forever.

From the website: <[www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/folk/tsuru/tsuru.html](http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/folk/tsuru/tsuru.html)> Any part of the text may be reproduced for educational purposes.

## Resources for study of *Twilight Crane*

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Other useful websites are listed on Internet handout. All of these sites may be found through

<[www.japan-guide.com](http://www.japan-guide.com)>

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