Dōtonbori and Benares

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"Sonezaki Shinjū (The Love-Suicide at Sonezaki)" of CHIKAMATSU Monzaemon was modeled after an affair which actually happened at Sonezaki Tenjin (shrine dedicated to the deified spirit of SUGAWARA-no-Michizane), in Umeda, Ōsaka, on April 7 of Genroku 16 (1703). Thereafter, love-suicides came to occur frequently, and twenty years later, in Kyōhō 8 (1723), a Prohibitory Decree on Love-Suicide was issued. Furthermore, the order was given to abandon the bodies of love-suicides in a cemetery near the site of the suicide. The bodies of many love-suicides were carried into the Dōtonbori Cemetery, which ranked top in this respect. Because of this, a large number of beggars, prostitutes, and untouchables entered this area, and there was no end to those who died of disease or collapsed on the street.

Scenes of the disposal of the body and the services for the dead in this pre-modern period remind us of the scene of Benares, India, in some respects. There can be seen a strange correspondence between them in the way the city underwent a transformation connected with the disposal of bodies, because the phase of transition between the destruction of the flesh by fire, and the ascension of the spirit, was expressed in a semi-stylized space structure through the mediation of the cemetery. To clarify the outline of the space structure, the author, in this paper, analyzes the scene of the "Pilgrimage to the Kannon" at the beginning of CHIKAMATSU's "Sonezaki Shinjū", and the scene of the "Lovers' Trip" at the conclusion of the piece.

Let us pay attention to the fact that these scenes, the "Pilgrimage to the Kannon" and the "Lovers' Trip" by CHIKAMATSU, symbolize two types of pilgrimage. The first type is a pilgrimage centering on visits to so-called sacred places or sites; in this piece, the "Pilgrimage to the Kannon". The second type, on the other hand, is the final pilgrimage, that is the suicide trip of lovers who hope for eternal resurrection (ascension to Heaven); in this piece, the scene of the "Lovers' Trip". The author also notes that these two types of pilgrimage appear in exactly the same form, in the services to the dead in Benares. This paper is an attempt at a comparative study that links these two.