

Extract about the Takasago *Nō* play, taken from *Myths and Legends of Japan* by F. Hadland Davis p.186 - 187.

“The dawn is near,
And the hoar-frost falls
On the fir-tree twigs;
But its leaves’ dark green
Suffer no change.
Morning and evening
Beneath its shade
The leaves are swept away,
Yet they never fail.
True it is
That these fir-trees
Shed not all their leaves;
Their verdure remains fresh
For ages long,
As the Masaka trailing vine;
Even amongst evergreen trees—
The emblem of unchangeableness—
Exalted is their fame
As a symbol to the end of time—
The fame of the fir-trees that have grown
old together.”

From Takasago, translated by W. G. Aston

The *Takasago* is generally considered one of the finest of the *Nō*, or classical dramas. The *Nō* was performed by statuesque players who chanted in an ancient dialect. It belonged to that period of Japanese formality fittingly described as ‘Heav’n to hear tell about, but Hell to see.’

The pine-tree of Takasago symbolises longevity, and in the following chorus from this drama we may gather the potency of this evergreen tree:

“And now, world without end,
The extended arms of the dancing maidens
In sacerdotal robes
Will expel noxious influences;
Their hands folded to rest in their bosoms
Will embrace all good fortune;
The hymn of a thousand autumns
Will draw down blessings on the people,
And the song of ten thousand years
Prolong our sovereign’s life.
And all the while
The voice of the breeze,
As it blows through the firs
That grow old together,
Will yield us delight.”

The efficacy of the pine-tree is still believed in to this day. It is conspicuous in the festival of the San-ga-nichi,* when pine branches decorate gateways during the New Year festivities. Both this use of the pine-tree and that of this particular *Nō* drama owe their origin to the great pine-tree of Takasago.

* San-ga-nichi - first three days of the new year. These days are holidays in Japan when various new year celebrations take place. Displaying gate pines (*kadomastu*) is believed to attract prosperity for the year ahead.