

Teradaya: Otose

Otose (1829–1877) is the name of the most well-known proprietress of the Teradaya Inn. The second daughter of an innkeeper in Ōminokuni Ōtsu (now Shiga Prefecture), Otose moved to Fushimi at age eighteen. She became the wife of Teradaya Isuke (dates unknown), who owned the Teradaya Inn, and gave birth to a son and two daughters.

Isuke was hopeless at business, so Otose soon took over the day-to-day business of the inn. Also a womanizer and a drunk, Isuke died at the age of thirty-five, at which point Otose took complete control of Teradaya.

While Otose ran the inn, Teradaya became a favored lodging of anti-shogunate members of the Satsuma Domain whenever they came to Fushimi. On May 21, 1862, the inn was the scene of the First Teradaya Incident, in which the de facto ruler of Satsuma, Shimazu Hisamitsu (1817–1887), sent warriors to force the rebels to return to Satsuma. Nine men were killed in the ensuing battle, but Otose remained firm amid the bloodshed. She hid her three-year-old daughter in a basket and protected the booking office where she presumably kept her earnings. After the battle, she received compensation from the Satsuma Domain, repaired the damage to the inn, and continued her business.

Otose habitually took care of people, including radical anti-shogunate samurai such as Sakamoto Ryōma (1836–1867), to whom she became a confidante and friend. She took in the maid Oryō (1841–1906), who would later become Ryōma's wife, as her “adopted daughter,” and even provided financial assistance to Oryō's mother. In the wake of Ryōma's attempted assassination in the Second Teradaya Incident (March 9, 1866), Otose was marked by the government as a “dangerous person of interest” and came close to being jailed. She died in 1877, nine years after the successful defeat of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Her grave is located at Fushimi Shōrin'in, not far from the inn that she ran and loved. Her resilient and generous spirit has made her a popular historical character, and her story is often featured on television and in film.