
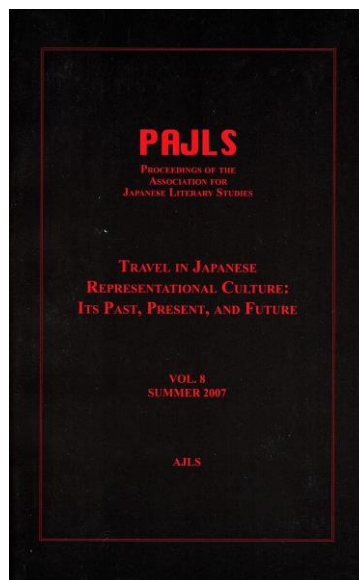


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Male Friendship in the *Tale of Ise* and the *Tale of  
Genji*”

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**“EXILE FROM HEIAN: JOURNEYING AS A PRETEXT FOR MALE  
FRIENDSHIP IN THE *TALE OF ISE* AND THE *TALE OF GENJI*”**

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There are two well-known depictions of noblemen exiled from the capital in Heian literature, the first being the so-called “azuma-kudari” or “azuma-yuki” sequence of episodes depicting the hero’s Journey to the East in the *Ise monogatari*; and the second being the Suma and Akashi chapters of the *Genji monogatari* depicting Genji’s exile there. These depictions have been studied exhaustively by numerous scholars over the years. Orikuchi Shinobu, for example, identified these depictions of exile as belonging to a literary motif of the wandering nobleman found in *setsuwa*, and Araki Hiroyuki described the structure of this wandering as being circular: a nobleman violates the constraints of his community, is driven into exile and, through his encounter with hardship and suffering connected to his journey, he eventually redeems himself and is allowed to return.<sup>1</sup>

Jin’ichi Konishi objects to these descriptions of the *Ise*’s Journey to the East, asserting instead that “The myth of Narihira was an oral transmission created within aristocratic society and is to be distinguished from popular *setsuwa*.”<sup>2</sup> According to Konishi, literary scholars who interpret the *Ise* hero’s journey to the East Country as a crude example of the motif of the nobleman wandering through strange lands “immoderately magnify the role of *setsuwa* motifs” in courtly literature.<sup>3</sup> Taking Konishi’s lead, I am proposing to examine exile in the *Ise* and the *Genji* from a new perspective, namely the role played by male friendship in them. In doing so, I am building upon Konishi’s belief that the *Ise*’s *otoko*, or Narihira, figure reflects a distinctive sense within aristocratic society of what constitutes a hero; as I see it, that to be a true hero, the man must be both a lover of women and a friend of men. What I wish to explore is the role of male friendship in the depictions of exile in the *Ise* and the *Genji*, and the ways that the depiction of exile creates a journeying space where male emotional experience is explored in both narratives. My point of departure is a question: Why does Genji

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Konishi, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

experience two places of exile, beginning in Suma and subsequently moving to Akashi? Normally, when looked at in terms of the *setsuwa* motif of the wandering nobleman, Suma constitutes the place where Genji suffers hardship, thereby redeeming himself in the eyes of his community, and eventually allowing him to return to the capital. The move to Akashi appears, then, to be the first step in his redemption, besides being necessary to the accomplishment of a major requirement of the tale's plot, which is that Genji should become the father of an empress.

I would like to argue that a more interesting logic underlying Genji's dual places of exile is to be found in the *Ise*'s episodes depicting the hero's Journey to the East, beginning with Episode 7 and ending with Episode 15 in the Tempuku-bon tradition. Following Tsukahara Tetsuo's discussion of the episodic structure of the *Ise*, we see that the hero's Journey to the East involves the fusion of two complementary trajectories in the tale, the first being the trajectory of erotic adventure, *irogonomi*, that dominates in episodes 1–6, and the other being the trajectory of male friendship that surfaces in Episodes 8, 9, and 11, and culminates in Episode 16 with the depiction of the hero's friendship with the nobleman, Ki no Arisune. Tsukahara describes the significance of these two trajectories of erotic adventure and male friendship in the tale in these terms: "The Heian nobility, bound by a bureaucratic system and forced to forfeit its humanity, was able to realize its humanity outside the bounds of the logic of a political system. If erotic adventure represented the recuperation of humanity between the sexes, then friendship represented the recuperation of humanity between members of the same sex."<sup>4</sup>

Episode 7 is pivotal, and signals in its opening lines the beginning of a journey: "Once there was a man. Tired of living in the capital he went to Azuma."<sup>5</sup> Episodes 8, 9, and 11 then reveal that the man is traveling with friends, or male companions; this is a significant point in Tsukahara's analysis, for the introduction of male-male camaraderie represents a departure from the *irogonomi*, or erotic adventure, that characterized the hero's experience in the capital up to this point in the tale. Through the artful sequencing of the opening episodes, readers conclude that the hero's disappointing love affair, usually associated with the historical Fujiwara no Takaiko, who was the future Empress Nijō, in fact provided the impetus for the hero's departure for the East.

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<sup>4</sup> Tsukahara, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> This and following translations from the *Ise* are by Frits Vos.

Beginning his eastward journey, the *Ise* hero enters a journeying space characterized not by the capital's erotic adventure but by male camaraderie and friendship. While women are absent from this space, the hero's thoughts are nonetheless filled with longing for the capital and the women (or, a woman) who remain there. In terms of male emotional experience, then, the Journey to the East in episodes 8, 9, and 11 allows the hero time for reflection on those he has left behind, and depicts the hero consorting with friends in the absence of women.

Episodes 10 and 12–15 depict the hero's courtship of various women after arriving at his destination in the East, namely the provinces of Musashi and Michi, or Michinoku. There is a decided shift in the man's status, however. Back in the capital, the hero was always the pursuer, but here in the East he finds himself being pursued. In other words, the hero is objectified in his new environment. Episode 14 clearly shows this switch in the hero's status in its opening lines: "Once a man had been traveling aimlessly to the Province of Michi. A woman there—(she will certainly have thought a man from the capital especially attractive)—was deeply in love with him." At his destination in the East, the hero of the *Ise* is now the object of the desires of provincial women, and his identity as a nobleman from the capital makes him distinctively appealing to them. At the same time, in many of the episodes that show provincial women pursuing the Narihira figure, provincial women are derided in one way or another for their lack of sophistication. This derision must have been a source of humor to aristocratic women in the capital, whose sense of superiority was thereby confirmed in the text.

The dynamic of the *Ise*'s Journey to the East involves, then, three aspects: (1) there are dual trajectories, erotic adventure being associated with the capital and with the Eastern Provinces, and male friendship being associated with the journeying space in between; (2) women are absent from the journeying space, which is occupied by men alone, but the hero's thoughts nevertheless—or, perhaps, as a result—often turn to recollecting women in the capital; and (3) the hero, who is the subject of erotic adventure in the capital, becomes objectified in the provinces. If we take these three aspects of the Journey to the East and apply them to Genji's exile from the capital in chapters 12 and 13 of the *Tale of Genji*, we can begin to understand an alternative logic underlying Genji's dual places of exile in Suma and Akashi that differs from the circular logic of the *setsuwa* motif of the wandering nobleman.

Genji's actual journey from the capital to Suma in chapter 12 is virtually absent from the text. As scholars reconstruct the journey, Genji would have left before dawn on a day in spring, probably riding on

horseback to Fushimi and then taking a boat down the Yodo River to Naniwa, a day's journey. The next morning he would have boarded a ship at Naniwa to sail the thirty miles westward to Suma. One would think that the *Genji's* author was well aware of all sorts of literary possibilities in giving a detailed account of the hardships of the journey, but clearly she chose to place her focus elsewhere. The text says only that, "Her [Murasaki's] image was with him throughout the journey, and he boarded his ship with a stricken heart. The days were long then, and with a following wind he reached his destination at the hour of the Monkey [roughly 4 p.m.]."<sup>6</sup>

Genji finds that his seaside lodgings at Suma are rustic but have been adequately prepared for him by officials from Genji's nearby estates. Despite the political risks, the governor of the province quietly offers to provide Genji with anything he might need. In the author's hands, a year of exile unfolds in which male companionship and thoughts of women back in the capital characterize Genji's days. In between prayers of penance and purifying fasts, he writes to Murasaki, Fujitsubo, the Rokujō Lady in Ise, and even Oborozukiyo, who is the cause of his present state of disgrace; also to the Minister of the Left, for news of his son Yūgiri; and soon it is autumn. His male companions include Yoshikiyo and Koremitsu along with several others, who have left parents and families behind to serve Genji in his exile; the text tells us that Genji "was so kind and such a delight to the eye that the four or five of them forgot their cares and found his intimate service a pleasure." There are descriptions of Genji's longing for the capital on a night of a full autumn moon, and a visit from the Dazaifu deputy on his way back to the capital from Kyushu. The essential masculinity of the unfolding scenes of Genji's life at Suma is enhanced by frequent quotes from Chinese verse, especially poems of friendship and exile by Bo Juyi. Winter arrives, and with it we hear for the first time of the Akashi no Nyūdō, or Novice, who learns of Genji's presence in nearby Suma. The stage is now set for Genji's move to Akashi, but first there is one final and beautifully rendered scene of male friendship when Tō no Chūjō comes to call. It has been a year since Genji left the capital, and we are told that his friend Tō no Chūjō missed him constantly. Finally, he throws caution to the wind and decides that he must pay Genji a visit, no matter what political consequences he might suffer at the hands of the Kokiden faction at court, Genji's enemies. Tō no Chūjō is impressed not so much by the austerity of Genji's place of exile as its intensely Chinese aura: *sumai-tamaeru sama, iwamukata-*

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<sup>6</sup> This and following translations from the *Genji* are by Royall Tyler.

*naku kara-mekitari*, translated by Tyler as “Genji’s house looked indescribably Chinese,” but again, the significance of this observation is to emphasize the utter masculinity of the environment. He and Genji spend a night conversing and composing Chinese poetry; their farewell, we are told, “left Genji blank with sorrow the rest of the day.”

Almost immediately following Tō no Chūjō’s departure comes the final scene of the Suma chapter, a violent storm in the third month, which threatens to sweep Genji and his men into the sea. In an agony of fright, Genji sees the threatening image of a being summoning him to the palace, which the text tells us is the dragon King of the Sea, a great lover of male beauty, or, alternately, in search of a suitably handsome husband for his daughter. With this new menace, Suma appears no longer to be a suitable a place for Genji. The Akashi chapter begins with a continuation of the description of the same violent storm. Genji’s lodgings are struck by lightning and burn to the ground. When the storm finally yields, Genji falls into exhausted sleep, and the image of his father comes to comfort him and to urge him to leave the place. At dawn, the Novice’s boat arrives off Genji’s shore and invites Genji to board and join him in Akashi. Inspired by the dream of his father, Genji accepts the offer and, as if by magic, he finds himself in Akashi at a house prepared for him by the Novice.

At Akashi, Genji becomes an object of desire, not unlike the Narihira figure at his destination in the Eastern Provinces observed in the *Ise*. The crucial difference is the status of the provincial woman, whom we come to know as the Akashi Lady, and who becomes Genji’s partner. The author appears to be modifying the *Ise*’s frank contempt for provincial women and clearly wants to avoid creating a figure of scorn in the Akashi Lady, and this is accomplished by making her father, the Novice, serve as the instigator of the courtship and the one who primarily makes of Genji an object of erotic desire for his daughter. At times the Novice comes across as something of a buffoon in his single-minded pursuit of Genji, but the author carefully isolates the daughter herself from such excess and any scorn it might generate in the reader, and in the end the girl comes across looking very much like the equal of any highborn lady at court. Despite her inferiority complex, it is important that the Akashi Lady be depicted as a fitting partner for Genji and respectable enough to be the mother of a future empress, and in this the author succeeds admirably.

If we analyze the *Genji*’s Suma and Akashi chapters in relation to the *Ise*’s Journey to the East, we see that Suma is a journeying space, characterized by male friendship and male camaraderie, and emphatically

masculine in its focus on Chineseness. From this perspective, Suma is not a destination at all, but a yearlong journey through a year's worth of sexual and emotional deprivation, mitigated only by the companionship of sympathetic men. Akashi is the true destination, for it is there that Genji becomes the object of erotic desire of a provincial woman, albeit mediated by her father. This mediation was for a very specific reason; namely, to preserve the Akashi Lady's status as a woman worthy of Genji and her fated role as mother of an empress.

The depiction of exile from the Heian capital in the *Ise* and the *Genji* is very much a forum for exploring two specific aspects of the emotional experience of male courtiers: their camaraderie in the absence of women, and their longing for the women who remain in the capital. It is part of what proves that Genji and the Narihira figure are indeed heroes, for they are shown to be not just lovers of women but also friends of men whose companionship brings them comfort. Moreover, exile forces a reversal of status for the tale's amorous hero, from subject to object. What that reversal reveals about the hero is very likely part of what redeems him in the minds of readers and allows us to welcome his return to the capital. Rather than circularity of the wandering sort found in popular *setsuwa*, exile to the East in the *Ise* or to Suma and Akashi in the *Genji* is the hero's pretext to experiencing the friendship of men through journeying.

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This paper expands on issues raised in my article "Five Paradigms of Male Friendship in the *Ise Monogatari*" and in chapter 4 of my book *A Poetics of Courtly Male Friendship in Heian Japan*.