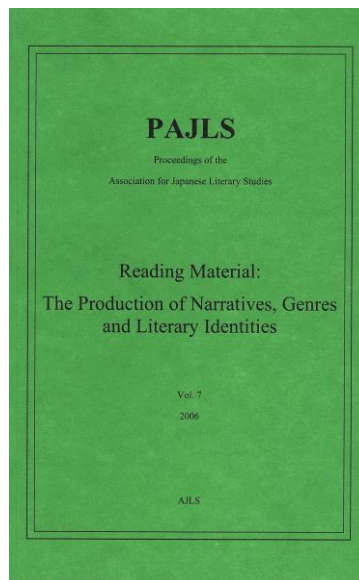


“Wang Zhaojun’s New Portrait: Photography in
Nineteenth Century *Kanshibun*”

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**Wang Zhaojun's New Portrait:
Photography in Nineteenth Century *Kanshibun***

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In 1874, just six years after the Restoration had made Tokyo the center of a new regime, a poet named Kikuchi Sankei (1819-1891) published a volume of verse that sought to depict the spectacular changes in material culture, architecture, and daily life visible in the new capital. Inspired by the recently introduced technology of photography, Sankei called his work *Tōkei shashinkyō* or “Tokyo Camera.” Each of the constituent poems of this completely un-illustrated text was presented as though it were a photograph; Sankei explained that although he would be using ink rather than chemicals, and writing on paper rather than glass, he would still be endeavoring to capture several striking scenes and eye-catching elements of the urban spectacle. The series of poetic snapshots appeared with a prodigious number of prefaces contributed by Sankei’s literary confreres, including one by Narushima Ryūhoku (1837-1884), who wrote:

Poetry may be dismissed as nothing more than a minor art, and yet among all the nations arrayed around the globe, there has never been one that lacks poetry. The nations of Europe and America that are said to be civilized... are all accustomed to respecting poetry... Recently, various gentlemen from our country have devoted themselves to mastering Western studies; they have conducted research in the natural sciences, and they have scrutinized Western laws. They have overlooked no domain of study, except for one: poetry, which nine out of ten of them reject as something useless. I find this quite puzzling, for the poetry of our country is rather like the poetry of the West – aside from the differences in orthography of course.¹

Surely Ryūhoku is exaggerating when he claims that there is little to distinguish Japanese poetry from Western poetry beyond mere orthography, but what deserves attention here is the way in which he frames literary practice as a discipline unjustly neglected in Japan’s rush to modernize. When *Tōkei shashinkyō* was published in the early 1870s, the fledgling Meiji government was of course busily sending hundreds of students and officials abroad to investigate

¹ Ryuhoku’s preface, dated September 1873, is the innermost (and chronologically the earliest) of the three prefaces appearing in the unpaginated front matter of the 1874 text; it has also been reprinted in *Ryuhoku zenshu* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1897), p. 293. This and all other translations are my own unless noted.

Western institutions, hoping to apply what they learned to the task of catching up with the West and allowing Japan to take its place as a modern nation state. Ryūhoku, just back in Japan from a world tour of his own, pointedly situated his friend Sankei's poetry collection in this context, portraying it as an essential complementary component of Japan's nation-building enterprise. Part of Japan taking its place among the powers, he argued, would mean that Japanese poets "took their places alongside the poetic masters of the West," and to that end, he proposed translating Sankei's *Tōkei shashinkyō* "so that the poets of Europe and America would know that our country also has talented poets."

So how did this work of poetry slated to serve as the means for establishing Japanese literary accomplishments overseas actually fare? Sad to say, in spite of the ringing endorsements that accompanied its release, Kikuchi Sankei's timely collection of poems on early Meiji period Tokyo is virtually unknown today. The reason the work has faded from Japanese literary memory is not, however, difficult to discover, for it is written in classical Chinese. It might seem strange to us that a work billed as proof that "our nation of Japan" has high-caliber poets should be composed in anything but Japanese, yet such doubts would not have even occurred to literary figures of the period. This text, and numerous others like it, comes from a time prior to the consolidation of the very idea of a "national language" in Japan. A decade or two later, new narratives of Japanese "national literary history" began to be constructed, and these systematically excluded *kanshibun* from the canons of Japanese literary study. In the year 1890, something of a watershed in the production of the national literary canon, the first comprehensive histories of Japanese literature were published, and the *Nihon bungaku zensho*, a twenty-four volume series of modern printed editions of classical primary texts – all in *wabun* rather than *kanbun* – was launched. In the same year that the anthology's first volumes began to appear, Ochiai Naobumi (1861-1903), one of its three editors and a founding scholar of the emerging domain of "national literary studies," published an essay heralding what he saw as the triumph of Japanese language poetic forms over Chinese, explaining it as the inevitable outcome of Japan's rising sense of national identity:

漢文漢詩廢れて國文國詩大に起りぬ。...かく一時にその勢力を得たるはいかなる理由のあるならむ。他ならず、世人おのおの其必要を感じたればなり。漢文漢詩の到底國人の思想をあらはすに足らざるを知りしなればなり。

Kanbun and kanshi have declined and kokubun and kokushi [prose and poetry in the national language] have greatly flourished... Why have they gained such sway in this manner all at once? It is precisely because each and every member of the populace has felt their necessity. It is because they realize that ultimately kanshi and kanbun are incapable of expressing the thoughts of the nation's people.²

This essay by Ochiai is but a single instance among many similar statements by pioneering *kokubungaku* scholars of the period, for whom this kind of "linguistic nationalism"

² Ochiai Naobumi, "Kokubun kokushi o ronjite yo no bungakusha ni nozomu," 1890, *Ochiai Naobumi Ueda Kazutoshi Haga Yaichi*, ed. Hisamatsu Sen'ichi. Vol. 44 of *Meiji bungaku zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1968), p. 11

constituted the new discipline's ideological pillar.³ The idea that *kanshi* and *kanbun* were incompatible with “the thoughts of the nation's people” retroactively cast the long tradition of *kanshibun* by Japanese authors in a suspect light, tainting them as somehow inauthentic. Shifts in the curriculum of the new national school system, as well as institutional realignments in higher education, would further erode the place of *kanshibun*, producing new generations of readers that came to regard what had always been an integral part of Japanese literary activity as something antiquated, affected, artificial, and abstruse.

Yet such a dismissive view of *kanshibun* is difficult to reconcile with the unprecedented proliferation of Chinese poetry societies during the first two decades of Meiji: a flourishing that encompassed not only major urban centers but rural areas as well. In addition to more widespread access to education, including many academies that continued to stress proficiency in classical Chinese, the early Meiji period saw the establishment of modern newspapers, some of which introduced columns devoted to *kanshi*, the founding of numerous literary journals featuring *kanshibun*, as well as a more extensive and efficient postal system by which these materials could be readily transmitted. This combination of factors greatly expanded the audience for *kanshibun* texts. That the readership was significant is clear enough from the popular success of several works, but just as important to note is the enlargement of the community of *kanshibun* writers. Without a substantial population of consumers aspiring to write classical Chinese poetry, surely no publisher would have reprinted the one-hundred-fascicle *Pei wen yun fu*, the famous early eighteenth-century dictionary of classical Chinese poetic diction and rhyme that appeared in a newly accessible version in Japan in the early 1880s.

It had long been the case that a wide range of topics not conventionally treated in Japanese poetic forms such as the *waka*, were routinely addressed in *kanshi*. One of the arenas wherein *kanshi* most clearly dominated poetic expression in the mid-nineteenth century, for example, was the depiction of overseas travel. While *waka* collections based on journeys abroad were by no means unknown, many of the earliest Japanese traveling overseas at the time kept some sort of diary or travelogue that incorporated *kanshi*. Perhaps the earliest instance of such a work was *Kōbei zasshi* (Miscellaneous poems composed on a journey to America), by Morita Kiyoyuki (1812-1861), an attendant on the Man'en embassy of 1860. Published immediately upon the embassy's return, Morita's collection includes dozens of *kanshi* that record his impressions of various exotic sights – on board his ship, in the numerous colonial ports it called at, and in the various American cities the embassy toured both before and after its official reception in Washington. Of particular interest is the poem Morita wrote about Harriet Lane (1830-1903), the young woman then serving as something of a “First Lady *pro tem*” for her uncle James Buchanan, the only U.S. President not to marry.

³ Haruo Shirane explains the eventual outcome of this idea that the national language was the embodiment of the “national essence” (*kokutai*): “This notion of a national language, which was strengthened by the importation of Western phonocentric notions and the *genbun-itchi* (union of spoken and written languages) movement, was contrasted with *kanbun*, a written language associated with China, a country that was in decline and that would succumb to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War. The result was a dramatic pedagogical shift away from the Confucian classics and the devaluation of Japanese writing in *kanbun*, which had been the language of religion, government, and scholarship.” Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 13-14.

亞國佳人名伶艷 An American beauty with the charms of a famous actress;

臂纏美玉耳穿珠 Fine jewels twist round her arms, pearls pierce her ears.

紅顏不必施脂粉 To her face, she need apply neither oils nor powder;

露出雙肩白雪膚 Exposing bare her shoulders, her snow-white skin.⁴

As can be seen in many of the poems in this collection, Morita focused much of his attention on the distinctive ethnic features of the non-Japanese people he encountered abroad. At the same time, however, the descriptors that specify Ms. Lane's ethnicity and the idiosyncrasies of her dress coexist with somewhat conventional evocations of female beauty in Chinese poetics; even Ms. Lane's "snow [white] skin" (雪膚), for example, echoes the description of Yang Guifei in Bo Juyi's "Song of Lasting Pain." Similarly, the comment about Ms. Lane not needing to wear makeup recalls the description of Yang Guifei's sister Lady Guoguo, who was said to be so naturally beautiful that she did not put on makeup even when appearing before the Emperor. Thus, we might say that Morita superimposes the figure of Harriet Lane onto these classical figures of Chinese beauties while taking care not to let her particularities vanish from view entirely.

A similar hybridity frames the poem as a whole, which, as the interlinear note that follows it explains, is actually not about Harriet Lane *per se*, but rather her reproduced image. In specifying that the poem was "Composed on a photograph of President Buchanan's first niece" (題大統領薄可南第一姪女寫真), Morita drew an analogy between his work and the genre of *tihuashi* (J. *daigashi* 題畫詩), or poems composed on paintings. In Japanese *kanshi* practice these poems typically accompanied or were imagined to accompany a well-known pictorial representation of a scene often drawn from Chinese or Japanese literature, and the poem's title would usually be 題…畫 (*e ni daisu* 畫に題す); here instead of *e* 畫, we find *shashin* 寫真. The word *shashin* (C. *xiezhen*) was an established term in both Chinese and Japanese meaning a realistic portrait, but in the mid-nineteenth century, it came to be used in the sense of "photograph." On the one hand the title Morita chose reflects the freshness of his encounter with the novel and somewhat unfamiliar representational medium, while at the same time assimilating the work into a longstanding tradition of similar sorts of poems composed upon images.

Morita was by no means the only early Japanese travelogue author to fix his attention upon photography. The new technology figures prominently in the diaries and travelogues composed by many of the Japanese dispatched abroad on the shogunal missions of the 1860s. In reading *Biyō ōkō manroku*, the travelogue Ichikawa Seiryū wrote about his trip to Europe in 1862, for example, one comes across references every few days to the mission members being photographed, exchanging photographs with local people, purchasing photographs of famous sites and personages, and going to view photographic panoramas in European capital cities.

Of course, *kanshi* that incorporated new topics such as photographs were hardly limited to encounters taking place abroad. With the host of changes ushered in by the Meiji Restoration,

⁴ Morita Kiyoyuki, *Kōbei zasshi* [s.l.]. Kōsetsu zōhan, 1861, p. 7a

kanshi were again employed to depict, respond to, and comment upon new material culture, making Japanese texts in Chinese from the period an especially rich resource for gaining insight into the artifacts of the time and popular attitudes toward them. A number of formal features of classical Chinese poetry, such as its larger vocabulary, its greater concision, its relative lack of rigid length restrictions, and its more multifarious store of poetic subjects made composition in Chinese especially accommodating for these ends. Moreover, the particularities of Japanese *kanshi* practice offered an additional layer of enjoyment, for any given composition could be appreciated on multiple linguistic levels.

It could be read as classical Chinese, of course, or it could be read in the hybrid form of Sino-Japanese, and some early Meiji *kanshi* poets even further extended these possibilities by experimenting with alternative orthographic practices. In 1870, for example, Osaka poet Tanaka Kajō (1825-1880) published *Nihon fukkoshi* (Poems of Japan's restoration), a varied collection of *kanshi* that contains many short poems on Osaka city life, as well as a sequence of poems on local scenes from the Kawaguchi foreign quarter. The fifteen poems in this latter sequence trade mainly on the whimsical incorporation of new lexical items, an effect only amplified by Kajō's somewhat jarring addition of *furigana* glosses derived mainly from English: *poaruku* “pork” for *choran* 豬糞, for example, or *heshido bīfu* “hashed beef” for *gyūran* 牛糞. At times, Kajō's efforts themselves seem a bit *kajō*, as in the case of the word *bakushu* 麥酒, for which he offered both *bīru* and *ēru* as glosses. In any case, amid the exuberant exotica of the series appears the following poem about a pair of lovers forced into anguished separation: a familiar trope to be sure, but one that appears here with a twist:

浪速倫敦蒸氣飛 From Naniwa to London, the steam flies;

別來尺素一何稀 After they parted, how rare a letter!

慕郎泣對寫真鏡 While she yearns for him, tearfully facing the photograph;

憐妾恨無傳信機 She pities herself, lamenting that she doesn't have a telegraph.⁵

Kajō's somewhat light poem in fact shows just how deeply new media technologies had penetrated daily life, changing the way that people viewed, remembered, and communicated even on the most intimate levels.

Around the same time, a few other poets were making the technology itself the focus of their scrutiny, further exploring the possibilities and implications of photographic representation. Perhaps the earliest such example is a poem in *Kankai shishi*, a collection of about one hundred *kanshi* composed by Sugi Chōka (1835-1920) while he was traveling with the Bunkyū shogunal embassy to Europe in 1862. In a Berlin hotel, Sugi wrote the following quatrain:

客舍無事戲詠寫真鏡 In my guest lodgings, I have nothing to do, and so I whimsically compose this poem on the camera

⁵ Tanaka Kajo, *Nihon fukkoshi*. [s.l.]: Kiritsudō, 1870. p. 5a

瞬間對照寫其眞 In the blink of an eye, it illuminates, capturing what is true;

太勝丹青畫得新 Vastly superior to paints, it inscribes something new.

若使漢時有斯術 If we could cause the Han era to have this technique,

昭君未必嫁胡人 Then Zhaojun would not have had to marry the Hun.⁶

The allusion, of course, is to the story of Wang Zhaojun – the palace lady who was sent off to marry the leader of the “barbarian” Xiongnu in the first century BCE. As the most influential version of the legend goes, the beautiful Wang Zhaojun refused to bribe the court artist commissioned to paint her portrait, prompting the unscrupulous man to willfully distort her charms. The Emperor, at first seeing only the unfaithful likeness of Wang Zhaojun’s portrait, consequently misjudged her true beauty, which meant that Zhaojun was unfairly selected as the one to wed the barbarian ruler.⁷ Since Sugi’s collection was published many years after his journey, it is difficult to know if he was in fact the first to waggishly speculate that Wang Zhaojun’s tragic end could have been averted if only the Han Emperor had been privy to the technique of photography. In the opening years of Meiji, for example, Narushima Ryūhoku wrote a regulated verse on the topic of “the camera” that draws the same conclusion in its final couplet:

當日漢宮傳此術 If the Han court had received this technology back then,

明妃何必嫁呼韓 Then what need would Wang Zhaojun have had to marry Hu Han?⁸

Although Japanese *kanshibun* is sometimes assumed to be merely a derivative assemblage of imitations of Chinese works, needless to say simple imitation was never the whole story, and it is worth mentioning in passing that sometimes influence ran in the opposite direction. Long after these Japanese poems appeared, and after he had spent several years associating with and reading the works of Japanese literati, the esteemed late Qing poet and diplomat Huang Zunxian (1848-1905) wrote his *Riben zashishi*, a collection of poems composed about Japan’s

⁶ Sugi Chōka, *Kankai shishi*. [s.l.]: [s.n.], 1904. pp. 13b-14a

⁷ Given the countless retellings and reworkings of the event over the centuries in both China and Japan, it is misleading to speak of a single story of Wang Zhaojun. In the most familiar version, which began to proliferate a century or so after Wang Zhaojun’s death and is the specific referent of Chōka’s poem, the story begins when Emperor Yuan commissions individual portraits of the women in his vast seraglio; hoping to insure a flattering portrait, virtually all of the women bribe the portrait artists, except for one: Wang Zhaojun. Having refused to pay the bribe to the artist Mao Yanshou 毛延壽, the beautiful Wang Zhaojun is painted as though she is especially ugly, making her first on the list when the Emperor uses the portraits to select the woman who is to be wed to the Xiongnu leader. When her departure comes and the Emperor realizes his mistake, it is already too late. For two thorough discussions of the Wang Zhaojun legends, see Eoyang and Bulaf (Chapter 3).

⁸ The poem “Shashinkyō” 寫真鏡 is included in Ryūhoku’s *Ryūhoku shishō*, ed. Ōhashi Shintar (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1894), p. 2 and *Ryūhoku zenshū*, p. 309; there is an annotated version in Hino Tatsuo, *Narushima Ryūhoku, Ōnuma Chinzan*. Vol. 10 of *Edo shijin senshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990), pp. 88-90.

post-Restoration culture, in which he included a poem on photography using precisely the same allusion to the Wang Zhaojun legend.⁹

Putting aside the question of which Japanese poet was the first to make this somewhat learned joke, the analogy became a quite widespread frame through which to make sense of the technology of photography: as an improvement on portraiture that insured a better approximation of external reality by reducing potential corruption from human agency.

Such a positive estimation of the possibilities of photography calls to mind the foundational aspirations of William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the calotype process, who described his goals as a pioneer of early photographic methods in terms of just such an elimination of human intervention in representation. In 1844, Fox Talbot published *The Pencil of Nature*, the world's first photographic collection, and as the work's title suggests, Fox Talbot's goal was to produce "natural," that is to say unmediated, images: images that were purely products of natural physical processes and thus, as he wrote, "divested of the ideas which accompany"¹⁰ pictures.

The idea was one that seems to have been familiar to at least some Japanese in the late Edo period as well. Among the miscellaneous texts that the irrepressible and somewhat eccentric French scholar and Japanophile Léon Rosny compiled for his *Nihon bunshū*, a collection he published in Paris in 1863, was a piece of calligraphy reading:

寫眞術は造物者の畫にして、光輝は其筆なり Photography is a picture drawn
by the Creator, and light is its brush (142).¹¹

In 1871, Rosny reproduced this epigram in his *Anthologie Japonaise: Poésies Anciennes et Modernes*, explaining that it had been presented to him one day by the shogunal official Matsuki Kōan (1832-1893), who had studied photography during his time in Paris (see pp. 110-111).

It is unclear whether or not Matsuki Kōan's definition of photography had a specific source. His recapitulation of Fox Talbot's metaphor – with photography as "the brush of the Creator" instead of "the Pencil of nature" – is striking, but Matsuki need not have been exposed to Fox Talbot's book in particular to have made the association. As James Ryan's fascinating work *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* makes clear, the Victorian faith in photography as "a perfect marriage between science and art: a mechanical means of allowing nature to copy herself with total accuracy and intricate exactitude"¹² was pervasive – prompting its widespread application to the exploration and survey of peoples and landscapes both abroad and at home.

⁹ Huang Zunxian, *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, ed. Qian Zhonglian III (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1981), p. 151.

¹⁰ Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the age of photography: the legacy of British realism* (Harvard UP, 1999), p. 13

¹¹ I have replaced Rosny's *hentaigana* with standard *kana*.

¹² Ryan James, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 17.

Yet while the greater potential for detail, accuracy, and objectivity that photographs provided was recognized by many Japanese *kanshi* poets of the mid-nineteenth century, their understandings were not so univocal or simplistic. If we return to Ryūhoku's poem for a moment, we see an awareness that photographs cannot be so easily correlated to external reality.

The opening couplets of the poem all suggest ways in which the photograph permits things that are impossible in reality as it is conventionally understood and experienced. He begins with an allusion to the story of the ancient Chinese emperor Wu of the Han, who burned a magic incense to conjure back the visage of his beloved after she died:

返魂誰道有仙丹 Who says that "returning soul" incense has special power?

巧寫其真小鏡團 Artfully, this round mirror records the truth.

Who needs the Emperor's magic incense, the poet asks, when one can see the faces of departed loved ones just by looking at their photographs? A similar realization of the impossible is at work in the second couplet, which reads:

傾國百年長不老 Hundreds of years may pass, but a state-toppling beauty never grows old;

故人千里忽相看 Old friends a thousand miles apart can suddenly see each other.

The disjunction Ryūhoku identifies between the ageless beauty in the photograph and the presumably aging referent recalls Roland Barthes' famous observation that "What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."¹³

The rift between the apparent reality of the photograph and our everyday experience of reality grows even wider in the third couplet:

各家君相一堂會 The lords and ministers from all around gathered together in one hall;

殊域山川雙眼攢 The mountains and rivers of foreign lands gathered before one's eyes.

From this couplet, we might imagine a novelty shop selling images of politicians, or perhaps a stately room decorated with the portraits of various eminent officials; the assemblage thus depicted could well be one that had never occurred. (See illustration on page 109.) Alternatively, Ryūhoku may have had a more specific image in mind. One popular souvenir produced to commemorate the 1867 International Exposition in Paris was a composite photograph entitled "Nouveau Panthéon des Souverains," in which heads of state from various European and Asian nations (including Tokugawa Yoshikuni) are posed as though gathered together in a lavishly

¹³Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 4.

appointed hall.¹⁴ As Clément Chéroux's *The Perfect Medium*, a recent book and traveling exhibition on "spirit photography," has so vividly demonstrated, it was not very long into the history of photography before photographers began to exploit optical tricks, time-lapse, composite images, and other legerdemain to fabricate realistic (or indeed hyper-realistic) images depicting events that had never happened.¹⁵

Either way, the poem suggests a rather sophisticated understanding of photography's potential for manipulation. Along the same lines, Japanese *kanshibun* poets' widespread invocations of the famous Wang Zhaojun legend in poems composed about photography directs our attention toward a distinctive feature of their understanding. The version of the Wang Zhaojun legend to which they referred had a clear villain: the portrait artist Mao Yanshou who distorted her beauty and was executed for his deception. In 1870, the Saitama poet Kasami Kokō (1837-1919) included a quatrain on photography in his series of "Miscellaneous poems of Tokyo," and here he made the point more explicit, referring to Mao by name:

咄嗚模出好容姿 In a flash, it describes a beautiful figure;

不借毛生粉筆奇 with no need to depend on the whims of Mao [Yanshou]'s brush.

若有當時傳此術 If there had been one to transmit this technique back then,

明妃未必嫁胡兒 Then Wang Zhaojun would not have married the Hun.¹⁶

In contrast to Talbot, *kanshibun* writers of the time did not aspire to purge the human element from representations of reality. Mao Yanshou's corruption was his own and was not taken to be symptomatic of all human mediation.

Of course Fox Talbot's desire to create unmediated images of nature was ultimately a fantasy impossible to realize, for his invention conditioned the very ways in which people saw and imagined the world. In her study of British literature in the age of photography, Nancy Armstrong discusses the process by which the modern perception of the world-as-image came into being in the mid-nineteenth century, a shift she describes in terms of an inversion of the traditional hierarchy of object over image: the "image visualized persons, places, and things inaccessible to the ordinary observer, thus expanding the observer's visual universe" and what's more, ultimately determined how they came to see not only a specific image but images in general.¹⁷ The proliferation of photography of course happened a bit later in Japan than it did in

¹⁴ The image is reproduced in Ishiguro.

¹⁵ See Inuzuka and Ishiguro (p. 155) for an example of another French spirit photograph included in the photograph album assembled by Ryuhoku's contemporary Mori Arinori.

¹⁶ Fujii Akira and Kasami Hiroo, *Kanshijin ga egaita Meiji: Kasami Kokō no shōzō* (Tokyo: Yumani shobō, 2002), pp. 126-27.

¹⁷ Armstrong, pp. 77

Britain, getting its real start in the early 1860s, but in no time, photographic images were bringing Japanese urbanites views not only of the exotic flora and fauna, architecture, and residents of foreign cities, but glimpses of themselves and of domestic scenes as well.

This gave the technology an especial currency and relevance to *kanshi* poets such as Sankei whose *Tokyo Camera* was part of a popular sub-category of *kanshibun* texts that focused attention on documenting contemporary urban scenes, pinpointing emerging trends and shifting customs, singling out certain distinctive features of particular objects and locales that helped to set the contours of the images readers had about them. In presenting a series of characteristic topical images of urban scenes through *kanshi*, these texts helped to construct a view of a given cityscape for readers both within and outside of the metropole. The analogy with the way photographs had begun to circulate was clear, and it was presumably this point of overlap that prompted Sankei to write his *Tōkei shashinkyō*. Yet while Sankei's text clearly demonstrates the allure of photographic representation and its analogues, it also shows the author mounting a somewhat defensive resistance to it, asserting its limits lest the role of the creator be supplanted entirely.

In fact, as two of the writers who contributed prefaces to Sankei's *Tōkei shashinkyō* made clear, while the technology of photography was unsurpassed in its ability to record the form of physical objects with accuracy and permanence, it was unable to capture human dimensions such as feelings and words, and this was precisely why Sankei's poetic "photographs" were superior. For his part, Sankei also cited the apparent absence of human intervention from the construction of photographs as the medium's greatest flaw. In the opening poem, Kikuchi plays on the word *kyō* (*kagami*) of *shashinkyō* (camera), faulting the camera for failing to be true to its name and serve as an instructive model for others:

鏡耶非鏡元圖畫 Are you a mirror? No, you are no mirror, but just a picture.

寫逼其真不須怪 What you depict is very real, of that there is no doubt.

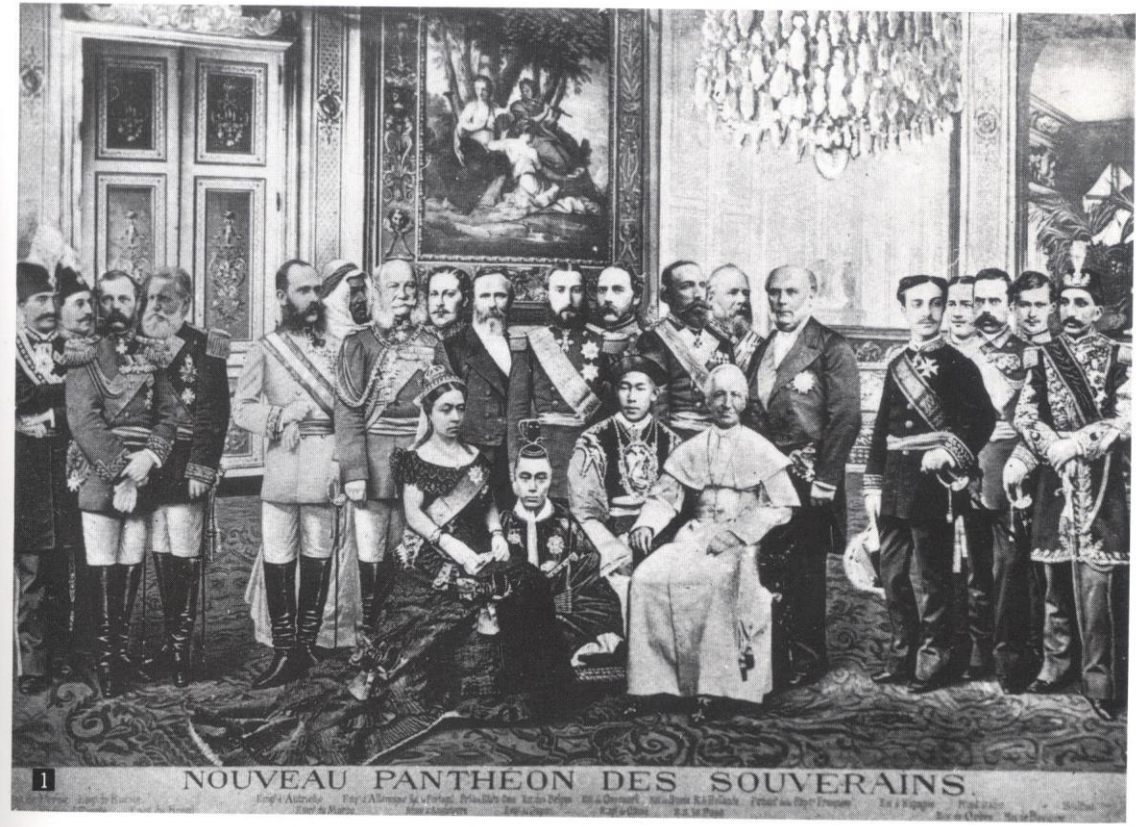
君不見以人爲鏡知得失 Yet know you nothing of taking other men as a mirror,
to know good and bad?

以古為鏡見興敗 Of taking the past as a mirror, to see rise and fall?

This dramatic flourish earned Sankei plaudits from one of his commentators, Ema Tenkō (1825-1901), who compared the poet's apostrophic address of the photograph to the stick used in a Zen monastery to admonish trainees.

And so, we can say that *kanshibun* authors reacted with some ambivalence to photography; they were not simply dazzled by Wang Zhaojun's new portrait – but were prodded to create both in response and in opposition to it. One reason the Wang Zhaojun legend was so frequently recounted and further embellished is that this beautiful yet unjustly misrepresented figure was the perfect stand-in for the talented yet unrecognized literatus who was thwarted by petty-minded officials. If Chōka, Kokō, Ryūhoku, and others were whimsically fantasizing that photography would have been a means to avoid Wang Zhaojun's fate of misrecognition, then in the preface he contributed to Sankei's collection, Ryūhoku imagined that *Tōkei Shashinkyō*

might be the means of insuring not that the objects depicted be properly appreciated, but that the artist who created them, Kikuchi Sankei, and by extension other Japanese composers of *kanshibun*, had their true talents recognized.



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