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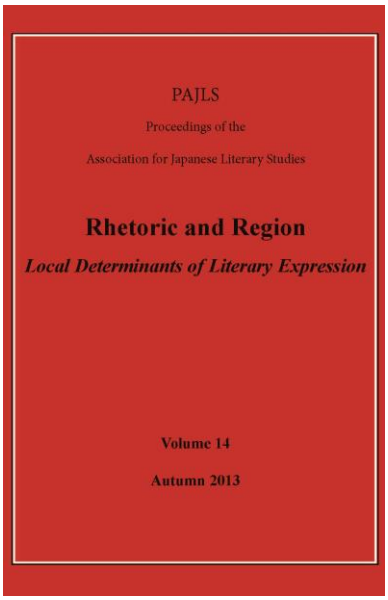


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**Kiritsubo and Yang Kuei-fei: A Sino-Japanese Dimension**

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Po Chü-i's (772-846) long poem: "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow" (長恨歌 *Ch'ang hen ko,* 806) spread in Japan during Po's lifetime and created a literary sensation while gaining unprecedented popularity in Japan. The poem is about Yang Kuei-fei 楊貴妃, a beautiful consort of Emperor Hsüan-tsung of Tang and her tragic end. It is no coincidence that Prince Genji's mother, the Lady of Kiritsubo 桐壷 is compared to Yang Kuei-fei in the first chapter of *The Tale of Genji* Through the comparison, Kiritsubo is defined as a woman with humility and quiet subtlety. After Kiritsubo's death, the Emperor sends a messenger to the dead lady's mother. The imperial emissary encounters the mother whose personal grief overpowers and makes her hint at criticism toward the Emperor in connection with her daughter's untimely death. In contrast, the Chinese magician flies to a magic isle where he meets Yang's spirit who greets him with an expression full of gratitude toward the Emperor even after her death. Thus Murasaki Shikibu, the author of *The Tale of Genji,* presents a new theme of true human emotions underneath humility and subtlety, the qualities that the Japanese people have valued. After the mother's passing, Kiritsubo's son Hikaru Genji falls in love with his stepmother Fujitsubo 藤壷, whose resemblance to his late mother is said to be astonishing. His quest for an ideal woman then leads to the discovery of young Murasaki, Fujitsubo's niece. In his romantic adventures true human emotion plays out as a primordial force, which could ruin his private life as it did with his parents. This study addresses the driving force behind narrative through an examination of its impact on the central theme of Hikaru Genji's story in relation with Po's Chinese poem.

**China, a Universal Model**

The reason why the first chapter of *The Tale of Genji* refers to Po's poem is a function of the Sino-Japanese relation during the Heian Period. China was a universal model for Japan, especially from the seventh to ninth centuries. The Chinese political system was imported, and Chinese language and literature were the source and medium of all higher learning. The Japanese people were fascinated by the literary heritage of China. The Japanese elites learned Chinese language and composed poems in the language. The Japanese had their own literary tradition in their own language, which was linguistically quite different from Chinese. Thus, the introduction of the

written language system from China and the consequent developments of *kana* scripts made it possible for the Japanese to record and write their own literary works. As a result, there appears to have developed two literatures in the Heian Period, one in Japanese and the other in Chinese. By the time that Fujiwara no Kintō (866-1041) compiled the *Wakan rōei shū* 和漢朗詠集 (A Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poetry Recitation, ca. 1018), Japanese taste in Chinese poetry, as well as in other genres of Chinese literature, had become highly sophisticated, so that the Chinese and Japanese poetries were often read and exhibited side by side.[1]

***Wakan rōei shū***

Kintō's *Wakan rōei shū* contains five hundred and eighty-eight excerpts from Chinese verse and two hundred and sixteen Japanese *waka* poems. These poems demonstrate the popular poetic tastes of the day. The term "*rōei*" actually means recitation of well-known Chinese and Japanese poems and it was a popular form of pastime among aristocrats.[2] These verses were set to music and became the themes of graphic representations.[3] The verses in the *Wakan rōei shū* were originally calligraphed on multi-panel screen paintings called the *Wakan-shō byōbu ni-hyaku chō* (和漢抄屏風二百帖, Two Hundred Folding Panel Screen of Japanese and Chinese poems).[4] Although the screen no longer exists, references in other works suggest that it consisted of a series of pairs of pictures. The upper image of each pair was executed in the Chinese style and the lower in the Japanese fashion, each pair being divided by a stylized flowing stream. The screen paintings in this case were done by the court painter Fujiwara no Yoshichika and the poems on the screens by Kintō, the compiler of the *Wakan rōei shū*.[5]

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[1] Thomas J. Rimer & Jonathan Chaves, trans., *Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing: The Wakan rōei shū* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 15.

[2] The Collection contains three kinds of poems. The first was written in classical Chinese by Chinese poets, works that became known to highly educated readers (the aristocratic classes, since they had the opportunity and leisure to master the difficulties of reading in the original Chinese). The second was written in classical Chinese by Japanese poets, who, through their training in Chinese and a genuine admiration of the original Chinese poems known to them, learned to write within the linguistic and stylistic parameters of classical Chinese verse. The third was the kind written in Japanese, in the form predominant at the time, the thirty-one-syllable *waka* (litearally, "Japanese poems," as opposed to a Chinese poems) or *tanka* (literally, a "short poem," as opposed to the longer Chinese forms). (Rimer and Chavas, pp. 2-3)

[3] Masako Nakagawa Graham. *The Yang Kuei-Fei Legend in Japanese Literature* (Lewiston, Queenston & Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998). p. 78.

[4] *Wakan rōei shū,* in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, v. 73 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1965), pp. 13-19.

[5] Graham, 1998, p. 78.

### *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

The most frequently quoted Chinese poems in the *Wakan rōei shū* are the one hundred and thirty-five excerpts from Po Chü-i's works. Considering Po's exceptional popularity in Japan, this should not be a surprise. Among Po's works in *Wakan rōei shū*, four are derived from *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. All four tell of the Emperor's grief at the loss of his consort Yang Kuei-fei.[6] The earliest recorded reference to Po Chü-i's works in Japanese documents dates from 838, when Fujiwara no Takamori (808-851), in his capacity of inspector of ships calling in Japanese ports, obtained from a Chinese vessel a copy of the collected works of Po Chü-i and Yüan Chen.[7] Takamori presented them to the court. At that time Po Chü-i was sixty-seven years old and less than thirty years had elapsed since the composition of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. Two other works of Po's are also known to have existed in Japan. The Japanese priest Jikaku (794-864) on pilgrimage to China, had brought back with him in 847 a part of Po Chu-i's works, including a single separate copy of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow.* Another Japanese priest-pilgrim, Keigaku, returned to Japan with copies of Po's works that he had made in China in 844.[8] Thus, as mentioned before, Po Chü-i's fame as a poet had spread to Japan within his own lifetime, and his works were eagerly sought by Japanese visitors to China. Po himself acknowledged the existence of copies of his works in Japan and Korea in a postscript to the second collection of his works, which was compiled in 845 as a sequel to the first one, in fifty volumes, that appeared in 824.[9] Japanese literati welcomed Po Chü-i's collected works with great enthusiasm. Together with the *Wen-hsüan* (A Literary Anthology of the Six Dynasties), Po's collections became a "must book" on the reading lists of Japanese noblemen. His works enjoyed no less success in Japan than in their land of origin. Interestingly, other famous T'ang poets such as Li Po and Tu Fu were barely known in Japan at that time.

The Japanese became familiar with *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* in at least three ways during the Heian Period. One is through the original Chinese work, the second through paintings on the themes described in the poem, and the third through Japanese translations in both verse and prose.[10] The first method was available only to students of Chinese including Fujiwara no

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[6] Ibid, p. 78.
[7] An anecdote says that Emperor Saga (r. 809-823) possessed a set of Po Chü-i's collections.
[8] Graham 1998, p. 66.
[9] Ibid., p. 65. Together the two collections are called the *Po-shih wen-chi* (A Collection of Mr. Po). *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is included in the twelfth volume of the first collection.
[10] "A Picture Contest (*Eawase*)," a chapter in the *Tale of Genji*, mentions a graphic rendition of Po's poem. Illustrations and texts were often considered inseparable, so this graphic rendition is most likely in the form of an illustrated text.

Tametoki, Murasaki Shikibu's father. The other two were more convenient for the aristocratic public. The oldest known Japanese painting on the theme of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is a screen painting. It is referred to in the *Ise-shū* (A Collection of Ise's poems) and in other Heian literary works. This particular screen painting was made at the command of Emperor Uda (r. 887-897), who directed the two celebrated poets, Ki no Tsurayuki (882-945) and the Lady Ise (c. 875 – c. 938), to compose poems on it. This screen painting is referred to in the first chapter of *The Tale of Genji.* Unfortunately the painting itself has been long lost, but Ise's poems are contained in her private anthology, the *Ise-shū*. Like those in the *Wakan rōei shū*, Ise's ten poems all tend to concentrate on the latter part of Po's work; namely on the theme of lost love.[11] As was Lady Ise, the author of *The Tale of Genji* was quite familiar with Po's poem.

Murasaki Shikibu (c. 973 – c. 1014) was Fujiwara Kintō's contemporary. Her father Tametoki was a scholar of Chinese literature. In such an environment she is believed to have read broadly in Chinese writings, including the *Shih chi* (The Records of a Historian) and Po Chü-i's collections. She married around the age of twenty-two and gave birth to a daughter. She was widowed three years after the marriage and perhaps, it was during her widowhood that she began to write *The Tale of Genji.* The date of her novel is placed somewhere around the beginning of the eleventh century. When she was about thirty years old, she became a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Shōshi (988-1074). According to her diary, the *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* 紫式部日記 (The Dairy of Murasaki Shikibu), written sometime after 1010, she secretly tutored the Empress on the new Music Bureau style poems (*Hsin-yūei fu*) contained in Po Chü-i's collection.[12] In Heian aristocratic society it was considered inappropriate to teach girls Chinese language or subjects. However, these private sessions with the Empress extended over a period of three years.

"The Paulownia Court" (*Kiritsubo no maki*), the first chapter of *The Tale of Genji* is especially indebted to Po Chū-i*'s The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. The title of Po's poem and the name of its heroine Yang Kuei-fei are mentioned as well as several other allusions. "The Paulownia Court" describes the romance of Hikaru Genji's parents, which ends in his mother's untimely death.

The Emperor insists on having Kiritsubo always beside him, and on nights when there is music or other entertainment, he requires that she be present. Sometimes the two of them sleep late, and even after they have risen he would not let her go. This description apparently echoes the lines of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*: "She spent her days pleasing the emperor and

[11] *Ise-shū*, Hanawa Hokiichi, ed., *Gunsho ruijū*, v. 273 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1894), p. 172. Ise, the daughter of Fujiwara no Tsugukage and wife of Fujiwara no Nakahira, is a celebrated Heian poetess. She later became Emperor Uda's concubine.

[12] *Murasaki shikibu nikki,* Tamai Kōsuke, ed., in *Nihon koten zensho*, v. 26 (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1969), pp. 207and 208.

accompanying him to banquets./ She had no free time./ In the springtime, /she accompanied him on his outings, /and would share his bed night after night."[13] The courtiers wryly compare Kiritsubo to Yang Kuei-fei, but the Emperor no longer cares what his courtiers and ladies say. The Emperor's favorite lady bears him a son, Hikaru Genji. The senior consort, the mother of the eldest royal prince, begins to see the new child as her son's rival for the throne, and she intensifies her efforts to stir up resentment against Kiritsubo, the new prince's mother.[14] The Emperor finally intervenes and assigns Kiritsubo to rooms adjacent to his own, but his thoughtfulness serves only to arouse new resentment. When the prince turned three years old, a lavish ceremony is held for him. The young prince already shows a sign of becoming a real paragon. His mother, however, can no longer endure the constant barrage of insults she receives at court. That summer she falls ill and requests to be allowed to return home, but the Emperor begs her to remain at court. Her health steadily worsens, and at length he gives his consent when her mother pleads with him to let her daughter leave the palace. The lady dies shortly after her return home and the Emperor plunges into grief at his favorite's death.

**The Royal Messenger**

The autumn winds moan around the eaves, and the evenings turn chilly. On such an evening the Emperor sends a woman named Myōbu to call at the home of his consort. A large portion of "The Paulownia Court" consists of the description of the royal messenger's visit.[15] This section is particularly filled with allusions to Po's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* which suggest that the author wishes to draw her reader's attention to the parallels between her story and that of Yang Kuei-fei. Judging from the treatments of Po's poem found in the *Ise shū* and the *Wakan rōei shū*, the royal messenger's visit was considered the key element by the Japanese. Mursaki shikibu's ability as an author is clearly evident in her skillful recasting of the Chinese account, placing it in a quiet domestic setting in Heian Japan. Here, in Murasaki's mind as well as her readers' the Chinese story and "The Paulownia Court" are placed side by side. The two works are compared in terms of storyline, poetry, and visual presentation. Through this paradigm, Murasaki introduces

[13] Wikisource, "Song of Everlasting Regret." Accessed August 20, 2012. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Song_of_Everlasting_Regret

[14] The Lady Kokiden, the daughter of the Minister of the Right, is the first imperial wife and the mother of the crown prince as well as princesses. The Emperor's marriages are political in nature, so Kiritsubo's is anomaly because she does not have any backing at court but is favored far beyond her station.

[15] "The Paulownia Court" may be divided into three parts: the parents' story, the royal messenger's visit to the deceased's mother, and Hikaru Genji's childhood and early marriage.

her new novel of Hikaru Genji. Let us examine the issue further to see how she completely transforms the famous Chinese poem.

Myōbu, the Imperial messenger, reaches the desolate house of Genji's grandmother. The weeds have grown high and the autumn wind had wreaked havoc on the garden where the rays of the moon filter through. Myōbu delivers the royal message and inquires whether the old lady wishes to move into the palace with the little prince because the Emperor sorely misses his child. The grandmother politely declines the invitation on the ground that she considers her own life to have virtually ended with her daughter's death. The old lady confides her feelings to Myōbu, recalling how her late husband had been determined to send their daughter to court. She then says, "Blessed with favors beyond her station, she was the object of insults such as no one can be asked to endure. Yet endure them she did until finally the strain and resentment were too much for her. And so, as I look back upon them, I knew that those favors should never have been."[16]

Sensing a touch of acrimony toward his majesty in the old lady's words, Myōbu is quick to comfort Kiritsubo's mother, affirming that the Emperor feels much the same way. Myōbu thinks of the sovereign, who is eagerly awaiting her report, and she reminds the grandmother that she must soon depart. The old lady thinks of appropriate gifts for his majesty on such an occasion. She sends as a memento of her daughter a set of robes, left for just such an occasion, and with them an assortment of bodkins and combs. The Heian readers familiar with the Yang Kuei-fei story would have at once associated "an assortment of bodkins and combs" with the "golden hairpin and inlaid case" that the Chinese consort presented to Hsüan-tsung through the intermediary of the Taoist magician.

Myōbu returns to the palace and finds the Emperor sitting up late waiting for her. The text reads, "He had become addicted to illustrations by the Emperor Uda for The *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and to poems by Ise and Tsurayuki on that subject, and to Chinese poems as well."[17] At this point the reader knows that the Emperor is comparing his lady and himself to Yang Kuei-fei and Emperor Hsüan-tsung. However, for the Japanese Emperor, the Chinese beauty in the painting is after all no match for his lost love; he never can forget her quiet charm. Myōbu brought back the old lady's letter to the Emperor. It reads, "The tree that gave them shelter has withered and died./ One fears for the plight of *hagi* shoots beneath."[18] The Emperor finds it a strange way to put the whole matter. Sensing that the old lady is still dazed in grief, he decides to overlook the poem's suggestion that he cannot help the child. Here Kiritsubo's mother pushes societal norms and

[16] Edward Seidensticker, trans., *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 9.
[17] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[18] Ibid., p. 11.

decorum to its limit while the Emperor responds with the patience of a sage king. Thus, the order and culture of Heian aristocratic world remain intact. Po's poem ends with the revelation of the lovers' oath that Yang Kuei-fei and the sovereign exchanged on a summer night, but the Japanese Emperor ponders the old lady's letter on a chilly autumn night. The difference is remarkable.

**Hikaru Genji**

Allusions to *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* are apparent in the section of "The Paulownia Court," but the distance between the original Chinese story and its treatment by Murasaki Shikibu is marked. Whereas the Taoist magician visits Yang Kuei-fei's spirit in Po Chü-i's poem, a court lady pays a call on the mother of the dead consort in "The Paulownia Court." The Taoist magician's world is changed into a domestic setting while the remote, overgrown house evokes an atmosphere that is both mysterious and melancholic.[19] The Chinese poem's ethereal encounter of the living and the dead is changed into a meeting between two women, ornamented with their sophisticated courtly dialogue, which is pungently punctured by the mot her's grief and frustration over her daughter's untimely death. Although the prince's mother is compared to Yang Kuei-fei, the two women are almost opposite in personality. Genji's mother lacks Yang Kuei-fei's political ambition and shrewdness.[20] The skill of the author of *The Tale of Genji* does not reside in the fact that she used the Chinese poem in her story but rather in the way she transformed it.

Murasaki Shikibu initiates a new story of Hikaru Genji while fixing an eye on Po Chü-i's celebrated poem. The story of Genji's parents creates the momentum to launch the story of the life of Hikaru Genji, while Kiritsubo's death leads to the introduction of the Lady Fujitsubo, Genji's stepmother. This new lady, only five years Genji's senior, is a daughter of the former emperor, whose resemblance to his late mother is said to be most astonishing. Young Genji pays special attention to his new stepmother. As he grows older, his interest in his stepmother turns into something more and it eventually results in the birth of Prince Reizei. Reizei grows up as Genji's younger brother and eventually ascends to the throne. Through Reizei, Genji's fortune rises in public, while privately he is frightened by the *karma* of his sinful deed. *The Tale of Genji* is simultaneously the story of fortune as well as etribution, and this dual thematic scheme makes

[19] Kanda Hideo, "Hakurakuten ni kansuru hikaku bungakuteki ichi kōsatsu," in *Genji monogatari, I*, (Tokyo: Nihon Bungaku Kenkyū Shiryō Kankōkai, 1969), p. 105.
[20] Endō Jitsuo, *Chōgonka kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kensetsusha, 1934), p. 102.

this classic special.[21]

Hikaru Genji's tale begins with the story of the hero's parents in the connection with Po's work. Yang's tragic story concludes in an ethereal realm on a magic isle, but in Genji's case, the story does not end but has a fresh start in Heian Japan. On the one hand, Yang's spirit expresses her gratitude to the Emperor and graciously presents the secret lover's oath as a token to the Emperor. On the other hand, Kiritsubo's mother hints at her criticism toward the sovereign. In her mind the Emperor's affection was a harbinger of both fortune and misfortune. Earlier in the text Kiritsubo's mother is described as inconsolable at her daughter's funeral. Mercifully, the broken-hearted old woman passes away three years after her daughter's death, and Genji is old enough to mourn the passing of his grandmother. Genji is going to be the one who explores this dual theme of happiness and tragedy in life. In time he becomes the most powerful man of the land as Prince Reizei ascends to the throne. Reizen is eventually told the truth about his birth and bestows a semi-imperial title on Genji. However, his new exalted position at court requires him to marry the Third Princess. As a result, his beloved wife Murasaki is taken ill due to mental distress, and she eventually dies.[22] Genji is grief-stricken but there is more: the Third Princess gives birth to Kaoru, fathered by a young courtier named Kashiwagi. Although Genji knows the secret, in public he must accept the baby of his principal wife as his own. On the baby's fiftieth day celebration, Genji holds Kaoru in his arms just as his royal father held Reizei in his many years earlier. In the midst of the elaborate celebration, Genji is overwhelmed by a myriad of emotions. The description of deep emotion hidden under formality in such a domestic scene indeed echoes that of Kiritsubo's mother when she received the royal messenger many years before.

In "The Paulownia" chapter, the story of Genji's parents is followed by the prediction of young Genji's future by a Korean sage. Genji's royal father summons him for consultation concerning the future course of Hikaru Genji. The Korean sage says, "It is a face of one who should ascend to the highest place and be father to the nation. But to take it for such would no doubt be to predict trouble. Yet it is not the face of the minister, the deputy, who sets about ordering public affairs."[23] This puzzling prediction is to be proven true before long. The emperor

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[21] According to Ōasa Yūji's"Fujitsubo,"there have been two thoughts on the main theme of *The Tale of Genji* since the 18th century. Motoori Norinaga in his *Genji monogatari tama no ogushi* (1796) discusses how Hikaru Genji's relation with Fujitsubo brings him benefit. Hagiwara Kōdō in *Genji monogatari hyōshaku,*186 focuses on Genji's illicit relation with Fujitsubo, which results in his failed marriage to the Third Princess. Ōasa Yūji, "Fujitsubo," in *Genji monogatari kōza III* (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1971).

[22] Murasaki is Fujitsubo's niece. Initially Genji was attracted to her due to her striking resemblance to Fujitsubo.

[23] Seidensticker, p. 14.

learns about Fujitsubo, a beautiful fourth princess of the former emperor. The princess' resemblance to Kiritsubo is so astonishing that the emperor's affection begins to shift to the new lady. Genji, who does not remember his mother, wants to be near this lady always. Genji and Fujitsubo are the Emperor's two favorites and the people begin calling Genji "the shining one" and Fujitsubo "the radiant sun."The Kiritsubo's story together with Yang Kuei-fei's have launched Hikaru Genji's saga.

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