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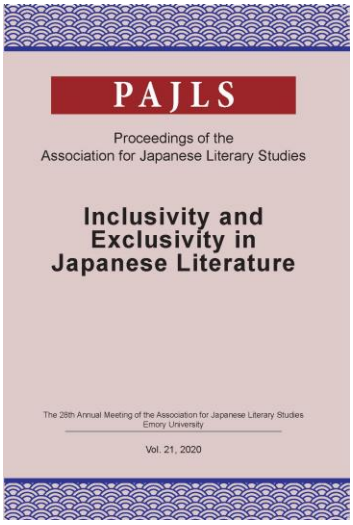

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BANQUET POETRY AND THE GENDERING OF SOCIAL AND TEXTUAL SPACES IN THE *MAN'YŌSHŪ*

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The *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (*Collection for a Myriad Ages*, completed in the latter half of the eighth century), contains over two hundred examples of poetry that are explicitly marked as having been composed at various kinds of banquet 宴 (*utage*).[2] These examples appear in twelve out of the *Man'yōshū*'s twenty volumes, mostly under the major poetic category of *zōka* 雑歌 ("miscellaneous poems").[3] In addition, there are a number of other poems whose content and relationship to other poems in the anthology have led scholars to speculate that they were also composed at banquets. Considering both the volume of poetry composed at banquets and the different types of banquets described in the *Man'yōshū*, it is clear that such occasions were central to poetic composition in late seventh and eighth-century Japan.

Originally thought to have been a ritual performed for the purpose of inviting the gods down and entertaining them with food and drink,[4] banquets in late seventh and early eighth-century Japan were also held in observance of nodal festivals such as the beginning of a new year or the Tanabata festival in summer. These occasions were spaces in which members of the Yamato court could commune with each other while a member of the imperial family or a high-ranking noble presided over them as host. Banquets can be thus considered as part of a general category of events pertaining to ritual observance, regardless of whether they were

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7352-8285
[2] In addition to the character 宴, the *Man'yōshū* includes a variety of compounds containing the character 宴 including *toyo no akari*/*shien* 肆宴, *kyōen* 饗宴, *enseki* 宴席, *enkai* 宴会, *enraku* 宴楽, etc.
[3] There are examples of compositions performed at banquets in Volume Four, which is entirely dedicated to *sōmon* 相聞 ("correspondences") poetry, and a few examples of *hiyuka* 譬喩歌 ("allegorical poems") composed in banquet settings in Volume Three. *Zōka* in general are identified as poems composed during public occasions such as imperial processions, hunts, and banquets, whereas *sōmon* are described as (mostly) private exchanges between at least two parties. *Hiyuka*'s status as a distinct poetic category has been subjected to scholarly debate for decades, given its overlapping characteristics with both *zōka* and *sōmon* as well as its origins in Sinitic poetry of the same name. For examples of this discourse in Japanese and English, see Omodaka (1958) and Yiu (1990) respectively.
[4] Kanazawa (2002), 151.

private parties in the residences of royalty or high-ranking courtiers, or official events sanctioned by the sovereign. Furthermore, poems linked to other public ritual events—such as hunts or imperial processions—are believed to have been composed at banquets hosted on grounds or in imperial villas after their conclusion.[5] Though the emotions expressed therein ranged from direct felicitations for the occasion to metaphorical poses of longing for another time or place, the recording of poetry from these events in the *Man'yōshū* served to demonstrate both the literary prowess and political influence of their authors as well as the power of banquet hosts to gather such distinguished individuals together.

Banquets also gradually became exclusive, hierarchical, and gendered social spaces of privilege. While there are some early examples of banquets in which both men and women participated, by the eighth-century there is a notable shift in the representation of women at banquets and other public events and the manner in which they are represented as compared to their male counterparts in the *Man'yōshū*. For example, while Volume One, whose dates range from Emperor Yūryaku's 雄略天皇 reign in the fifth century to Empress Genmei's 元明天皇 in the early eighth century, includes ten women out of its thirty-six named poets, there are only six identifiable women out of over fifty poets recorded in Volume Three, whose reigns span from Empress Jitō 持統天皇 in the late seventh century up the Empress Shōmu 聖武天皇 in the mid-eighth century. In terms of percentages, the number of women between these two volumes decreases from twenty-two percent to roughly twelve percent. In addition, most women represented at these events were active before the Tenpyō 天平 period (729–749), the first era of Emperor Shōmu's reign that is also generally considered as the "modern" period within the first sixteen volumes of the *Man'yōshū*.[6] What little banquet poetry by women from the Tenpyō period remains in the anthology is contextualized within the space of private drinking parties. We can conclude, therefore, that while banquets were once represented as a social setting in which both men and women participated equally, these spaces became gendered as

[5] Ibid., 151–52.

[6] The last four volumes are generally considered as coming from Yakamochi's personal collections beginning from his tenure as the governor of the Etchū province 越中国 (745), and therefore anthologized later than the first sixteen volumes. Itō Haku and Nakanishi Susumu are credited with the two major competing theories about the *Man'yōshū*'s formation, but both distinguish the first sixteen volumes as separate from the last four. For more information on theories surrounding the anthology's formation, see Itō (1974) and Nakanishi (1992) in Japanese, and Horton (2012) and Duthie (2014) for English-language summaries.

predominantly masculine within the text, suggesting a reality where women began to disappear from public life and their literary participation was confined to more intimate environments.

Banquet poetry from the early period of the *Man'yōshū* contains examples by both men and women, most of whom had close connections to the imperial throne. Although the headnotes and footnotes provide little information beyond the location at which the banquets took place, the poems seem to have some ritual or political function. The first explicit example of a banquet poem is attributed to Princess Nukata 額田王 (dates unknown, c. seventh century), a significant poet from the *Man'yōshū*'s first period who was also one of Emperor Tenmu's 天武天皇 (r. 673–686) consorts. It is recorded in the first volume during a procession to the Hira Palace:

> *From the Age when the Sovereign reigned from the Kawara Palace in Asuka (Empress Ametoyo Takara Ikashi Hitara-shihime)*[7]
>
> *A poem by Princess Nukata (not certain)*
>
> That temporary abode in Uji where we stayed,
> Whose roof we covered with thatch cut from the autumn fields,
> How my thoughts return to it!
>
> *In regard to the [above], if we examine it against Governor Yamanoue no Okura's* Ruijū karin, *it says, "According to one book this is a poem by the sovereign from the year Earth-Senior/Monkey [648] when the sovereign made a visit to the palace in Hira." However, the* Nihon shoki *says, "In the first month of spring in the fifth year [659], on the day Metal-Junior/Serpent of the first month of Earth-Junior/Hare the sovereign arrived from the hot springs of Ki. In the third month, beginning on Earth-Senior/Tiger, the sovereign made a progress to the palace in Yoshino and held a banquet. On the day of Metal-Senior/Dragon, the sovereign made a progress to Hira Bay in Ōmi."*[8]

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[7] Empress Saimei 斉明天皇 (594–661). She reigned first as Empress Kōgyoku 皇極天皇 between 642 and 645, then ascended the throne again as Saimei from 655 until her death in 661.

[8] Kinoshita (2001), *MYS* I, Poem 7.

One of the major issues of Nukata's poem is the ambiguity surrounding its composition. Given that the poem was composed during the official setting of an imperial procession, there are more sources for the compiler to reference in contextualizing the poem. This creates a conundrum, however, when those sources contain conflicting information. As the endnote indicates, a no longer extant poetic anthology, the *Ruijū karin* 類聚歌林, dates the poem to a journey made by the sovereign in 648, but the only record of a journey to Hira in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (720) dates to eleven years later. The *Ruijū karin* also attributes the authorship of the poem to the sovereign instead of to Nukata, thus raising the possibility that the poem may have been originally ghost-written by Nukata for her sovereign. Two things are clear from this example, however: first, that women were present at public events such as imperial processions and active in the banquets following them, and second, that high-ranking women composed poetry (perhaps on behalf of the sovereign) during this time period. It even suggests that women could speak for the sovereign within a public setting.

Like Poem 7 above by Princess Nukata, another example of banquet poetry from Volume One of the *Man'yōshū* is scant on facts yet alludes to political situations at the end of the seventh century. The last entry in the book, Poem 84, was composed by Prince Naga 長皇子 (d. 715) when he attended a banquet with Prince Shiki 志貴皇子 (d. 716) at the Saki Palace. Naga and Shiki were the sons of Emperors Tenmu and Tenchi 天智天皇 (r. 668–672) respectively. As Torquil Duthie points out, the fact that both Shiki and Naga's sons became the leading contenders for the throne after the death of Empress Shōtoku 称徳天皇 in 770, suggests that the following poem was included to foreshadow later imperial succession:[9]

A poem from when Prince Naga and Prince Shiki held a banquet together at the Saki Palace

If it were autumn, they would be as we see now,
Mountains where the deer cries in longing for his wife—
These hills above Takanohara.

[The above] is a poem by Prince Naga.[10]

[9] Duthie (2014), 199.
[10] Ibid., *MYS* I, Poem 84.

Compared to Princess Nukata's poem, the headnote Prince Naga's poem contains a little more information, but not much besides the location and the names of its highest-ranking participants. Based on information provided in other volumes of the *Man'yōshū* and commentaries, it seems that the Saki Palace was Prince Naga's residence, making him the banquet host.[11] While it is unclear if this banquet was held after an official event or was a private gathering between two princes, the inclusion of a poem from this time is peculiar, particularly given the fact that it is the lone entry in the last section of Volume One, titled, "The Nara Palace." As the probable banquet host, Prince Naga would have been expected to provide a composition. The fact that it is the only one recorded from that event in the anthology spotlights Prince Naga as an important political figure as well as a literary talent within the court. The mention of Prince Shiki in the headnote also gestures toward his important place in imperial history, however, as Prince Shiki's son ended up acceding to the throne as Emperor Kōnin 光仁天皇 (r. 770–781) and continued the imperial line into the ninth century. The image of Shiki and Naga hosting a banquet together as recorded in Volume One hence implies a union between the two competing factions, at least on a textual level.

The political dimensions of poetry banquets as well as the recording of such events in the *Man'yōshū* continues well into the eighth century. As Gustav Heldt has argued regarding *waka* poetry banquets in the early Heian period (794–1185),[12] banquets in the mid-eighth century became sites where competing political factions vied for literary prestige as they composed on similar topics at the request of a high-ranking figure. One example of this is from an impromptu banquet held by retired sovereign Genshō 元正天皇 (r. 715–724) after a sudden snowfall, which included the participation of the poet who would become the main compiler of the *Man'yōshū*, Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (c. 718–785), and his powerful political ally, Tachibana no Moroe 橘諸兄 (684–757). The banquet took place in 746, and selections of its poems are recorded in Volume Seventeen:[13]

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[11] For more information, see Omodaka (1957), 458–59.

[12] Specifically, he argues that participants adopted the Chinese ideal of "harmonizing verse," and that the act of composing poetry and performing it in front of an audience contained sociopolitical importance along with literary significance. Heldt also states that in the Heian period "poetic exchanges between high-ranking members of the court… often sought to alleviate political tensions between different parties…" Heldt (2008), 14.

[13] Only the headnotes and endnotes are translated due to limited space.

In the first month of Tenpyō 18[14] *much white snow fell, and several inches piled up on the ground. Subsequently the Minister of the Left Lord Tachibana led Major Counselor Fujiwara no Toyonari Asomi as well as several princes and courtiers to visit the retired Sovereign's residence (the west courtyard of the Empress's palace), where they performed the service of sweeping away the snow. Thereupon she issued a command that the great ministers, state councillors, and various princes attend her in the great hall, and the various ministers and masters attend her in the narrow hall, where she had them served wine and gave them a feast. By imperial decree she proclaimed, "All of you various princes and ministers, make a few compositions on this snowfall and submit each of your poems to me."*

[Poems recorded from the banquet omitted for space]

Fujiwara no Toyonari asomi, Kose no Nademaro asomi, Ōtomo no Ushikai sukune
Fujiwara no Nakamaro asomi, Prince Mihara, Prince Chinu
Prince Funa, Prince Ōchi, Prince Oda
Prince Hayashi, Hozumi no asomi Oyu, Oda no asomi Morohito
Ono no asomi Tsunate, Takahashi no asomi Kunitari, Ō no asomi Tokotari
Takaoka no muraji Kōchi, Hata no imiki Chōgen, Narahara no miyatsuko Azumahito

The aforementioned princes and courtiers [above] composed poems in response to imperial decree, and submitted them in order. Their poems were not recorded at that time, and have since been lost. In the case of Hata no imiki Chōgen, however, Minister of the Left Lord Tachibana teased him, saying, "If you cannot compose a poem, present musk[15] *as recompense." For this reason he stayed silent.*[16]

Unlike the previous examples, the preface for this sequence provides abundant information about the banquet's context and even records the names of its attendants as well as some of their actions and behavior. In

[14] Roughly corresponding to February of 746.
[15] "Musk" 麝 here refers to musk presumably from Siberian musk deer.
[16] Kinoshita (2001), headnote and endnote for *MYS* XVII, Poems 3922–3926.

describing the retired sovereign's commands to the princes and courtiers, who as dutiful subjects sweep away the snow and compose poetry at her request, this preface envisions a miniature version of the Yamato court. It creates textual space for the courtiers to commune with their (retired) sovereign and honor her. What is notable, however, particularly given the gender of the retired sovereign herself, is the absence of women from the event. Except for Retired Sovereign Genshō, all the participants listed are men.

It is significant that the five poems from this event recorded in the *Man'yōshū* are all authored by members of Tachibana no Moroe's faction, which included Yakamochi. This group had conflicts with various members of the Fujiwara such as Nakamaro, especially after his appointments to State Councilor 参議 (*sangi*) and Left Master of the Capital Offices 左京織 (*sakyōshiki*) in 743 and the death of Genshō and Moroe's preferred imperial candidate, Prince Asaka 安積親王 (728–744), in the following year.[17] The exclusion of Nakamaro's entry among others can be interpreted as a slight on the part of the compiler, Yakamochi. Yakamochi's Snowfall Banquet sequence alludes to its social contexts through the inclusion and exclusion of poems in the text of the *Man'yōshū*, thereby showcasing a particular group's cultural and political prowess. The importance of literary skill is all the clearer in the endnote's description of Hata no Chōgen's humiliation by Moroe for his lack of ability in composing *uta* poetry.

Volume Five of the *Man'yōshū*, which is dedicated to compositions by Yakamochi's father, Ōtomo no Tabito 大伴旅人 (665–731) and his poetic circle at Dazaifu during his tenure as governor-general 大宰帥 (*Dazai no sochi*) between 728 and 730, represents a different kind of political context for banquet poetry. Volume Five is unique in the *Man'yōshū* for its extensive headnotes, endnotes, and literary prefaces full of references to Sinitic classics. One of the most famous poetic sequences in this volume, from a plum blossom party Tabito hosted in 730, begins with the following preface:[18]

Thirty-Two Plum Blossom Poems, with an additional preface

[17] See Aoki, et. al. (1989), 425–27 and 437 respectively for Nakamaro's appointments and Asaka's death. See Naoki (1993), 251–53, for more details on Moroe's regime in English.

[18] Given limited space, only the preface is provided here.

> *On the thirteenth day of the first month of Tenpyō 2*[19] *we gather at the venerable Governor-General's residence and hold a banquet. At the time it is a good month in early spring; the weather is fine, and the breeze gentle.*[20] *The plum blossoms open up like powder before a beauty's mirror, and the orchids smell like perfume trailing a sachet.*[21] *Not only that, but clouds also move across the peaks at dawn, and pines are draped in gauze, leaning over canopy plants.*[22] *Mountain caves are filled with mist in the evening, and birds trapped in crepe wander lost in the woods. In the garden new butterflies dance, and in the sky old geese return home. And so, with heaven as a parasol and earth as a seat, bringing our knees close, we send the winecups flying. Inside a room, words are forgotten, and outside in the smoky haze, we open our hearts to each other. In tranquility we free ourselves, and in geniality we are content.*[23] *If there was not a garden of letters, how could we express our feelings? In poetry,*[24] *collections on the subject of fallen plum blossoms are recorded; how then is the past different than the present? We should also sing of plum blossoms in the garden and make a few short compositions.*[25]

With clear references to classical Chinese texts such as the *Lantingji xu* 蘭亭集序 ("Preface to the Poems Collected from the Orchid Pavilion") by Wang Xizhi and Zhang Heng's *Gui tian fu* 帰田賦 ("Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields"), anthologized in the *Wen xuan* 文選 (*Selections*

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[19] This date roughly corresponds to February 8th, 730.

[20] *Wen xuan* Chapter 15, Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields: "Then, in the finest month of mid-spring/when the weather is fair and the air clear…" 於是仲春令月, 時和氣清 (translation by Knechtges [1996], 141.) Also similar to a line in the *Lantingji xu* preface, 是日也，天朗氣清，惠風和暢。

[21] The powder to which the line refers is a white powder used by women as makeup and applied to the face. This line resembles a poem on the topic of spring wind by Northern and Southern Dynasties poet He Xun, among other Sinitic verse. The next line about the orchids' perfume resembles verses found in the *Chu ci* ("Songs of Chu") and the *Wen xuan*. The orchid is likely the specimen *Cymbidium goeringii*, or the noble orchid.

[22] The canopy plant, from the genus *Paris*, is also known as the *kinugasa* 蓋 or *kinugasasō* キヌガサソウ.

[23] 淡然 Ch. *dan ran* or Jp. *tanzen*, meaning to not be bothered or indifferent. 快然 Ch. *kuai ran* or Jp. *kaizen* meaning to be elated, in a good mood, or have pleasant feelings. The phrase 快然自足 comes directly from the *Langtingji xu*.

[24] This refers specifically to 詩 *shi*, or classic examples of Sinitic verse.

[25] Kinoshita (2001), preface to *MYS* V, Poems 815–846.

of Refined Literature), the preface to the plum blossom party sequence depicts an idyllic space in which the noble courtiers—all of whom are male officials and Tabito's subordinates—can let go, drink freely, and compose poetry. This space provides a sense of structure and security in the face of life's uncertainties, which is not dissimilar to depictions of the feast in early Sinitic poetry as described by Stephen Owen.[26] In addition, by referring back to texts such as the *Lantingji xu* preface, where Wang Xizhi asserts that through the act of reading and writing one can transcend the ephemerality of life and join, in Wendy Swartz's words, "a spiritual community of like-minded men that transcends temporal boundaries,"[27] the Plum Blossom Party Preface frames the event as participating in a transtemporal literary dialogue. Poetry as framed in the preface functions not only as a social lubricant used to establish camaraderie among participants, but also as a means for them to express themselves in the style of their (Sinitic) literary predecessors and join that transhistorical community.

As Jeremy Robinson has observed, Tabito's plum blossom banquet is clearly scripted, and the purpose of the preface is to provide an organizing framework for the sequence that follows. Robinson makes special mention of the fact that, "…the thirty-two poems are included in a consistent and complete manner, unlike the messy reality of other banquets represented in the *Man'yōshū*, in which only a few poems are preserved."[28] The result is a sequence that operates as its own distinct literary unit, carving out a space in which to showcase literary contributions from Tabito's inner circle within Volume Five.

However, the significance of Tabito's preface does not seem to have been strictly literary. In a recent article published shortly after the Japanese government's announcement of the new era name *Reiwa* 令和, Shinada Yoshikazu argues that Tabito's references to Sinitic texts are clearly meant to convey his frustration with the current state of the Yamato court.[29] The plum blossom party was held following the infamous "Nagaya Incident," 長屋王の変 in which the four Fujiwara brothers schemed to charge Tabito's ally Prince Nagaya 長屋王 (d. 729) with witchcraft and sedition and thus force him to commit suicide.[30] In this historical context, the

[26] Owen (2006), 196–97.
[27] Swartz (2012), 279.
[28] Robinson (2004), 205.
[29] Shinada (2019), 51.
[30] The four brothers were Muchimaro, Fusasaki, Umakai, and Maro. Each of them became a founder of one of the four main branches of the Fujiwara lineage. For more information about the Nagaya Incident in English, see Naoki (1993), 247–48.

reference to Zhang Heng's "Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields" takes on new meaning. Just as Zhang Heng found joy in the countryside away from corrupt court politics, Tabito implicitly critiques his own contemporaries in the capital through an idealized depiction of the banquet.[31] Thus the Plum Blossom sequence and its preface in Volume Five of the *Man'yōshū* becomes a literary space in which to both escape from, and covertly express dismay at, the state of the court after Nagaya's downfall.

The banquet poetry composed by the third major poet of the Ōtomo lineage, Lady Sakanoue 大伴坂上郎女 (active first half of eighth century), Tabito's sister and Yakamochi's aunt, does not receive the same kind of literary or historical contextualization as the poetry of her male relatives, even though Sakanoue appears frequently in volumes dominated by the Ōtomo lineage other than Volume Five, and is one of the few women with banquet poetry among her contributions. The following two poems depict an exchange during a family banquet between Sakanoue and Ōtomo no Surugamaro 大伴駿河麻呂 (d. 776), one of her relatives who would eventually propose marriage to Sakanoue's daughter. This exchange is one of several in which Sakanoue expresses concern over her daughter's welfare, and Surugamaro tries to reassure her that he has good intentions:

A poem Lady Ōtomo no Sakanoue recited on a day when she held a banquet with her relatives

Since I did not know the mountain had a guardian,
I staked it out and cordoned it off with rope—
An act that fills me with shame!

A poem immediately in response by Ōtomo no sukune Surugamaro

Even if there is any mountain guardian,
Who would unfasten the rope used by my sister
To wrap around the mountain?[32]

For the claim that Nagaya was falsely accused of treason, see Aoki, et al. (1989), 341–43.

[31] Shinada (2019), 51–52.

[32] Kinoshita (2001), *MYS* III, Poems 401–402.

A poem by Lady Ōtomo no Sakanoue during a banquet with her relatives

Just as such, enjoy yourselves and drink!
Even the grass and trees, though they flourish in spring,
Come autumn, they will wither.[33]

A poem by Lady Ōtomo no Sakanoue

After meeting and drinking together with friends,
Plum blossoms floating in our cups filled with *sake*,
Even if they fall, it matters not.

A poem in response

This was even allowed by the authorities.
Is this sake we will drink only for tonight?
Flowers, please never fall!

Concerning [the above], alcohol was banned on official orders, and one could not have a banquet within the capital. However, since it was said that it was permissible to enjoy drinking with one or two close relatives, the respondent made these two lines.[34]

Just as with Sakanoue and Surugamaro's exchange in Volume Three, this exchange at the end of Volume Eight positions Sakanoue as the initiator for a family event and the poetic sequence it. A poem composed as a reply to hers then follows. This is similar to other banquets depicted in the *Man'yōshū*, where women are often the first to offer up a composition and then men respond to them in turn.[35] What is notable about Sakanoue's case, however, is that it is one of the few examples that showcases poetry from private parties, and the poems cited above (MYS 401 and 995) are the *sole* examples of banquets hosted among relatives in the entire anthology. Furthermore, like Tabito's Plum Blossom sequence, poems such as 995 in Volume Six and 1656 in Volume Eight are also concerned with ephemerality and sensual abandonment. While there are no overt

[33] Kinoshita (2001), *MYS* VI, Poem 995.
[34] *MYS* VIII, Poems 1656–1657.
[35] See Iwashita (2014), 1–21, for a detailed analysis of banquet poetry between men and women and how it differs from *sōmon* 相聞 ("mutual exchange") poetic practices.

references to Sinitic classical texts, Sakanoue's poems display an awareness of the banquet's function in creating cultural community, even while confined within the space of the Ōtomo residences.

Like the Sinitic banquets by which they were inspired, poetry banquets in eighth-century Japan were organized around a main figure of authority, who commanded his or her subordinates to compose poetry. The fact that Tabito's Plum Blossom Banquet in Dazaifu and Yakamochi's Snowfall Banquet at Retired Sovereign Genshō's Residence feature no women poets and that Lady Sakanoue's banquet poems are limited to familial gatherings with her relatives showcase the reality that public poetry banquets were mostly restricted to male officials. The gendered nature of sociocultural spaces at the eighth-century Yamato court in turn defined the gendering of textual space in the *Man'yōshū*. For instance, in Volume Five, which includes several banquet sequences such as Tabito's Plum Blossom Party, the presence of women such as Sakanoue is practically nonexistent. By contrast, Sakanoue dominates Volume Four, a book composed of personal exchanges between friends, relatives, and lovers. Given that the act of collecting and recording the poetic exchanges between banquet attendants served as a means of transmitting the cultural legitimacy of the Yamato court, the exclusion of women from literary participation in public forums such as state-sponsored banquets, and their restriction to the more intimate realm of family gatherings, is likely to have had a profound effect on the extent to which women poets were represented in the *Man'yōshū*.

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