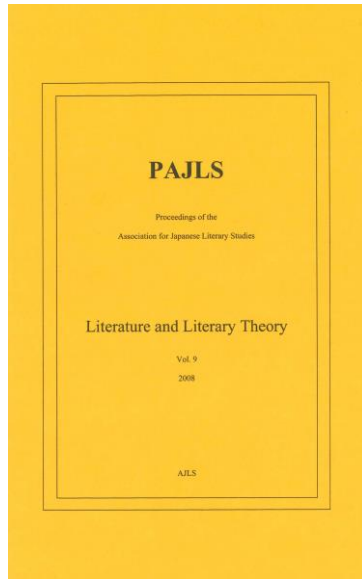


# “Potentiality of Literary Experience: The Role of the Past in Medieval Poetic Theories”

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## Potentiality of Literary Experience: The Role of the Past in Medieval Poetic Theories

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In 1192, one of the most important poetry matches called *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, or *the Poetry Match in Six Hundred Rounds*, was held. The organizer Fujiwara no Yoshitsune (1169-1206) invited twelve poets to participate in the match and asked Fujiwara no Shunzei (1111-1204) to be its judge. This poetry match is considered to have played an important role in the history of Japanese poetry in its scale and the variety of its topics. In *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, an interesting argument arose between one of the participants Kenshō (1161-1207) and the judge Shunzei. This became a controversial topic among medieval poets for years afterward.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, by focusing on the argument at *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, I will first explore how the concept of time engages with medieval poetical theories. Secondly, I will move on to the development of a concept of “the past” peculiar to the medieval poetic technique *honkadori*. Finally, I will show that considering medieval poems in terms of the concept of time enables us to identify a drastic change in the paradigm of *waka* composition in the medieval era.

In *Ropyyakuban utaawase* Kenshō composed a poem on the topic of “love associated with robes” (*koromo ni yosuru koi*) as follows:

*The Poetry Match in Six Hundred Rounds*, Love IX, Round 19, Left, Kenshō, 1117  
Koi goromo itsuka hiru beki kawayashiro  
shirushi mo nami ni itodo shiorete

Soaked with tears of love I wonder when my robes will dry.  
Though I prayed to the god of Kawayashiro, the shrine on the river, there is no  
sign of its work, and the waves of the river wet my robes.<sup>2</sup>

His opponent, Fujiwara no Ietaka (1158-1237), pointed out that Kenshō’s poem is based on a poem composed by the poet Ki no Tsurayuki (872-945) shown below.

Kawayashiro shino ni orihae hosu koromo  
ikani hoseba ka nanoka hizaramu

At the river shrine, I spread out many a robe to dry.  
But oh, why have they not dried yet after many days?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Matsuno Yōichi, Kubota Jun ed., *Karonshū* (Tokyo: Miyai shoten, 1971), 408-409 and Kawahira Hitoshi, “Hekianshō shoshikō 2: tsuichū kawayashiro no mondai,” in *Atomi gakuen joshi daigaku kiyō*, vol. 17 (March 1984), 92.

<sup>2</sup> My translation is based on Kubota Jun and Yamaguchi Akiho, eds., *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, vol. 38, *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998), 390.

<sup>3</sup> Tsurayuki’s poem was later incorporated into *Shinkokinwakashū* (Book XIX, Sacred Songs, 1916). The translation is based on *The Shin kokinshū*, Heihachirō Honda trans. (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1970), 527.

Ietaka says that several interpretations have already been offered on Tsurayuki's poem and asks for Kenschō's interpretation. As Ietaka mentions, the meaning of Tsurayuki's poem has been a point of controversy among poets throughout the years. In particular, the meaning of "Kawayashiro" has remained unclear. For example, a poet called Minamoto no Toshiyori wrote in his poetic treatise *Toshiyori zuino*, or *Toshiyori's Poetic Essentials*, as follows:

Nobody is certain about "Kawayashiro." Someone said people built a shrine on the water and performed the god's dances in summer. Thus, "Kawayashiro" means a shrine built on the water.<sup>4</sup>

In response to Ietaka's question at *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, Kenschō answers as follows:

Tsurayuki's poem describes a ritual called "Natsukagura," or the god's music ritual held in summer. At the ritual, people plant cleyera trees in a purified river, place bamboo leaves on altars, and make offerings. That's what we call a "kawayashiro," or river shrine. You can find the details in *Natsukagura no fu*, or *Musical Score of the Summer Dances for the Gods*.<sup>5</sup>

Here, we must draw attention to the following points of Kenschō's interpretation. First, he translates the word *shino* as "bamboo leaves." Second, he bases his interpretation on a musical score called *Natsukagura no fu*. Fujiwara no Shunzei, the judge of *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, commented on Kenschō's interpretation by referring to Toshiyori's view.

According to Minamoto no Toshiyori's writing, people didn't even know about "kawayashiro." I asked someone, who has continued the tradition of the dances, if he knows about *Natsukagura no fu*, and he answered that although there was supposed to be a ritual called "Natsukagura," he has never seen the musical score. Since Minamoto no Toshiyori was an expert at playing the *hichiriki*, or double reed instrument, he must have known well about the dances. However, he wrote that nobody knew about "Natsukagura"! Kenschō maintains that the detail of the ritual "Natsukagura" is described in *Natsukagura no fu*. I must ask him to offer evidence to prove that the text of *Natsukagura no fu* really exists.<sup>6</sup>

Shunzei continues as follows:

Tsurayuki's poem reads "Kawayashiro shino-ni." *Shino-ni* is an ancient word, which means "frequently" or "always." It was used in the past in *Man'yōshū* and other poems.<sup>7</sup>

Here, we can see a sharp division of opinions over the interpretation of Tsurayuki's poem between Shunzei and Kenschō. What leads them to have such different opinions? At first, I

<sup>4</sup> My translation is based on Hashimoto Fumio, Ariyoshi Tamotsu and Fujihira Haruo, eds., "Toshinori zuino" in *Karonshū*, vol. 87, *Shinpen Nihon bungaku koten zenshū* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 2002), 166.

<sup>5</sup> *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, 390.

<sup>6</sup> *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, 391-2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, 392.

would like to provide an overview the history of the word *shino-ni*. As Shunzei argues, *shino-ni* was frequently used in poems. We can find poems including *shino-ni* especially in *Man'yōshū*. Shunzei was very interested in the word *shino-ni*. He listed five poems which included the word in his treatise *Koraifūteishō*, or *Poetic Styles Past and Present*, and made comments on them. One of the poems merits our attention.

*Man'yōshū*, vol.3, 268, Hitomaro  
 Ōmi no umi ūnami chidori naga nakeba  
 kokoro mo shino ni inishie omōyu

Out on Ōmi Sea plovers on the evening waves,  
 when I hear your cries, into my now helpless heart come thoughts of long ago.<sup>8</sup>

He wrote that “the word *shino-ni* in this poem was always used in poems in the past.”<sup>9</sup> As he argued in his comment in *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, Shunzei again emphasizes the fact that *shino-ni* is an ancient word. From his point of view, the word *shino-ni* was something of the past and no longer in use in the present time. It is true that poems which included *shino-ni* practically disappeared after the *Man'yōshū* period. In contrast, we can find an opposite view on *shino-ni* in Kenschō's opinion. In response to Shunzei's comment in *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, Kenschō wrote a long commentary called *Kenschō chinjo*, or *Kenschō's statement*, in which he argues as follows:

I have heard for years that Ta no Suketada compiled *Natsukagura no fu*. Suketada's son, Chikakata, left the text to his son, Narikata. It is said that the text was written by Suketada's own hand. It was named “Blue-covered book.” The late Shigeie made a copy of this volume. And then Shigeie's book was delivered to Akisuke.<sup>10</sup>

Kenschō explains how the text of *Natsukagura no fu* has been passed down through generations. The important thing here is that, from Kenschō's perspective, *Natsukagura* is not something of the past but something that has descended to the present time. Since *Natsukagura no fu* describes how to carry out the ritual of dances in summer and describes *shino-ni* as bamboo leaves, which are used at the ceremony, *shino-ni* is not abandoned, he argues, but is still available in the present.

We can now see a clear difference between Shunzei and Kenschō over how to grasp “the past.” While Kenschō argues that *shino-ni* has been used from the past to the present, Shunzei maintains that although *shino-ni* was used in the past, it has been abandoned. This difference is inscribed in how they interpret Tsurayuki's poem. When Kenschō interprets Tsurayuki's poem, he argues that he can understand what is described in the poem by reference to *Natsukagura no fu*. It seems that the text of *Natsukagura no fu* is for him the basis to convey the meaning of words from the past to the present. However, Shunzei disputes Kenschō's idea in his treatise *Koraifūteishō* and explains the creation of the text of *Natsukagura no fu* as follows:

<sup>8</sup> Edwin Cranston trans., *A Waka Anthology One volume: The Gem-Glistening Cup* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 192.

<sup>9</sup> Hashimoto, et al., *Karonshū*, 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Ropyyakuban utaawase*, 477.

Someone, a performer of the god's dances, was so proud of his knowledge about the god's dances that he tried to interpret Tsurayuki's poem as a description of the dances. And he wrote a musical score to instruct how to carry out the ritual such as "You have to place bamboo leaves at altars" without realizing that those words actually came from *Man'yōshū*.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Shunzei argues that the text of *Natsukagura no fu* was fabricated by someone after Tsurayuki, who tried to explain Tsurayuki's poem by using his knowledge about the dances. People tend to think that if a text has a long history of how it has been handed down to descendants, it conveys an accurate image of things in the past. But Shunzei insists that it is easy to make up documents to interpret things in the past by using the framework prevalent in the present, and he emphasizes that the word included in Tsurayuki's poem came from *Man'yōshū*. Now we need to remind ourselves again of how he described the words of *Man'yōshū*. When Shunzei describes *Man'yōshū* as compositions of "ancient words," he perceives the past as completely separated from his time. Here we can see how deeply the concept of time engaged with poetical theories in medieval times.

It is famous that Shunzei was the one who introduced *honkadōri* to medieval poetry. *Honkadōri* is a poetically sanctioned pattern of citation, according to which a poem is signified through an explicit allusion to an old one called *honka*. Shunzei praised highly the recollection of the original poem through the new one in his critical judgments on the poetry matches, *utaawase*. As we have already seen, he argues that the words used in *Man'yōshū* are "ancient words" from a past completely separated from Shunzei's present. How do the "ancient words" work in *honkadōri*?

Shunzei puts his idea on *honkadōri* into practice in composing poems. I would like to show an example. Some have argued that Shunzei composed this poem in early autumn in 1193 after his wife Chikatada no musume died that spring. Actually, however, it was created in response to a poem, which his son Fujiwara no Teika wrote. Teika's poem reads as follows:

*Chōshūeisō* 193, Teika  
 Tamayura no tsuyu mo namida mo todomazuru  
 naki hito kouru yado no akikaze

The autumn wind blows o'er the bower where she lived, once dew and my tears  
 falling without cease.<sup>12</sup>

In response, Shunzei composed the following poem shown below.

*Chōshūeisō*, 194, Shunzei  
 aki ni nari kaze no suzushiku kawaru nimo  
 namida no tsuyu zo shino ni chiri keru

As autumn has come and the wind turned cool,  
 dews of tears have begun scattering heavily.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Koraifuteishō* in Hashimoto, et al., *Karonshū*, 306.

<sup>12</sup> Teika's poem was later incorporated into *Shinkokinwakashū* (Book VII, Elegies, 788). The translation is based on Honda, *The Shin kokinshū*, 215.

Scholars have contended that, compared to Teika's poem, Shunzei's poem does not express his regret as deeply. In his poem, Teika expresses his deep sorrow by directly stating that he misses the deceased (*naki hito kouru*) and describing a flood of tears which never stops. On the contrary, Shunzei's poem just focuses on tears likened to dew drops blown by the autumn wind. Some researchers have pointed out that these two poems were created based on the following episode of *The Tale of Genji*. In Minori, or "The Law," the heroine, Lady Murasaki dies.<sup>14</sup> The scene of Genji's visit to Lady Murasaki is described as follows: "She seemed to revive somewhat when autumn came at last and the weather turned a little cooler, but even so, she was far from well."<sup>15</sup>

It is thought that Shunzei's poem, which reads "As autumn has come and the wind turned cool" refers to this narrative. In addition, when Lady Murasaki dies, she exchanges poems with Genji and the Empress Akashi. We can find the expression of dew drops in all the poems:

"Alas, not for long will you see what you do now: any breath of wind may spill from a hagi frond the last trembling *drop of dew*." (Lady Murasaki)

"When all life is *dew* and at any touch may go, one drop then the next, how I pray that you and I may leave nearly together!" (Genji)

"In this world where no *dewdrop* can linger in the autumn wind, why imagine us to be unlike the bending grasses?" (The Empress Akashi)<sup>16</sup>

From these examples, it is said that Shunzei and Teika identified the death of Shunzei's wife with that of Lady Murasaki in their poems.<sup>17</sup> In this way, researchers have argued that in the practice of *honkadōri* the new poem and the old ones overlap.<sup>18</sup> It is true that *The Tale of Genji* had an impact on Shunzei's poem. However, we cannot ignore the fact that Shunzei's poem includes the word *shino-ni*. How does then *shino-ni* work in this poem? In addition to the fact that Shunzei's poem includes *shino-ni*, I will show that we can find a poem which includes both *shino-ni* and *tsuyu*, or dew drops, in *Man'yōshū*. Thus, "dew drops" in Shunzei's poem could also refer to this *Man'yōshū* poem.

<sup>13</sup> My translation is based on *Fujiwara Shunzei zenshū* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 2007), 232.

<sup>14</sup> Kubota Jun analyzed Teika's poem, pointed out that it evokes scenes of the typhoon, or *nowaki*, in the chapters of "The Paulownia Pavilion," "The Typhoon" and "The Law," and argued that Teika identifies himself with Yūgiri. Kubota Jun, *Fujiwara no Teika*, vol. 9, *Ōchō no kajin* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1984), 87-91.

<sup>15</sup> Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, Royall Tyler trans. (New York: Viking, 2001), 758.

<sup>16</sup> Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji*, 759 (emphasis mine).

<sup>17</sup> Watanabe Yasuaki, "Fujiwaka Toshinari no engo teki shikō: shino-ni o megutte," *Kokugo to kokubungaku*, vol. 81, no. 15 (May 2004), 34-35.

<sup>18</sup> See Ariyoshi Tamotsu, ed., *Waka bungaku jiten* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1982), 579; Fujihira Haruo, "Hōhō no wakugumi: honkadōri," *Shinkokin to sono zengo* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 1983), 148; Kami Hiroyuki, "Honkadōri no hyōgen kōzō," *Bunkyo daigaku joshi tanki daigakubu kenkyū kiyō*, vol. 38, (December 1994), 14; Kawahira Hitoshi, "Honkadōri to honzetsudōri: moto no kōzō," *Shinkokin to sono jidai* (Tokyo: Kazama shobō, 1991); Nakagawa Hiroo, "Chūko honkadōri gensetsu shiron," *Kōza heian bungaku ronkyū* (Tokyo: Kazama shobō, 2001); and Tani Tomoko, "Shinkokin kajin no shōshitsu o yonda kagun ni tsuite: imēji no jūshōhō no keisei," *Kokugo to kokubungaku*, vol. 63, no. 12 (February 1986), 27.

*Man'yōshū*, Vol.10, 2256

Aki no ho wo shino ni oshinabe oku tsuyu no  
ke kamo shinamashi koi tsutsu arazu wa

If the *drops of dew* lying heavy on the branches of the bush cloves  
are to fade and disappear I would rather die than love (emphasis added).<sup>19</sup>

Now we must draw our attention to the first phrase of Shunzei's poem, "aki ni nari kaze no suzushiku kawaru nimo." This phrase includes two verbs: *naru* and *kawaru*. In this poem both expressions mean that a condition has changed. "Aki ni nari" not only means that autumn has come but also suggests that summer has ended. Similarly, as for "kawaru" in "kaze ha suzushiku kawaru," which means that the wind has turned cool, implies the wind was warm in summer. Thus, the upper phrase seems to stress transition, by which things become something of the past. Next, let us look at the second phrase, which includes *shino-ni*. As we have already seen, in Shunzei's view *shino-ni* is an abandoned word. In this sense, *shino-ni* alludes to the past when the word was actively used. It seems that this poem as a whole focuses on the fact that the time that has gone by cannot be recalled. People realize this in their life precisely when someone closed to them dies. Now we can understand that Shunzei's poem discloses the fact that "the past," when the deceased was alive, is lost forever; the text is thus perceived as the absence of that past.

The practice of *waka* poems was supposed to refer to the poems created in the past. In this sense, the relationship between the old and new poems of *waka* manifests unique intertextuality. The practice of *honkadōri* especially encouraged poems to include some words or images from older poems. Therefore, it has been said that *honkadōri* constitutes a dual structure between the old and new poems. However, after examining how the concept of the past is played out in *honkadōri* we can see that our analysis of the structure of *honkadōri* needs to be more complex. According to Shunzei, by recollecting the original poem through the new poem, *honkadōri* can be understood as an attempt to disclose the fact that the poem itself is lost, that is, to disclose its absence. By revealing the poem as absence, *honkadōri* puts into motion a type of anachronism that tries to postulate retrospectively from the present the time of the past when the poem was created. In this sense, it is not accurate to describe *honkadōri* as a dual structure, which suggests a static image. I would like to emphasize here that *honkadōri* constitutes the complex dynamics of time that reveals a past arriving through the present—the modality of the present time lived as past. In conclusion, considering the work of *honkadōri* in terms of the concept of time enables us to find how the paradigm of *waka* drastically changed when medieval poets intended to incorporate the peculiar concept of the past into their poetical theories.

<sup>19</sup> H. H. Honda trans., *Man'yōshū* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1967), 180.