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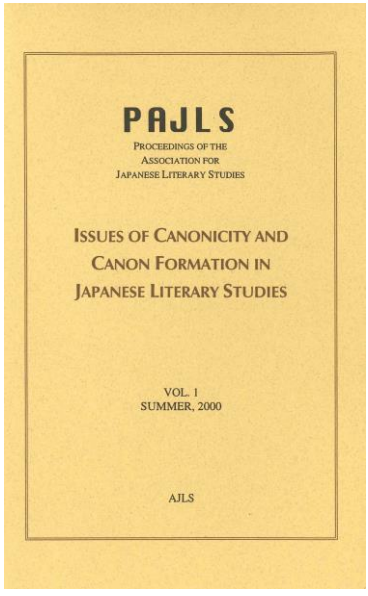

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THE TALE OF THE HEIKE: ITS MODERN CRITICS AND THE MEDIEVAL PAST

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Introduction

In the course of the twentieth century, *Heike monogatari* [The Tale of the Heike] emerged from a position of benign neglect during the early decades of Meiji to become one of a select group of works that now constitutes the classical canon of Japanese literature. In successive critical appreciations, the *Heike* has been variously characterized as a nostalgic lament for vanished imperial glory, a Buddhist sermon on impermanence, an epic of the Japanese national spirit, and a work of placation, an exemplification of Japanese religious sensibility.

One group of Meiji scholars, for example, which included such figures as Haga Yaichi (1867-1927), Fujioka Sakutarō (1870-1910), and Igarashi Chikara (1874-1947), undertook to make warrior literature (*gunki*) suitable for an increasingly imperialistic state ideology. They singled out those elements of the *Heike* that they felt were closest in tone and sentiment to the tradition of court literature, stressing its "lyrical" and quietest Buddhist message of impermanence and the sufferings and sacrifice (*gisei*) of tragic and defeated heroes.

Another group of scholars, contemporaneous with the first group, adopted a more populist reading of *Heike*, celebrating the work and the medieval period in which it appeared as an epic expression of the national spirit and a harbinger of twentieth-century bourgeois democracy. These early proponents of an epic *Heike*, which included writers like Ikuta Chōkō (1882-1936), Iwano Hōmei (1873-1920), and Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949), were most vocal in the first decades of the century, and their notions of epic were derived from then-current European romantic doctrines which held that national consciousness often crystalized around primitive folk epics of oral provenance.[1] The attractiveness of this theory as a tool for building a

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[1] See Hans Aarsleff, "Scholarship and Ideology: Joseph Bédier's Critique of Romantic Medievalism," in *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*, ed. Jerome J.

national consciousness is obvious. However, because the heroic ages in which such epics were held to have taken shape were often characterized as primitive expressions of democracy, the theory was difficult to reconcile with the imperial ideology of the prewar period. As a result, it played a relatively minor role in shaping a canonical view of the *Heike* in the prewar period.

In the post-World War II period, this populist reading was taken up and reworked by Marxist historians into a view of the *Heike* as a national epic, which then functioned as a rallying point for national unity in the postwar economic revival. The epic reading dominated well into the seventies, and even today its influence lingers on in textbook selections of the work. The tendency to view the *Heike*'s Pure Land Buddhism as the crystallization of a so-called popular spirit and to project back onto the warriors of the medieval period the notion of a modern subjective self was fundamental to the epic reading and has only recently begun to disappear from scholarly discussions of the work.

Another approach to the *Heike* derives from folklore studies. This approach developed contemporaneously with, and in part as a reaction to, the postwar epic reading of the *Heike*. Drawing heavily on the work of Orikuchi Shinobu, Yanagita Kunio, and Tsukudo Reikan, all of its proponents have emphasized placation (*chinkon*) as a key for understanding the *Heike*.

I have already dealt extensively with the evolution of the *Heike* into a canonical classic in another paper.[2] I will therefore limit myself in this paper to three interrelated topics that I touched on only briefly in the earlier paper: 1) the stylistic mixture of chronological (*nendaikiteki*) and oral vernacular (*katari*) elements in the *Heike*; 2) the related phenomenon of its mixed Chinese and vernacular style, the so-called *wakan konkō bun*; and 3) the problematic of space and orality in the folkoric approach of Yanagita Kunio.

McGann (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 93-113.

[2] See my forthcoming essay "Nation and Epic: *The Tale of the Heike* as Modern Classic," *Inventing the Classics: Canon Formation, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*, ed. Haruo Shirane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and for general introduction to *The Heike*, see my essay "*The Tale of the Heike*," *Medieval Japanese Writers*, Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 203, ed. Steven D. Carter (Detroit: Gale Group, 1999), 88-99.

All three of these issues have been at the center of debates about the *Heike* that have helped shaped a canonical view of the work in the postwar period, and the first two go back to issues raised as early as Meiji.

Ishimoda Shō and the Problem of Chronological Form

In his extremely influential book on the *Heike*, entitled *Heike monogatari* (1957), the historian Ishimoda Shō (1912-1986) devoted an entire chapter to the problem of chronological (*nendaikiteki*) form in the *Heike*.[3] He devotes several pages of this chapter to the discussion of a perplexing chronological entry at the very end of the episode entitled "Fukuhara ochi" ("Flight from Fukuhara"), which rounds off the *Heike*'s seventh scroll: "On the twenty-fifth day of the Seventh Month in the second year of Juei, the Heike completed their flight from the capital."[4] This phrase, Ishimoda notes, echoes a chronological entry that occurred seven episodes earlier in "Miyako ochi" ("The Emperor's Flight from the Capital"), after the narration of the Taira clan's initial flight from the capital: "When it dawned, it was the twenty-fifth day of the Seventh Month. The sky with its Heavenly River was already bright, clouds trailed over the eastern peaks, the dawn moon was cold and white, and the cocks crowed busily."[5] Sandwiched between these two chronological entries are seven episodes in the oral vernacular style (*katari*) that narrate various incidents related to the individual members of the Taira in the course of their flight from the capital before the onslaught of the Genji forces. Altogether these episodes take up about twenty pages of text in the Japanese original, without a single chronological entry or indication of time.

In his discussion, Ishimoda observes that the chronological entry at the end of scroll seven appears to be out of place, since the second flight from Fukuhara that it commemorates ought to have taken place on a different day. Ishimoda explains this anomaly by arguing that if the last chronological entry were absent, the audience would not grasp the flight from Fukuhara as

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[3] Ishimoda Shō, *Heike monogatari* (Iwanami shoten, 1957), 123-54.

[4] *Heike monogatari*, in volume 33 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, ed. Takagi Ichinosuke, Ozawa Masao, Atsumi Kaoru, and Kindaichi Haruhiko (Iwanami shoten, 1960), 116-17; for Ishimoda's discussion, see *Heike monogatari*, 146-51.

[5] Ibid., 96.

a part of the *Heike*'s larger narrative, and as a result the narrative would lose coherence and the audience/reader their bearings. For Ishimoda, the chronological entries functioned as crucial indications of time, providing temporal coordinates that integrated the intervening *setsuwa* into a coherent narrative. In Ishimoda's words, "they narrate (*monogataru*) the objective progress of real events (*kyakantekina shinkō no jittai*)... The chronological entries alone provide the temporal connections that enable the objective reality to assume narrative form." In other words, without chronology there would have been no narrative, no history, and no epic. Thus the essence of the *Heike*'s narrative style, for Ishimoda, resided in its chronological form, which he identified as its characteristic epic (*jojishi*) form. The historian Ishimoda, anticipating arguments that would later be made by Paul Ricoeur in his study *Time and Narrative*, was well aware of the critical function of time or temporality in organizing the events of experience and history into coherent and usable narratives.

Ishimoda's study of the *Heike*, published in 1957, was aimed at the general reader, and it has continued to enjoy a remarkable popularity, with thirty-eight reprintings as of 1992. But it was in Ishimoda's earlier groundbreaking study of medieval Japanese history, *Chūseiteki sekai no keisei* [The Formation of Medieval Society], published right after the war in 1946, that the theoretical bearings of his argument were enunciated most clearly.[6] In this work, Ishimoda used a Hegelian-Marxist reading of history to transform the medieval period into a narrative of national emergence, in a deliberate attack on the ahistorical essentialism of prewar imperial ideology. This earlier work also included an entire chapter on the *Heike*, which contained important reflections on the evolution of the genre of *monogatari*.[7] For example, in this early study, Ishimoda read the emergence of Heian period *monogatari* literature as a self-criticism of the aristocratic class that had crystalized in a sense of personal awareness (*kojin*) among its most alienated members. This self-criticism or negation of the urban aristocratic culture was then countered by its subsequent reaffirmation as the urban aristocrats moved into the provinces and formed ties with an agricultural- and soil-based warrior class rooted in the peasantry. The new narrative genres that emerged out of this synthesis—*Shōmonki* (10th c.), *Mutsuwaki* (11th c.), and

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[6] Ishimoda Shō, *Chūseiteki sekai no keisei* (Itō shoten, 1946).

[7] Ibid., 239-56.

Konjaku monogatari shū (12th c.)—were characterized by Ishimoda as representing a shift from the "fiction" and "lies" of traditional *monogatari* to the factual concerns of a chronological mode.[8] For Ishimoda, therefore, the chronological form inherited from the Chinese-derived imperial histories was "sublated" into an epic narrative mode, which then helped to regulate the profusion of *setsuwa* and oral *katari* that he and others of the social-historical school (*rekishi shakaigaku-ha*) associated with popular energies released by the medieval social revolution.

The Dialectics of Wakan Konkō bun

So ingrained is the association of the *Heike* with the so-called mixed Chinese-Japanese style (*wakan konkō bun*) that even today most general introductions to *Heike monogatari* mention it as a matter of course. Like Ishimoda's fusion of chronological form and *katari*, the mixed style was held to have been the product of a dialectical synthesis of popular, warrior, and aristocratic elements. Nagazumi Yasuaki, another member of the social-historical school of scholarship, explained its evolution in his 1956 study *Chūsei bungaku no tenbō*.[9] He begins by locating the origins of this style in the military chronicle *Shōmonki*, which, according to Nagazumi, incorporated popular speech (*zokugo*), but not its most vital element, the language of oral narrative (*katari kotoba*). The latter was first achieved in *Konjaku monogatari shū*, which succeeded in absorbing the living spoken language of the day and for the first time produced a style freed from the constraints of Chinese style (*kanbuntai*). Nagazumi then goes on to discuss the distinction between the *Konjaku*'s style and the vernacular Japanese style (*wabun*) of *Ise monogatari*, noting how the former suppressed the lyrical impulse of *Ise*'s style. Nagazumi's point here is that the *wabun* style, originally derived from the living speech of the aristocracy, ossified after the period of *The Genji*, and that *Konjaku* managed only an incomplete transformation of the Chinese style (*hentai kanbun*). I will skip over some of Nagazumi's intervening stages and simply note that in the *Heike* the lyrical impulse of the courtly tradition was finally fully absorbed, and the result was

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[8] Ibid., 245-46.

[9] Nagazumi Yasuaki, *Chūsei bungaku no tenbō* (Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1956), 131-44.

a synthesis of all previous elements resulting in the perfection of the mixed style of writing.

It is interesting to note that the term *wakan konkō bun*, which has figured so prominently in postwar discussions of *Heike monogatari,* had in fact first emerged in the debates over language reform in the mid-Meiji period. In 1878, Konakamura Kiyonori first made use of the term in order to distinguish the mixed style from vernacular (*kanabun*) and Chinese (*kanbun*) styles of writing.[10] For Konakamura, the mixed style merely denoted the insertion of Japanese words into Chinese prose, for which the antecedents went all the way back to *Kojiki.* A similar point was made by Yamada Toshio in an interesting critique of the whole concept of *wakan konkō bun* stye.[11] For Yamada, *wakan konkō bun* was the product of negotiating the translation of Chinese into Japanese and hence a linguistic possibility at all stages in Japan's literary past. By the second decade of Meiji, however, the style had become identified with an historically evolved style that was believed to have first emerged in the genre of military chronicles and that was subsequently taken up by Edo scholars of Chinese (*kangakusha*) as a suitable style for popular instruction. In the first general history of Japanese literature, for example, *Nihon bungakushi*, published in 1890 by Mikami Sanji, the mixed style was traced back to the *Heike* and *Genpei Jōsuiki*; and in an article published only three years later in 1893, which traces the style back to the Kamakura period, it was recommended as a model for standard literary style (*kokubun*).[12]

The tendency to identify the mixed style with the Kamakura period, and specifically with works like the *Heike*, also appears in the writings of the Meiji economist and historian Taguchi Ukichi (1855-1905). In Taguchi's case, however, the style is clearly linked to political concerns that anticipate Ishimoda's emphasis on the realistic narrative possibilities of the *Heike*—that is, Ishimoda's concern with facts and realities grounded in a narrative of national awakening. In 1883, for example, Taguchi had discussed the creation of an authentic Japanese historiographical style in his popular essay

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[10] Discussed in Nishida Naotoshi, *Heike monogatari no kokugogakuteki kenkyū* (Wasen shoin, 1990), 264-66.

[11] See Yamada Toshio "Wakan konkō bun," *Iwanami kōza: Nihongo 10, buntai* (Iwanami shoten, 1977), 257-77.

[12] Nishida, 262-83.

Nihon kaika shōshi (*A Short History of Japanese Civilization*, 1883). In noting the use of the *wabun* style in works like *Ōkagami* (*The Great Mirror*, 1119) and *Mizukagami* (*The Water Mirror*) to write of political matters, he wrote: "These works are endowed with historiographical form; namely, having freed themselves from fictional form (*monogatari no tai wo manukarete*), they show an approximation to the form of history." But the foundation of a true historical style for Taguchi belonged to the authors of works like *Hōgen monogatari*, *Heiji monogatari*, *Genpei jōsuiki*, and the *Heike*. He assigned three stylistic qualities to these works: 1) a flexible prose grounded in their mixed Chinese and Japanese style; 2) imaginative power (*sōzōryoku*); and 3) most importantly, the "so-called descriptive style of the day," namely, the recording of history through a style controlled by facts (*jijitsu*). The historical implications of this for Taguchi were expressed as follows: "Thus we must recognize that in our nation's history, the achievement of making a clear connection between politics and the conditions of the people dates in fact from Hōgen and Heiji."[13]

In the work of postwar Marxist-inspired historians and literature scholars such as Ishimoda and Nagazumi, as well as in the writings of the liberal Meiji economist Taguchi, the late-Heian and Kamakura periods—defined as *chūsei* in Ishimoda and Nagazumi—functioned as an origin point for a new narrative of national identity. Its signs were the fusion of chronological form with vernacular narrative and of Chinese with Japanese linguistic elements, and its vehicle the military chronicles, but principally the *Heike*. This is further borne out by a study of Yamada Yoshio entitled *Heike monogatari kō*, published in 1911 under the auspices of the Kokugo chōsa iin kai (Committee Members for the Investigation of the National Language). The stated aim of Yamada's study, which was the first systematic modern attempt to collate all the variant *Heike* texts, was to accumulate materials for the study of the modern colloquial speech and to help establish a standard literary style. In the Preface to his study, Yamada expatiated on the hitherto neglected Kamakura period as a valuable source for the study of the Japanese language.[14] After noting the way in which the literature of the Nara and Heian periods had been idealized through its con-

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[13] See Taguchi Ukichi, *Nihon kaika shōshi* (Kaizōsha), 119-23.

[14] *Heike monogatari kō*, ed. Kokugo chōsa iinkai (Kokutei kyōkasho kyōdō hanbai sho, 1911), 1-9.

nection to the court, he writes of the Kamakura period: "Conditions changed and power came into the hands of the military retainers. The entire country, apart from the aristocrats in the capital, was brought under the influence of the manners of the military retainers, and the people (*minzoku*) showed a spontaneous liking for frankness and simplicity (*chokkan kan'yō*)." He then goes on to suggest that "the remarkable simplicity and vigor (*kanketsu kappatsu*) in the literature and arts of that time were likely based on this change in manners." The Kokugo chōsa iin kai that sponsored Yamada's study had been established in 1902 by Ueda Mannen for the express purpose of tackling the national language question, which included the problems of both *genbun itchi* and *hyōjungo*.[15] As has been noted for Western canon formation, the construction of canons and the establishment of linguistic norms are often parallel processes. The origins of the *Heike*'s so-called mixed style in a medieval linguistic evolution may be of this nature. First conceptualized in Meiji and then taken up as a major issue by the social-historical school with renewed vigor in the postwar period, *wakan konkō bun* appears to have been no more than the projection of the *genbun itchi* debate back onto the staged evolution of a national linguistic norm in the course of the Heian and Kamakura periods.

The Space of Orality: Yanagita Kunio and the *Heike*

In the work of Ishimoda and other scholars of the social-historical school, the importance attached to chronological form and the synthetic narrative style of *wakan konkō bun* in the *Heike* was part of a larger critique directed against the ahistorical essentialism of prewar imperial ideology. For the mystical origins of the transcendent imperial state, they substituted a narrative grounded in historical and temporal determinations, which conveniently assumed form in the *Heike*'s mixture of chronological and oral vernacular styles. For Ishimoda chronological form was always prior to the oral elements of the work, and he shared a widely-held belief in the so-called *ur-Heike*, which was supposed to have been a chronicle written in Chinese (*kanbun*). While subsequent expansions of this ur-*Heike* through the incorporation of oral *setsuwa* and *katari*-like elements played a critical role in transforming it into a national epic poem (*kokuminteki jojishi*), over-

[15] Nishida, 26-27.

expansions of the text, as in the *Nagatabon* variant, had in Ishimoda's view destroyed the chronicle-epic, resulting in a loss of narrative coherence. For Ishimoda, therefore, the *biwa hōshi* played a largely secondary role in his theory of *Heike* formation, limited to reciting the written text of the *Heike* and thereby disseminating it across the length and breadth of Japan.

Oral theories of the *Heike*'s formation, which began to assume shape about the same time as the postwar epic theory, proposed what appears to be a radically different view of the work. One of the most influential proponents of this theory has been the folklorist Yanagita Kunio, mainly through his essay on the *Heike*, "Ariō to Shunkan Sōzu," which he first published in 1940.[16] Another important influence has been that of Orikuchi Shinobu, principally by way of his general theory of *monogatari* literature. For Yanagita and other folklorists, the *biwa hōshi* did not merely mediate the dissemination of the *Heike*, but was the originating voice of the tradition. In a well-known statement from "Ariō to Shunkan Sōzu," Yanagita put the matter very succinctly: "To state the matter clearly, the oral narrative (*katari*) comes first. Literature (*bungaku*) is simply the recording of it or at most the addition of a few touches."[17]

Yanagita illustrates this theory in a discussion of the Ariō episode in the *Heike*'s third scroll. According to the Kakuichi variant of the *Heike*, Shunkan and other conspirators were exiled to Kikai-ga-shima by Kiyomori as a punishment for their involvement in a plot against him. Shunkan, however, was left alone on the island when his fellow conspirators returned to the capital after receiving a pardon. Meanwhile, he was visited one day by a wandering monk named Ariō, who learned Shunkan's story and stayed long enough to witness his death. According to Yanagita's theory, Shunkan's story was subsequently disseminated throughout Japan by wandering storytellers who had assumed the name of the Ariō figure in the *Heike*. The basis for his theory are numerous place names scattered throughout Japan bearing the name Ariō or names derived from it. It is important to keep in mind that for Yanagita, the historical Ariō, as the witness of Shunkan's death, plays the crucial role that links these wandering storytellers together. This is evident in his definition of orally transmitted narrative (*katari*) as "the careful narration of what one has seen or heard." Yanagita asserts, for

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[16] Yanagita Kunio, *Yanagita Kunio zenshū*, vol. 9 (Chikuma shobō, 1990), 93-111.
[17] Ibid., 102.

example, that the language of the *Heike*—and here he has in mind the oral language of the recited *Heike*—transmits the actual felt experience of Shunkan as he watched the disappearing boat that left him behind on the island.[18] It is thus through the historical Ariō's having spoken with Shunkan and subsequently witnessed his actual death and suffering that the authenticity of the narration is guaranteed.

On one level, Yanagita appears to have understood oral narrative as the unmediated expression of authentic experiences tied to specific locales or places. Yet as one reads further into this essay, Yanagita produces a quite different reading of place or locale and its relation to orality. For example, in his discussion of the meaning of Ariō's name, Yanagita states that the *ō* of Ariō's name (written with the graph for "king"), although now used even by commoners, had originally signified the royal child of a deity (*kami*). Furthermore, the *ari* element of the name Ariō derives, we are told, from the verb "*aremasu*" that denotes the action of a *kami*'s sudden appearance in visible form. *Ari*, therefore, was used of the wisest of human beings who transmitted messages from the world of invisible spirits. As an example, Yanagita cites the name of Hieda no Are, the reciter of the *Kojiki*. After enumerating various place names with this element in it, he notes that the burial grounds found in many provinces with the names Arizuka and Ari no Miya, although today mistakenly explained as signifying the auspicious omen of an ant, actually denoted the trace of such hierophanies.[19]

What had initially started out as a defense of the importance of specific places and the stories associated with them ends up by making all places interchangeable. The singular place or locale and its stories, obscured under historically determined place names, becomes the utopian site of a transcendent hierophany. In brief, Yanagita's technique of decrypting local toponyms, by disclosing the primary oral signification hidden beneath their graphic representation, ends up producing a generalized space filled by an orality that functions as a transcendent expression of the sacred. It is Yanagita's theory, together with Orikuchi's related theory of the origins of *monogatari* literature, that has provided the basis for the many placation (*chin-*

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[18] Ibid., 96-97.

[19] Ibid., 105-08.

kon) readings of the *Heike* that proliferated alongside the epic reading in the postwar period.[20]

The epic and folkloric theories of the *Heike*'s formation developed more or less concurrently in the postwar period, extending from the 1950s into the 1970s, and together they helped to articulate a new narrative of national identity and a new sense of the national space. Despite different aims and approaches, they both ended up achieving similar and complementary results, which may be summed up as follows. Whereas the epic theory totalized in the temporal idiom of history, uniting the particularities of class, language, and cultural difference in a grand narrative of national awakening, the oral or folklore approach totalized in the idiom of space and, under the guise of preserving particularities of place and experience, actually spirited them away into a transcendent sacred space that was everywhere and nowhere at once.[21]

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[20] A full bibliography of these studies would take up many pages. One representative work is Fukuda Akira, *Gunki monogatari to minkan denshō*, Minzoku mingei sōsho 66 (Iwasaki Bijutsu Sha, 1972).

[21] I would add, however, that I do not share the view that folklore approaches to literature can simply be dismissed as veiled defenses of the *tennō* system. The work of both Yanagita and Orikuchi, with their regional and localist perspectives, can also yield important insights into space and the workings of marginal oral cultures, as is demonstrated, for example, in the work of Hyōdō Hiromi. Hyōdō's major works include *Katarimono josetsu: Heike katari no hassei to hyōgen* (Yūseidō, 1985), *Ōken to monogatari* (Seikyūsha, 1989), *Taiheiki "yomi" no kanōsei: rekishi to iu monogatari* (Kōdansha, 1995), and *Heike monogatari no rekishi to geinō* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2000).