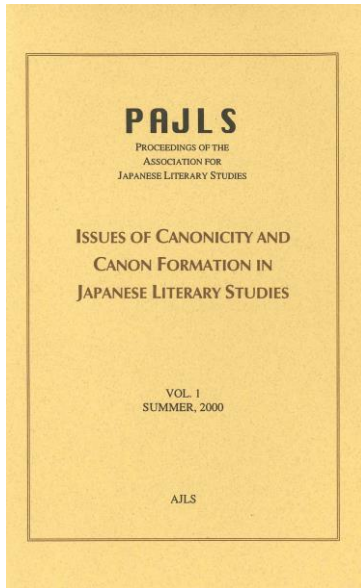


“The Discourse of ‘*Makoto*’ and the Canonization of Tokugawa Waka”

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THE DISCOURSE OF “*MAKOTO*” AND THE CANONIZATION OF TOKUGAWA *WAKA*

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Introduction

The *waka* poetry of the Tokugawa period occupies an unhappy place in most histories of Japanese literature. When compared with *waka* of earlier periods it is dismissed as the stale remnant of a once-great tradition, and viewed in its contemporary context its tendency to adhere to what is seen as an outdated classical aesthetic makes it seem out of step with the vibrant popular culture, valued for its depiction of contemporary reality in vernacular language, that is seen as the hallmark of Tokugawa literature. While I will not offer a reappraisal of the literary merits of Tokugawa *waka*, I do want to examine the discourses that have shaped the modern reception of this poetry. I begin with the assertion that we cannot discuss any individual author, work, movement, or period without situating these, explicitly or implicitly, within some kind of literary history. The characterization of particular examples of *waka* as premodern or modern, conservative or revolutionary, aristocratic or popular, always takes place within the context of a historical narrative that defines such terms in certain ways and grants them particular values. In this paper I look at how the canonization of Tokugawa *waka* has been affected by the ways in which the supposedly direct and unmediated mode of poetic expression labeled as “*makoto*,” commonly translated as “truth,” or “sincerity,” is constructed through historical narratives that are premised on certain ways of emplotting the passage from the “pre-modern” to the “modern.”

The most common view of Tokugawa *waka* in modern scholarship sees it as stifled by its excessive adherence to classical models, with the emergence of a modern poetics in the Meiji period then portrayed in terms of a release from the artificial constraints imposed by these models. According to this view, while Tokugawa *waka* was bound to a stilted classical language and the tired clichés of *hon'i*, or “poetic essences,” the development of a modern poetics allowed poets to compose in a natural language based on their actual experiences and observations of the world, making possible a direct and transparent expression of the poet’s self.

The imitative tendencies of Tokugawa *waka* are seen as most pronounced in *kokugaku* poets such as Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769) and Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801). While a truly modern poetics is not seen as emerging until the Meiji period, a gradual tendency toward individualism and self-expression is detected in a movement away from neoclassicism that began in the late eighteenth century with Ozawa Roan (1723-1801), continued with Kagawa Kageki (1768-1843), and reached its highest development with the regional poets of the Bakumatsu period. While Roan and Kageki were active in Kyoto, the often idiosyncratic regional poets operated largely outside the main centers of literary culture. Two of these regional poets, Tachibana Akemi (1812-68) and Kuma Kotomichi (1798-1868), are today often viewed as the twin pillars of Bakumatsu *waka*, noted for the freshness of spirit they introduced to a dying poetic tradition. In my paper I look at Akemi, Kotomichi, and Norinaga, and examine how their canonization has been affected by the roles they play in different literary historical narratives.

The Modernization of *Waka*

The modern canonization of Tachibana Akemi began with Masaoka Shiki's (1867-1902) praise of his poetry in an essay entitled "Akemi no uta," published in the magazine *Nihon* in 1899. Shiki's high regard for Akemi's poetry is based less on its technical merits than on what Shiki interprets as its basis in genuine experience and the reverence it shows for the *kokutai* and emperor. It is well known that Shiki idealized the *Man'yōshū*, and his high opinion of Akemi comes in part from his conviction that Akemi had come closer than any of his Tokugawa contemporaries to truly absorbing the spirit of this anthology. While the *Man'yōshū* had provided the inspiration for one version of Tokugawa neoclassicism, Shiki is careful to distinguish what he sees as the mere outward imitation of the *Man'yōshū*, as practiced for example by Mabuchi, from a genuine reproduction of its spirit, which requires that one follow the actual *process* through which *Man'yōshū* poems were composed, a process that Shiki identifies with his own ideal of *shasei*, or "sketching from life."

In "Akemi no uta" Shiki presents his *Man'yōshū* ideal as follows:

There are people in the world who try to imitate the *Man'yōshū*.
They don't use any new words apart from those used in the

Man'yōshū, nor do they seek out any new content apart from what is common in the *Man'yōshū*. They put forth the stale poems they create in this way and claim to be composing in the *Man'yō* style, but this is an instance of copying the form of the *Man'yōshū* while losing its spirit. The poets of the *Man'yōshū* had no regulations regarding either the words they could use in their poetry or their subject matter. In the *Man'yō* style, one composes on subject matter using any words.¹

Elsewhere in the same essay he expresses similar thoughts with reference to the term "*makoto*":

The single word "*makoto*" is the essence of Akemi, and of the *Man'yōshū*. As the essence of the *Man'yōshū*, it is the essence of *waka*. What I refer to as "depicting things just as they are" is nothing other than *makoto*. Poets of later times had empty theories demanding that they compose based on *makoto*, and depict things just as they are, but the fact that they were unable to go beyond false (*itsuwari*) cleverness is because they had a problem with misunderstanding the meaning of "*makoto*" and of "just as it is."²

Mabuchi had also professed an ideal of "*makoto*," and, like Shiki, found it in the *Man'yōshū*. Nevertheless, to Shiki his poetry is "*itsuwari*," the opposite of "*makoto*." Shiki's comments reflect how the term "*makoto*" has functioned for many writers on *waka* as a kind of master signifier, the signified of which has constantly been redefined as norms that had previously been naturalized as "*makoto*" come to be exposed as constructs, only to be replaced by new ideologies of "*makoto*." This indicates that we can not simply accept the term "*makoto*" as referring to a vaguely conceived "truth" or "sincerity," but rather always need to look at how "*makoto*" is constructed in each instance of its use.

¹ Masaoka Shiki, "Akemi no uta," *Shiki zenshū*, ed. Masaoka Tadasaburō, 25 vols. (Kōdansha, 1975-78), vol. 7, 152.

² "Akemi no uta," 144.

A view related to Shiki's appears in the work of Sasaki Nobutsuna (1872-1963). Sasaki, the son of the *kokugaku* scholar and poet Sasaki Hirotsuna (1828-1891), was not only a major poet, but was also the most important early figure in the modern canonization of *waka* poetry and poetics. While still in his teens he collaborated with his father on the *Nihon kagaku zensho* (1890-91), a twelve-volume anthology of major texts of *waka* poetry and poetics, which he completed on his own after his father died during the editing process. Later he compiled a continuation of this work, the *Zoku Nihon kagaku zensho* (1897-1900), also in twelve volumes. In addition to such anthologies, which played a key role in making many previously unpublished texts available to a wide audience for the first time, Sasaki organized these texts into a historical narrative in his seminal *Nihon kagaku shi* (1910), the first systematic scholarly treatment of the history of *waka* poetics.³

One of the central literary historical categories in this study is that of "kinsei," which for Sasaki is not merely a chronological designation, referring to the period from 1600 to 1868, but rather involves an attitude of free inquiry that rejected the authority of the *hiden*, or "secret transmissions," of the medieval poetic houses. While he writes that the seeds of this "kinsei" attitude emerged in the early Tokugawa period with such scholars as Toda Mosui (1629-1706) and Keichū (1640-1701), Sasaki does not categorize all Tokugawa *waka* poetics as "kinsei." In particular he sees the *dōjō*, or court nobles, as holding on to "chūsei" traditions, a view that has until recently served to almost entirely exclude *dōjō* poetry and poetics from histories of Tokugawa literature.

In his "Kajin kuma Kotomichi" (1918) Sasaki grants Kotomichi a privileged place within literary history by positioning him as the culmination of *kinsei* poetics. While Sasaki praises *kinsei* poetics for breaking free of *chūsei* constraints, he sees the problem with *kinsei* poetics as lying in a disjunction between theory and practice. He argues that while scholar-poets such as Norinaga displayed a liberated attitude in their rejection of secret transmissions, in their own poetic practice they remained enslaved to a rigid neoclassicism that, like *chūsei* secret transmissions, ultimately contributed to the stagnation of *waka* by suppressing the "originality" (*dokusōsei*) and

³ Sasaki Nobutsuna, *Nihon kagaku shi* (Hakubunkan, 1910).

“individuality” (*kojinsei*) that he claims are the “lifeblood of poetry.”⁴ Sasaki then idealizes Kotomichi for being the Tokugawa poet who most fully realized the potential of *kinsei* poetics, putting into practice a freedom that had previously only existed in theory.

In the critical writings of both Shiki and Sasaki, the constraining role of classical models only takes on its full meaning within a historical narrative of Japan’s transition to modernity. That is, their evaluations of Tokugawa *waka* do not simply take the form of synchronic snapshots of the past, but are embedded in particular strategies of narrativizing the relationship of the past to the present. Their picture of Tokugawa *waka* poets as enslaved to classical models bears a certain resemblance to Hegel’s image of China as governed by static objective structures that demand blind obedience and impede the development of true subjectivity,⁵ and just as for Hegel China is significant not in itself, but rather as a particular stage in the unfolding of Spirit, for Shiki and Sasaki the imitative poetry of the Tokugawa period takes on meaning as something to be overcome. The fact that this overcoming of neoclassicism is itself presented as a return to the classics, such as with Shiki’s attempt to recover the spirit of the *Man’yōshū*, reveals the role of tradition as the flip side of a modernity that is seen as both a repudiation of the immediate past and the realization, in the modern nation-state, of an ahistorical national spirit.

Motoori Norinaga

This vision of the realization of tradition in modernity is challenged by a narrative that sees modernity as disruptive of directness and immediacy, locating these qualities instead in a premodernity that is often conflated with the essentially Japanese. One example of this can be found in discourse on the *shishōsetsu*, or “I-novel,” the supposed immediacy of which is often contrasted with Western fictionality and representation. While for Shiki the term “*makoto*” is associated with modern forms of expression, in this narrative the same term is used to invoke an essentially Japanese directness of spirit

⁴ Sasaki Nobutsuna, “Kajin kuma Kotomichi,” Sasaki Nobutsuna and Umeno Mitsuo, eds., *kuma Kotomichi to sono uta* (Kokin shoin, 1926), 24.

⁵ See for example G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 116-38.

that is compromised by modernity, such as in Watsuji Tetsurō's definition of "*makoto*," in his *Rinrigaku* (1937-49), as a practical truth realized in socio-ethical acts, in contrast to the Western contemplative notion of truth.⁶

An alternative version of this narrative, present most notably in the work of Maruyama Masao (1914-96), reverses the value judgments attributed to premodern immediacy and modern mediation. Maruyama sees the development of a consciousness of fictionality, in particular a consciousness of the constructed nature of social reality, as a prerequisite for modernization. He describes the medieval worldview as one in which social institutions are viewed as part of nature, and thus immutable, and sees modern political consciousness in contrast as based on the recognition of the fictional (or constructed) nature of social reality, which he claims makes possible a modern subjectivity that freely mediates itself through the objective structures of society rather than being passively absorbed into them. Maruyama writes mainly about political thought, but he applies this framework to literature in his critique of the I-novel in his "Nikutai bungaku kara nikutai seiji made" (1949).⁷

The two constructions of "*makoto*," one associating the term with modernity, and the other linking it to premodernity, are both brought into play in discussions of the poetics of Motoori Norinaga. Norinaga's poetics, developed in such texts as *Ashiwake obune* (1757?) and *Isonokami no sasamegoto* (1763), seeks an immediate encounter with the world, which is to be expressed directly in poetic language. At the same time, it demands that this experience and expression conform to culturally defined norms that are mediated through a canon of classical Japanese texts.

Norinaga himself is by no means unaware of the apparent contradiction involved here, and he resolves it by invoking two levels of *makoto*. The first level refers to the raw expression of emotion, while the second, deeper, level involves conformity with specific cultural norms, exemplified by such Heian texts as the *Genji monogatari*. So even if one is not actually moved, for example, by the moon or by cherry blossoms, it is still *makoto* to compose

⁶ Watsuji Tetsurō's *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert Carter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 272.

⁷ Translated as "From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics," Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. Ivan Morris (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

a poem as if one were in fact moved by them, as this is a culturally approved response. This theorization of two levels of *makoto* implies that when we conform to the cultural norms embodied in the deep level of *makoto*, what we say will be alienated from what we feel. But these norms are, according to Norinaga, the responses dictated by our true human nature, and the only reason they fail to come to us spontaneously is that we have been drawn away from our true nature through a process of historical decline and contamination by foreign cultures. By immersing ourselves in texts such as the *Genji*, he argues, we will gradually come to spontaneously feel according to the norms embodied in these texts, thus closing the gap between the two levels of *makoto*.⁸

The dialectical structure of Norinaga's theory makes it open to being interpreted in terms of one of its elements at the expense of the other. A narrative such as Sasaki's that focuses on the liberation of *waka* from artificial constraints will characterize Norinaga's poetics as a form of neoclassicism that suppresses individuality. A view of "*makoto*" as traditionally Japanese, on the other hand, will stress Norinaga's insistence on directness and immediacy, without taking into account the way in which these are explicitly related to a poetics of neoclassical imitation. For example in his *Nihon seiji shisōshi kenkyū* (1952) Maruyama sees Norinaga's poetics as a naturalism that retreats from the incipient modernity represented by Ogyū Sorai's (1666-1728) theory of politics as a human invention.⁹

⁸ For an example of Norinaga's description of this process of internalization see Motoori Norinaga, *Isonokami no sasamegoto*, in *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, ed. no Susumu and Kubo Tadashi, 20 vols. (Chikuma Shobō, 1968-75), vol. 2, 177.

⁹ For Maruyama's discussion of Norinaga in the English translation of this work see Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, trans. Mikiso Hane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 143-76, 264-73. There is a certain overlap between Maruyama's explicit Hegelianism and the implicit elements of Hegelianism that I argued could be found in Shiki and Sasaki. The difference lies in the way in which Shiki and Sasaki simply stress the artificiality of neoclassicism, while Maruyama is more properly Hegelian in that his concern is more with how in the medieval (or premodern) worldview fictionality is not *recognized* as such. That is, he does not actually believe that the social structure of premodern society is any less contingent than that of modern society; the difference between premodern and modern society for him lies instead in our *consciousness* of this con-

Both views of Norinaga's poetics play a role in Hisamatsu Sen'ichi's *Kinsei waka shi* (1968). Although Hisamatsu is more generous than Sasaki in his judgment of the scholastic neoclassicism of Tokugawa *waka*, he still follows the same basic narrative in that he sees an excessive adherence to classical models as the weak point of Tokugawa *waka*. Hisamatsu does comment on the importance of fictionality to Norinaga's poetics, but he sees this fictionality not in terms of mediation by specific cultural constructs, but as the attainment of a higher artistic truth. In part this results from the fact that he accepts the idea that Norinaga is extracting, through a positivist philology, values inherent in the classics, rather than seeing him as taking the classics themselves as normative. This allows him to avoid problematizing the self-evidence of the term "makoto," which he sees as the single spirit underlying both Norinaga's poetics and his seemingly disparate Ancient Way (*kodō*) studies.¹⁰

Reconsidering Anticlassicism

By uncovering the narrative strategies used to emplot histories of Tokugawa *waka*, I do not mean to imply that these histories are merely arbitrary constructions. Turning back to the first narrative, that of the emergence of individualism from neoclassicism, the question of how the poet should relate to poetic precedent was certainly one of the central issues debated in Tokugawa *waka* poetics. For example Kotomichi opens his *Kozo no chiri* (1839?), one of his two collections of notes on poetry, with a comment on the alienating effect of basing one's poetry in classical models:

When one tries to compose what is one's own, it is unorthodox.
When one tries to avoid being unorthodox, it is something of the ancients. This is the difficult aspect of poetry. So however many poems of the ancients one composes, it is as if one has not com-

tingency. In my view Norinaga's neoclassicism displays a very strong consciousness of fictionality, which is perhaps why this aspect of his poetics is ignored by Maruyama, who is concerned with using Norinaga on an allegorical level to represent the failure of modernity to develop in Japan.

¹⁰ Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, *Kinsei wakashi* (Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1968), 136-53.

posed anything at all. It is truly sad to compose one's entire life without producing any poetry.¹¹

He goes on to explain how the "*magokoro*," or "true heart" (a term related to "*makoto*"), is manifested in spontaneously composed poetry,¹² and argues against the idea of poetry as "*tsukurimono*" ("something constructed"), a view that he associates with Norinaga.¹³

It is not difficult to see how Kotomichi's critique of a lifeless neoclassicism could be read as a manifesto for individual self-expression, but there is a certain anachronism in projecting such an ideal onto his poetics. I read his poetics instead as part of a trend in *waka* poetics since the late eighteenth century to regard the native textual tradition more as a resource than as an authoritative canon. This entails not so much an abandonment of a poetic canon as an attempt to relate to the canon in a less deterministic manner, an attitude closer to haikai than to modern individualism. In *Kozo no chiri*, for example, Kotomichi describes the relationship between poetic precedent and poetic practice by comparing it to the lumber one uses to build a house:

To say that all the wise ones of old composed like this or like that, or to say that Kazan and Ichijō are good, or that the *Man'yōshū* or *Kokinshū* is good, or to say which period is bad and should not be used as a model—to go on like this, speaking only of the manner of composition, is as if when building a house one were to discuss only the lumber and not the house. One should realize that one needs to first grasp what kind of a thing a house is—that it is something to keep out the rain and the dew.¹⁴

For Norinaga the norms embodied in the native textual tradition formed a closed system, an a priori totality to which he saw his own poetic practice as subordinated. Kotomichi reverses this relationship by conceiving of the

¹¹ kuma Kotomichi, *Kozo no chiri*, Sasaki Nobutsuna, ed., *Nihon kagaku taikai*, 10 vols. (Kazama Shobō, 1957-63), vol. 8, 465.

¹² *Kozo no chiri*, 465.

¹³ *Kozo no chiri*, 466.

¹⁴ *Kozo no chiri*, 465.

poem itself a totality—in his metaphor, the house—to which poetic precedent is subordinated in a relationship of part to whole, or raw material to final product.

This denial of fixed literary norms is related to a competing vision of the relationship of poetry to the social order, one that I want to argue opens up a space in which to recognize the contingency of a community united through poetry. For Norinaga the community of Japanese is held together by the communication in poetry of the deep emotions he refers to as "*mono no aware*." He removes the uncertainty from this act of communication by demanding that everyone mediate their poetry through a single set of internalized cultural norms, the norms that I mentioned earlier as making up Norinaga's deep level of "*makoto*."¹⁵ Kotomichi does not reject all normativity in poetry, but unlike Norinaga he does not require that poetic norms be inscribed within the act of composition itself.

This posteriority of normative standards to poetic practice is reflected in Kotomichi's separation of the production of poetry by the poet from the judgment of that poetry by the critic. While he does not deny that there is good and bad poetry, he says that the poet should simply express himself spontaneously without regard for whether his poetry will be good or bad: "One should simply compose based on one's heart. The quality of that poetry is not something for the person who composes to know. It is something that is left to the anthologist."¹⁶ He implies this same distinction when he writes in *Hitorigochi* (1844?) that "The Way of poetry is public, but poetry is private."¹⁷ This view of poetry is ultimately connected to a view that social diversity should be reflected in poetry, as Kotomichi argues that people should compose based on their own gender, age, and social status rather than conform to a single set of norms.¹⁸

¹⁵ I discuss this aspect of Norinaga's poetics in my "Monorōgu to shite no waka: Motoori Norinaga no kagaku ni okeru komyunikeeshon no mondai" ("Waka as Monologue: The Problem of Communication in the Poetics of Motoori Norinaga"), in *Hihyō kūkan* II-22 (summer 1999).

¹⁶ *Kozo no chiri*, 467.

¹⁷ kuma Kotomichi, *Hitorigochi*, in Sasaki Nobutsuna, ed., *Nihon kagaku taikei*, 10 vols. (Kazama Shobō, 1957-63), vol. 8, 476.

¹⁸ *Hitorigochi*, 475.

Conclusion

The separation of Tokugawa *waka* from the literary historical narratives through which it has commonly been constructed helps to resolve certain paradoxes that emerge from within these narratives. For example many readers of such Bakumatsu poets as Akemi and Kotomichi express a certain disappointment when moving from their poetic theories to a reading of their actual poetry, a disappointment aroused by the feeling that these poets really have not escaped from the past so much after all. This is usually attributed to a mismatch of theory and practice, one of the most commonly cited features of Tokugawa *waka*. This mismatch is in part due to the fact that in the Tokugawa period *waka* poetics came to be not only a guide to composition, but also a vehicle for reflection on broader philosophical issues. But it often also carries with it the implication that in the premodern period there is a certain inescapability to Japanese tradition, which exerts a kind of gravitational pull on those who try to move away from it, and that the unity of theory and practice must await the radical rupture of modernity to be realized. This gap between theory and practice narrows, though, if we consider that perhaps these poets were not theorizing quite what we think they were. They were aiming at a new relationship to the poetic tradition, which by most accounts they did achieve, even if they did not create the passionate self-expression demanded of them by later poets and scholars.

In Norinaga's case, the main paradox pointed to by modern scholars is the conflict between his ideal of a primal emotionality and the heavy mediation of this emotionality through a specific textual tradition. In my analysis of Norinaga I discussed how these two aspects of Norinaga's poetics are theorized in his own writings in terms of two levels of "*makoto*," each of which fits in modern scholarship into a different historical narrative of the passage from premodernity to modernity. The resolution of the apparent conflict between these two levels of "*makoto*" is central to Norinaga's poetics, but scholars often gloss over this resolution because it brings to light the incompatibility of the conflicting narratives of modernity with which each version of "*makoto*" has come to be associated. But when we no longer tie Norinaga's two versions of "*makoto*" to specific discourses of modernity, it becomes much easier to accept them as constituting a single coherent theory.

Finally I should say that while I have been trying to look at Tokugawa *waka* on its own terms, I do not necessarily exempt myself from charges of imposing a history of my own. But my intention has been less to present a picture of Tokugawa *waka* free from all projections or constructions, a goal that would contradict my own theoretical premises, than to challenge certain specific narratives that have persisted in shaping our views of this literature in often imperceptible ways.