“Chinese Learning as Performative Power in *Makura no sōshi* and *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*”

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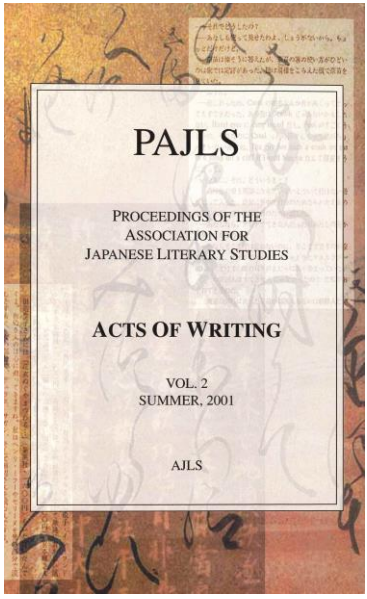

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CHINESE LEARNING AS PERFORMATIVE POWER IN *MAKURA NO SÔSHI* AND *MURASAKI SHIKIBU NIKKI*

NAOMI FUKUMORI

Were mid-Heian period women really barred from Chinese learning? The evidence from extant texts reveals that such was not the case.

In this paper, I would like to explore the issues of language and identity construction in mid-Heian women's texts by examining the function of references to Chinese learning and allusions to Chinese writings in Sei Shônagon's (清少納言, b. 966?) *Makura no sôshi* (枕草子, early eleventh century)[1] and Murasaki Shikibu's (紫式部, b. 978?) memoir, the *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* (紫式部日記, events of 1008-1010). Questions concerning women's ability to read and write Chinese have been posed persistently by readers and scholars in attempts to delineate and qualify the conditions of women's literary production during this so-called "flowering" of women's vernacular writing—that is, the period patronized by the regencies and chancellorships of Fujiwara Kaneie (藤原兼家, 929-990), Kaneie's sons Michitaka (道隆, 953-995) and Michinaga (道長, 966-1027), and Michinaga's son Yorimichi (頼通, 992-1074), from about 980 to about 1070.[2] The longstanding working assumption in scholarship has been that women were denied formal training in Chinese learning, and that, therefore, they pursued literary expression in the vernacular. The relationship between the two facts—women's restriction from Chinese learning and their production of vernacular writing —is, of course, much more complex.

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[1] A list of the Chinese allusions in *Makura no sôshi* can be found in Yahagi, 133-151.

[2] In fact, there was a recent discussion (summer 2000) on the PMJS (premodern Japanese studies) email list on gendered literacy. The archived discussion can be found at the following URL:http://www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~pmjs/archive/2000/literacy.html

The following explanation is a now-familiar one. That is, that the Chinese language—the *lingua franca* of East Asia—and other Chinese cultural practices were introduced to the imperial system by the Yamato clan as a state project aimed at buttressing its claims to sovereignty both in the Japanese archipelago and in the greater East Asian sphere. Because men were the actors in government who of necessity had to learn these practices, a cultural dimorphism gradually developed whereby the adopted Chinese culture and native Japanese culture became gendered—that is, the signification of Chinese, male culture was set off against that of the native, female culture. The other dichotomies that developed out of this Japanese/Chinese or *wakan* (和漢) dialectic are as they appear below[3]:

China (specifically Han [漢] and Tang [唐] cultures)	Japan (Yamato [大和])
Chinese language	Japanese vernacular language
Chinese literature: *shi* (詩), *fumi* (文)	Japanese literature: *uta* (歌), *monogatari* (物語)
male	female
public (*ôyake* [公])	private (*watakushi* [私])
formal (*hare* [晴])	informal (*ke* [褻])

The Japanese writing systems which developed through introduction of the Chinese language can also be located within this dialectic: the *mana* (真名) or "perfected names," which are the "model" Chinese characters, versus the *kana* (仮名) or "provisionary names," which are abbreviated forms of *mana* used for transcription of Japanese; and *otokode* (男手) or "masculine hand," which is a calligraphic style employed to write *mana* or unabbreviated characters, in distinction from the *onnade* (女手) or "feminine hand," which is the calligraphic style used to write *kana* or highly cursive characters.[4] Therefore, we can chart the relationship of

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[3] This chart is adapted from LaMarre, 29, and Chino, 235-246.

[4] For a visual demonstration of the difference between *otokode* and *onnade*, see Arntzen, trans., 108-09.

these writing systems in the following contrastive manner:

mana	*kana*
otokode	*onnade*

The ordering of these elements in columns like this gives the impression that there existed such starkly binary manifestations of cultural practices in Heian society. However, as explored provocatively by Thomas LaMarre in his recently published book on the *wakan* dialectic in relation to calligraphic styles and poetry, *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription*, the idea of a Japan unadulterated by foreign influence is a spectre of modern, scholarly fantasy and simply a result of a longing for a pure, native culture. The dynamic of *wakan* dialectics during the Heian period, in actual practice, was one of productive intercourse between the elements lined on either side of these two columns. In other words, there is no essential China or essential Japan, except in heuristic reckoning.

ZAE VERSUS *YAMATODAMASHII*

The term used in the Heian period to refer to Chinese learning was *zae* (才). *Zae* comprises all of the knowledge imported into Japan from China, including the ability to write and read Chinese. In this paper, *zae* will refer specifically to the knowledge of Chinese writings, of both Chinese and Japanese origin, as well as the ability to write either *mana* or the Chinese language itself.

We can say that for the Heian Japanese, *zae* represents the Confucian learning required to uphold the ideals of government set up by the Yamato polity. *Zae* was, as a matter of course, a necessary acquirement for Heian courtiers, but it was to be balanced in a dialectic with the native value of *yamatodamashii* (大和魂) or "Japanese spirit"[5]—which can be defined as that innate intelligence which cannot be learned through *zae*. Although a fictional work, Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji monogatari* (源氏物語, early-eleventh century) explains the desired combination through the instructions given by Hikaru Genji on

[5] See Pollock, 58-59, for a discussion of the dialectics of *zae* versus *yamatodamashii*.

his son Yûgiri's education: "It is only by having *zae* as the base that one's *yamatodamashii* can best be put to use in the world."[6] In *Ôkagami* (大鏡, ca. 1119), which relates the history of the Fujiwara family and particularly the rise of Fujiwara Michinaga, the two values are again invoked as the traits required to rule. In *Ôkagami*'s view of government, however, an excess of *zae* cannot replace native ability, as is shown in the historical example of Fujiwara Korechika (藤原伊周, 974-1010), who lost to Fujiwara Michinaga in his bid to become the head of the Fujiwara clan.[7] *Ôkagami* also offers us an interesting commentary on the acquirement of *zae* by women in its characterization of Takashina Kishi (高階貴子, 954 [?]-996), the mother of Fujiwara Korechika and Empress Teishi (藤原定子, 977-1000; the patron of Sei Shônagon). We are told that Kishi, in her capacity as a palace attendant, composed Chinese poetry even better than the male courtiers. In evaluating Kishi's eventual tragic demise, the *Ôkagami* narrator attributes the outcome to Kishi's Chinese learning, commenting, "People say, 'It is bad for a woman to have excessive *zae*'" (女のあまりに才賢きは、物凶しき).[8] In sum, Chinese learning needed to be balanced by native intelligence in men, and, for women, the common judgment was that excessive Chinese learning spelled doom. Given such characterizations of *zae* in the mid-Heian period, how can we analyze the Chinese learning documented in *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* and *Makura no sôshi*?

SEI SHÔNAGON VERSUS MURASAKI SHIKIBU

The autobiographical writings of Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shônagon unequivocally show that these women had some Chinese learning and were aware of the gendered significations of *wakan* dialectics. Interestingly, scholars have fashioned these two contemporaries who served in the salons of rival empresses to the Emperor Ichijô (一条天皇, 980-1011, r. 986-1011) as embodiments of

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[6] Ishida and Shimizu, 222.

[7] *Ôkagami*, 210.

[8] *Ibid.*, 208.

the contrasts in Heian literature, culture, and aesthetics—they are often mentioned in one breath to encompass the range of Heian expression. Japanese textbooks introduce Murasaki Shikibu as the author who, through her *Genji monogatari* represents the profound, psychologically-probing aesthetic of *mono no aware* (もののあはれ) and Sei Shônagon as the purveyor of the more wit-based, lighter aesthetic of *wokashi* (をかし) or "amusement" in her *Makura no sôshi*. The difference in genre between *Genji monogatari*—the first *monogatari* to be attributed to a woman—and *Makura no sôshi*—the first example of *zuihitsu* (随筆)—also provides convenient tags for contrast. In the matter of Chinese learning, the two women would also appear to manifest antithetical qualities—Murasaki is the modest apologist for her unseemly, inappropriate knowledge, while Sei Shônagon is the exuberant exhibitionist of a prized skill. Murasaki Shikibu's own pronouncement of distaste for Sei Shônagon certainly has encouraged readers through the years to entertain a catty, soap-opera-like antagonism between these two celebrated authors. In the famous critique of ladies-in-waiting in the epistolary section of her diary, Murasaki takes Sei Shônagon to task specifically for Sei's supposedly shameless display of unpolished skill, and she augurs a pathetic destiny for a person like Sei. Murasaki writes:

> Sei Shônagon really was a terribly conceited person. She scattered Chinese characters [*mana*] all over her writings, thinking herself so clever, but when one examined them carefully, there was much that was deficient. Such a person who considers herself superior to others will inevitably come to look bad and meet a dreadful end, and those who put on an air of elegance, acting sensitive in the most disheartening of situations and trying to capture everything of interest, are sure to look inappropriate and superficial. How could the future turn out well for such a person?[9]

What Murasaki finds despicable is the unrestrained use of ill-executed *mana* or unabbreviated Chinese characters, which she takes to be

[9] *Murasaki shikibu nikki*, 202.

indicative of Sei's other shortcomings.

This acerbic evaluation is echoed by latter-day scholars who find Sei's performances and exhibitions of knowledge offensive to their notions of Heian sensibility. Case in point is Mikami Sanji (三上参次) and Takatsu Kuwasaburô's (高津鍬三郎) comment about Sei Shônagon and Murasaki Shikibu in their *Nihon bungakushi* (日本文学史), a work published in 1890 as the first Japanese literary history. They wrote:

> One [i.e., Murasaki Shikibu] is calm and chaste, and her sentences reveal her to be an example of womanly virtue. The other [i.e., Sei Shônagon] is too modern, restless, and too arrogant about her intelligence. Although Shikibu was knowledgeable, she did not reveal it. She pretended not even to recognize the character for the number "one." Shônagon did not treat men as men, and her lively debates drawing upon famed events and literary allusions shocked the gentlemen.[10]

A century later, Watanabe Minoru (渡辺実), the editor of the 1991 edition of *Makura no sôshi* in Iwanami's *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (岩波新日本古典文学体系), expresses a similar sentiment by noting in his introduction that Sei wrote obsessively about outdoing educated men.[11] But is Sei merely being transgressive by showing off an unseemly skill? What were the parameters of permissible or sanctioned female knowledge in Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shônagon's time?

Female Learning in the Mid-Heian Period

The instructions for ideal feminine accomplishment are provided in Sei Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi* itself. In the passage "Seiryôden no ushitora no sumi no" (清涼殿の丑寅の隅の,[12] in Ivan

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[10] Mikami and Takatsu, 321-22.

[11] Watanabe, 2 (hereafter, SNKT). All English translations of *Makura no sôshi* in this paper are mine. Passage numbers from Ivan Morris's translation will be given for reference.

Morris's translation "The Sliding Screen in the Back of the Hall"),[13] Sei Shônagon's patron, the Empress Teishi, is disappointed when her women perform subpar during an impromptu test of their knowledge of the first imperial anthology *Kokinshû* (古今集, Collection of Japanese poetry, ancient and modern, 905). She goes on to admonish them gently, drawing upon the anecdote of how Fujiwara Morotada (藤原師尹, 920-969) had instructed his daughter (Fujiwara Hôshi [藤原芳子] d. 967), who eventually became a consort (*nyôgo* [女御]) of Emperor Murakami (村上天皇, 926-967, r. 946-967), to "First develop your calligraphic hand. Next, learn to play the seven-stringed zither better than anyone else. Finally, make it your scholarly pursuit to memorize all the poems in the twenty volumes of the *Kokinshû*."[14] The education befitting an empress-to-be doubtlessly should serve the needs of any woman seeking to advance herself in court circles. Therefore, it seems that calligraphy, musical talent, and knowledge of the *Kokinshû* poetic canon comprise the desired curriculum; Chinese learning of course was not prescribed.

The actual extent of Heian women's literacy in Chinese is uncertain, but the historian Shimura Midori (志村緑) has surveyed a wide range of documentation to prove that from the tenth century on, Heian women did read and write Chinese, including (1) the reading and writing of sutras, (2) the playing of a game called *hentsugi* (偏つぎ) which involved recognition of Chinese character parts, (3) the writing of poetry with allusions to Chinese literary works, and (4) the signing of women's names on land ownership documents.[15] Assuming that it would not be overly challenging for women to learn just the characters for their names, the last of these sources does not provide evidence of a depth of Chinese learning; however, the other instances provide demonstration of a measure of functional knowledge of Chinese.

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[12] Passage 20, SNKT, 21-27.

[13] Passage 11, Morris, 34-39.

[14] SNKT, 25.

[15] Shimura, 22-38.

Sei Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi* and Murasaki Shikibu's diary offer interesting examples of the discursive positions from which the autobiographical narrator demonstrates Chinese learning. Both narrators are self-conscious about their knowledge of Chinese writings, and they manipulate the cultural significations of *zae* discourse to stage interactions between themselves and those who are in power, particularly men. Here, I find it helpful to call upon Judith Butler's theory of performative gender, which provides one way of conceptualizing Murasaki and Sei's understanding of the cultural coding that underlies gender construction in their society. Butler contends that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."[16] The ensuing discussion of the performance of *zae* in *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* and in *Makura no sôshi* respectively will demonstrate the ways in which the female narrator circumvents gender transgression through molding her Chinese learning into acceptable female performances.

THE PERFORMANCE OF *ZAE* IN *MURASAKI SHIKIBU NIKKI*

Chinese learning for women would seem to fall on the side of negative, superfluous knowledge, at least according to Murasaki's references in *Murasaki Shikibu nikki.* The section in Murasaki Shikibu's diary immediately following the condemnation of Sei serves to clarify the conventional, contemporary attitudes toward women's display of Chinese learning. As Murasaki reflects upon the emptiness that has haunted her since her husband's death, she looks one by one at the Chinese texts left in poignantly careful order by her husband. When her attendants catch her in this act, they chastise her saying, "You, ma'am, are so unhappy because you pursue such things. What woman reads Chinese writings (*mana bumi* [真名文])? In the past, women were prohibited even from reading sutras!"[17] According to this, the practice of unfeminine, Chinese learning is the crux of Murasaki's problem. This

[16] Butler, 25.

[17] *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, 204.

reproof sets off Murasaki's evaluation of her own character, specifically other women's misunderstanding of her, and these thoughts eventually return to an elaboration of her Chinese learning. She records that the emperor, after reading her *Genji monogatari*, commented that she must surely have read the *Nihongi* (日本紀 [The Chronicle of Japan], 720); he praises the depths of her learning, exclaiming, "It seems she truly has *zae*!" We are told that a Palace Attendant named Saemon (左衛門の内侍) jealously teases Murasaki for this attention, facetiously nicknaming her "Our Lady of the Chronicles" (*Nihongi no mitsubone*, [日本紀の御局]).

In her own defense, Murasaki denies ever displaying her knowledge, and segues into revealing how she gained the knowledge but quickly learned to mask it. The story is an oft-repeated one in Murasaki Shikibu lore, and is referenced in the previously-mentioned comments by Mikami Sanji and Takatsu Kuwasaburô. According to Murasaki, she overheard the lessons her father was conducting for her brother and proved herself more capable than her male sibling. This caused her father to lament that she had not been born a son. She tells us, however, that she later heard people remarking that a pompous display of Chinese learning is unflattering, even for a man (をのこだに才がりぬる人は、いかにぞや), and thus more so for a woman. Murasaki thus began to feign complete ignorance, to the point of awkwardly executing the character for the number "one" (一). She also pretends not to be able to read the cartouches of Chinese poetry attached to folding screens. Despite these obfuscations, however, Murasaki's patron, Empress Shôshi (藤原彰子, 988-1074), expresses a desire to study the Tang poet Bai Juyi's (白居易, 772-846) collection. Although these lessons are held discreetly, the emperor and Empress Shôshi's father Fujiwara Michinaga hear about them and proceed to have Chinese texts copied out expressly for the women. This exposition on Chinese learning ends with Murasaki voicing hope that the jealous Palace Attendant Saemon does not hear about these august favors.

How are we to interpret this passage? Why is she telling us about her Chinese learning at such great length and what exactly is she telling us? We should note that this discussion began with Murasaki's evaluations of her contemporary ladies-in-waiting—Izumi Shikibu (和泉式部, b. 976?), Akazome Emon (赤染衛門, fl. 976-1041), and Sei

Shônagon. It is specifically Murasaki Shikibu's criticism of Sei's indiscriminate scattering of Chinese characters that provides the prelude to Murasaki's ruminations. The contrast is clear: while Sei is unrestrained in demonstrating her Chinese mastery, Murasaki studiously has been masking hers. Murasaki provides minute detail of everything she does to appear ignorant of this "forbidden knowledge;" in other words, she deconstructs the performance of Chinese learning—the writing of characters, the appreciation of inscriptions. Despite the self-denigrating surface of this discourse, however, this section actually reveals Murasaki's connections to the sources of power in her society. The relationships, including those with her father, the emperor, Fujiwara Michinaga, and Empress Shôshi, are strengthened specifically through Murasaki's *zae*. The spite-filled Palace Attendant Saemon, as well as the other women who fail to understand Murasaki's character, serve as foils to highlight the privileged nature of the relationships fostered by Chinese discourse. Chinese is posited as a privileged body of knowledge that isolates a woman from others of her gender and status, and elevates her discursively to a level of equal footing with the highest ranking.

ZAE IN *MAKURA NO SÔSHI*

This performative power of *zae* is even more prevalent in Sei Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi*. Sei Shônagon's knowledge of Chinese writings is often remarked upon by scholars, both negatively and positively. Those who take a negative view criticize Sei's allusions as superficial and specious.[18] Others, notably Ikeda Kikan,[19] have commented upon Sei's sophisticated use of Chinese allusion, which not only reveals her knowledge of Chinese literature but also the ability to appropriate the Chinese original to a new level of creative expression.

Allusions to Chinese works can be found in all three types of passages that made up *Makura no sôshi*—that is, the list, essay, and memoir passages—and they range in effect from descriptive, at times superficial, flourishes in the lists and essays to witty appropriations in the

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[18] A representative example of this opinion can be found in Kanda, 31.

[19] See for example Ikeda, 211-225.

memoir passages. What I would like to focus on are the passages in which Sei showcases allusions to Chinese literature in conversation with male courtiers and with her patron, Empress Teishi. They form a discrete category within *Makura no sôshi*, having their own distinct pattern of narrative discourse. In these passages, Sei is presented with situations to which she is required to respond spontaneously; she is at times asked to cap a poem, at other times to perform in response to the mise-en-scène. Although past readers of *Makura no sôshi* have interpreted these passages negatively as exhibitions of Sei's flashy personality and as flagrant transgressions of feminine behavior, I would like to reinterpret them within the context of Heian Japan's gendered *wakan* dialectic as Sei's deliberate construction of a privileged discourse between her and those in socio-political power. I will show that Sei clearly stays within the bounds of legitimate female learning, and, moreover, that the significance of these allusions lies in Sei's performative talent and her understanding of the relationship between gender, language, and, ultimately, power.

The first thing to note about Sei Shônagon's allusions to Chinese literature is that they are mostly allusions to Bai Juyi's poems from his *Collected Works* (*Hakushi monjû* [白氏文集]). Given that Sei herself lists *The Collected Works* at the top of her list of Chinese writings, this is perhaps no surprise.[20] That the common noun *monjû* or "collected works" referred only to the works of Bai Juyi attests to the Tang poet's overwhelming popularity in Heian Japan. Of further interest is the fact that all of the Bai Juyi poems alluded to by Sei appear in the work *Wakan rôeishû* (和漢朗詠集 [Japanese and Chinese poems to sing], ca. 1013), compiled by Sei's contemporary Fujiwara Kintô (藤原公任, 966-1041). This work lists exemplary couplets of Chinese poetry written by both Chinese and Japanese poets, and includes *waka* (和歌) as well. Because it is divided into categories by the seasons and by other miscellaneous topics, the work functions as a handbook for poetic composition. The compilation of *Wakan rôeishû* was completed after Sei's writing of *Makura*; therefore, Sei could not have referenced this work to build her knowledge of the Chinese literary canon.

[20] Passage 197, "Fumi wa," SNKT, 245. This passage is not included in Morris's translation.

However, the couplets and *waka* included in this collection were the *bons mots* of the Heian court at the time of compilation, and the fact that Sei's allusions remain within the references of this work suggests that Sei did not necessarily have a particularly wide knowledge of Chinese literature but that she quoted from a defined corpus. The focus for evaluating Sei's allusions, therefore, should be on how she utilizes these allusions rather than on the quantification of her learning.

The Japanese scholar Kawaguchi Hisao's (川口久雄) theory that the core contents of *Wakan rôeishû* were originally inscriptions placed upon screen paintings provides tantalizing insight into the Heian Japanese use of Chinese couplets. This theory is based on the supposition that *waka* poems and Chinese couplets were chosen or written to match idealized visual scenes—a variation of *daiei* (題詠), a practice in which the poet was required to infuse a specific experience into a generic, set topic through her/his versification.[21] Therefore, each of the *waka* and couplets in *Wakan rôeishû* captures a specific scene (the organization of the anthology into topics supports this also). I would argue that the use of Chinese allusions in *Makura no sôshi* is actually a similar exercise in which Sei Shônagon pairs a visual setting—the combination of factors comprising the poeticizing circumstances—with the evocative verbal imagery of a well-known composition.

The principles behind the type of allusive practice demonstrated by Sei Shônagon in *Makura no sôshi* have been discussed insightfully through the concept of "*ori*" by Hashimoto Fumio (橋本不美男) in his article "Ori no keisei to bungei" (折の形成と文芸 ["The construction of occasion and literature"]).[22] *Ori* is the specific, momentary combination of time, circumstance, audience/actors, and location at hand that make up the setting encountered by the poet.[23] Although the establishment of an intimate connection between occasion and composition is the basis for evaluating any traditional poetic composition, Hashimoto has discovered documented instances from the mid-Heian period where a person has

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[21] Kawaguchi, 624-26.

[22] Hashimoto, 345-366.

[23] *Ibid.*, 359.

appropriated a poem written by someone else and then has been given attribution for the poem.[24] In this case, what is being recognized through this seemingly mistaken attribution is not the actual authorship of the poem but rather the manner in which the person was able to capture the specific matrix of *ori* through the chosen poem. In other words, the attribution marks the authorship of *ori.*[25] Hashimoto sees Sei's uses of *waka* and Chinese literary allusions in *Makura no sôshi* as examples of such poetic constructions of *ori* in the mid-Heian period. Indeed, it is the encapsulation of *ori* that lies at the heart of Sei's successful allusions to Chinese literature. However, Heian society's positioning of Chinese literature and writing as domains of men necessitated an observance of gendered conventions in *Makura no sôshi.* While Sei Shônagon must be circumspect in the performance of her *zae*, her understanding of the gendered coding of Chinese language allows her to take advantage of her learning to establish a privileged discourse between herself, the men in power, and her patron Empress Teishi. What she devises are performances of her Chinese learning that remain within the bounds of female propriety.

One of the most famous performative scenes in *Makura no sôshi* is "Yuki no ito takô furitaru wo" (雪のいとたかう降りたるを), rendered in Ivan Morris's translation as "One Day, When the Snow Lay Thick on the Ground."[26] In this compact passage, Sei and some other ladies-in-waiting are in attendance on the empress on a day when, as the passage title indicates, snow lay thick on the ground and the lattices are closed to keep out the cold. The empress turns to Sei and says "Tell me Shônagon, how is the snow on Incense Burner Peak?" Sei immediately recognizes the empress's words as an allusion to Bai Juyi's poem, "Beneath Incense Burner Peak I Have Newly Made My Mountain Residence; the Thatched Hut Has Just Been Completed—Informally Inscribed on the Eastern Wall" (香鑪峯下新卜山居草堂初成偶題東壁).

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[24] *Ibid.*, 345-49.

[25] *Ibid.*, 364-65.

[26] Passage 280, SNKT, 321. Passage 157, Morris, 241-42.

The famous couplet from this poem that comes to Sei's mind is:

遺愛寺鐘欹枕聽
香鑪峯雪撥簾看

The bell of the Temple of Bequeathed Love—
I hear it striking against my pillow;
the snow on top of Incense Burner Peak—
I see it through the rolled up blind.[27]

To show her recognition of the empress's allusion, Sei orders a maid to open the lattice and has her roll up the blinds, in re-enactment of the Bai Juyi poem. The performance rates highly with both the empress and the other women, inspiring some of the women to remark that Sei indeed was born to serve the empress. Rather than chanting the Chinese poem, which might be deemed inappropriate flaunting of knowledge, Sei subtly appropriates the allusion into a socially acceptable performance. This scene has captured the imaginations of a great number of artists as a crystallization of the aesthetics of *Makura no sôshi*—it demonstrates the performance of elegant wit, which is the basis of *wokashi*.[28]

All major male political figures make appearances in *Makura no sôshi*, including Fujiwara Michitaka (Sei's patron's father), Fujiwara Michinaga, Emperor Ichijô, and the illustrious courtier-heroes of the day, the Shinagon (四納言 ["The Four Counselors"])—Fujiwara Kintô, Minamoto Toshikata (源俊賢, 960-1027), Fujiwara Yukinari (藤原行成, 972-1027), and Fujiwara Tadanobu (藤原斉信, 967-1035). The presence of all of these men in the passages of *Makura no sôshi* is significant, for it reflects the power within Fujiwara Michitaka's regency, as well as the gravitational pull of Empress Teishi's salon. More significantly, the continuing presence of some of these men in Teishi's salon after Michitaka's death and Teishi's decline in power is symbolic of the

[27] Rimer and Chaves, trans., 167.

[28] For instance, the image of Sei Shônagon found on the dust jacket of Edith Sarra's *Fictions of Femininity: Literary Inventions of Gender in Japanese Court Women's Memoirs* is a depiction of this passage.

cultural prestige still attached to her presence. The last passage I would like to consider, "Tô no Chûjô no suzuronaru soragoto wo kikite" (頭中将のすずろなるそらごとを聞きて, "The Captain First Secretary, Tadanobu")[29] demonstrates the dynamics of refined literary repartee, which doubtlessly drew the male courtiers to Empress Teishi's salon.

In this passage, we are told that Tadanobu has heard some rumors that have made him wary of Sei Shônagon. Missing her, however, he decides to give her an opportunity to prove her worth. What does he send? Elegantly calligraphed on a heavy, blue paper is the first line of a famed Bai Juyi couplet taken from the poem "In My Mount Lu Thatched Hut on a Rainy Night, Living Alone; Sent to the Supernumeraries Niu the Second, Li the Seventh, and Yü the Thirty-Second" (廬山草堂、夜雨獨宿、寄牛二・李七・　三十二員外):

蘭省花時錦帳下

You in the "Orchid Bureau" at this time of flowers
beneath the embroidered curtains[30]

Tadanobu asks her to provide the capping line of the couplet. The line in question is:

廬山雨夜草庵中

me, here in Mount Lu on a rainy night,
inside my thatched hut . . .

Unable to seek out the empress for her advice, Sei replies through a *waka* rendering of the capping couplet, borrowing the lines written by Fujiwara Kintô in an exchange he had with Fujiwara Takatada (藤原挙直, dates

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[29] Passage 78, SNKT, 88-93. Passage 51, Morris, 88-93.

[30] Rimer and Chaves, 167-168.

unknown[31]):

Takatada

九重の／花の都を／おきながら

Leaving behind the beflowered capital,
that of the nine-fold enclosure,

Kintô

草の庵を／誰かたづねむ

Who would visit
this grass hut of mine?

Tadanobu's test requires Sei to exercise caution, for she cannot simply inscribe the missing line as her response—after all, as Sei notes, "were I to write the second half of the poem in my somewhat faltering Chinese characters as if I were a know-it-all, it would make a bad impression."[32] It is most likely that Tadanobu sends this note to Sei based on the assumption that she knows the Chinese canon most commonly invoked by the Japanese. Therefore, this test concerns not whether she knows the poem, but how she will package her response. Taking some coal from a fire, Sei scribbles Kintô's lines. This response is a hit with not only Tadanobu, but also with the other courtiers. On this occasion, Sei immediately recognizes the Chinese couplet, but rather than reply with the Chinese capping line, she improvises a solution that reveals greater sensibility for its reflection of her understanding of the Chinese allusion as well as the proper codes of conduct of her age.

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[31] Fujiwara Takatada served as a Chamberlain (*kurôdo*) under Emperors Enyû (r. 969-984), Kazan (984-986), and Ichijô (r. 986-1011).

[32] SNKT, 90.

CONCLUSION

Scholarly interpretation of the display of Chinese learning in Murasaki Shikibu's diary and Sei Shônagon's *Makura no sôshi* has tended to set these writers at opposite extremes of demure restraint and exhibitionism. As I have shown, however, both works involve performative manipulations of Chinese discourse that make the women's *zae* either acceptable to the society or to those in power. It is undeniable that women in the Heian period had Chinese learning, and the conceptualizations of recent feminist and gender criticism can, I believe, create viable frameworks for investigating further the *wakan* dialectics that are operating in women's representation of a masculine corpus of learning.

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