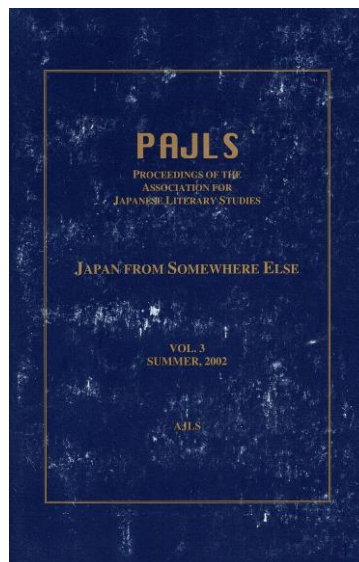


“The Poetics of Colonial Nostalgia: A Case for
Taiwan Manyōshū”

Faye Yuan Kleeman 

*Proceedings of the Association for Japanese
Literary Studies* 3 (2002): 2–11.



PAJLS 3:
Japan From Somewhere Else.
Eiji Sekine, Editor; Joyce L. Detzner, Production Editor.

**THE POETICS OF COLONIAL NOSTALGIA:
A CASE FOR *TAIWAN MANYŌSHŪ***

Faye Yuan Kleeman
University of Colorado

INTRODUCTION

Lately, Japan's colonial past has been in the news. In the spring of 2000, the Ministry of Education gave formal approval to a new middle school history textbook created by the "Association for Making a New History Textbook" (*atarashii kyōkasho o tsukuru kai* 新しい教科書を作る会).¹ The revisionist, "liberal historical view" (*jiyū shikan* 自由史観)² espoused in this work had triggered a vigorous debate among Japanese educators and its approval drew bitter protest from China and Korea. In summer, another incident involving Japan's colonial past flared up. The Prime Minister Koizumi Keizō's visit to Yasukuni Shrine, two days before the official Memorial Day of the End of the War (*shūsen kinenbi*), enraged both the right wing, saw his avoidance of August 15th as a kowtow to the pacifist, and the left, which viewed the act itself as an unacceptable concession to militarist sentiments.

Such incidents reveal that the ghost of colonialism, though not always evident, lurks just beneath the public consciousness and can, in fact arise to

¹ In the media it is often just referred to as "Tsukuru kai." The group is headed by the critic Nishio Kanji 西尾幹二, with many of its funding members drawn from the ranks of conservative academics, such as Fujioka Nobukatsu 藤岡信勝 and Haga Tōru 芳賀徹 of Tokyo University, the critic Nishibe Susumu 西部邁 and the manga author Kobayashi Yoshinori 小林善則. The middle school textbook written and edited by the organization passed the Ministry of Education's assessment in spring of 2001 and was published by Kinsōsha. For more details on the group and the textbook controversy, see <http://tsukurukai.com>.

² This standard translation for the term *jiyū shikan* is rather misleading. "Free" in this context does not indicate "progressive," as it often does in the West (especially the Anglo-American political context), but rather a conservative interpretation of Japan's role and actions during the World War II that is "free" from the influence of the left-wing apparatus, as represented mostly by progressive scholars and Japanese Teacher's Union (Nikkyōso). The new textbook is created to "liberate" the Japanese populace from the "masochistic" historical view (*jigyakuteki shikan* 自虐的史観) espoused by these groups. See Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "The View Through the Skylight," (2000).

dominate current events.³ Below, I will examine yet another colonial legacy that is rarely discussed: the poetic legacy of *waka* in Japan's ex-colonies. The practice of composing *waka* and *haiku* was first introduced to natives of the colonies by Japanese educators as part of the general education policy. The colonial poetic cartography closely parallels the outline of political and military conquest, spanning an area from the Kurile Islands to Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan and the South Pacific.⁴ More than half a century after the end of Japanese rule in these regions, most of the poetic practice has vanished, but it survives among amateur poets in Taiwan. I will look at an anthology of *waka* composed by Taiwanese poets, *Taiwan Manyōshū* (Anthology of Ten Thousand Leaves of Taiwan). In particular, I will consider the interpellation of postcolonial linguistic and artistic subjectivity within the construct of nostalgia.

GENEALOGY OF THE *TAIWAN MANYŌSHŪ*

During the first decade of Japan's colonial rule in Taiwan (1895-1905), when the focus was on suppressing armed insurgences and consolidating power, a transitional education system combining instruction in Japanese language and *kanbun* (classical Chinese read through Japanese) was implemented throughout the island. The second decade saw a much more aggressive implementation of a program of assimilation, focusing on the Japanese language and civics. This eventually culminated in the Imperial Subject Movement (*Kōmin undō*) after the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This movement banned all written and spoken forms of the native language in public venues, mandated that native families change their surname to a Japanese one, and promoted through indoctrination unquestioning loyalty to the state and the emperor. As a consequence of these policies, the population that had substantial command of the Japanese language almost doubled in five years, from 38% of the total native population in 1937 to near 60% in 1941 (roughly 6 million people).⁵

With the end of the war, Japan retreated and the Chinese Nationalists took over the island. The official language was switched from Japanese to

³ For example, after the terrorist incident in New York on September 11th, the debate surrounding whether the Self Defense Force (*jeitai*) should be dispatched to assist US and its allies' in military action took on an unprecedented urgency. The need to affirm their alliance with the US came into conflict with fears that its ex-colonies in Asia, mainly China and Korea, might see it as a new kind of militarism and with a minority counter-argument that Japan should assert its own subjectivity as an independent nation and not act like the US's colonial subject.

⁴ See Tanaka Masuzō and Miyashita Kyōko eds. (2000).

⁵ Fujii Shōzō (1998): 31-36.

Mandarin. In order to consolidate its new reign over the island and to fortify a new national identity with the continent, the Nationalist government suppressed the Japanese language. No written or spoken Japanese was allowed in public. Japanese-language books and newspapers were confiscated from tourists entering the country and government-controlled media regularly satirized anyone who followed Japanese customs. A generation of writers and intellectuals whose intellectual language was Japanese, the so-called “Japanese language generation” (*Nihongojin* as apposed to *Nihonjin*), lost their voice. A few were able to make the transition into using the new standard language, North China’s Mandarin, and continued to write and publish; but for most, Mandarin remained a foreign tongue over which they had only limited mastery; they were forced to choose silence or risk arrest.

However, the legacy of Japanese language literature in Taiwan never completely died out. People gathering informally in small groups or within their families continued to speak in Japanese and books surviving from the occupation era or smuggled in surreptitiously were passed around. With the advent of the VCR, even Japanese television programs and movies could sometimes be viewed.⁶ A sizable proportion of the population continued to live in Japanese houses, the *tatami* makers flourished, and Japanese food remained an essential part of the island’s cuisine. Japan was also a favored destination for the scions of native families headed for graduate study overseas.

One prominent aspect of the survival of Japanese culture in Taiwan was the verse tradition. It survived, of course, in private communication, but also in occasional poetry gatherings or *utaawase*. Beginning in the late sixties, in particular, there was a revival of the *tanka* form among members of the older generation which had been educated in Japanese.

At the center of this small but dynamic movement was Kohō Banri 孤蓬万里 (a.k.a. Dr. Wu Jiantang, 1926-1999), a typical member of the “Nihongo generation,” who had been about twenty years old when Japan lost the empire. Kohō Banri was typical of many intellectuals educated in colonial Taiwan in that he was not only adept at Japanese *waka*, but also

⁶ Here I speak of the period preceding the liberalization of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Today, Japanese culture is freely available in a variety of forms, from a Kinokuniya bookstore in downtown Taipei to Japanese television stations on cable TV.

classical Chinese poetry⁷ and he was also an excellent swordsman in the *kendō* tradition.⁸ While in high school, he had studied the *Manyōshū* with the famous *Manyō* scholar Inukai Takeshi.⁹ After the war, he was trained as a medical doctor both in Taiwan and Japan. In 1968, he founded the *tanka* magazine *Taipei Kadan* 台北歌壇, which regularly sponsored poetry gatherings and competitions, fostering a community of interest in the Japanese poetic tradition. The part-time poet once lamented that “the *waka* style of Taiwan is often considered old fashioned,” but he took pride in the fact that his unadorned and unpolished *waka* style was appreciated by the poet Ōoka Shinobu, who included it in his prestigious *Asahi Shinbun* column, “Oriori no uta” 折々の歌 (A poem for every season), nineteen times.¹⁰ In 1994, a major Japanese publishing house, Shūeisha, published a two-volume collection of *waka* edited by him, titled *Taiwan Manyōshū* 台湾万葉集. For this work Kohō was awarded the Kikuchi Kan Prize.¹¹ The collection comprises about 1400 carefully chosen *tanka* with prose explanatory notes accompanying each poem.

READING COLONIAL NOSTALGIA IN *TAIWAN MANYŌSHŪ*

In the following section, I have selected some poems from this group of amateur poets, drawn from the ranks of physicians, schoolteachers, businessmen and housewives, that illustrate the complex mix of emotions stirred up by memories of the colonial era. The subjects treated in this collection range from everyday life and family affairs to landscapes and politics. Here I have chosen a number of poems that deal with poetry and with the colonial past. They cannot be said to be representative of the Nihongo generation as a whole, but their poems do give us insight into how some members of that cohort kept Japanese culture alive and integrated their experiences of a Japanese world now long disappeared into their modern, Taiwanese lives.

⁷ His unusual pen name was taken from Li Po’s famous “Seeing a Friend Off”

青山横北部 白水遶東城
此地一為別 孤蓬万里征

⁸ He held the 8th *dan* rank in *kendō* and placed third in the Third World Championship *Kendō* individual competition .

⁹ Inukai Takeshi taught Japanese literature in Taiwan from 1942 to 1945. He also wrote the preface for a Taiwanese edition of the book. The preface for the Japanese version was written by the poet Ōoka Shinobu.

¹⁰ See Preface in Kohō Banri (1994): 8-11.

¹¹ The work was first published as a three-volume collection in 1981, 1988 and 1993 respectively in Taiwan. Shūeisha combined the three into a two-volume set and reissued them in 1994.

6 COLONIAL NOSTALGIA

My first examples center on the act of poetic composition itself.

指を折り短歌詠み居れば忘れ居し大和言葉が次々と湧く
高 秀

While bending my fingers
Composing (counting off) a tanka
Forgotten Japanese words
Spring forth,
one after another.

忘れ居し言葉幾つを拾ひつぎ綴りゆかむか三十一文字は
陳 益

Shall I patch together
thirty-one syllables,
Picking up a few
long forgotten words.

These two *waka* emphasize the process of composing *waka* while struggling to recover a vocabulary suffering from long disuse. The memory is dredged for appropriate words, which seem to leap forth from untold depths, then must be woven together to form the fabric of a forgotten language.

子や孫に残すものなしせめてはも心残さむ短歌に託して
うた
高 淑英

Nothing to leave
My sons and grandsons.
At the least,
Let me leave my heart,
Entrusted to this poem.

うつしよに花をこぼして敷島の雅びの短歌の詠みつがれゆく
王 翠月

I continue to compose
The elegant poems
Of Japan,
Scattering cherry blossom petals
In this ephemeral world.

老醜を追ひやらむと若きらとはしやぎ若き歌を詠むなり
呉 玉梅

To chase away
Ugly old age
I make merry
With the young folks
Composing youthful poems.

夫逝きて婆やと二人の侘び住居短歌よ花よと気ままなる日び
ゆ ずまいう た
高 淑英

After the death of my husband
With my old maid
Two of us in this humble dwelling
Carefree days full of
Poems and flowers.

Echoing the previous theme of “forgetfulness,” this group of *waka* remind us of the shared concerns of these composers with old age, and their determination to continue the art form. They also highlight the isolation this generation feels in a postcolonial reality in which younger generations have moved on and no longer feel the bonds of the colonial past. For example, the next poem humorously shows the generation gap and confusion in a postcolonial, multilingual society.

日本語と台湾語混る北京語の御伽話に孫ふくれ面
蔡 西川

My grandchild pouting at
Fairy tales told mixing
Japanese and
Taiwanese
with Mandarin.

There are also poems that reminisce, expressing a simple nostalgia toward a peaceful childhood filled with symbols of Japanese culture. Here the author reveals how deeply his memories of childhood are linked to distinctively Japanese children’s games:

お手玉に陣取りごっこ縄跳びと平和なる時代に幼時過ぎ
江 苑蓮

I spent my childhood
Playing at dibs
Battle games
And jumping rope
In a peaceful age.

There are, of course, also painful memories of the wartime that reveal loyalties now abandoned:

明日は征く僚 ^{ともわし}驚なりと残し来し「恩賜の煙草」そっくり渡す
蕭 翔文

Saying, “Tomorrow I go to battle as
A fellow eagle,”
He handed me all the
Imperial cigarettes
He had been saving.

In this reminiscence, the cigarettes once treasured as a reminder of the Imperial institution in whose name they did battle were passed on to a comrade, unenjoyed, as the young warrior goes off to his death.

翌朝は巨鯨を葬る愛機撫で夕焼空に心を燃やす
蕭 翔文

As I stroked
My beloved craft
Which tomorrow would bury a giant whale
My heart burned in the
blazing red of the setting sun.

In this poem the kamikaze's determination to take a large American ship to the depths of the ocean with him and his plane contrasts with the anguish inspired by the image of the setting sun, which foreshadows his own death and the Empire's impending defeat.

The same ambivalence toward Japan's wartime defeat is represented more whimsically in the following poem:

敗戦がなせし皮肉にわがさだめ芦草まとふ舟の如かり

陳 益

My fate
Tangled in the irony
of defeat,
Like a boat
tangled in the reeds.

A similarly complex set of emotions surrounds the figure of the Shōwa Emperor Hirohito. In the next poem, his death inspires memories not of the past glories of empire, but of the treats young children received on his birthday:

紅白の饅頭貰ひし天長節今は懐かし昭和帝逝きて

蕭 翔文

The Emperor's Birthday,
When we got red and white buns,
Fondly remembered now,
The Showa emperor
has passed on.

In the following poem, modern technology intrudes upon the same scene, revealing how much the emperor as a signifier has changed for these former imperial subjects.

すめらぎと曾て崇めし老人の葬儀のテレビにまぶたしめらす

孤蓬万里

Closing my eyes
to the television showing
The funeral of an old man
Once revered
as the Ruler.

Certainly, the composers are aware of and resigned to the futility of practicing an art form that is about to die out once they have passed on, as attested in this poem also by the editor Kohō Banri:

日本語のすでに滅びし国に住み短歌詠み継げる人や幾人

Living in
The country where Japanese
Has already perished
How many are there
Those who continue to compose *uta*?¹²

CONCLUSION

The decision of the *Taiwan Manyōshu* poets to write in the language of the former colonial overlord has enraged some nationalistic critics and baffled others. For example, in a roundtable dialogue (*taidan*) between the literary critic Kawamura Minato, the historian Narita Ryūichi, and the Korean-Japanese linguist Lee Yeounsuk, Lee, who viewed this in the context of contemporary Korea's postcolonial response to the occupation era, was particularly perplexed. She expressed misgivings that some Japanese might take comfort in this fact and read it as a sign of nostalgia for Japanese rule while glossing over the realities of colonial rule itself.¹³ Just such a response is found in the works of the ever controversial *manga* author Kobayashi Yoshinori, a member of Tsukurukai with which we began this paper. In his recent *A Discourse on Taiwan (Taiwan ron, 2000)*,¹⁴ he interprets the colonial nostalgia he sees in this generation of Taiwanese as a preservation of the traditional Japanese spirit now lost in his native Japan through post-war democratization and an educational system that does not promote national pride. Like his earlier, equally controversial *A Discourse on War (Sensōron, 1999)*, this work generated vigorous debate within Japan, and subsequently, after its translation into Chinese, in Taiwan. It is ironic that Kobayashi Yoshinori's neo-colonial polemic enjoyed wide diffusion because of a postcolonial situation in which a global market has arisen for Japanese cultural commodities (i.e. *manga, karaoke, anime* etc.), and marks a generational shift within the ex-colony of Taiwan from an elder generation that enthusiastically pursued the high art of *waka* to a younger

¹² Kohō Banri (1994): 9.

¹³ Kawamura Minato (1999): 140-150. Marukawa Tetsushi also cautions the same in his *Taiwan posuto koroniaru no shitai* (2000).

¹⁴ Kobayashi Yoshinori follows up his popular but controversial New Declaration of Egomanism (*shin gōmanizumu sengen*) with *Taiwan ron*. Several short trips to Taiwan culminated in a yearlong serialization on the conservative men's magazine *Sapio*.

generation with an insatiable postmodern appetite all for aspects of Japanese pop culture.

The colonial nostalgia conveyed in these poems reveals a much more complex set of sociopolitical and textual positions that warrants our attention. The poetic diaspora, resulting in a poetic hybridity, was shaped by historical conditions (both colonial and postcolonial), language and identity politics, and, in some cases, pure nostalgia. But a one dimensional reading that focuses only on such issues denies the fundamental urgency of individual artistic subjectivity. Poets should not be read as simply a masochistic interpellation or abandoning of their (linguistic) subject position(s), nor should they be understood simply as a naïve celebration of a constructed past through poetic mimicry or grafting. Here, I would like to quote Ki no Tsurayuki: “Japanese poetry has its seeds in the human heart and burgeons into many different kinds of leaves of words.”¹⁵ The poets in *Taiwan Manyōshū* assert their linguistic and artistic subject position, nurturing the seeds sewn in their hearts through colonial transmission with words harvested from transcultural hybridism.

The colonial legacy comes in many guises: material, cultural and linguistic. Japan’s colonial legacy in Taiwan is to be found not merely in the railway system and the neo-colonial architecture of the Presidential Palace; it survives in cultural features such as food and customs, in elements of the self-definition of the Taiwanese people, and in linguistic hybridism. By tracing the genealogy of these poetic artifacts and locating them within the proper historical context, we may be able to avoid an ahistorical, overdetermined reading of these *waka* as simply another displaced cultural commodity, like *manga*, *karaoke*, or *anime*, in postcolonial Asia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fujii Shōzō 藤井省三. 1998. *Taiwan bungaku kono hyakunen* 台湾文学この百年. Tokyo: Tōhō shoten.
- Kohō Banri 孤蓬万里, ed. 1994. *Taiwan Manyōshū* 台湾万葉集. Tokyo: Shūeisha.
- Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 2000. “The View Through the Skylight: Nishio Kanji, Textbook Reform and the History of the World.” *Japanese Studies* 20-2 (September, 2000): 133-140.
- Tanaka Masuzō and Miyashita Kyōko eds. “Tokushū hajjin to kajin no ajia chizu 特集 俳人と歌人のアジア地図” in *Shuka* 朱夏 14 (Spring, 2000): 2-89.

¹⁵ Preface (jo) of *Kokinshū*.