

Primers, Commentaries, and Kanbun Literacy in Japanese Literary Culture, 950-1250CE

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ABSTRACT

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This project seeks a new perspective on issues of literacy, literary language, and cultural contact in the literature of premodern Japan by examining the primers used to study Chinese-style literature in the Heian and early medieval periods (c. 900-1250CE). Much of Heian literary production was centered on *kanbun*: “Chinese-style” writing that resembled classical Chinese and mobilized allusive connections to classical Chinese texts, but was usually read based on classical Japanese vocabulary and syntax. The knowledge gleaned from introductory kanbun education forms an important and little-researched common thread linking readers and writers from a wide range of backgrounds – from male and female courtiers to specialized university scholars to medieval monks and warriors eager to appropriate court culture. While tracing the roles of commonly-studied kanbun primers and commentaries in shaping Heian literary culture and its medieval reception, I consider key aspects of premodern Japan literacy – from the art of *kundoku* (“gloss-reading”) to the systems of knowledge involved in textual commentary and the adaptation of kanbun material. Examining the educational foundations of premodern Japanese literary culture demonstrates that kanbun and other literary styles functioned as closely entangled modes of literacy rather than as native and foreign languages, and that certain elements of classical Chinese knowledge formed a valued set of raw material for literary creativity.

Chapter 1 outlines the diversity of premodern Japanese literacy and the key primers and encyclopedic reference works involved in kanbun education. Chapter 2 focuses on a primer for

learning written characters, the *Thousand Character Classic* (*Qian zi wen*), discussing its varied reception in the contexts of calligraphy practice, oral recitation, and commentarial authority and offering translations from the tongue-in-cheek literary showpiece *Thousand Character Classic Continued* (*Zoku Senjimon*, 1132). In Chapter 3, I examine the role of kanbun knowledge in Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*, early 11th century), which foregrounds the social and creative roles of introductory kanbun material as a vocabulary of conversational quotation among both men and women. Chapter 4 turns to *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* (*Shin gafu ryakui*, 1172), a ground-breaking anecdotal commentary on Bai Juyi's poetry, to discuss the way that kanbun texts were interpreted and reinvented through commentary. Chapter 5 discusses an innovative poetic adaptation of a kanbun primer, *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (*Mōgyū waka*, 1204), which makes use of poetic topics and historical anecdotes as effective ways of organizing kanbun knowledge and also suggest the potential for introductory education to spark literary creativity across genre boundaries. I conclude with a brief look at the relevance of premodern Japanese kanbun education for broader questions about literary language and for comparisons involving other transregional classical languages like Latin. By illustrating the processes by which elements of Chinese literary culture were adopted and adapted throughout East Asia, this project provides fertile ground for exploring issues of literacy and cultural interaction that underlie all forms of literature.

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Introduction

The textual world of premodern Japan offers an ideal context for exploring questions about literacy, literary education, and cross-cultural contact. It involved a continuum of inscription that can be loosely divided into *wabun*, “Japanese-style” writing that could be transparently sounded out as classical Japanese, and *kanbun*, “Chinese-style” writing that resembled classical Chinese but was usually read (and written) based on classical Japanese vocabulary and syntax. In terms of content as well as form, kanbun writing in Japan drew particularly heavily on material from the Chinese continent, which was constantly being adapted and put to new literary uses. In past scholarship, kanbun has often been neglected or dismissed as an awkward and alien register, but in fact its complex relationship to classical Chinese and its central role in premodern Japanese literary culture deserve deeper consideration. My project seeks a new perspective on literature of the Heian and early Kamakura periods (c. 950-1250CE) by examining the texts and practices of kanbun education, showing how students assimilated the fundamental knowledge necessary to participate in literary life.

Though the Heian period is often depicted as the heyday of *wabun* literature (famous for *wabun* prose like the *Tale of Genji*), primary education for the aristocracy was centered on *kanbun* texts – some written in Japan, and many brought from the

continent (to emphasize reading style rather than place of origin, I consider both as “kanbun”). While acknowledging the role of the imperial university and its curriculum, particularly on genres of formal kanbun writing, I am interested in moving beyond this official standard to consider how literary figures of different genders, backgrounds, and social positions encountered and absorbed kanbun knowledge. This approach reveals another vaguer but more pervasive educational standard – the network of primers, commentaries, and reference works that mediated interactions with other kanbun texts, particularly at the level of introductory education.

At the center of this heterogeneous and little-researched informal educational “canon” are introductory primers full of model poems and historical anecdotes, which were memorized and recited across a relatively broad demographic. The lively reception, rewriting, commentarial adaptation and rearrangement of these educational texts demonstrates that certain basic elements of Chinese knowledge were not a static foreign ‘scripture’ monopolized by a small number of scholars, but an integral part of intellectual life and a widely-accessible body of raw material for literary creativity.

Texts chosen as primers and the ways in which they were studied varied according to historical period, social position, gender, and other factors, rather than forming a single cohesive curriculum. Four texts that frequently appear in the context of

introductory education (sometimes explicitly grouped together as the Four Primers, *shibu no dokusho*) are the *Thousand Character Classic* (千字文, J. *Senjimon*, Ch. Qianzi wen), a mnemonic poem for learning written characters; the *Child's Treasury* (蒙求, J. *Mōgyū*, Ch. Mengqiu), a collection of rhymed historical anecdotes; and two topically-arranged poetic collections, the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (百二十詠, J. *Hyaku nijū ei*, Ch. Bai ershi yong), which contains topic poetry by the early Tang poet Li Jiao, and the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (和漢朗詠集, *Wakan rōeishū*), which contains Chinese-style lines and couplets and Japanese-style poems from skilled poets of the past. Additionally, the works of the Tang poet Bai Juyi, particularly his “New Ballads” (新樂府, J. *Shin gafu*, Ch. Xin yuefu), were widely studied as an introduction to Chinese-style poetic composition, and could plausibly be considered a ‘Fifth Primer.’ Together, these five texts represent a widely shared set of literary common-sense about the nature of poetry, history, and topical cosmology; they provide a good starting point for considering the types of educational texts that were most commonly studied, as well as the kinds of knowledge most urgently gleaned from them.

The foundation of a project like this one – which seeks to trace a trajectory from students’ actual experience of kanbun primers into the wider world of literary

activity – must rest in close attention to reading practices. Here I am inspired, on one hand, by work in literacy studies (e.g. by Brian Street) that has moved away from the concept of literacy as a monolithic technology exerting discrete influence on a culture and towards describing plural, interrelated literacies inextricably embedded within social contexts – and on the other hand, by scholarship on Japanese manuscript materials (e.g. by Tsukishima Hiroshi) that has revealed much about the diversity of Heian reading practice. The two fundamental ingredients of kanbun reading practice were *kundoku*, or ‘gloss-reading,’ a method of reading kanbun as a distinctive type of classical Japanese by a series of syntactic rearrangements and semi-standardized lexical glosses, and *ondoku*, or ‘sound-reading,’ based originally on Chinese pronunciations. Just as the seeming dichotomy between kanbun and wabun – glossed simply as ‘Chinese-style’ and ‘Japanese-style’ above – is in fact based on a tangle of inscriptionary, content-based, and situational considerations, the apparently neat and convenient opposition between *ondoku* and *kundoku* tended to become a matter of subtle gradation in the context of actual literary practice, with most reading combining elements of both approaches.

Introductory kanbun primers are an ideal site for examining the nature of Heian literacy, in both narrow and broad senses. There is comparatively rich textual evidence

suggesting how they were read, in terms of both *ondoku* and *kundoku*. Moving one step beyond these basic reading practices, primers also demonstrate the importance of commentary and other mediating texts. Most of the key primers introduced above were accompanied by explanatory commentary from their earliest appearance in Japan, and the rest acquired commentarial treatment in the late Heian period as they were canonized for audiences beyond the court. The way that Heian kanbun primers are defined and redefined by both the commentary-like reading practice of *kundoku* and the addition of various layers of scholarly commentary is an opportunity to consider basic literacy and advanced textual scholarship as distinct parts of a single educational continuum.

A still broader sense of kanbun literacy involves the creative use of kanbun-based knowledge in various other genres, usually centered around the most widely familiar primer material. Commonly-chanted Bai Juyi poems and Chinese biographical anecdotes from the *Child's Treasury* often form the basis of jokes in literary depictions of court life like Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* (枕草子 *Makura no sōshi*), while even the most erudite university scholars still turned to primers for inspiration or parodic material. In this sense, as well, kanbun primers form an important and insufficiently-studied common ground within Heian literary culture, encoding a

stock of material for allusion along with many basic assumptions about literary topics, cosmology, and genre standards.

Seeking to understand Heian Japan as biliterate or multiliterate rather than bilingual, and to understand kanbun and wabun as two mutually entangled literary standards rather than entirely separate “languages,” provides fertile ground for exploring broader issues of literacy and reading practice. By illustrating the processes by which elements of Chinese literary culture were adapted throughout East Asia, this project also contributes to what Sheldon Pollack has termed “the comparative study of premodern processes of cosmopolitan transculturation”; the position of kanbun in Japan provides a thought-provoking point of comparison for cases involving other transregional classical languages like Latin and Sanskrit.

This dissertation begins in Chapter 1 by introducing the five key primers listed above and situating them within a more complex network of supporting texts; topical encyclopedias, anthologies, and literary handbooks. I also briefly outline the more formal educational paths pursued by a few scholars through the state university and its associated schools; although this dissertation focuses on introductory texts and primers that operated beyond this system, the interaction between the canonical university curriculum and less official kanbun resources provides important context. Here I also

revisit the traditions of sound-based and gloss-based reading, *ondoku* and *kundoku*, which were largely curated and transmitted through university families as they shaped the reading of kanbun as a whole.

Chapter 2 takes a closer look at the *Thousand Character Classic* (千字文, Ch. *Qianzi wen*, J. *Senjimon*), a natural starting point in terms of its early introduction to Japan, its enduring popularity, and its role in the acquisition of basic literacy. The content of this text, which was widely used as a primer for learning written characters, suggests that many students learned to write in the context of a particular worldview; one that was centered on imperial government and court life, and constructed images of social common-sense and the natural world from that perspective. The many different educational functions of the *Thousand Character Classic*, however, reflect a more complex picture; I discuss the reception of this text in terms of written character (as a symbolic link to the celebrated calligrapher Wang Xizhi), sound (as a key text for *ondoku*-style recitation that formed part of the Heian soundscape), and commentarial authority (as a source for classical references in late Heian commentaries for beginning students). Finally, I discuss a parodic tribute titled *Thousand Character Classic Continued* (続千字文 *Zoku Senjimon*, 1132), in which the author mimics the form of the original primer while reimagining and even subverting its content in a piece of

literary showmanship aimed to impress his scholarly colleagues. This creative reenactment of a familiar children's primer illustrates the varied social roles of educational texts.

Chapter 3 explores the literary implications of kanbun education from another angle, with a look at the role of kanbun knowledge in Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* (枕草子 *Makura no sōshi*, early 11th century). While the court of Emperor Ichijō around the turn of the eleventh century is now most familiar as the age of the *Tale of Genji*, noted for the creation of wabun texts that now form the core of the modern Japanese literary canon, it was also the age that gave rise to Fujiwara Kintō's *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (和漢朗詠集 *Wakan rōeishū*), perhaps the single most influential literary primer of premodern Japan – a court in which a fashion for kanbun quotation was set by top officials like Kintō, the skilled calligrapher Fujiwara no Yukinari, and the acclaimed poem-chanter Fujiwara no Tadanobu. Rival empresses Teishi (Sei Shōnagon's patron) and Shōshi fostered literary talent of all kinds in their salons and used kanbun-based wit as part of their social arsenal as they maneuvered for imperial favor. Sei Shōnagon's constructed literary view of this court and its most important personages foregrounds social and creative uses of essential kanbun knowledge, reflecting patterns of education that shaped an informal canon of

introductory or accessible kanbun suited for conversational quotation among both men and women.

In Chapter 4, I examine the way that kanbun texts, including the most introductory, were interpreted and recreated through commentary. I focus on the case of *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* (新樂府略意 *Shin gafu ryakui*, 1172), a commentary on Bai Juyi's "New Ballads" by a monk known as Shingyū (信救). The importance of Bai Juyi's poetry in Heian literary culture cannot be overstated, and his "New Ballads," a set of fifty social-criticism poems full of exotic and memorable plots and characters, often played a special role as introduction to Bai Juyi's other work. The earliest full-fledged commentary on these poems is Shingyū's, which illustrates an important trend across all literary genres in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: the repackaging of Heian court classics into an introductory canon for the education of wider audiences (including the new warrior elite). Shingyū's work is an ideal case for exploring the diverse functions of commentary, which in addition to its role in processes like canon formation and widening education could also become a space for scholarly innovations and the creative retelling of familiar material. Shingyū's approach in explaining the "New Ballads" privileges the esoteric, memorable, and anecdotal; in his treatment of the historical events behind the "New Ballads," he uses

unusual sources – including a lost Tang dynasty primer, a “sequel” to the *Child’s Treasury* (唐蒙求, J. *Tō Mōgyū*, Ch. Tang Mengqiu) – to create new and memorable retellings of familiar events like the tragic death of concubine Yang Guifei. Textual commentaries like Shingyū’s, in tandem with oral lectures, were an integral part of the act of reading, both reflecting and shaping what readers found in kanbun texts like the “New Ballads.”

In Chapter 5, I take up another example of the way that key texts of the Heian court – including kanbun primers – were reworked for the benefit of wider audiences in the early medieval period: Minamoto no Mitsuyuki’s *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* (蒙求和歌 *Mōgyū waka*, 1204). This genre-bending primer rearranges anecdotes from the *Child’s Treasury* (Ch. *Mengqiu*, J. *Mōgyū*, a Tang collection of stories about historical figures) into a season-based topical schema reminiscent of a waka anthology, giving a waka poem and prose retelling for each anecdote. To make the anecdotes more accessible to readers without kanbun training, Mitsuyuki combined several strategies common to educational texts of his day, including topical structuring for easy reference, poetry for ready memorization, and anecdotal commentary. As he reimagined kanbun historical anecdotes within a framework of waka topics, Mitsuyuki drew artful and often surprising connections across boundaries of genre – for example,

linking the story of famous sickly beauty Xi Shi, whose grimaces of pain were imitated in vain by ugly women, to the story of Yūgao in the *Tale of Genji*; or representing the story of the warrior Tian Dan, who tricked a besieging army into retreat by tying torches to the tails of oxen and driving them into the enemy camp, with the summer seasonal topic of *kayaribi* (torches lit to drive off mosquitos). *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* is both an explanatory commentary and a creative poetic exercise, illustrating the way in which educational contexts could foster innovative literary activity and also suggesting a productive, dynamic relationship between poetry and anecdote in which topical structures for organizing literary knowledge play a key role.

The afterword concludes with a brief look at some possible directions for future study, including the world comparative context of Japanese kanbun literacy. The oft-remarked but seldom thoroughly explored comparison between classical Chinese and Latin takes on new dimensions when considered from an educational perspective; juxtaposing these two educational traditions highlights the worldwide importance of textual commentary in shaping the circulation of knowledge, as well as the commonality of certain educational techniques like mnemonic poetry and didactic anecdote, while also underscoring significant differences in the transmission of Latin and classical Chinese as literary languages.

The vast majority of literature, even into the modern period, has not been written in the author's native tongue; questions surrounding literary languages and their transregional spread can thus lay claim to a broad general relevance. A deeper understanding of the underlying patterns by which kanbun was learned in early Japan, along with providing fresh insights into key issues in Japanese literary studies, will also open up opportunities to reexamine common assumptions about the nature of premodern literacies and literary knowledge.

Chapter 1 From Primers to Encyclopedias: an Overview of Heian Kanbun

Education

In his diary, the waka poet Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241) complains that although around age seven or eight his son Tameie studied several primers on *kanbun* (Chinese-style literature), the young man is now obsessed with kickball and has already forgotten his studies:

They say that in recent days, the Lesser Captain Tameie plays kickball day and night. Having met with this era when our two lords [Emperor Juntoku and Retired Emperor Gotoba] delight in kickball, he hopes to become their close attendant... Just like the people who starved to death in the palace in the days when the king of Chu delighted in slender waists, he doesn't so much as look at a single book. Even the *Child's Treasury* and *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* that he read when he was seven or eight years of age, he has now abandoned and forgotten. This is all the future cause of bad fortune for our entire house, a supernatural punishment of demonic illusions and accumulated evils.¹

¹ MGK v3 p437 (建保元年五月十六日).

少将為家近日日夜蹴鞠云々。遇兩主好鞠之日、慙為近臣。... 楚王好細腰之日、如宮中餓死人、不見一卷之書。七八歲之時、僅所讀蒙求百詠、猶以廢忘。是皆一家不運之令然、魔縁積惡之崇也。 With the line about the king of Chu, Teika links his son's neglect of reading to pursue the game favored by the emperor and retired emperor to a more dramatically unhealthy precedent; when the king of Chu was dotting on a slender-waisted beauty, many other court ladies starved themselves trying to conform to his tastes.

Although Teika is lamenting his son's neglect of their house tradition of waka scholarship, he still uses two kanbun primers, the *Child's Treasury* (蒙求, Ch. Mengqiu, J. Mōgyū) and *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (百二十詠, Ch. Bai ershi yong, J. Hyaku nijū ei; commonly shortened to 百詠), to represent the most basic level of study. What are these primers, so well-known that a waka poet with little specialized training in Chinese texts would still use them to catalogue his son's failings? How did fundamental elements of kanbun literacy form part of the Heian court legacy for early medieval canon-builders like Teika, and how did they connect writers with very different backgrounds throughout the Heian and medieval periods?

This chapter lays the groundwork for investigating such questions, by clarifying what I mean by both “kanbun” and “literacy” for the purposes of this project. I will begin with a more detailed discussion of the concepts of kanbun and kundoku reading introduced in the preface. I will then give an overview of sources for acquiring kanbun literacy in the Heian period, beginning with a small group of basic primers like those mentioned by Teika and moving outward to encompass a network of commentaries, topical encyclopedias, and other reference works. This bird's-eye view of the educational landscape will allow some key patterns in the circulation of kanbun knowledge to emerge.

The Dimensions of Kanbun Literacy

Learning to read and write according to any of the diverse textual modes practiced in Heian Japan involved internalizing accepted combinations of orthography, linguistic register, and literary style. These three factors are usually closely interrelated, but it is nonetheless important to consider how orthography (the most immediately accessible aspect of a text, from a modern reader's point of view) and other elements of register and style combine to form patterns of textuality that would be absorbed by a Heian student.

Orthographic choices varied along two main axes: in terms of the strategies used to represent language, which could involve various combinations of logography (word-based representation) and phonography (sound-based representation), and in terms of calligraphic style, which could adopt different degrees of cursivization and abbreviation. By the early Heian period, logographs (*mana* 真名, now known as *kanji*) were supplemented by two partially standardized traditions of simplified characters used phonographically and referred to as *kana* 仮名; these consisted of angular abbreviated characters originally used in contexts of kundoku marks and glossing (*katakana*) and highly simplified cursive characters developed as calligraphic art and generally used to

write waka poetry and some courtly prose (*hiragana*).² In the realm of linguistic register and/or literary style, particular textual modes might involve characteristic choices of grammar, vocabulary, and intertextual allusions, attention to formal constraints like poetic meter and to overall topical arrangements, and the inclusion of paratextual structures like prefaces, titles, and commentary or annotation.

Taking into account both surface inscription and evidence about reading practices, a typology of textual modes drawing on sources used in this project would have to include the following kinds of possibilities:

Example A: Chōshō MS *Child's Treasury* (長承本蒙求).

Logographic writing in full conformance with standards of literary Chinese, with reading marks emphasizing *ondoku* (sound-reading) based on Chinese-style pronunciations.

Example B: Kanda MS *Complete Works of Bai Juyi* (神田本白氏文集).

² This is by necessity a highly abbreviated schematic of the intersections between orthography and literary style; for more detail on the development of kana and the mana/kana distinction, see Frellesvig 2010, 158-169, and Lurie 2011, 314-329. Tsukishima 1963 and Kobayashi 1967 contain extensive treatment of these issues. Lamarre 2000 (Chapters 4-5) meditates on the continuum of calligraphic styles and the aesthetic implications of mana and kana.

Logographic writing in full conformance with standards of literary Chinese, with reading marks emphasizing *kundoku* (gloss-reading) and showing how to read it as classical Japanese. To argue that Bai Juyi's poetry is not literary Chinese would render the category meaningless; but just as clearly, there was an established tradition of reading it as Japanese, and one cannot assume that Heian readers were always keeping Chinese-based sound values in mind.

Example C: A kanshi (Chinese-style poem) by a Japanese poet from a mid-Heian manuscript of the *Japanese and Chinese-Style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集). Without outside information (such as the Japanese name of the poet), we might not be able to distinguish it from a Chinese poem like that in Example B.³ Yet it was almost certainly written with a Japanese reading in mind, and was certainly appreciated within the Heian court in the form of a Japanese reading, as attested by descriptions of kanshi chanting in texts like the *Pillow Book* and *Tale of Genji*.

³ This is not to say that kanshi composed in Japan were generally indistinguishable from continental poetry; the Japanese literary culture centered on kanshi naturally developed some stylistic preferences of its own. In many cases, however, it would be difficult to be certain of a poem's origin based on formal criteria.

Example D: Passage from Fujiwara Teika's diary, *Meigetsuki* (明月記). Some parts conform fairly closely to literary Chinese norms, but other parts reflect Japanese syntax and distinctive usages, indicating that it was written with Japanese readings in mind. (This kind of text is sometimes referred to as non-standard kanbun (*hentai kanbun*); see discussion below.)

Example E: Prose section from the oldest surviving manuscript of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (*Mōgyū waka* 蒙求和歌, 1204). Mostly written in phonographs (specifically, *katakana*), but with some logographs (*kanji*) mixed in; conforming to classical Japanese grammar, but with stylistic features suggesting the kundoku reading of a kanbun text. Among texts that employ a mixture of phonographic and logographic strategies, there is a great deal of possible variation in style, and the phonographs may be abbreviated in various ways (as *katakana* or *hiragana*). The *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi* 枕草子) might even also go in this broad category, as extant manuscripts rely mostly on hiragana but still include the occasional logographic usage. Mixed styles that drew heavily on traditions of kundoku reading to spell out classical Japanese prose in a combination of logographs and *katakana* became increasingly popular from the end of the Heian period.

Example F: A waka poem⁴ from a mid-Heian manuscript of the *Japanese and Chinese-Style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集), or a passage of classical Japanese prose written entirely in phonographs (specifically, hiragana). This type is comparatively rare and difficult to neatly divide from the previous category of mixed script; most phonographic writing makes use of the occasional logograph, perhaps to fill some of the role of punctuation in aiding readability, and calligraphic art often consciously mixes characters (whether read as phonographs or logographs) of varying visual complexity.

⁴ *Waka* (Japanese-style poetry) involves compact, highly allusive verses governed by a syllabic meter, with thirty-one syllables (or mora) in a 5-7-5-7-7 pattern, and is characterized by a strong tendency toward a specific set of refined topics and vocabulary (centered on courtly romance and an abstract, highly aestheticized natural world organized by season).

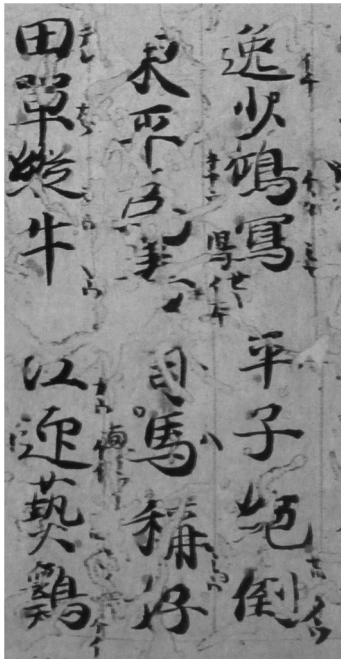
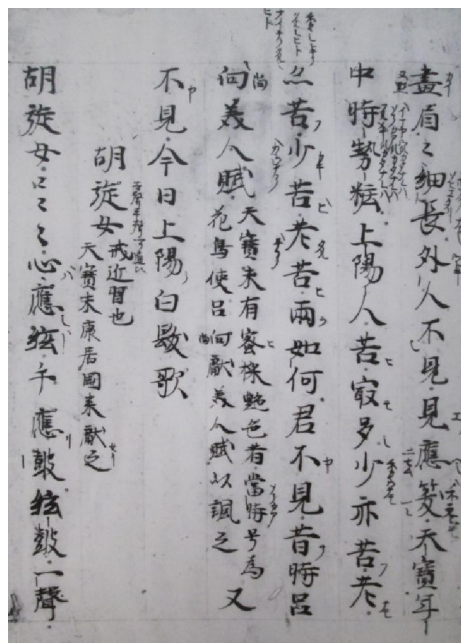


Figure 1. Chōshō MS *Child's Treasury* (長承本蒙求, early 12th century⁵). Reproduced from Tsukishima 1990. **(Example A)**

Figure 2: Kanda MS *Complete Works of Bai Juyi* (神田本白氏文集, early 12th century⁶). Reproduced from Ōta and Kobayashi 1982. **(Example B)**



⁵ The main text was probably inscribed in the mid-tenth century, and the reading marks were added in 1134.

⁶ The main text was written out in 1107; the reading marks were added in 1113.

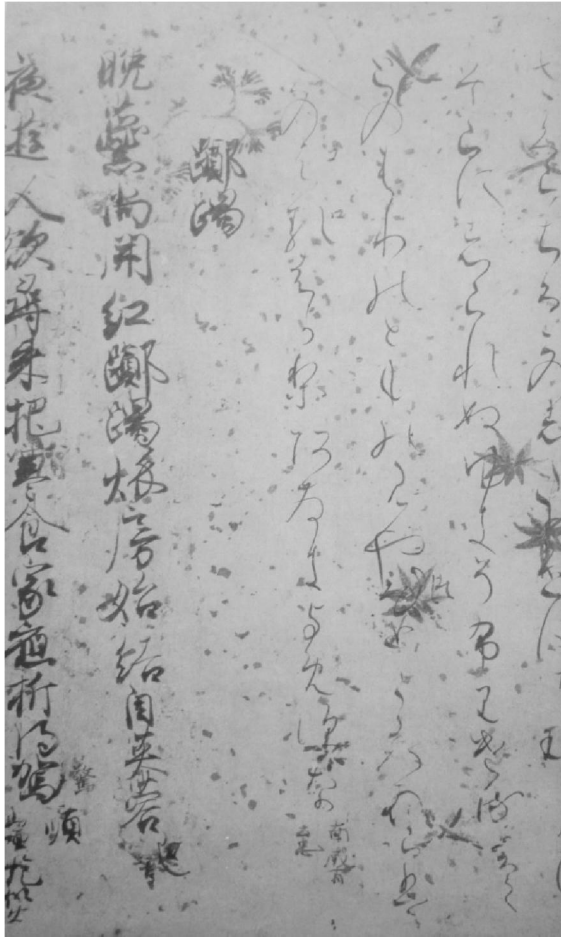


Figure 3: Kanshi (left) and waka (right) in a mid-Heian manuscript of the *Japanese and Chinese-Style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集, early 11th century). The left-most of the two kanshi lines is a couplet by Minamoto no Shitagō; the right-hand kanshi line is a couplet by Bai Juyi. Reproduced from Geijutsu shinbunsha 1984. **(Examples C and F)**

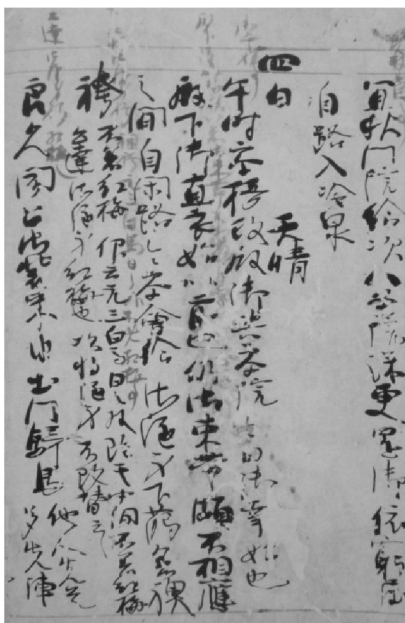


Figure 4: Fujiwara Teika's diary, *Meigetsuki* (明月記). Reproduced from Reizeike shiguretei bunko et.al. 1997. **(Example D)**

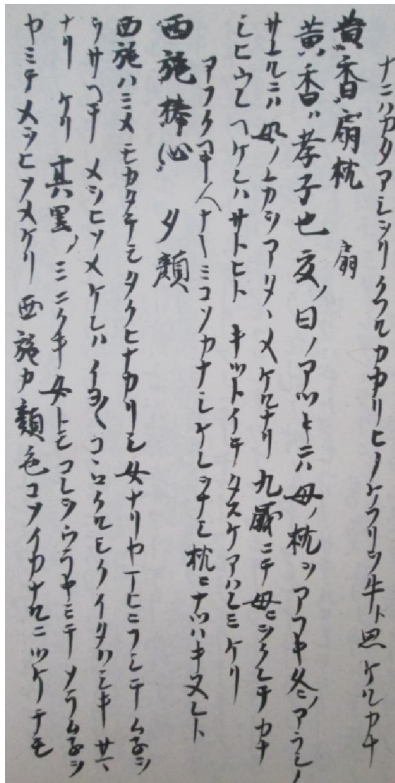
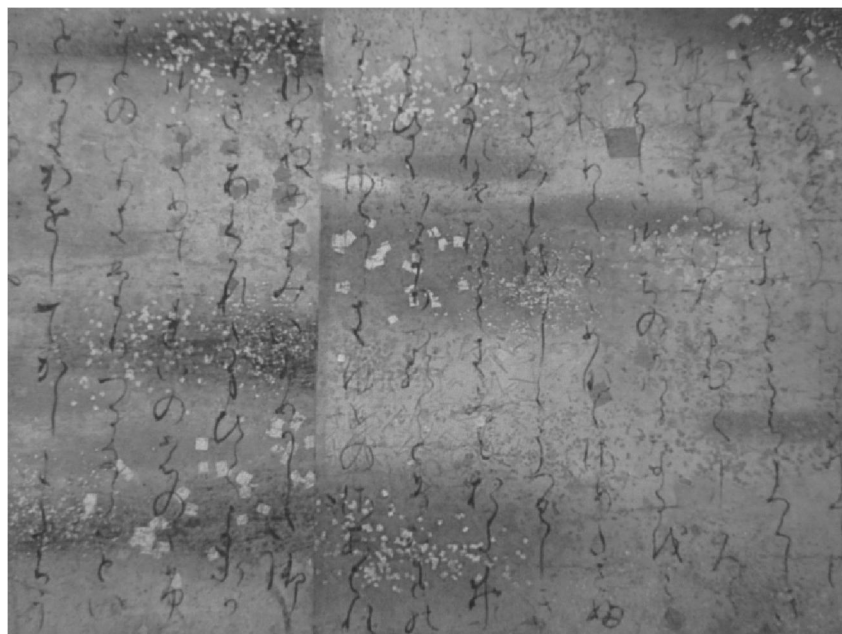


Figure 5: Kokkai toshokan kō MS *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (*Mōgyū waka* 蒙求和歌, 1204). Reproduced from MGW1. (Example E)

Figure 6: Portion of text from *Tale of Genji* picture scroll (*Genji monogatari emaki* 源氏物語絵巻, early 12th century), Yokobue chapter. Reproduced from Yamamoto et.al. 1998. (Example F)



Texts similar to examples A-D (and even waka poems that use unabbreviated kanji as phonographs) could be readily pronounced using some form of continental Chinese pronunciation, though in example D the meaning for a continental listener would start to break down in places. But every one of the texts listed here could be pronounced as Japanese, and examples C and below were most likely written with such readings in mind. Examples A-D can be loosely termed *kanbun* (Chinese-style or logographic writing), while E and F could be termed *wabun* (Japanese-style writing) or *kanabun* (phonographic writing) – but this list of examples shows the limited usefulness of such a binary distinction and the difficulty of entirely separating inscription from other considerations of literary style and genre.

Applied to these texts, the seemingly straightforward question “what language is it?” begins to lose its meaning. When faced with examples B and C, which look similar and have similar documentable readings in a Heian court context, are we to say that B (kanshi poetry originally composed in China) is “in Chinese” while C (kanshi poetry written in Japan) is not, simply because we happen to know the latter was written by a Japanese courtier with Japanese readings in mind? How can we acknowledge the linguistic environments of both Tang and Heian writers, when the texts they produced can often look so similar at first glance? How can we cope with a situation where the language of a text seems to be determined not by any visible formal criteria, but by either the intentions of its writer or by the habits of its reader? And should the position of writer or reader take precedence?

One way to move beyond these contradictions is to acknowledge literary Chinese as a transregional literary standard rather than a language in the colloquial sense — not because it was ever “ideographic” in the sense of functioning without reference to sound, but because its connections to sound were from early on flexible and readily localized. To claim that logographs were not ‘native’ in Japan is to ignore the important fact that they were never

‘native’ anywhere, in the sense of possessing some kind of inherent and unchangeable relationship with speech.⁷ Instead, they formed a complex system that visually codified elements of sound and meaning-related information and at the same time linked them to a spoken language by customs of reading – but the precise nature of these links were constantly developing, as styles of speech evolved semi-independently from styles of writing. Strategies of reading and writing in Japan, including kana writing, were an organic extension – dramatically different in scale and complexity, but not in essence – of strategies already in play within the character-based writing system.

If we accept that localized reading is actually part of the very nature of literary Chinese, not only in Japan but throughout East Asia, a wide range of local written styles (examples A through D, at minimum) — could perhaps be considered “literary Chinese,” even if surrounded by practices of literacy that made no attempt to connect them with any spoken Sinitic language. But to minimize any confusion with an anachronistically imagined Chinese language, I will use the deliberately vaguer term *kanbun* (漢文) to refer broadly to logographic writing bearing some connection with the stylistic norms of literary Chinese, whether poetry or prose and whether created in Japan or on the continent.⁸ Where necessary I will distinguish further between varieties of *kanbun*, referring to writing that conforms closely to literary standards abstracted from classical Chinese texts as “Literary Sinitic” and logographic writing that includes Japanese syntax and other local features (sometimes called

⁷ Saitō Mareshi (2011) has helpfully discussed the fact that written characters, from their first development in China to their later introduction in Japan and elsewhere, never under any circumstances existed as a transparent reflection of spoken language. In their earliest stages, they were prized for material and spiritual functions rather than as a way to communicate spoken language; and after that, they were always ‘brought from elsewhere,’ introduced from another linguistic community (separated in time and/or space).

⁸ Japanese-language scholarship tends to use *kanbun* and related terms to describe logographic kanji-based texts regardless of their origin (specifying “Japanese *kanbun*” only as needed), while English-language scholarship on Japan has tended to use “*kanbun*” only for texts written in Japan, in contrast to “Chinese texts.” In the context of this project it is more practical to have a term referring to the body of texts that were studied as models for a logographic “Chinese” style, encompassing both those written in Japan and on the continent, and so with apologies for the potential confusion I will adopt the more inclusive sense of the term.

hentai kanbun 変体漢文) as “Logographic Japanese”; these are not distinct categories so much as two ends of a stylistic continuum.⁹

Faced with a kanbun text, premodern Japanese readers could adopt one of two strategies (or a combination of both). One option was *ondoku* (“sound-reading”); a passage could be read out according to a tradition of sound values based on continental Chinese pronunciations.¹⁰ The other was *kundoku* (“gloss-reading”); it could be read in accordance with classical Japanese vocabulary and word order by means of a semi-standardized system of syntactic rearrangements and lexical glosses. Some or all of the glosses and rearrangements involved in *kundoku* could be noted on a manuscript as a kind of commentarial mark-up, creating a permanent record of a given scholarly tradition of reading and making it easily accessible to future readers.

Kundoku differs in several thought-provoking respects from (at least narrowly-defined) “translation.” This is partly due to the solid presence of the written character as intermediary, and to the use of commentarial glossing as a model rather than the kind of translation that erases or replaces the original text. This tended to encourage the collection of multiple readings for a given character (rather than reinforcing tight, exclusive tropes of equivalence).¹¹ Still, the formation of semi-standardized tropes of equivalence (or calques) between written characters and Japanese words helped to shape *kundoku* renderings

⁹ In adopting these terms, I follow Steininger 2010. Some thoughtful scholarship on kanbun written in Japan (texts like examples C and D above) has in recent years used the term “Sino-Japanese.” This is preferable to simply talking about these texts as written in Chinese, but still seems to me to risk giving a misleading impression – perhaps that such texts are defined as linguistic mixtures of Chinese and Japanese (which is not necessarily the case, and draws attention away from the main issue of inscriptionary style).

¹⁰ There were several slightly different systems of pronunciation, most notably *go-on* (呉音, referring to earlier-imported systems based on southern Chinese and/or Korean pronunciations that continued to be used through the Heian period in Buddhist contexts) and *kan-on* (漢音, based on the spoken standard of the Tang capital Chang’an, and promoted as the formal standard by the early Heian government and academy). See Numoto 1997 and Frellesvig 2010, 274-277.

¹¹ For an interesting comparison, see Lydia Liu’s (1995) discussion of the much more recent creation of tropes of equivalence between certain Chinese and English words (e.g. *hu* 胡 and barbarian).

as a distinctive style, a form of translationese (or “calcolect”¹²) that was not expected to conform exactly to any other style of classical Japanese.

Often the individual figure of the translator is not discernible; if anything, we would have to think of kundoku as form of translation where the work of linking source and target language is a collaborative project distributed among groups of scholars and readers and over a span of time. More crucially, a version of the text in the source language does not necessarily exist for readers prior to the kundoku “translation” – in this sense, kundoku must be thought of as a kind of reading. Readers who looked at a Chinese text and rendered it as kundoku-style Japanese would not have thought of themselves as translating, but simply as reading (and perhaps participating in a tradition of scholarly glossing).

The nature of kundoku highlights the fact that connections between reading and writing kanbun and the adoption of linguistic, literary, and cultural material from the continent were not automatic. That is not to say, however, that there were no such connections; they existed, but developed in a context-dependent and flexible way based on patterns of education. In this project, I will use “kanbun literacy” as a broad and inclusive term for the knowledge needed to appreciate and/or create Chinese-style writing – rooted in texts that are written logographically with attention to Literary Sinitic standards, but encompassing the circulation of anecdotes, phrases, and intellectual tools across boundaries of written style.

Kanbun in Heian Literary Culture: Competing Narratives

The role of Chinese sources and kanbun-style writing has always been a key issue in conceptualizing premodern Japanese literature. Until recently, English-language scholarship had often either ignored the role of kanbun literature in favor of focusing on the modern

¹² Lurie 2011, 211.

canon of wabun classics, or had relied on a vision of premodern Japan oppressed by the influence of Chinese culture, with elite men reduced to churning out sterile and tedious imitations of foreign literature in a difficult foreign language, while court women, sheltered from such influences, instead created enduring works of literature in their native tongue. Chronological narratives of premodern literary history have tended to acknowledge the early Heian period as a kanbun-dominated “dark age for the native style,”¹³ which shifted towards a flowering of kana literature with the compilation of the anthology *Kokin wakashū* (*Collection of Japanese-style Poems from Past and Present*, 古今和歌集, commonly known as the *Kokinshū*) in the early tenth century and the creation of prose works like the *Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語) in the early eleventh.

Scholars in more recent years have increasingly begun to acknowledge that these narratives rest on troubling assumptions – about premodern dynamics of native and foreign, about gender relations, and about the relationship between speech and writing. The search for more nuanced approaches to the position of kanbun in Heian Japan has been advanced, for example, in books from Thomas Lamarre and Atsuko Sakaki, in dissertations by Jason Webb and Brian Steininger, and in a number of articles exploring specific genres (for example, treatments of kanshi anthology prefaces and of topic poetry by Wiebke Denecke).¹⁴ However, kanbun literature (particularly past the early Heian period) is still often thought of as a marginal topic, and assumptions about writing “in Chinese” still haunt the discussion.

Some recent scholarship has adopted a “kanji cultural sphere” (*kanji bunkaken*) model, which is useful in situating the Japanese case within East Asia as a whole and

¹³ Influenced in part by Kojima Noriyuki’s monumental work on early Heian kanbun literature, titled *Kokufū ankoku jidai no bungaku* (Literature in the Dark Age of the National Style). (Kojima 1968-1998).

¹⁴ Lamarre 2000, Sakaki 2006, Webb 2005, Steininger 2010, Denecke 2004 and 2007. On the issue of modern conceptions of Heian literature, their gender implications, and the way they were used in constructing national literary history, see Suzuki 2000 and Yoda 2004.

breaking down the constraining China/Japan binary. However, it runs the risk of suggesting a uniform cultural hegemony of written characters rather than a diverse map of local variations, and requires additional care in fully addressing the relationship between the spread of written characters and the borrowing of other cultural elements.

Another alternative, drawing on parallels with other transregional literary languages like Latin and Sanskrit, is to talk about kanbun and wabun in terms of a cosmopolitan/vernacular model. This approach can be very productive, but still requires a certain amount of care about definitions – for example, “vernacular” is used in some linguistic contexts to suggest a colloquial or non-standard variety, which in the context of premodern Japan would be misleading. Talking about waka as “vernacular poetry” risks overemphasizing its roots in natural speech – waka is a highly restricted and heavily allusive literary code, no less standardized and “classical” than kanshi. It is “vernacular” in the sense of being a locally rather than transregionally-defined literary standard, not in terms of informality. Another crucial complication for a cosmopolitan/vernacular model lies with the written styles of kanbun that can be termed “Logographic Japanese” – kanbun diaries, letters, and many other social and everyday texts – which conform to a transregional standard in certain ways but otherwise ignore it in favor of local syntax.

More generally, the particular nature of kanbun literacy requires close attention to the relationship between spoken and written language. While many cases of cosmopolitan/vernacular interaction involve diglossia (a split between two or more linguistic varieties, which fill different sociolinguistic niches), Heian Japan can more usefully be understood in terms of digraphia (the sociolinguistic split between multiple written varieties). The differences between kanbun and other styles are rooted in written contexts, and although kundoku-style language developed an important oral dimension through reading aloud, it rarely decoupled from texts to be used in unscripted speech.

Ultimately, conceptions of the kanji cultural sphere and cosmopolitan/vernacular dynamics are both useful up to a certain point, but come with certain caveats. It may be possible to fill in some of the gaps with a focus on patterns of reading and writing and with close attention to literacy theory (particularly the idea of multiple socially-embedded modes of literacy).

Recent work in literacy studies has moved away from the concept of literacy as a discrete technology exerting influence on a pre-established culture, and towards describing a given setting in terms of multiple literacies that are inextricably embedded in social contexts.¹⁵ In the case of Heian kanbun education, it is necessary to think about literacy on multiple levels, from the transmission of concrete methods for reading and writing kanbun, to the role of textual commentary in reading and study, to a kind of broad cultural literacy — the circulation of kanbun-based knowledge (proverbs, poetic phrases, anecdotes, and assumptions about genre and topic) even beyond the bounds of Chinese-style logographic writing. No student ever learned to read and write kanbun in isolation, but the exact nature of the cultural context that accompanied specific techniques of inscription could vary depending on background and setting. In using “kanbun literacy” as a key phrase, I have this broad concept of literacy in mind.

The diversity of Heian reading practice has been explored in a rich body of work on materials with *kundoku* markings by Japanese scholars; classic sources include the work of Tsukishima Hiroshi and Kobayashi Yoshinori.¹⁶ English-language scholarship has seldom fully engaged with such questions, but this is beginning to change: in the past few years, for example, David Lurie has set a new standard for discussion of early Japanese literacy and the

¹⁵ This approach is skillfully introduced in Houston 2004; see also a now-classic case study by Brian Street (1984).

¹⁶ Tsukishima 1963, and more recently and accessibly 1969; Kobayashi 1967.

nature of kundoku, and Brian Steininger has shed light on practices of reading and commentary linked to tenth-century university contexts.¹⁷

This project nonetheless aims to fill an important gap in terms of the texts it addresses; recently there has been increasing attention to the importance of primers, commentaries, and encyclopedias alongside “the Chinese classics” in premodern Japan and throughout East Asia, but there is still comparatively little scholarship examining them directly.¹⁸ In terms of chronological framework, also, whereas existing scholarship on kanbun has tended to focus on the early Heian period, I have chosen to look at the late tenth to early thirteenth centuries in order to gain multiple perspectives on the role of kanbun literacy in the Heian court tradition – as it functioned in the cultural setting of classical Japanese canonical works like the *Pillow Book* and *Tale of Genji*, and as it was defined by later generations of scholars, monks, and courtiers who appropriated the Heian court canon. By focusing on patterns of education and broadly-defined literacy, I hope to break down simplistic wabun/kanbun dualities and move closer to the concrete experiences of Heian readers and writers.

Pathways to Kanbun Literacy: the State University and Beyond

Most discussion of Heian education has focused on the role of the state university. Thanks to the scholarship of Momo Hiroyuki and Hisaki Yukio, we have a fairly clear picture of the governmental backing, economic support, institutional outlines, and curriculum of this

¹⁷ Lurie 2011, Steininger 2010.

¹⁸ There is very little scholarship on primers in English as yet, with Steininger 2010 providing a notable exception. Cohesive discussions of Heian primers and literary education as whole are difficult to find in Japanese as well; Satō Michio (e.g. 2008) has been a pioneer in this regard, and some groundwork was laid by Ōta Shōjirō (as will be discussed later in this chapter). A greater number of scholars have done in-depth work focused on a specific educational text; in this context, the scholarship of Kuroda Akira, Yamazaki Makoto, and Yanase Kiyoshi requires special mention.

institution.¹⁹ Established by law in the early eighth century as part of the Ministry of Ceremonial, it may never have entirely filled the idealized outlines specified in the codes, and certainly by the early Heian period significant changes in its institutional structure were already underway.

The early state university had emphasized study of the Confucian classics (明經道), with provision also for a faculty of law (明法道) and lower-status faculties of mathematics (算道) and belles-lettres (紀伝道); there also seem to have been professors to teach practical skills in pronunciation and calligraphy. But the faculty of belles-lettres, the *kidendō* (紀伝道), quickly became the most popular, and the status of its professors was adjusted accordingly.

The university system as understood in the tenth century involved a challenging series of examinations leading to (generally minor) bureaucratic career success. Progression up the ladder of academic status usually began with a preliminary reading examination; students who passed, by correctly reading aloud passages from the *Records of the Historian* (Ch. *Shiji*, J. *Shiki*), would be named Provisional Students of Literature (*gimonjōshō*). The next hurdle was the *shōshi* examination to progress as a full-fledged Student of Literature (*monjōshō*); this involved composing a poem on a set topic with attention to the rules of rhyme and tonal patterning (*hyōsoku*). At any given time, two of the full students of literature were selected as Special Scholarship Students of Literature (*monjō tokugōshō*), which made them eligible to receive certain provincial posts and/or to sit the highest examination, the *hōryaku*, which involved composing a substantial parallel-prose treatise on a set topic. Only

¹⁹ Momo 1947, Hisaki 1990. As far as English-language scholarship on the university, a few classic sources give brief overviews based on Momo and Hisaki; see Borgen 1986 (Chapter 2), Ury 1999 (367-375), and Smits 2007. Recent dissertations by Brian Steininger (2010) and Saeko Shibayama (2012) treat key university scholars and their literary activities in more depth: the former examines tenth-century academic culture and its literary implications with a focus on Minamoto no Shitagō, and the latter discusses Ōe no Masafusa and the tradition of late Heian kanbun studies in relation to the establishment of waka poetry as a scholarly discipline.

sixty-five men managed to pass this examination in the years 704-931.²⁰ These examinations could be taken many years apart, and many students studied for a while without progressing in status at all.

This academic pathway to advancement was not realistically accessible to those without some kind of minor family status, and it offered very little incentive for those with high family status who were already set to inherit a high starting rank and a position in the court bureaucracy. It was likely to appeal most to men from low to mid-ranked bureaucrat families, particularly ones with some tradition of family study (which might at least give a student early access to texts and teaching, and in the case of one of the major scholarly houses would likely mean considerable help from various relatives and professional connections along the way). Over the course of the Heian period, the university system increasingly became the province of certain scholarly lineages, particularly the Ōe, the Sugawara, and certain branches of the Fujiwara. As academic posts became nearly hereditary, the examination system itself became increasingly a matter of ceremony; by the late Heian period, for example, the examiner for the *shōshi* exam conferring full “Student of Literature” status would actually compose the required verse ahead of time and distribute it to the examinees so they could write out clean copies.²¹

The physical site of the university, too, reflected the growing importance of the scholarly houses. The building housing the faculty of belletristic studies had a northern hall used for lectures, and two dormitories to the east and west, which also eventually played a role in teaching; students were allowed lodging in one of the dormitories depending on their lineage, and the end result was that the east building (東曹) was dominated by the Ōe, while

²⁰ Momo 1947, 259.

²¹ Momo 1947, 266.

the west building (西曹) served the same purpose for the Sugawara. Meanwhile, the Fujiwara family sponsored a semi-independent residential school nearby, the Institute for the Promotion of Scholarship (Kangakuin 勸学院), which was sometimes referred to as the south building (南曹). A few other families also established semi-independent residential schools (*bessō* 別曹), which housed, supported, and instructed students from their lineage before and during their studies at the university itself.

Over the course of the Heian period the trend was toward increasing decentralization, with the growth of residential schools on the outskirts of the university that eventually supplanted the university proper as sites for teaching. This trend is sometimes framed as the decline of the university, but it seems more helpful to think in terms of an evolving academic culture that was increasingly transmitted within scholarly houses, whose members also disseminated kanbun-related knowledge more widely in their roles as tutors and lecturers. Although the chapters that follow mainly focus on writers who lacked university status, most of them have strong connections with the university complex and/or turn to a senior university scholar for tutoring and literary validation.

Momo Hiroyuki characterizes home tutoring as a primitive form of education that, once more developed forms of institutional education were in place, was largely only relevant to the very highest elite.²² But considering models of education over a broad demographic, I would rather say that private or small-group tutoring (whether conducted in the student's home or in a semi-public setting) was the fundamental pattern of kanbun education, with more institutionally structured variations emerging as special cases. Even at the university, there is a sense that individual teacher-disciple relationships were critically important and operated alongside and against the institutional structure (Momo suggests that an advanced

²² Momo 1947, 385-386.

university student generally followed an “advisor” from his own dormitory division, and mentions the case of one student who created problems for himself by choosing a teacher from the opposite residence).²³

Scholars training at the state university did not dwell in isolated academic seclusion; they were government functionaries who contributed to court culture through activities like giving lectures, tutoring the elite, and participating in poetry-related competitions and social events. Court lectures, in particular, brought the emperor and high-ranking courtiers into direct contact with university-style learning; the texts chosen overlapped with the university curriculum, favoring the Confucian classics, dynastic histories, and the anthology *Literary Selections* (Ch. *Wenxuan*, J. *Monzen*, 文選), but also stretched to include other material popular at court – *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, the *Complete works of Bai Juyi*, and the *Child’s Treasury* (J. *Mōgyū*, Ch. *Mengqiu*, 蒙求). As we will see in Chapter 2, this also promoted interest in these texts among university scholars, even if they were not officially on the curriculum.

Even as its institutional cohesion declined through the late Heian period, scholars affiliated with the state university played a decisive role in shaping how kanbun texts were read, written, and made the objects of scholarly inquiry; but they still represent only one part of the story. Ultimately, even if we consider the university as a complex including the house schools that sprung up around it, it catered to a relatively small number of students. In this project, I am particularly interested in the less well-explored question of how readers and writers beyond the university interacted with kanbun knowledge, and here literary primers offer a glimpse into a shared body of cultural knowledge that linked many readers and writers separated by chronology and social background.

Outside of the university context there was no unified curriculum for acquiring basic

²³ Momo 1947, 166.

kanbun literacy. However, as mentioned in the preface, there are five texts that particularly stand out for their frequent appearance in educational contexts: the *Thousand Character Classic* (J. *Senjimon*, Ch. *Qianzi wen*, 千字文), a rhymed set of one thousand different written characters expressing basic information on cosmology, history, and morality; the *Child's Treasury* (J. *Mōgyū*, Ch. *Mengqiu*, 蒙求), a collection of rhymed historical anecdotes; the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (J. *Hyaku nijū ei*, Ch. *Bai ershi yong*, 百二十詠), an encyclopedic collection of topic poems by Tang poet Li Jiao; the topically-arranged mid-Heian poetry anthology *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū* 和漢朗詠集); and the dramatic and socially-conscious “New Ballads” (J. *Shin gafu*, Ch. *Xin yuefu*, 新樂府) of the popular Tang poet Bai Juyi. These texts privilege certain types of information: topically-arranged poetic material and historical anecdotes condensed into rhymed couplets. By the end of the Heian period, all five texts circulated in Japan with the addition of commentary, testifying to the importance of commentarial scholarship in mediating between educational texts and literary culture at large.

Except for the “New Ballads,” this list coincides with the Four Primers (四部の読書) defined by Ōta Shōjirō in a classic article on educational texts.²⁴ Ōta’s scholarly tour-de-force collects references to the *Thousand Character Classic*, *Child's Treasury*, *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, and *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* from a variety of premodern sources. However, the extent to which the Four Primers may have been defined as a premodern category remains unclear; although he lists many cases referring to each of these four texts being studied individually or in smaller combinations, Ōta can present only two examples of all four being listed together. In particular, there is an obvious

²⁴ Ōta S. 1959. Although he does not include it in the Four Primers category, he also mentions the “New Ballads” as an alternate educational resource.

chronological limit to the usefulness of this grouping; the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* was not even compiled until the early eleventh century and was not fully established as a primer until the late Heian period, by which time the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* was gradually becoming less prominent in most educational contexts.²⁵ For this reason, rather than simply adopting the Four Primers as a canon for introductory education, I will address each of the four texts (along with Bai Juyi's "New Ballads" as a 'Fifth Primer') as independent members of a loosely-defined group of resources for the beginning student.

This underscores an important point; namely, that sources for introductory education were seldom organized into explicit canonical hierarchies to the same extent as higher-status texts. In fact, they are quite rarely discussed at all, and form a largely unspoken baseline for Heian literary activity that can only occasionally be glimpsed at the roots and around the edges of the established canon. Ultimately, the texts chosen as primers and the ways in which they were studied varied according to historical period, social position, gender, and other factors, reflecting the full variety of literature as a whole rather than coalescing as a single, unified curriculum. Nevertheless, the five texts I have listed provide a good starting point for considering the types of sources that were commonly studied at an introductory level, by a diverse group of participants in literary culture ranging from court women to warrior monks, specialists in waka poetry to high-ranking male courtiers in top court posts. These introductory sources also suggest the kinds of information – poetic and biographical allusions, rhyme patterns, topical cosmologies – that were prioritized by students.

In the following sections, I will take a closer look at each of these five texts and its reception. I will then move beyond this basic set of concise, memorizable primers to consider the flourishing culture of topical encyclopedias, commentaries, and other educational works

²⁵ Satō M. 2006 and 2008.

that surrounded them.

Cornerstone of Literacy: the *Thousand Character Classic* (千字文)

From the chaotic vastness of heaven and earth to the classical lore of birds and plants to the stories of famous generals and the etiquette of proper social behavior, the *Thousand Character Classic* (千字文, Ch. *Qianzi wen*, J. *Senjimon*) crams a great deal of cosmological detail into a mere two hundred and fifty brief lines. As the name implies, it is composed of one thousand different characters, with no repetitions; they are arranged into four-character lines, which in turn form rhymed couplets. Within this highly controlled structure, there are topical connections and associations linking most couplets, as well as some degree of overall attention to encyclopedic completeness. The first couplet sets up a grand and universal scale:

天地玄黄、宇宙洪荒。
 テンチのあめつちは クエンクワウとくろく・きなり
 ウチウのおほぞらは コウクワウととおほいにおほきなり
 Heaven and earth dim and yellow, space and time vast and wild.²⁶

An exhaustive cosmological schema is developed further in the following eight couplets, which move through astronomical phenomena, the calendar, minerals, plants, and animals. The focus then shifts to human civilization, with lines describing the virtuous achievements of the first emperors, and transitions to more general themes of moral and social correctness. Drawing heavily on the Confucian *Analects* (論語), and more occasionally on sources ranging from the Mao-Commentary *Classic of Poetry* (毛詩) to *Kongzi jiayu* (孔

²⁶ Text is based on Ogawa 1997, cited as SJM; the kana give readings for the couplet based on *Senjimon onketsu* (thought to reflect Heian readings). I will omit readings for the other examples, but they would most likely have been read out in similar *monzenyomi* style.

子家語), many lines assume the tone of common-sense sayings:

資父事君、曰嚴與敬。

孝當竭力、忠則盡命。

As you treat your father, serve your lord; that is, seriously and respectfully.

In filiality you should exhaust your strength; in loyalty, spend your life.²⁷

This type of didactic material comprises the bulk of the *Thousand Character Classic*, but later passages also cover some points of etiquette (proper methods of letter-writing and paying respects at a shrine), basic geography (famous rivers, location of two capitals), and matters relating to palace life. There are also some lines about historical figures (with an emphasis on statesmen and generals), similar to those in the *Child's Treasury*, though not always following the same strict format. In its final couplet, the text reveals some meta-awareness of its role as a writing primer, listing grammatical particles often used to conclude a phrase (謂語助者、焉哉乎也).

As well as being an impressive feat of verbal skill, the central conceit of the text (the use of one thousand different characters without repetition) makes the *Thousand Character Classic* a natural choice for a calligraphy primer, and it has been used in this capacity from the early days of writing in Japan until the present day. Composed by the Liang period scholar Zhou Xingsi (周興嗣) in the early sixth century, it gained popularity from its traditional association with the legendary Jin dynasty calligrapher Wang Xizhi (王羲之), and from the widely-circulated model version of the text copied out by Xizhi's descendant Zhiyong (智永) in a close imitation of his ancestor's style. From early on, commentary was

²⁷ As Li Xian's commentary (the most widely used commentary in Heian Japan, about which more discussion will follow in Chapter 2) points out, 資父事君 draws on the *Classic of Filial Piety* (孝經), while the following couplet is based on the *Analects* (論語). His commentary also adds several historical anecdotes about filial children and loyal retainers. SJM p114-121.

added explaining the allusions behind the rather cryptic four-character lines; the best-known is by Li Xian (李暹), although commentaries by at least five different scholars were known in ninth-century Japan.²⁸

The *Thousand Character Classic*'s widespread use as an introductory primer means that many students first learned written characters in the context of a particular worldview; one that was centered on imperial government and court life, and that constructed images of social common-sense and the natural world from that perspective. On the other hand, it is the only one of Ōta's Four Primers that is actually seldom alluded to directly in the context of formal kanbun writing in the Heian period. Perhaps because of its role as the oldest and most basic of common introductory primers, it continued to play a largely unsung role in basic literacy throughout the Heian and medieval periods – until, in the Edo period, it became more visible as a mainstay of introductory education in local temple schools. The varied dimensions of its reception are the subject of Chapter 2.

The Human Face of History: the *Child's Treasury* (蒙求)

As is clear from its title, based on the phrase “children and the ignorant seek me” (童蒙求我) from the *Classic of Changes (Yijing)*, the *Child's Treasury* (Ch. *Mengqiu*, J. *Mōgyū*, 蒙求)²⁹ was explicitly created as a primer for young students. It was compiled by the Tang scholar Li Han (李瀚), who immediately added his own explanatory commentary. The *Child's Treasury* was transmitted to Japan at some point before 878, when it was used in the first-reading ceremony for a young prince. Like the *Thousand Character Classic*, it is

²⁸ NGM p5-6. Except for Li Xian's, these are now lost.

²⁹ *Child's Treasury* is a rather loose translation chosen for brevity and to suggest this text's purpose as a primer. Another possible English title, used in Steininger 2010 (118), is *Searching from Ignorance*.

composed of four-character lines arranged in rhymed couplets, but it focuses exclusively on anecdotes about famous people from history and legend, with each line containing two characters referring to a person and two characters hinting at an anecdote about them. Rhyme provides some mid-level structure, with the rhyme-character changing every four couplets, but there is no overall topical arrangement, though lines within the same couplet are linked by close topical association.

For example, the couplet 買妻恥醮, 澤室犯齋 (“Mai’s wife was ashamed of remarriage; Ze’s wife broke a taboo”) alludes first to the story of Zhu Maichen’s wife, who left her poor but scholarly husband and later died of shame on meeting him again after he attained success, and then to the story of Zhou Ze’s wife, who broke a taboo to look after her husband (who fell ill while conducting ritual purification) and was arrested by him – using the theme of the transgressing wife to link the two anecdotes into a couplet.

The thematic link between halves of a couplet often brings out specific aspects of a story or leads the reader towards a particular interpretation. In the example above, the two wives are arguably not the main characters of their respective anecdotes, but the neat counterpoint between them cause their roles to stand out. Zhu Maichen’s wife, based on hardhearted and selfish motives, disregards the rules of social conduct and abandons her husband, is nevertheless treated kindly by him when they later meet, and suffers a sad end – while Zhou Ze’s wife, based on kindhearted and selfless motives, disregards the rules of social conduct to look after her husband, is nevertheless treated harshly by him, and suffers a sad end. Parallelism in the *Child’s Treasury* clearly goes deeper than the surface structure of each couplet.

On the other hand, the mnemonic couplets of the *Child’s Treasury* were seldom if ever experienced in isolation; in fact, they are only meaningful (beyond their role in acclimatizing reciters to the sounds of *ondoku*) insofar as they stand for full anecdotes

encountered through some other source. Usually, this source was the commentary transmitted as part of the *Child's Treasury* itself. Early manuscripts now extant include some with commentary and some consisting of only the couplets; but it is probably fair to assume that the latter were used in early educational contexts where learning the content of each anecdote was not the main goal (e.g. *ondoku* recitation practice for young children) or where commentarial explication would be added through lectures or other means.³⁰ In the case of the Zhu Maichen story, several often-alluded-to aspects of the narrative are not even hinted at in the four-character line; for example, the image of ‘brocade by night’ to describe not returning home after achieving success in the world, which appears in a Ki no Tsurayuki waka poem; and Zhu Maichen’s exact ages when he speaks with his wife and when he achieves public office, which form the basis of a *Pillow Book* episode discussed in Chapter 3. To be sure of understanding references to this anecdote, a student needed to know the *Child's Treasury* commentary.

The Song period commentary by Xu Ziguang (徐子光) that became standard from the Edo period onward was not known to people of the Heian period, who read the *Child's Treasury* based on earlier traditions of commentary that developed from Li Han’s original annotation. For the example above, the Xu commentary cites the Histories of the Former and Later Han quite closely, including vivid details like the exact words Zhu Maichen’s wife replies with before leaving him (“Someone like you will just end up starving to death in a ditch! How can you become rich and highly ranked?”), the texts Zhu Maichen lectures on to impress the emperor with his learning, and the fact that Zhou Ze had failed in his previous post through carelessness (possibly explaining his excessive zeal for the rules of his position).

³⁰ See Numoto (1997) on practices of reading the *Child's Treasury*, and also Tsukishima Hiroshi’s explanation of kundoku marks in *Mōgyū kochū shūsei* (MGKS). It seems that the couplets of the *Child's Treasury* were customarily read in *kan-on*. For an important early manuscript containing only the couplets (without commentary), see *Chōshō-bon Mōgyū* (Tsukishima 1990).

The “old commentary” (古注), by contrast, is more of a digest covering the key points.

The couplet in its “old commentary” form reads as:

Mai’s wife was ashamed of remarriage; Ze’s wife broke a taboo.

From the *History of the Han*: Zhu Maichen had the style-name Wengzi and was from Kaixi. His family was poor, but he immersed himself in study and did not pursue business. His wife sought a divorce. Maichen said to her, “I will attain high rank at age forty. I am now thirty-nine.” His wife did not listen and left him. The following year he submitted a treatise in the capital, and Emperor Wudi made him a Palace Attendant. His Majesty said to Maichen, “To attain high rank and not return to one’s old home is like wearing brocade and traveling by night.”

Zhou Ze of the Later Han had the style-name Yadu. He held the post of Chamberlain for Ceremonials, and during a ritual purification he fell ill. His wife came to see him, and he had her arrested and thrown in jail. At the time, people said, “For my life, I wouldn’t want to be the Chamberlain’s wife. A year has three hundred sixty days, and he holds purification rituals on three hundred fifty-nine. On the one day he’s not in purification, he gets drunk as mud.”³¹

As can be seen in this example, the *Child’s Treasury* represents (and is perfectly adapted to) a system of historical knowledge approaching the nature of a code-like language, in which personal names or ‘code-words’ call up entire anecdotes or sets of associations. This language of allusion allowed rich and multi-layered communication, and learning it was necessary for participation in many forms of literary activity. But on the other hand, the system of allusion to historical anecdotes was never standardized to the level of a code, and in practice texts were often experienced along with commentary or verbal explanation that expanded the code-words back into full anecdotes or associative networks. This commentarial apparatus also had a life of its own; it could reinterpret the meaning of a

³¹ 買妻恥醜，澤室犯齋

ばいさいちせう たくしつはんさい

漢書、朱買臣百字翁子、会稽人。家貧耽学、不事産業。其妻求去。買臣謂曰、予年卅当貴。今卅九。妻不聽遂去。明年長安上書、武帝拜為侍中。上謂買臣曰、富貴不歸故郷、如衣繡而夜行。後漢周澤、字雅都。為太常、清齋遇疾。妻視之、収妻在獄。時人語曰、生世不諧作太常妻。一歲三百六十日、三百五十九日齋。一日不齋、醉如泥者也。See *Mōgyū kochū shūsei* (MGKS v1 p61-2; the Kokyū-bon 故宮本 manuscript, which has kundoku reading marks considered to be late Heian period – see Tsukishima Hiroshi’s *kaisetsu* in final volume of series). Hayakawa (MG p512) transcribes the Zhu Maichen ‘old commentary’ out of special interest, but not the Zhou Ze portion.

passage, debate multiple possible interpretations, or introduce entirely new associative networks beyond those imagined by the author.

The focus on people – names of historical figures – as the organizing principle of history in the *Child's Treasury* begs for explanation. Of course, much of history is inevitably about people, but the commitment to biography in texts like the *Child's Treasury* goes beyond a casual emphasis on human interest and takes the place of other potential methods for organizing historical material (like year-by-year chronology – most *Child's Treasury* commentaries specify the era of each anecdote, but there is no attempt to fix specific dates or adopt a chronological order – or the more inclusive cosmological arrangements of topical encyclopedias). Here one might suggest a connection to literary situations that demanded allusion to a historical anecdote about a person; for example, the socially important genre of line topic poetry (*kudaishi*), which generally required a biographical allusion in the third couplet. The *Child's Treasury* both grew out of and reinforced the trend towards a view of history centered on anecdotes about people, which could constantly be recirculated into new literary contexts as well as expanded and reinterpreted by means of commentary.

The *Child's Treasury* was not the only comprehensive source for anecdotal history available in Heian Japan. One potential competitor or supplement is the *Jade-Carving Collection* (J. *Chōgyokushū*, Ch. *Diaoyu ji*), a larger-scale encyclopedia of fifteen or twenty volumes that arranges biographical anecdotes into topical categories.³² Like the *Child's Treasury*, it consists of condensed mnemonic lines and longer explanatory commentary, but the condensed lines vary in format between topical sections (some use four-character lines like the *Child's Treasury*, while others use six-character lines) and are not rhymed, which together with the large size of the compilation suggests that it was not intended as a primer

³² See Yanase et.al. 1985. The *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* lists it as a work of fifteen volumes, while Song dynasty bibliographies say it had twenty.

for recitation aloud. However, the topical categories, like “Cleverness,” “Beautiful women,” and “Lovers of wine,” seem eminently useful to a poet in search of the perfect allusion.

Although there is evidence that this text was known in Japan by the mid-eighth century and at least one copy still survived in the late Heian period, there is never any sign that it replaced the *Child's Treasury* or came anywhere near its popularity, and the only manuscript that survives today is a fragmentary one covering volumes twelve and fourteen.³³ The transmission of a text is not a simple matter of survival of the fittest; it can be affected by factors besides the suitability of said text for its literary environment, including random quirks of the transmission process. Still, comparison with the *Jade-Carving Collection* suggests that perhaps the enduring popularity of the *Child's Treasury* – what Hayakawa Kōzaburō has called “Mōgyū power” – rested on recitability as well as content. Its compact, well-ordered format and use of rhyme may have given it an initial edge over other anecdotal history collections, which would then have been perpetuated once the tradition of reciting it became well-established in scholarly families as part of introductory education.³⁴

We will encounter the *Child's Treasury* again in the chapters that follow, particularly in Chapter 3 (where it shapes a generally accepted understanding of key Chinese historical anecdotes at the mid-Heian court) and in Chapter 5 (where it inspires an early thirteenth-century waka adaptation that is marketed to the young shogun and his circle).

³³ The Shinpukuji MS transcribed in Yanase et.al. 1985 (249). According to the colophon, both volumes were transcribed separately (and out of order) in Tenpyō 19 (747CE), which suggests that at the latest the *Jade-Carving Collection* was brought to Japan with the Tang mission that returned in 734. The composition date and authorship of the text itself are unknown, and no copies have survived on the continent.

³⁴ For more on *Child's Treasury*-type educational texts, see Hayakawa 1973 and Zhang 1962, 52-75. Several *Child's Treasury* “sequels” or texts of a similar type can be attested in premodern Japan; for example, the *Hare Garden Volumes* (兔園冊 or 兔園策府), a Tang primer slightly predating the *Child's Treasury* that today survives only as fragments from Dunhuang, which may have focused on historical anecdotes expressed in metrical language (Zhang Zhigong (1962, 53-54) characterizes it as the first *Child's Treasury*-type text, while Tang Guangrong (2008, 261-262) describes it as a more general encyclopedic primer and Kawaguchi Hisao (1975, 746) mentions it as one of many popular texts used in basic education for non-elites in the Tang period). Again, unlike the *Child's Treasury* itself, neither *Hare Garden Volumes* nor the later encyclopedic primers modeled on the *Child's Treasury* have left more than scattered traces in premodern Japanese literary contexts.

A Cosmology of Five-Character Lines: Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (百二十詠)

Alongside biographical history, composition in most kanbun genres required a (literally) encyclopedic command of existing literary material related to discrete topics, particularly the plants, animals, and natural phenomena that dominated the world of poetry. The early Tang poet Li Jiao (645-714) addressed this need with an ordered sequence of one hundred and twenty poems on various single-character topics. This sequence is known by various manuscripts and under various titles, including the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (百二十詠), *Hundred Compositions* (百詠, with more convenience than accuracy), and *Miscellaneous Compositions* (雜詠); I will adopt the former for the sake of consistency.³⁵

Li Jiao was a successful bureaucrat, who has been criticized by many later writers for serving five successive rulers during his politically turbulent lifetime. Acclaimed as one of the 'Four Companions of Composition' (文章四友), he excelled at the various kinds of social poetry popular at court, leading one scholar to dub him the "grand old man of court poetry" and perhaps the most representative poet of the early eighth century.³⁶ Critics since Li Jiao's time have often dismissed the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* as rigidly formalistic and uninteresting, but this is arguably a result of judging it by the wrong standards. In recent years, a few scholars have begun to reevaluate this collection in terms of its educational functions in both China and Japan and its influence on later genres.

Liu Yi makes a powerful argument for viewing this set of poems as a primer first and foremost, rather than as a poetry collection with incidental educational functions. She points

³⁵ Kanda Kūichirō (1949, 43) has collected references to the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* in Chinese catalogues of books from the Tang period onwards, noting the variations in title.

³⁶ Owen 1977, 231 and 265.

out that the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* is unusual in several ways; it has a systematic topic arrangement (very rare among Tang poetic collections), its poems observe the formal constraints of regulated verse to a large degree, the allusions in its poems are mostly to well-known texts like the dynastic histories, relatively large numbers of early copies have survived, and these copies show a wide geographical distribution, from Dunhuang in the north-west to Japan in the east. These facts could all be explained if the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* was created and used as a primer for poetic composition, intended to spread the new style of regulated verse.³⁷

The educational potential of the collection is also suggested by the fact that it acquired a commentary early in its history (again, making it highly unusual among Tang poetic collections). In 747, Zhang Tingfang (張庭芳) produced a commentary on the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* that explained many of the allusions and built on additional intertextual layers. In its preface, he praises Li Jiao's skillful composition, but goes on to say that he intends his commentary for "youths" rather than "future worthies," in the hopes that "it will be of aid in the crafting and polishing of verse, so that one may avoid sluggishness."³⁸

As the following example illustrates, each poem in the sequence is full of intertextual references that converge upon a kind of poetic definition of the title topic:

梅	
大庾斂寒光	南枝獨早芳
雪含朝暝色	風引去來香
妝面回青鏡	歌塵起画梁
若能遙止渴	何暇泛琼漿 ³⁹

³⁷ Liu 2002a, 2002b.

³⁸ Owen 1977, 287-288 (the translation is his).

³⁹ Xu 1995, 232. See also LJ p104.

Plum⁴⁰

Dayu Peak gathers up the chilly light,
 The southern branches alone yield early fragrance.
 Snow holds its color, morning and night;
 Wind carries its scent, coming and going.
 Her adorned face turns in the green mirror,
 Dust from his singing rises from patterned-wood rafters.
 If at a distance it could quench thirst,
 What leisure would it have to float on fine wine?

The poem builds a riddle-like composite picture of the “plum” topic, describing it from various angles in a kind of metonymic code. Rather than describing the topic directly, the poet expects us to recognize that it stands at the empty center of his web of associations. The first couplet hints at geographical and temporal points of origin for the topic; Dayu Peak is also known as Plum Peak, and by general poetic convention the southern branches are the first to flower in the spring. The second couplet adds paired sensory descriptions, though still mediated by other objects; we can see the white color of the blossoms in snow and breathe their fragrance on the wind. The third couplet presents parallel intertextual references, to an anecdote about the daughter of Han Wudi, Princess Shouyang, in which plum blossoms fell on her forehead and adhered there, and to a convention that when Duke Lu sang it disturbed the dust on the plum-wood rafters.⁴¹ Finally, the fourth couplet alludes to another historical anecdote, this time from the *History of the Han*, in which the commander of a band of desperately thirsty military conscripts mentions that the fruit from a distant grove of plum trees will quench their thirst; their mouths water, and they manage to reach the nearest spring

⁴⁰ 梅 is more precisely a kind of apricot, but is commonly translated as “plum,” and since it scans better I will continue that tradition.

⁴¹ Xu Dingxiang (1995, 232) attributes these references to the *Songshu* (a history of the Liang Song dynasty allegedly compiled by Shen Yue) and *Fengsu tong* (an Eastern Han collection of discussion on customs and rites) respectively, by way of excerpts included in the great Song dynasty topical encyclopedia *Taiping yulan*. Although this encyclopedia postdates Li Jiao by several centuries, the inclusion of both anecdotes perhaps suggests that both of these anecdotes had become part of the cultural landscape rather than being tethered to a specific intertext. The emphasis lies on the outline of the historical anecdote and its relation to the topic, rather than its original context.

after all. Li Jiao counterbalances this rather down-to-earth reference with an elegant allusion to the custom of floating petals in cups of wine at court banquets.

In this way, the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* relies on an intertextual model for defining a topic; rather than directly explaining the literary meaning of a character like 梅 (“plum”), it builds an indirect composite picture by means of a surrounding network of associations. There is only one thing that can join together Dayu Peak, fragrant southern branches, the color of snow, scented wind, the description of Princess Shouyang, dust dancing on rafters, and the ability to quench thirst from a distance and float on the surface of wine – namely, the plum that gives the poem its topical title. This style of definition would be immediately useful to an aspiring poet, as the spontaneous composition of occasional poetry in courtly social contexts required the ability to quickly bring to mind a set of poetic associations for any topic.

In terms of this intertextual mode of definition as well as its overall system of organization, the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* closely resembles a topical encyclopedia, or *leishu* (類書). The poems are arranged by topic category for easy reference, and each poem presents a set of literary methods for describing the given topic, ranging from allusion to descriptive metaphor. Several scholars have drawn parallels between the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* and a slightly later topical encyclopedia, the *Record for Beginning Study* (Ch. *Chuxue ji*, J. *Shogakuki*, 初学記, discussed further below). Perhaps reflecting a shared topical culture, there is significant overlap between the topics included in the *Record for Beginning Study* and in Li Jiao’s *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, and corresponding entries often include overlapping allusions.⁴²

Li Jiao would have been familiar with the design of encyclopedias, since he had been involved in the project of compiling one earlier in his life. Hu Zhi’ang has suggested

⁴² Ge 1995, 31-32. The topical encyclopedia connection is also discussed in Steininger 2010, 125.

based on this fact and on Li Jiao's participation in the early Tang poetics manual boom (one such manual attributed to Li Jiao, with the generic title *Shi ge* 詩格, still survives) that the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* was designed to combine the educational advantages of the topical encyclopedia and the poetics manual, providing example poems demonstrating the principles of contemporary poetics arranged in encyclopedic format for easy reference.⁴³

The topic progression of the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* presents a cosmology in miniature, beginning with celestial phenomena and moving systematically through the natural and human spheres. Different manuscript lineages vary in arrangement, but the topic sections in an early manuscript (alleged to be in the hand of Emperor Saga (786–842)) have the following order:⁴⁴

Heavenly phenomena – Earthly matters – Fragrant plants – Auspicious trees –
Divine birds – Favored beasts – Dwellings and locations – Household accessories –
Literary objects – Implements of warfare – Music – Jades and silks

This ordering shows a cosmological progression from heaven to earth, from plants to animals, and from the natural world of plants and animals to the sphere of human culture (as represented by manmade objects linked to cultural activities of construction, literature, war, music, and trade).

The most important distinction between Li Jiao's collection and a more conventional encyclopedia is perhaps its ease of memorization. The two most salient features of the formally careful verse that Li Jiao employs, prosodic patterning and semantic parallelism, would both aid in memorization, to the obvious advantage of a beginning student struggling to internalize large amounts of poetic material. The *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* thus

⁴³ Hu 2004.

⁴⁴ Kanda Kiichirō (1949, 44-45) describes the Saga manuscript and its topic ordering; Ikeda Toshio (1974, 261-262) discusses the textual lineages and various topic orderings in detail. See also a helpful summary in Steinger 2010, 126-127.

presents an alternate model for organizing large amounts of information, one tailored even more closely than the topical encyclopedia to the needs of introductory education.

Li Jiao's collection was an important educational text in Japan throughout the Heian period and beyond.⁴⁵ Emperor Montoku (827–858) studied the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* as a child, and the major early Heian poet Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) alluded to them in his work; there is also a later anecdote linking him to Li Jiao, in which he tops Li Jiao's supposed legendary feat of composing one hundred poems in a day by composing ten in one hour.⁴⁶ When Minamoto no Tamenori (源為憲) compiled the children's textbook *Kuchizusami* (口遊) in 970, he noted in the preface that his student had already mastered the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*.⁴⁷ At least one phrase adapted from the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (namely, "The pine wind enters the night zither" 松風入夜琴, based on the sixth line of the poem on "Wind") took on a literary life of its own; on the basis of a waka exchange involving the tenth-century poetess Princess Kishi, the association between wind blowing through pines and the sound of a zither became an established trope in wabun genres, and appears throughout the Akashi chapter of the Tale of Genji.⁴⁸ The collection continues to be mentioned in diaries and prefaces alongside other kanbun primers up until the medieval period, when it seems to have been valued as part of the court kanbun tradition; the warrior tale *Record of the Glory and Decline of the Minamoto and Taira* (*Genpei seisuiki* 源平盛衰記), for example, at one point mocks some cowardly warriors for not even knowing the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (describing it as "a minor text that

⁴⁵ For collected references to the use of Li Jiao's poems in introductory education, see Ōta S. 1959 (237-238) and Momo 1994 (403-404).

⁴⁶ Jiang (2005) and Takashima (1984) both note phrases reminiscent of the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* in Michizane's poetry; Takashima discusses this anecdote and its various sources (703-705).

⁴⁷ KZ p29.

⁴⁸ Takashima 1984, 709; Steininger 2010, 129-131.

small children read, called the *Hundred[-Twenty] Compositions* 小児ノヨム百詠ト云小文).⁴⁹ Based on the existence of commentary texts that differ significantly from each other and show signs of continuing addition by medieval scholars, it seems likely that the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* was being widely recopied and made the object of scholarship up to the Muromachi period among monks engaged in kanshi composition.⁵⁰

Several lines from the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* became popular as topics for Heian line-topic poetry (*kudaishi*), an important court style of kanshi using a five-character line as the topic. Jiang Yiqiao has argued that the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* was instrumental in the formal development of *kudaishi*, claiming that there are significant similarities between its couplet structure and what would later become the standard *kudaishi* form.⁵¹ Although it is difficult to conclusively establish a direct path of influence, the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* was clearly well-suited as a primer and reference text for topic poetry composition, and would have shaped students' expectations about poetic structure and style.⁵²

The *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* provided a compact, easily-memorizable, and topically organized set of model poems that conveys the formally exacting structure of regulated verse as well as a number of useful poetic associations for each topic, including related historical anecdotes and poetic vocabulary in parallel format. It would have offered unique advantages for the study of *kudaishi*, but even so it seems to have gradually lost ground to other topically-arranged model poem collections (most notably the *Japanese and*

⁴⁹ See discussion in Yanase 1999, 524-525.

⁵⁰ Steininger 2010, 137.

⁵¹ Jiang 2005. On *kudaishi*, see Satō et.al. 2007 and Denecke 2007.

⁵² For further discussion of this text's reception in Japan and particularly its connections with line-topic poetry, see Steininger 2010, 127-132.

Chinese-style Chanting Collection, discussed below, which offered a more useful and up-to-date set of topics and vocabulary). Much as it was still studied and annotated in some medieval contexts, its educational role did not survive into the Edo period, by which time it was considered lost. It is the only one of Ōta's Four Primers that did not continue to play an important educational role through to the nineteenth century.

Drama and Social Criticism: Bai Juyi's "New Ballads" (新樂府)

The mid-Tang poet Bai Juyi (772-846) has a special place in the history of premodern Japanese kanbun sources; his writings were transmitted to Japan within his own lifetime, and quickly became extremely popular. Out of his extensive poetry and prose compositions, a particular set of fifty poems found in volumes three and four of his *Complete Works* (*Hakushi bunshū* 白氏文集) drew particular interest; known as the "New Ballads" (Ch. Xin yuefu, J. Shin gafu, 新樂府), they critique or lament various social and political problems through brief, dramatic case studies presented in the metrically flexible music-bureau ballad form.⁵³ The "New Ballads" are in many ways unusual primer material; rather than famous people and sayings of the classical past, they depict a lively panorama of the poet's contemporary society, which lavishes particular attention on the idiosyncratic margins and reflects a rather ambiguous relationship with the imperial center.

Bai Juyi himself was part of a group of contemporary poets working to adapt the ballad genre to express current social commentary and political criticism; rather than any kind of literary rebellion, he probably had in mind his official responsibilities to advise the

⁵³ There is surprisingly little work in English on Bai Juyi's social-criticism poetry, or even on Bai Juyi himself. Smits 1997 briefly explores the reception of the "New Ballads" in Heian Japan; I follow his example in using the translation "New Ballads" instead of other wordier possibilities like "New Music-Bureau Poetry." In Japanese, there is a comparatively rich body of scholarship on Bai Juyi and his reception: see Shizunaga 2010, Ōta T. 1969, and the *Haku kyoji kenkyū kōza* series for a good overview.

emperor (he held the post of Reminder (左拾遺), which involved correcting state documents and critiquing policy) as well as the long tradition of social-criticism poetry based on precedents in the reception of the *Mao-Commentary Classic of Poetry* (Maoshi). However, his “New Ballads” were ground-breaking in their compelling use of narrative, which quickly won them both popularity and harsh criticism among his contemporaries. For the Bai Juyi-obsessed Heian elite, the “New Ballads” often acted as a manageable and self-contained introduction to the poet’s work, an introduction full of particularly memorable characters and phrases.

I will explore the nature and reception of the “New Ballads” more extensively in Chapter 4, which includes translations of several poems and their Heian commentary. To give an initial sense of the eclectic scope of the sub-collection, here is a selection of titles, each with an authorial subtitle explaining the (alleged) purpose of the poem:

The Dance of Seven Virtues: in praise of the suppression of rebellion and demonstration of the Imperial Endeavor
 The Seas are Vast: warning against seeking immortals
 The White-Haired Lady of Shangyang: expressing sympathy for a lonely lady
 Dervish Girl: warning against recent customs
 An Old Man from Xinfeng with a Broken Arm: warning against frontier campaigns
 The Taixing Road: using husband and wife to critique relations between lord and retainer that do not end well
 Catching Locusts: criticizing local officials
 Trained Rhinoceros: mourning the difficulty of carrying a policy through to its end
 Playing the Five Strings: expressing distaste for the way that improper song derails elegant music
 The Captive Rong Tribesman: concerning the emotions of the suffering populace
 The Two Vermilion Towers: criticizing the growing number of Buddhist temples
 Fragrant are the Peonies: praising the emperor’s concern for farmers
 Lady Li: reflecting on unhealthy love for a concubine
 Hazelwood for the Rafters: criticizing extravagant dwellings
 Pulling up a Silver Vase from the Bottom of a Well: to prevent licentious behavior
 The Mynah Bird: expressing sympathy for those who unjustly suffer

Most of the didactic subtitles seem difficult to take at face value; in “Fragrant are the

Peonies,” for example, the focus of the poem is on describing peony blossoms in luxuriant detail and sharply satirizing the extravagant fad for these flowers among the wealthy elite, with only a final nod toward the emperor’s more enlightened outlook. In the later reception of “New Ballads” poems, at least, more attention is often paid to lush descriptions of the wealthy, exotic, and/or immoral people being criticized than is directed toward the final “moral.”

Although Bai Juyi’s poetry has often been characterized as simple or accessible, it was not necessarily transparent to Heian readers. The earliest known reading marks for Bai Juyi’s poetry in Japan are found in the Kanda MS *Complete Works* (神田本白氏文集), which covers volumes three and four, precisely those containing the “New Ballads”; this manuscript includes occasional commentarial margin notes, and probably reflects a tradition of detailed explanatory lectures.⁵⁴ The first full commentary on any of Bai Juyi’s poems appears with the late Heian monk Shingyū’s *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* (*Shin gafu ryakui* 新樂府略意, 1172), and in the following centuries there were probably a number of additional commentaries,⁵⁵ although few survive today. As an unusual creative variation on this commentarial trend, at the start of the thirteenth century Minamoto no Mitsuyuki created a set of three waka adaptations based on important kanbun primers, one of which was the “New Ballads” (unfortunately his adaptation is lost, and only a few of the waka survive in other collections). In Chapter 4, I will consider the comparatively late-blooming commentarial reception of the “New Ballads” in terms of shifts in how the Heian court canon was defined and disseminated at the beginning of the medieval era.

If the “New Ballads” offered one common entry point to the many imposing

⁵⁴ Ōta and Kobayashi 1982.

⁵⁵ For example, the Kongōji MS *Shin gafu chū* transcribed by Gotō Akio (1990), and the Shinpukuji MS *Shin gafu chū* transcribed in Ōta T. 1969.

volumes of Bai Juyi's *Complete Works*, another was the selections from his poetry included in couplet collections and anthologies of chanting material – the focus of the next section.

A Poetic Sourcebook: the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection (Wakan rōeishū)*

Out of Ōta's Four Primers, the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection (Wakan rōeishū 和漢朗詠集)* is the only one created in Japan; it also has the latest date of compilation and adopts an innovative topical structure that incorporates both kanshi (written on the continent and in Japan) and waka.⁵⁶ It was compiled in the early eleventh century by Fujiwara Kintō, a leading cultural arbiter of his day, possibly as a wedding gift for the regent's son Fujiwara no Norimichi on the occasion of his marriage to Kintō's daughter in 1012 (although a competing theory links it to a set of Chinese and Japanese-style screen paintings).⁵⁷ The title frames it as a selection of material for poetry-chanting (*rōei* 朗詠), although this represents an oversimplification of both its content and its later reception.

The *Chanting Collection* is arranged under a series of topics, beginning with the four seasons (divided into a progression of seasonal subtopics), and continuing with an ordered array of miscellaneous topics. Within each topic section, kanshi couplets by Chinese poets (and occasionally rhyme-prose or lines from Chinese histories) come first, followed by

⁵⁶ Sources in English include Rimer and Chaves' full translation (1997; they render the title as *Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing*), Ivo Smits' pair of substantial articles on the text and its reception (2000a and b), and the middle section of Lamarre 2000. Smits provides the most comprehensive introduction to the history and reception of the text, while Lamarre includes a particularly thought-provoking exploration of its calligraphic aspects. Lamarre renders the title as *Collection of Han and Yamato Cantillations*; while translating *rōei* as cantillation does bring out interesting parallels with the tradition of Hebrew biblical chanting, I have gone with "chanting" as a more general-purpose translation. In Japanese, Miki Masahiro (1995) has written extensively on the *Chanting Collection* and its reception, and Aoyagi 1999 examines *rōei* as a social practice as far as is possible from existing Heian and medieval sources.

⁵⁷ Kawaguchi Hisao points out the description in the Kamakura anecdote collection *Kokon chumonjū* of a Heian screen illustrating the *Chanting Collection*; each panel had a Chinese-style scene in the top half and a Japanese-style one in the bottom half, separated by a water scene in the middle (see discussion in Smits 2000, 419-421).

Japanese kanshi couplets and finally by waka (the one exception is the very first section, ‘The Beginning of Spring,’ which begins with a waka). The first, seasonal part of the anthology owes more to the world of waka topicality, while the second, miscellaneous part is oriented more toward kanbun-based topics like ‘Immortals,’ ‘Prime ministers,’ and ‘Dancing girls.’ The topical arrangement would have enhanced the collection’s usefulness as a poetic handbook and treasury of chanting material, allowing the quick recollection of appropriate couplets by topic or situation.

Although waka were also intoned musically, in Heian and early medieval contexts the term *rōei* was only applied to particular styles of chanting kanbun. Judging from descriptions in Heian sources and from surviving medieval chanting manuals, the material chanted in *rōei* was a kundoku rendering of the kanbun lines (one that made heavy use of Chinese-style readings for compounds, but embedded them into classical Japanese morphology and syntax); many syllables would be highly ornamented, with considerable tonal variety.

Aoyagi Takashi has shown that there is a significant but imperfect overlap between the poems included in the *Chanting Collection* and the material of socially performed *rōei* in other contemporary sources; one intended purpose of the *Chanting Collection* may have been to recommend a set of possible material for chanting, but considering the inclusion of waka it is clear that Kintō also had other artistic goals in mind. However, although the relationship between the *Chanting Collection* and the repertoire of poem-chanting was not originally so straightforward, by the early medieval period the *rōei* repertoire became much more standardized and centered on a small number of poems from the *Chanting Collection* and its sequel collections *Shinsen rōeishū* (新撰朗詠集, early twelfth century) and *Wakan*

kensakushū (和漢兼作集, late thirteenth century).⁵⁸

The varied mixture of visual styles in the *Chanting Collection* made it a popular calligraphic exercise and showpiece very soon after its compilation; a large number of manuscripts and fragments survive from the Heian and early medieval periods, including lavish ones traditionally attributed to Kintō himself and to his contemporary the famous calligrapher Fujiwara no Yukinari.⁵⁹ Its role as an introductory primer developed gradually over the following two centuries, and an important element in this process was the appearance of commentaries, beginning with Ōe no Masafusa's *Gōchū* and followed by the monk Shingyū's more detailed *Shichū* (1161) and by an increasing profusion of commentaries through the medieval period.

An extended discussion of a *Chanting Collection* couplet and its late Heian commentary (which relies on the *Thousand Character Classic*) can be found in Chapter 2; the social practice of poem-chanting and its meaning within Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* is a central theme of Chapter 3. Out of all the primers discussed here, the *Japanese and Chinese-Style Chanting Collection* – with its implications for the creative organization of kanbun-related knowledge, the social and performative dimensions of kanbun literacy, and the interplay between wabun and kanbun genres – is located near the core of this project, and will be encountered in many contexts in the pages that follow.

Organizing Knowledge: Topical Encyclopedias and Handbooks

Based on the five introductory texts above, we might provisionally define a kanbun primer in terms of a strong tradition of being memorized and recited aloud. But there are

⁵⁸ Aoyagi 1999. For an English-language introduction to the musical aspects of *rōei* performance, see Stephen Addiss' article in Rimer and Chaves 1997, 244-259.

⁵⁹ See Lamarre 2000 on *Chanting Collection* calligraphy.

other resources worth mentioning that were important in introductory education while lacking this dimension. The minimalist outlines of introductory primers are part of a wider educational world of commentaries, topical encyclopedias and handbooks, and in this section I would like to explore the larger context of reference sources potentially available to a Heian student.

As is suggested by the nature of the kanbun primers discussed above, many kanbun genres were intensively intertextual, depending on links with a large number of other sources. This means that becoming kanbun-literate involved considerable challenges in what we might anachronistically call information management. The late ninth-century *Bibliography of Books Extant in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* 日本国見在書目録), which focuses on cataloguing non-Buddhist texts of Chinese origin, lists around seventeen thousand volumes worth – and is not a complete record, since some sources known to have been transmitted to Japan by that time are not included (e.g. the *Child's Treasury*).⁶⁰ Tacitly agreeing on a shared informal canon of relatively brief and memorization-friendly primers is one strategy for coping with the wilderness of texts; but when a student had to venture beyond those primers more involved strategies would be needed.

Ann Blair, in appropriating the idea of “information management” for discussion of early modern European contexts, has described four basic principles for coping with textual overload, the “four Ss”: storing, sorting, selecting, and summarizing.⁶¹ Reference works can prioritize these operations in different combinations depending on their exact functional niche; in the context of Heian Japan, different approaches to sorting and selection distinguished a wide array of sources, ranging from dictionaries that focused mainly on collecting evidence for character pronunciation (ordered by character reading or by meaning

⁶⁰ See Yajima 1984 for a volume count, and NGM p40-56 for a list of sources left out.

⁶¹ Blair 2010.

according to a topical schema), to topical encyclopedias collecting more substantial excerpts showing a given word in context (all arranged according to a cosmological hierarchy of topics), to commentaries collecting a similar density of excerpts from past authorities (but arranging them according to the lines of the text being annotated), to poetry handbooks listing rhyme categories, tonal patterns to avoid, and sets of useful parallel phrases.

A considerable number of quotations from the Chinese classics in Heian texts turn out to be mediated by topical encyclopedias (Ch. *leishu*, J. *ruisho*, 類書), large-scale compilations of short passages from other texts that are arranged in entries by topic and structured according to a cosmological topic order. In Heian Japan, two Chinese topical encyclopedias were particularly important: the *Topical Collection of Literature* (Ch. *Yiwen leiju* J. *Geimon ruijū* 芸文類聚, 624CE) and the *Record for Beginning Study* (Ch. *Chuxue ji*, J. *Shogakuki*, 初学記, 727CE). The former is a substantial Six Dynasties work of one hundred volumes, while the latter is a more compact and beginner-friendly thirty-volume reference compiled at the order of Tang emperor Xuanzong in aid of his children's studies. A short excerpt from the *Record for Beginning Study* will serve to illustrate the kind of content and structure found in a topical encyclopedia; I will paraphrase some portions of the entry for “Plum” (梅) and translate others in full.⁶²

“Plum” (梅)

Explanation of the topic

The *Subcommentary on the Meaning of the Classic of Poetry* (詩義疏) says: the plum is of the apricot family. The tree and leaves are all like the apricot, except black. The *Miscellaneous Record of the Western Capital* (西京雜記) says: At the start of the Han, when they built the Shanglin Park, the many officials each contributed renowned fruit trees. There were the marquis's plum, the vermilion plum, the purple-blossom plum, the shared-heart plum, the purple-sash plum, and the fair-companion plum. The *Treatise on Outlandish Things* (異物志) says: the “poplar

⁶² As noted above, “plum” is a conventional but inexact translation for 梅.

plum” is like a slingshot ball. It matures in the fifth month...[excerpted]... The *Broad Treatise* (廣志) says: In the land of Shu, they call the plum “lao” (橪); they are large like goose eggs. From plum and “lao” both, one can make oil. The “yellow plum” is made using ripe “lao.” (The character 橪 is pronounced like the character 老.)

Phrases in parallel

Purple sash: White blossom (The *Miscellaneous Record of the Western Capital* says: When they built the Shanglin Park, the many officials each contributed renowned fruit trees. There were the purple-sash plum and the swallow-fat plum. Liu Yiqing’s “Poem on an Outing to Tuo Lake” says: Sunny days turn sweet and mild/Grass and trees grow lush and high/Plum blossom blankets trees in white/The peach and apricot shine with glorious rays.)

Single branch: Three fruits (Liu Xiang’s *Garden of Persuasions* (說苑) says: The messenger from Yue, Zhu Fa, took a single plum branch and sent it to the king of Liang. The king of Liang’s retainer called Hanzi looked at the other attendants and said, “How can you have a single branch of plum and send it to a state-governing lord?” Mao’s *Classic of Poetry* (毛詩) says: Plums are falling; their fruits are three.)

Clear eye: Fragrant mouth (Wu’s *Materia Medica* (吳氏本草) says: The plum pit makes for a clear eye, increasing one’s energy so one will not grow hungry. The *Subcommentary on the Meaning of the Classic of Poetry* (詩義疏) says: Plum laid in the sun and dried becomes a dried delicacy; crush it into soup or broth, or hold in the mouth for a fragrant mouth.)

Cloud Mountain’s dried plums: Luo Stream’s resplendent glories (The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海經) says: Up Cloud Mountain, the fruits can be dried as delicacies. Guo Pu’s commentary says: “delicacy” means “dried plum.” Pan Yue’s “Rhyme-prose on Living at Ease” says: Withdrawing and living at ease/By the stream of Luo. It also says: Plums, apricots, garden cherries/Adornments of resplendent glory and beautiful patterns/Flowers and fruit glow and sparkle/Words cannot stretch to describe it.)⁶³

The entry continues with a section on rhyme-prose (*fu* 賦), which cites at length from Liang

⁶³ 叙事

詩義疏曰、梅、杏類也、樹及葉皆如杏而黑耳。西京雜記曰、漢初、脩上林苑、群臣各獻名果、有侯梅、朱梅、紫花梅、同心梅、紫蒂梅、麗友梅。異物志曰、楊梅似彈丸、五月熟…廣志曰、蜀名梅為橪、大如鴈子、梅橪皆可以為油、黃梅以熟橪作之。(橪音老)

事對

紫蒂 白花 (西京雜記曰、脩上林苑、群臣各獻名果、有紫蒂梅燕脂梅。劉義慶遊鼉湖詩曰、暄景轉諧淑、草木日滋長、梅花覆樹白、桃杏發榮光。)

一枝 三實 (劉向說苑曰、越使諸發執一枝梅遺梁王、梁王之臣曰韓子、顧左右曰、惡有一枝梅乃遺制國之君乎。毛詩曰、標有梅、其實三兮。)

明目 香口 (吳氏本草曰、梅核明目、益氣不飢。詩義疏曰、梅曝乾為腊、羹臠壺中、又可含以香口。)

雲山乾腊 洛涘繁榮 (山海經曰、雲山之上、其實乾腊、郭璞注曰、腊、乾梅也。潘岳閑居賦曰退而閑居、于洛之涘、又曰、梅杏郁棣之屬、繁榮麗藻之飾、華實照爛、言所不能極也。)

CXJ p682 (梅).

Emperor Jianwen's "Rhyme-prose on Plum Blossom," and a section for *shi* poetry (詩), which includes excerpts from Six Dynasties poetry on plum blossom in snow, early plum blossom, and breaking off plum blossom.

Much like a drastically expanded version of Li Jiao's topic poetry (discussed above), the entries in this encyclopedia construct associative definitions of literary topics, bringing together excerpts from gazetteers, treatises, court poetry, and commentaries on the classics. Overall, the approach is geared toward providing helpful resources for poetic composition – particularly with the emphasis on parallel phrases related to the topic, which could be readily reused in new poetry.

This kind of associative definition shares some similarities with textual commentary, which also functioned to excerpt past works and build topical links between them. The type of content found in encyclopedias and commentaries and the role they played in transmitting excerpts can be very similar. The major difference lies with the organizing principle; a commentary uses the lines of an extant work as headings for organizing excerpts, while a topical encyclopedia uses a cosmological arrangement of topic headings. The latter is arguably a more convenient reference format for struggling writers, while the former seems likely to remain more closely linked to readerly reception of a specific text – but the distinction between readerly and writerly reception might not always be so clear-cut, and commentaries might be repurposed as reference sources as well. (For further discussion of commentary, see Chapters 2 and 4.)

As with many commentaries, the material in the *Record of Beginning Study* is eclectic, drawing on a wide range of treatises, commentaries, and gazetteers, and including interesting facts that do not seem very relevant for poetic composition (e.g. that the giant plums of Shu province are the size of goose eggs). Sometimes there are apparent inconsistencies or disconnects within the same entry; in this case, the passage from the *Miscellaneous Record of*

the Western Capital about Shanglin Park is cited twice, but with a different list of plum-tree varieties each time, and the reasoning behind that is unclear. Faced with entries like this, it is possible to pick out some overall patterns and probable educational agendas, and even imagine some potential readers and how they might have used the text, but it is not always easy to come up with a single reading that unifies the entire mosaic of disparate excerpts.

The culture of excerpting, remixing, and heterogeneous textual linkage that pervades the commentaries and encyclopedias encountered by Heian readers, along with the particular systems of topical organization and condensed parallel phrasing on display in a text like the *Record of Beginning Study*, provided a framework for the acquisition of kanbun literacy. It also informed the creation of additional reference works in Japan, ranging from treatises on waka poetics to kanbun composition handbooks. I will round out this section with a brief look at one such handbook, the *Splendid Phoenix Excerpts* (*Bunpōshō* 文鳳抄) compiled by Sugawara no Tamenaga (1158-1246) in the early thirteenth century.

Phoenix Excerpts is one of several surviving compositional handbooks that focuses on information a student might need while composing kanshi.⁶⁴ In the final volume it includes information on rhyme categories and words that share a possible Japanese reading but fall in different rhymes, but the first nine volumes present a cosmological topic arrangement in which each section lists synonyms and related phrases for the topic heading. The approach is akin to the parallel phrase section of the *Record of Beginning Study* translated above, but more obviously adapted for compositional aid; most sections contain synonymous phrases and related references in a variety of lengths (particularly two-character and four-character), so that one can easily be found to fit any metrical situation. For example, the “Plum” (梅)

⁶⁴ For further details about the *Bunpōshō*, see Kawaguchi 1975, 999-1011. Other compositional handbooks include, for example, the *Tekkinshō* (see Satō M. 1998) and *Sakumon daitai*. For an English translation of the *Sakumon daitai*, see Steinger 2010, 223-261.

section lists poetic stand-ins for plum blossom like “crimson beauty” and “white petals” (紅艷, 白片), as well as four-character phrases like “southern branches blossom first” (南枝先發, a reference to the famous plums of Dayu Peak, which also appears in the Li Jiao poem on “Plum” translated above and in a kanshi couplet found under “Plum” in the *Chanting Collection*) and “scenery of Zhongnan mountain” (終南山色). Some phrases have brief annotations; the latter expression is followed by a line of commentary that cites a relevant line from the Mao-commentary *Classic of Poetry* and explains that “Zhongnan is a famous mountain in Zhou.”⁶⁵

While *Phoenix Excerpts* answers the needs involved in composition of highly ornamented literary genres like kanshi and poetic prefaces, other topically arranged vocabulary collections reflect the importance of other social and practical types of kanbun writing. From the late Heian period on, *ōraimono* (letter-writing handbooks) played an increasingly important role as writing primers. The earliest surviving letter-writing handbooks contain sample letters in full, with or without topical arrangement (Fujiwara no Akihira’s *Meigō ōrai*, dating to the mid-eleventh century, is an early example).⁶⁶ From Tamenaga’s time, however, there was growing interest in handbooks that broke the models down further into useful letter-writing phrases, creating specialized epistolary glossaries.

Tamenaga himself is credited with an early example of this kind of handbook. The surviving manuscript of his *Vocabulary for Letter-writing* (*Shōsoku kotoba*) is in the hand of a well-known sixteenth-century calligrapher, who copied it out together with another slightly later letter-writing handbook; the manuscript could thus have functioned as a calligraphic copybook as well as a reference for composing letters and other formal documents.

⁶⁵ BPS p234.

⁶⁶ Also known as *Unshū ōrai*.

Tamenaga's *Vocabulary for Letter-writing* lists useful phrases with pronunciations noted in kana and geared to a combination of ondoku and kundoku, arranged by social context (e.g. "Should be used when receiving a favor") and other pragmatic headings (e.g. synonyms for commonly-repeated epistolary vocabulary like "celebration," "[your honorable] request").⁶⁷

Letter-writing handbooks expanded the educational repertoire to cover nuanced honorific language and other elements that did not form part of continental standards for Literary Sinitic, but were essential in writing correct Logographic Japanese – they became increasingly popular through the medieval and early modern periods, reflecting the importance of being able to communicate skillfully in various styles and genres of kanbun.

The rich and diverse reference layer of Heian literary culture offers the tantalizing possibility of filling in a more detailed picture of literary acculturation around the outlines given by introductory primers. There are several challenges involved, however. One is the impossibility of fully understanding this aspect of textual culture based on surviving records; it is clear from citations in existing texts that there was actually a greater number of reference works related to kanbun writing – glossaries and dictionaries adapted for various purposes, collections of excerpts arranged by topic, brief treatises on composition, and so forth – which have failed to survive to the present day. A more fundamental issue is the question of how to read and interpret reference texts, which tend to present highly structured textual spaces full of disparate voices that present problems for a simple definition of authorship.

Mary Franklin-Brown has pointed out in the context of encyclopedic practices in medieval Europe that commentaries and topical encyclopedias can create heterogeneous textual regimes in which the author/compiler may not provide a strong unifying perspective and the "ideal reader" may not emerge as a consistent position.⁶⁸ Her insights ring true for

⁶⁷ See SK.

⁶⁸ Franklin-Brown 2012.

many of the commentaries and reference texts scattered throughout this project, where the coherent subject position of a single knower is not always apparent, and a single entry may jump from serious canonical classics to primers most readers would have memorized to obscure esoteric sources, and incorporate a wealth of entertaining but barely-relevant anecdotes along the way. Ann Blair, writing on early modern European reference works, has made the related suggestion that these texts can be understood as dealing in information (discrete, reusable, and public) rather than knowledge (which assumes an individual knower)⁶⁹; premodern Japanese reference works may similarly include content that is treated as public in the sense of being readily reusable and unmoored from specific authorship, and they also operate within a fluid manuscript culture in which it is accepted that quotations may change shape as they are transmitted by memory and in writing.⁷⁰ In the chapters that follow, I will try to find a balance between acknowledging the irreducibly heterogeneous content of commentaries and reference texts, and situating them as far as possible within the educational trajectories of individual writers and students.

Conclusion

This project defines kanbun literacy in a broad sense, as “knowledge needed to read and/or write kanbun texts”; although kanbun writing usually ended up conveying similar sound information to wabun writing (ie classical Japanese phrases), it also involved distinct metalinguistic dimensions, so that creating or understanding well-formed kanbun involved specific kinds of genre awareness and cultural knowledge. The densely allusive nature of kanbun literacy created a significant information retrieval problem, which readers and writers confronted armed with the power of mnemonic training and with whatever textual memory

⁶⁹ Blair 2010, 2.

⁷⁰ See Nugent 2010 for a discussion of poetic transmission in Tang China, which is instructive in this context.

aids they could. Evolving strategies to deal with this challenge helped shape the nature of kanbun literacy, emphasizing the literary practices of topical organization, rhymed and metrical language, and discrete anecdotes linked to the names of historical figures.

The body of knowledge involved in reading and writing various styles of kanbun formed part of the classical court tradition, both in terms of its actual role in mid-Heian court settings and in terms of its inclusion in the project of defining and marketing court culture amid social shifts at the end of the Heian period. The chapters that follow give close-ups on specific moments involving primers and their reception, moving from the state university in the early twelfth century (Chapter 2) to the inner palace at the turn of the eleventh century (Chapter 3) to temple settings (Chapter 4) and the new shogunal capital (Chapter 5) in the late twelfth/early thirteenth-centuries. By exploring various facets of kanbun literacy within different social settings, I hope to illuminate its role in formation and reception of the Heian court literary tradition.

Chapter 2 Perspectives on a Primer: the *Thousand Character Classic* and its Reception

The *Thousand Character Classic* (千字文, Ch. *Qianziwen*, J. *Senjimon*) holds a special place in premodern Japanese educational history, illustrating the fundamental interrelation between kanji-based literacy and other aspects of basic kanbun knowledge. Its early appearance and multifaceted reception in Japan, its enduring popularity, and above all its direct connection to the most basic processes of literacy make it a logical starting point for a discussion of kanbun education.

The *Thousand Character Classic* presents a literary tour-de-force of one thousand different characters arranged into rhymed couplets. As outlined in Chapter 1, it progresses through a cosmological scheme that begins with heaven and earth and moves on to human affairs, including a variety of allusions and social admonishment. The universe of the *Thousand Character Classic* is centered on the imperial palace and is committed to a stable and well-regulated natural and social order. It is also a profoundly textual cosmology; not only are most of its lines underpinned by precedents in Confucian and other recognized classics, creating a composite effect not unlike a topical encyclopedia, but a strong tradition of textual commentary (mainly represented in Japan by the annotation of Li Xian) was constantly unpacking these allusions and bringing them to the surface.

Scholars, calligraphers, and texts themselves are also among its central themes. For example, lines 119-122 start with an enthusiastic description of the imperial libraries, and then move by association to mention two great calligraphers of the past and allude to important discoveries of ancient documents:

既集墳典、亦聚群英。

杜稟鍾隸、漆書壁經。¹

Having collected ancient scriptures, they also gather many brilliant scholars.²

Du's grass style, Zhong's clerical script; lacquer writing and classics hidden in a wall.

The entire work also ends with a self-consciously textual flourish, listing grammatical elements normally used to conclude a phrase (“These are known as particles: *yan, zai, hu, ye.*” 謂語助者、焉哉乎也). In this way, it begins with the whole universe as its scope, and by the end has collapsed everything down to the span of a written phrase, in a kind of meta-expression of the power of writing.

In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the nature of the *Thousand Character Classic* and its establishment as a primer in Japan, highlighting examples that showcase its reception from various angles, in terms of written character, spoken word, and scholarly authority. I will conclude by discussing a case that showcases an orthodox form of university-based kanbun literacy while raising issues of textual hierarchies, parody, conflicting worldviews, and the social roles of primers: an erudite twelfth-century “sequel” text entitled *Thousand Character Classic Continued* (続千字文 *Zoku Senjimon*).

Origin Narratives

The *Thousand Character Classic* is now generally credited to the Liang dynasty scholar Zhou Xingsi (周興嗣). However, early narratives about the creation of this text reflect a complex awareness of authorship, in which the art of the calligrapher, the verbal skill of the poet, and the

¹ SJM p188-189. Du Cao and Zhong Yao are both famous calligraphers of the past; Zhong Yao is sometimes alleged to be the creator of an original *Thousand Character Classic* (see the discussion of origin narratives below), but Li Xian's commentary makes no mention of that here. 壁經 ‘classics hidden in a wall’ refers to texts lost in the book-burnings ordered by the first emperor of Qin and then later rediscovered hidden in the walls of Confucius's old house.

² 墳典 ‘ancient scriptures’ are the records of early semi-mythical emperors (三皇・五帝), but may here refer simply to the classics in general. Li Xian's commentary tells the story of the Qin book-burnings, and explains the gathering of texts and scholars in terms of Han dynasty efforts to establish basic scholarship on recovered classical texts.

scholarship of the commentator all play important roles – as well as a dramatic vision in which written characters are in constant peril from the ravages of time.

There are several versions of this origin narrative, but one given in the preface to the Ueno manuscript of the *Thousand Character Classic* (the oldest extant text in Japan) can be paraphrased as follows.³ The Wei dynasty calligrapher Zhong Yao (鍾繇) created a thousand-character poem with no repetitions, which won lavish praise. Unfortunately, the passage of time and the chaos of civil upheaval took its toll; during the Yongjia uprising of 311, in which the imperial libraries were moved to a new capital in an arduous journey exposed to rain and sun, the text became badly damaged. In the Jin dynasty, the celebrated calligrapher Wang Xizhi (王羲之) copied out the remaining characters in his distinctive style, but the textual fragments were still jumbled, without a clear pattern. The Liang emperor Wudi therefore commanded Zhou Xingsi to ‘arrange the rhymes’ (次韻), reordering the characters and recreating an intelligible text. The resulting reconstructed *Thousand Character Classic* immediately became a popular subject for calligraphy practice, and Li Xian (李暹), to whom this preface is credited, added commentary explaining in detail the classical anecdotes or references suggested by each cryptic four-character line.

This preface positions the *Thousand Character Classic* in reference to a tragic narrative of textual loss. As Glen Dudbridge has discussed, this is a theme that resonates throughout premodern Chinese bibliographic studies, based on the tendency to locate moral and intellectual authority in writings of the past, which were always imperfectly transmitted and under threat of total destruction from war and natural disaster.⁴ The *Thousand Character Classic*, however, is presented as a rare survivor, a treasury of past wisdom and calligraphic traces that has been painstakingly reconstructed and preserved for the benefit of future students.

³ See Kuroda et.al. 1989, 55-57.

⁴ Dudbridge 2000 (most directly, 6-11).

Many versions of this narrative dispense with the initial role of Zhong Yao. (In fact, as seen in the previous section, he is actually mentioned in the text of the *Thousand Character Classic* itself, with no special note of any authorial role in the commentary.) Accounts in the *History of the Liang* (*Liangshu* 梁書) and several Tang sources cast Wang Xizhi and Zhou Xingsi as the two key figures, calligrapher and ‘rhyme-arranger.’ There was undoubtedly a tradition of collecting and rearranging characters in Wang Xizhi’s hand, which had been carved in stone or copied out carefully to preserve the shapes of the characters and could then be rearranged as needed into new calligraphic copybooks – it is not implausible that Liang Emperor Wudi would have commanded Zhou Xingsi to make such a copybook for the young imperial princes.⁵

Although Zhou Xingsi is now generally credited as the “author” of the *Thousand Character Classic*, in the course of the text’s reception his role was sometimes underplayed or even forgotten entirely, whereas the text was often linked ostentatiously to Wang Xizhi and presented as a model of his legendary calligraphic style. In the Tang dynasty, the monk Zhiyong (智永), a descendent of Wang Xizhi, made eight hundred copies in close imitation of Wang Xizhi’s style; his *Cursive Thousand Character Classic* (*Zhencao Qianzi wen* 真草千字文), in particular, circulated as a model version of the text that reinforced the connection to Wang Xizhi. These multilayered narratives about the *Thousand Character Classic*’s creation thus reflect the importance of calligraphic style, as well as the rhymes ‘arranged’ by Zhou Xingsi and the knowledge of classical references represented by Li Xian’s commentary, in the acquisition of even basic literacy.

The *Thousand Character Classic* as Written Characters

A text like the *Thousand Character Classic* was experienced in a variety of different ways: as a calligraphic primer prized for its visual variety, as an opaque set of rhymed syllables for

⁵ Ogawa (1997) leans toward this account.

childhood recitation, and as a storehouse of classical knowledge and allusion arranged in easily-memorizable format and explained through detailed commentary. In this section, I will explore this text's reception in Japan from these three main angles: the *Thousand Character Classic* as written character, as voice, and as commentarial authority.

The exact date when the *Thousand Character Classic* was first brought to Japan is not clear; but there is little doubt that it was part of an early stage of literacy in the Japanese archipelago. Both the *Kojiki* (古事記, 712) and *Nihon shoki* (日本書紀, 720) mention the arrival of books and tutors from the Korean peninsula in the reign of Emperor Ōjin (late fourth-early fifth century at the latest), and the *Kojiki* account names the books as the Confucian *Analects* and the *Thousand Character Classic*. Since the *Thousand Character Classic* of Zhou Xingsi did not yet exist at this point, scholars have variously argued that the entry refers to an earlier primer with the same title (e.g. Zhong Yao's alleged text) or that "Thousand Character Classic" in this entry is an error for some other text entirely (e.g. the earlier calligraphic primer *Jijiupian* 急就篇). But the most natural explanation is that this reference to the advent of the *Thousand Character Classic* in Ōjin's reign should not be taken literally, but rather as a projection of a contemporary image of literacy into the semi-mythological past. While the *Kojiki* record thus does not pin down the first appearance of the *Thousand Character Classic* in Japan, it does suggest that by the beginning of the eighth century it had an established role as a writing primer, to the point of representing the idea of literacy as a whole.⁶

This idea is reinforced by evidence from *mokkan* (wooden writing tablets) unearthed at the site of the Fujiwara capital, the site of government from 694-710. Several *mokkan* show repeated characters from the *Thousand Character Classic* and *Analects*, as if bits of each text were being copied out on spare scraps as writing practice. Tōno Haruyuki tentatively dates these *mokkan* to 701-703, and suggests that they are the work of lower-level government officials – a key

⁶ See Lurie 2011, 111-113.

demographic in the contemporary development of practical, bureaucratic literacies. Later traces of *Thousand Character Classic* writing practice have also been found in *mokkan* from Heijō (Nara) and the Shōsōin, attesting to its continued importance as a primer for learning how to use written characters.⁷

There is little evidence regarding copybook-type practice later in the Heian period, but the *Thousand Character Classic* most likely continued to be a common choice for writing practice, receiving a boost from its association with the hand of the famed Jin dynasty calligrapher Wang Xizhi. Traces of Wang Xizhi's hand do not survive in original manuscript form, and this was true from early on. Instead, they have been painstakingly copied and transmitted, both on paper and in more lasting media (carved into stone and wood, which could then be used to create rubbings, which were then used as copying models in turn); in this sense, the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi is a shared cultural practice that goes beyond the body of work of the calligrapher himself. Various such examples identified as Wang Xizhi's calligraphy were transmitted to Japan, and an idealized "Wang style" based on models attributed to Wang Xizhi and his son Wang Xianzhi was a major ingredient in the development of Heian calligraphy. Alongside influential early calligraphic renderings of waka poetry, the famous *Autumn Bush Clover Copybook* (Akihagijō 秋萩帖, a National Treasure now held by the Tokyo National Museum) includes Wang-style letters, some of which no longer survive in China.⁸

The influential Heian calligrapher Fujiwara no Yukinari, who was later known as one of the "Three Traces" (a top three list of Heian calligraphers that also includes Ono no Michikaze and Fujiwara no Sukemasa), was instrumental in establishing ideals for court calligraphy that drew heavily on Wang-style sources.⁹ His diary, the *Gonki* (権記), sometimes lists texts he obtained for

⁷ Tōno 1977.

⁸ See Carpenter 2007. Pages 161-163 summarize the role of the Wang style in Heian calligraphy.

⁹ See Carpenter 1997, particularly 128-131. Carpenter also discusses the codification of the Yukinari style by his later

use as calligraphic models; in an entry in Kankō 8 (1011), he mentions returning six manuscripts he had borrowed three years earlier from the imperial library, including four attributed to Wang Xizhi and two attributed to the Han calligrapher Zhang Zhi; one of the latter is a cursive script *Thousand Character Classic*.¹⁰ As John Carpenter has pointed out, attribution to Zhang Zhi, who died long before the *Thousand Character Classic* was compiled, is likely to be purely honorific (a way of indicating ancient pedigree), and this text may well have been a copy of Zhiyong's Wang Xizhi-style cursive *Thousand Character Classic*. Regardless, this diary passage suggests that Yukinari turned to at least one copy of the *Thousand Character Classic* as part of his study of the Wang Xizhi style.¹¹

What kind of impression would the *Thousand Character Classic* leave with someone who encountered it solely as a calligraphic model, carefully copying the forms of the characters without specific instruction on its meaning? At minimum, the basic rhythm of the paired four-character lines and a general sense of the meaning and cosmological structure (based on the writer's knowledge of character meanings from other sources) would presumably become familiar on some level. The next section considers another analogous form of reception, with a similarly complex relationship to textual meaning – the use of the *Thousand Character Classic* as recitation material to foster comfort with the rhythms of sound-based and gloss-based reading.

The *Thousand Character Classic* Given Voice

Learning to read characters involves sound and speech alongside visual elements, and the *Thousand Character Classic* seems to have been an important resource in this regard as well.

descendants; this often makes it difficult to isolate his individual contributions, though there is no doubt that he was renowned as a court calligrapher in his own lifetime. The *Autumn Bush Clover Copybook* mentioned above is sometimes attributed to Yukinari, though competing theories about its authorship place it anywhere from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries (see Carpenter 2007, 165-166). For a general biography of Yukinari, see Kuroita 1994.

¹⁰ GK v5 p159 (Kanko 8/6/8).

¹¹ Carpenter 1997, 129.

Concrete evidence about the oral/aural dimensions of education is unavoidably scarce, but existing sources tend to support the idea that the *Thousand Character Classic* was customarily recited aloud, and usually recited using some form of *ondoku*, or sound-based reading. That is, the characters were read in their original order, as a string of syllables based originally on Chinese pronunciations (though this did not exactly equate to reading a text ‘in Chinese’).¹² Most kanbun texts in most situations were read with some level of attention to Japanese grammar, by means of *kundoku*; but giving entire lines a sound-based reading (particularly using *kan-on*, the set of pronunciations most recently recalibrated to Tang capital standard) was a strategy sometimes adopted when there was a perceived need for attention to rhyme or other sound qualities of a kanbun passage – mainly in the case of introductory primers and Buddhist sutras. Alternatively, a hybrid form of reading known as *monzenyomi*, named for the Six Dynasties anthology *Literary Selections* (Ch. *Wenxuan*, J. *Monzen*, 文選), allowed the reciter to express both sound qualities and meaning by reading each phrase twice, once as *onyomi* and then once according to the corresponding *kundoku* reading.¹³

As Ōta Shōjirō has pointed out, the mid-Heian proverb collection *Common Sayings of Our Age* (世俗諺文 *Sezoku genbun*, 1007) includes a saying “sparrows around the academy” (文室邊雀), which is explained as follows:

In the *Thousand Character Classic* it says “秋収冬藏 (shūshūtōzō).” I now suggest that common usage takes this phrase to resemble the cries of sparrows around an academy; unclear.¹⁴

The final conclusion “unclear (未詳)” is rather mystifying, since the rest of the commentary lays

¹² See discussion of sound-based and gloss-based reading in Chapter 1.

¹³ On *monzenyomi*, see Steininger 2010, 51-52, and in more detail Tsukishima 1963, 261-294.

¹⁴ 千字文云、秋収冬藏。今案世俗以此文為文室邊雀啼未詳。SGB p184. Ōta Shōjirō (1972) hints at the possibility that the final comment ‘unclear’ (未詳) may be added by a later commentator who no longer understands the connection between sparrows and the *Thousand Character Classic*; but the reading marks he uses seem to differ from those in the Kanchi-in manuscript cited here.

out a cohesive explanation; sparrows in ancient Japan were thought to cry ‘shūshū,’ just like the start of this particular line in the *Thousand Character Classic* when read with *ondoku*, and the proverb builds on this pun to suggest the educational impact of environmental osmosis. The implication is that through long exposure to the sounds of students repeatedly reciting an already rather bird-like *ondoku* rendering of the *Thousand Character Classic*, the cries of sparrows roosting around a school building might take on a similar tone – just as human students (and people in general) learn unconscious habits from those around them. As Ōta has discussed, a very similar saying later arose concerning the *Child’s Treasury*, illustrating that these two texts were both widely familiar and closely associated with the somewhat unusual practice of *ondoku*.

The vocal presence of the *Thousand Character Classic* can occasionally be heard in the world of *wabun* literature. In the *Tale of the Hollow Tree* (*Utsuho monogatari*), there is a scene in which the daughter of the scholarly protagonist Toshikage (also known by her court position of Imperial Handmaid, *naishi no kami* or *kan no otodo*) enthusiastically describes the studies of her newly-adopted stepson Kogimi to her son Nakatada: “One day Kogimi was set to practicing the *Thousand Character Classic*, and in one day it seems he had it all by heart. Chanting poetry and so on, I might even say his voice surpasses yours – it was truly moving.”¹⁵

Although she may not have been directing Kogimi’s education herself, the way she describes his study of the *Thousand Character Classic* suggests that she may have been personally present and taking a keen interest in the proceedings, while her evaluation of his skill helps establish her role as an appreciative audience and critic for *kanbun* recitation.¹⁶

¹⁵ 「おとど、俊蔭娘「小君、一日千字文習はしたてまつりたまひしかば、やがて一日に聞き浮かべたまふめりき。詩など誦じたまふ、御声にはまさりためり。いと面白うあはれになむ」。仲忠「いとをかしうはべることを...」(UM v3 p448). *Utsuho monogatari* is rife with textual problems, but this passage is relatively stable across surviving variants.

¹⁶ Uehara (2005) takes this passage to mean that Kogimi’s father Kanemasa is teaching him directly, as do the *Shinpen zenshū* commentators; Aoyagi (1999, 385) takes it to mean that the daughter of Toshikage is actually teaching Kogimi, which would make this an even more interesting episode – but unfortunately, the use of *keigo* makes such a reading unlikely. Her use of *-ki* suggests speaking from personal experience, implying that she may be present while Kanemasa or a designated tutor leads Kogimi’s recitation – and though the use of *-meri* (implying indirect

Other records of the *Thousand Character Classic* as part of the Heian court soundscape include a passage in *Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (*Eiga monogatari*) about the splendor of services at Hōjōji under Michinaga's patronage, which describes a rich variety of voices chanting sutras and other texts, concluding with the sound of young men reciting the *Thousand Character Classic* and *Classic of Filial Piety*.¹⁷ By placing these two texts last, after a series of higher-status forms of Buddhist recitation, this passage suggests their introductory educational function.

In this way, although the practice of reciting the *Thousand Character Classic* aloud may have been particularly associated with young boys, it seems that it nevertheless had a broader impact on the aural environment of the Heian court, becoming a widely-recognized example of the sound of kanbun *onyomi* within court culture as a whole. In this light, a brief mention of kanbun education in the *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi* 枕草子, early 11th century) also comes to mind. Under 'Appealing Things' (うつくしきもの), author Sei Shōnagon includes "Boys about eight or nine or ten years old, with child-like voices reading out kanbun."¹⁸ The recitation text is not specified, but one might plausibly imagine that these young students are reciting the *Thousand Character Classic*.

The *Thousand Character Classic* as Textual Authority

Although primers may have frequently formed an unacknowledged resource for scholars compiling commentary, for an introductory primer to be explicitly cited as a commentarial authority was the exception rather than the rule. But such examples do appear in a few late Heian

knowledge) would seem contradictory, it can be understood as a coy reluctance to speak directly about kanbun matters (see Sei Shōnagon's similar polite posturing in the *Pillow Book*). Her enthusiastic description of Kogimi's voice reinforces the impression that she was personally present at the scene.

The position of Imperial Handmaid (*naishi*) was a highly responsible one at court, involving some level of kanbun knowledge (for further discussion, see chapter 3).

¹⁷ またある僧坊を見れば、うつくしげなる男ども、千字文を習ひ、孝経を読む。EM v2 p322.

¹⁸ 八つ九つ十ばかりのをの子の、声は幼げにて文よみたる、いとうつくし。MS p272.

commentaries aimed at a comparatively beginner-level audience, reinforcing the connections between commentary and introductory education and bringing to the surface the participation of primers in a larger context of scholarship.

The *Thousand Character Classic* or its commentary, for example, is cited seven times in the monk Shingyū's *Private Commentary on the Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū shichū* 和漢朗詠集私注, 1161), which is itself a commentary on a primer, annotating the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū*) with a wealth of anecdotes and explanatory comments for the benefit of beginning students. Shingyū turns to commentary on the *Thousand Character Classic* to shed light on several matters related to astronomy and the calendar, as well as a few classical names and places that he seems to be having trouble tracking down.¹⁹ In the example I will focus on here, Shingyū brings *Thousand Character Classic* commentary to bear on a thorny terminological problem in the following couplet from Yuan Zhen's poem "Sitting up at night" (夜坐):

萤火乱飛秋已近
 辰星早没夜初長
 Firefly sparks scatter in flight; autumn is already near.
 The mid-season star²⁰ quickly fades; the night is growing long.

This couplet appears in the 'Fireflies' section of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*,²¹ and later literary citations tend to focus on the first line with its image of fireflies. But before that, it was included under the category of 'Late Summer' in the influential kanshi couplet

¹⁹ WKRSC. Shingyū (also known as Shin'a or Kakumyō) and another of his commentaries will play a key role in Chapter 4, and his biography will be discussed there in full.

²⁰ 辰星. This is the contentious point of interpretation focused on in Shingyū's *Private Commentary*. Rimer and Chaves (1997, 69-70) translate the couplet as: "The fireflies' lights fly randomly – autumn's getting near; the water star sinks early now – nights begin to lengthen" and gloss the "water star" as Mercury; see below for discussion of the competing interpretations.

²¹ WKR p108.

collection *Brilliant Couplets of a Thousand Years* (*Senzai kaku* 千載佳句, c. 947-57), and this seasonal topicality highlights a problem of interpretation: what exactly does the ambiguous term 辰星 (glossed variously as Mercury, Antares, or “mid-season star”) mean here, and how does it reflect the season?

Issues of textual variation complicate matters further; in surviving editions of Yuan Zhen’s collected poems,²² the problem word instead appears as 星辰, which can be understood more straightforwardly as “star” (though this does not solve the problem of seasonality, i.e. why a generic star or stars setting/fading early would signify longer nights and the approach of autumn). But in *Brilliant Couplets of a Thousand Years* and in the *Chanting Collection* and its commentaries, the term is taken as 辰星 without question. Yuan Zhen’s poetry was transmitted to Japan alongside Bai Juyi’s, in the first half of the ninth century, but unfortunately no texts predating the twelfth century now survive (in China or Japan).²³ There is thus no way to be certain at what point 辰星 became 星辰 or vice versa – though since no *Chanting Collection* commentators mention the 星辰 alternative, it seems most likely that they were unaware of it and that copies of Yuan Zhen’s collection circulating in the Heian period consistently read 辰星.

Regardless of how this textual situation came to pass, premodern commentators found themselves faced with the task of explaining 辰星, and the main interpretive priority for them seems to have been explaining why this star setting or fading would herald the end of summer and fit the seasonal context of the couplet. Shingyū’s effort is based partly on earlier comments about this couplet from noted scholar, tutor, and author of the earliest surviving *Chanting Collection*

²² YZJ. The poem also appears in *Complete Tang Poems* (Quan Tang shi 全唐詩).

²³ See Hanabusa 1977, 133-6. *Montoku jitsuroku* 文德実録 records that Fujiwara no Hamamori submitted a collection of Yuan Zhen’s and Bai Juyi’s poems to Emperor Ninmyō in 838. Yuan Zhen’s collection also appears alongside Bai Juyi’s in the *Bibliography of Books Extant in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* 日本国見在書目録, c. 891).

commentary, Ōe no Masafusa – but he adds more sources, including *Thousand Character Classic* commentary, in an attempt to define the term further.

夜座。元稹。辰星者、千字文注曰、辰北極五星也。漢書曰、辰星四仲月出。而此詩趣、過五月當六月。古來難義也。或曰、辰星秋早沒非也。四中月四季中月也。二月春中、五月夏中、八月秋中、十一月冬中也。²⁴

“Sitting at night.” Yuan Zhen. Regarding “辰星,” commentary on the *Thousand Character Classic* says, “辰 is one of the Five Stars, the one in the north.” The *History of the Han* says, “The 辰星 appears in the four middle months” – and the theme of this poem is passing from the fifth month and reaching the sixth month. This has long been a difficult point. Someone has said, to say that the 辰星 quickly fades in autumn is not correct. The four middle months are the four mid-season months. The second month is the middle of spring, the fifth month is the middle of summer, the eighth month is the middle of autumn, and the eleventh month is the middle of winter.

To roughly summarize, two main interpretations of 辰星 emerge here. The first, represented by the *Thousand Character Classic* commentary, takes it to mean the star associated with north out of the set of five stars (五星) associated with elements and directions (the north star in this set is also linked to the element of water, and many modern interpretations of the poem gloss 辰星 as “Mercury” (the “water star” 水星) based on this reading). This reading is probably the more orthodox, since 辰星 as “water star” has a basis in the *Records of the Historian (Shiji)*, which curiously enough is not cited here. The second line of interpretation depends on the concept of the mid-season star, a designated star used in calendrical studies that is particularly bright and well-positioned at the height of a given season; taking 辰星 to be the mid-season star of summer allows a plausible solution to the problem of seasonality in this couplet, since for the 辰星 to become less visible would mean that the height of summer has passed.

The “mid-season star” line of thought is originally Ōe no Masafusa’s idea, based on his reading of Yan Shigu’s commentary on the *History of the Han (Hanshu 漢書)*. Although Shingyū

²⁴ WKRSC p403.

does not explicitly credit him, he is clearly citing some version of Masafusa’s comments on this couplet, either Masafusa’s commentary in the form of margin notes on a manuscript of the *Chanting Collection*, or a later recompilation of Masafusa’s work like *Notes on Conversations with Ōe* (*Gōdanshō*)²⁵ – and from the way he arranges the commentary, ending with extra explanation on the “mid-season star” reading, Shingyū seems to favor this interpretation rather than the *Thousand Character Classic* one. It follows that he is citing the *Thousand Character Classic* for reasons other than interpretive aid; but a primer like the *Thousand Character Classic* is hardly the sort of textual authority that would usually make good “window-dressing” in the sense of establishing a scholar’s credentials.

Here a look at the particular agenda of the *Private Commentary on the Chanting Collection* suggests avenues for further consideration. Satō Michio has characterized it as a commentary for beginners without much kanbun background, noting that it pays a lot of attention to the basic mechanics of the topic-poem (*kudaishi*) form – things that any beginning student at the imperial university, for example, would already know.²⁶ Shingyū’s decision to bring in *Thousand Character Classic* commentary for extra explanatory power was most likely related to his target audience; an attempt to include commentarial authorities that would be known to kanbun-studies beginners. Citing *Thousand Character Classic* commentary first, before more orthodox sources like the *History of the Han*, could be a way to ease readers into the argument using a non-threatening title, structuring authoritative knowledge in terms of familiarity as well as conventional canonical hierarchies.

Although Shingyū’s citation of the *Thousand Character Classic* is a somewhat unusual case, it established a precedent that continued into succeeding generations of *Chanting Collection* scholarship – for example, Eisai’s commentary on this couplet (和漢朗詠集永濟注, early

²⁵ WKRGK p76; GDS p742.

²⁶ Satō M. 2005.

Kamakura) inherits the same *Thousand Character Classic* reference.²⁷ The commentary added to the *Thousand Character Classic* by Li Xian and others linked it into the larger network of commentarial scholarship and established its place in the universe of classical textuality; it also provided a source of anecdotes, definitions, and textual precedents that could then be recycled into new commentaries like Shingyū's. I will return to questions of commentary and education in connection with other primers in Chapter 4, but this case provides a first glimpse into how introductory primers could participate in the productive dynamics of commentarial scholarship.

In this brief look at *Thousand Character Classic* reception in Japan, I have highlighted three aspects of the text – written character, vocal recitation, and commentary – that suggest its varied cultural functions. It is worth noting that, if considered purely as a means for learning written characters, the *Thousand Character Classic* does not seem like the ideal textbook; although some effort is made to include useful characters, some basic and simple-to-write ones (e.g. “north” 北, or numerals one through ten) are missing, and there is no attempt to present simpler characters first out of consideration for the absolute beginner.²⁸ But instead of being optimized solely to promote the efficient memorization of written characters, the *Thousand Character Classic* possesses other features that won it a strong position in the educational “canon”: association with an icon of calligraphic style, exemplary end-rhyme, readily-memorizable format, and explanatory commentary connecting it to the larger world of classical texts. The enduring popularity of the *Thousand Character Classic*, regardless of these issues, underscores the fact that acquiring literacy is not an isolated and straightforwardly rationalizable process, but rather an inextricable part of a given cultural environment.

From the glimpses of *Thousand Character Classic* reception afforded by existing sources, it appears that it loomed large in literate imaginations throughout the Nara and Heian periods in

²⁷ See WKREZ p61.

²⁸ Ogawa (1997) points out some common characters that are missing.

connection with the study of written characters and their sound-readings, but that as a “public primer” for visible consumption it largely gave way to other texts like the *Child’s Treasury*. Still, it clearly never lost its quieter background role as an introductory primer for the young, especially for calligraphy; and it would emerge into the foreground again in the Edo period as a commonly-used textbook for temple school (*terakoya*) study.²⁹ In the meantime, it continued to make occasional cameo appearances in other texts, in contexts suggesting a continuing image as the most basic of introductory primers. In the following section, I will take a closer look at a particularly dramatic example: a twelfth-century *Thousand Character Classic* “sequel” that raises questions about the parodic potential of scholarly education and about the complex position of a primer like the *Thousand Character Classic* within literary culture as a whole.

Imagining a Primer: Miyoshi no Tameyasu’s *Thousand Character Classic Continued*

In 1132, the university scholar Miyoshi no Tameyasu (三善為康, 1049-1139) circulated a meticulously-constructed homage to the *Thousand Character Classic* among his literary colleagues. In his *Thousand Character Classic Continued* (*Zoku Senjimon*, 続千字文), he set out to replicate the original feat of creating an intelligible and rhymed series of four-character lines without repeating a single character,³⁰ but with the added challenge of not repeating any characters from the original *Thousand Character Classic*. Surviving only in the Edo-period compendium *Gunsho ruijū* (群書類従), it is accompanied by a poem exchange between Tameyasu, university head Fujiwara no Atsumitsu, and several other prominent literati (who follow Atsumitsu’s lead in extravagantly

²⁹ As a hint that this text may have already been playing a role in informal home tutoring at the beginning of the Edo period, there is a reference to young aristocratic women in Kyoto studying from the *Thousand Character Classic* in the early seventeenth century; see Kornicki et.al. 2010 (9) and Shiga 1977, 231.

³⁰ The surviving copy of this work has 258 characters missing, and some obvious lacunae (characters that don’t fit into four-character lines, marked with blank spaces in the *Gunsho ruijū* edition). In extant sections, there are two characters that overlap with the original *Thousand Character Classic*, and three characters that are repeated within the work itself (though there is some possibility these are later copying errors).

praising the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* for its poetic and educational merit).³¹

Tameyasu is an intriguing character; he spent most of his life at the imperial university, but lacking a powerful patron, he failed the examinations multiple times and did not achieve the status of professor (*hakase*) until age sixty (sometimes styling himself ‘Old Man of the University’ in gentle self-mockery). His degree was actually in mathematics (*sangaku* 算学, which included logistics and strategy), but he seems to have attended lectures in the faculty of literature (*kidendō* 紀伝道) as well; his interest in literary pursuits and his active participation in the literary culture of the day are attested by his compilation of a kanbun anthology (*Chōya gunsai* 朝野群載), a reference for beginning kanshi composition (*Dōmō shōin* 童蒙頌韻), and a handbook of useful practical and literary knowledge (*Shōchūreki* 掌中歷).³²

Tameyasu’s experience at university would have meant familiarity with texts beyond the basic primers. For example, the Mao-commentary *Classic of Poetry* (毛詩), which contains a great deal of now-obscure vocabulary relating to the natural world, and *Erya* (爾雅, *J. Jiga*), an early topically-arranged collection of glosses on the classics, were included in the university curriculum. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Six Dynasties collection *Literary Selections* (Ch. *Wenxuan*, *J. Monzen*, 文選) was an important part of literature study at the university; particularly in its rhyme-prose (*fu*) section, it also contains a great deal of elaborate and comparatively rare vocabulary.³³

³¹ There has been very little work done on the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* to date. Ogata (1966, and more briefly 1981) gives a numbered arrangement of the lines with some preliminary comments and tentative kundoku readings (though his readings contain a few probable errors); Kawaguchi 1975 (896-901) introduces the text very briefly and comments on its Buddhist sentiments. There is no known surviving manuscript predating the *Gunsho ruijū* edition; my citations are based on the Seikadō bunko text comprising rubbings from the original woodblocks used to print the *Gunsho ruijū* (originally in the possession of its compiler Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一), which has some additional handwritten notes and reading marks of uncertain provenance on the main text but not the poems (ZSJM1).

³² On Tameyasu’s biography, see Kimoto 1987.

³³ See Steinger 2010 (38) on how the *Literary Selections* and *Erya* were taught to beginning university students.

Tameyasu's interest in such texts is immediately visible. The most striking difference from the original *Thousand Character Classic* is the profusion of relatively difficult vocabulary. While the original (as discussed above) does not always seem to keep ease of calligraphy practice in mind, the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* takes this to an extreme with a collection of purposely odd and unusual character choices.³⁴ Some of this effect is probably due to the added challenges of Tameyasu's task as he attempted to avoid reusing any of the characters in the original, but he could certainly have found more commonly-used characters left out of the *Thousand Character Classic* if that had been his goal. (For example, the character "north" 北 still doesn't appear in the *Thousand Character Classic Continued*, at least in the extant portions.) That said, Tameyasu does not entirely push complexity and obscurity to their extreme, or treat them as independent goals in their own right; rather, he selects a range of characters, skewed toward the complex and challenging, from texts on the university curriculum.

Other notable differences from the original *Thousand Character Classic* include a more salient topical arrangement, with cohesive sections on topics like marriage, rituals, farming, and various types of wildlife; less attention to ritual etiquette and social common sense (at least in the extant portions); a greater emphasis on the natural world, with long sections devoted to birds, animals, and insects; and a larger number of *Child's Treasury*-style biographical anecdotes incorporated into the various topic sections.

Tameyasu's prefatory poem specifically cites the kanbun primers *Child's Treasury* and *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* as models, and many of the anecdotal allusions scattered throughout the topical arrangement of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* can be traced to the *Child's*

³⁴ Categorizing vocabulary as obscure, unusual, or difficult is admittedly a very relative judgment; one could argue, for example, that any phrases found in university curriculum standards like the *Classic of Poetry* and *Literary Selections* are by definition not obscure. However, Tameyasu does seem to be choosing comparatively unusual vocabulary from these sources; of the bird and insect names in the extant parts of the text, for example, very few appear in the *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō monzui*), and many are not included in the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (suggesting a lack of Japanese attestations in any period).

Treasury.³⁵ More precisely, Tameyasu's approach to well-known anecdotes seems to involve some direct textual reliance on the *Child's Treasury*, while generally adopting a freer "common knowledge" perspective. Lines 42-43, for example, read:

製練后妃 裁箒婕妤³⁶

Working with raw silk – the Empress; cutting out a fan – Jieyu.

The story of the virtuous Empress Ma, who always wore a simple unfinished gown of raw silk, can be found in the *Child's Treasury*, but the image of the palace lady Ban Jieyu lamenting her loneliness with reference to a white fan discarded after the end of summer, a popular allusion in Japanese kanshi poetry and even wabun genres, is based on a famous poem attributed to her in the *Literary Selections*. Although she does appear in the *Child's Treasury*, she is represented there by an anecdote about her virtuous conduct while she was still in favor at the palace. Her portrayal in the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* thus reflects her usual conception in contemporary kanshi, rather than the way she is presented in the *Child's Treasury*. Still, while the *Child's Treasury* is far from the only source for Tameyasu as he collects anecdotes to weave into his topical schema, it is clearly an important one.

³⁵ A preliminary examination shows at least the following fourteen cases of probable direct reference to the *Child's Treasury* (ZSJM numbers are line numbers in Ogata 1966):

ZSJM#21 蒙求#500 劉寬蒲鞭
 ZSJM#42 蒙求#229 馬后大練
 ZSJM#44 蒙求#269 蘇武持節
 ZSJM#45 蒙求#227 買妻恥醜
 ZSJM#67 蒙求#72 郝隆曬書
 ZSJM#88 蒙求#309 屈原澤畔
 ZSJM#89 蒙求#274 范蠡泛湖
 ZSJM#111 蒙求 #413 管仲隨馬
 ZSJM#114 蒙求#282 甯戚扣角
 ZSJM#133 蒙求#194 車胤聚螢
 ZSJM#158 蒙求#401 相如題柱
 ZSJM#159 蒙求#402 終軍棄繻
 ZSJM#168-9 蒙求#89 范冉生塵
 ZSJM#170 蒙求#435 顏回箒瓢

³⁶ 箒→(竹+妾)

This stands in sharp contrast to the position of Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*; although Tameyasu mentions it alongside the *Child's Treasury* as a model primer, it is difficult to confirm any allusions to it within the extant sections. Line 102, "The swallow rejoices in hazel-wood rafters" (燕賀杏梁) is based on an allusion (originally from the *Huainan zi*) that can also be found in the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*; but Tameyasu seems to deliberately reject the Li Jiao connection. Whereas in the original passage both swallows and sparrows are celebrating in the rafters (大廈成而燕雀相賀), Li Jiao chooses to ignore the swallow and put this allusion in his poem on the sparrow (大廈將成日、嘉賓集杏梁). Tameyasu, on the other hand, focuses his line on the swallow, setting it up in parallel to an unrelated line about the sparrow in the previous couplet.³⁷ This could be explained by simple indifference to the *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (which may have been waning in popularity as a primer by the late Heian period), but in pairing the swallow with the sparrow in the same couplet, it almost seems to go a step further towards active repudiation. Certainly the scholarly approach of this line undermines Tameyasu's claim to be imitating primers like Li Jiao's.

These patterns of allusion suggest that Tameyasu did not simply take the *Thousand Character Classic* as a model, or even derive his source material in a straightforward way from the key kanbun primers he himself cites as inspiration. Rather, he used the *Thousand Character Classic* as a starting point to construct a rather different kind of text. His use of a similar format to the *Thousand Character Classic* and his introduction of many well-known references, including those familiar from the *Child's Treasury*, serve to suggest an idealized primer-like model; but on the other hand, with his inclusion of unusual and difficult characters, his emphasis on the *Classic of Poetry* and higher-status canonical classics, and his penchant for cynical and playful literary flourishes (which will be discussed further below) he consciously distances himself from his alleged project of

³⁷ The original passage is: 大廈成而燕雀相賀 (HN v17 p10). LJ p122 (雀). See also YWLJ p1596 (燕). A translation of a longer passage including lines before and after this one appears below.

writing a primer.

It is worth pausing for a moment here to consider the outstanding difficulty of Tameyasu's achievement. There is no close equivalent in English, but distant analogues might include large-scale lipograms (for example, experimental novels written entirely without using the letter 'e') – creative projects carried out under highly restrictive formal conditions. The *Thousand Character Classic*, though very well-known, was a text without official canonical standing, so introductory it would not appear on the university curriculum at all; for Tameyasu to apply such considerable scholarly energies to a *Thousand Character Classic*-like project surely includes a hint of (self-) parody. This brings us to an important question; was the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* actually intended as a primer? As will be discussed below, Tameyasu and his scholarly colleagues all claim it was – but can we take their words at face value?

Ogata Hiroyasu, the only scholar to address the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* in any detail, is eager to understand it as a nativizing adaptation of the *Thousand Character Classic* – the earliest of a great many attempts to recast this primer in a form more suited to Japanese educational needs, presaging the countless *Thousand Character Classic* variants of the Edo period.³⁸ The inclusion of popular anecdotes from the *Child's Treasury* would at first seem to support this view. However, not only is there no evidence of students actually using this text, but despite the occasional well-loved anecdote it is difficult to see how the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* (full of relatively obscure characters seldom needed in kanbun composition) would have been any better suited to educational needs of the time. If anything, the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* is true to its title – not a Japanese adaptation of the original *Thousand Character Classic* (a *Honchō Senjimon*), but a continuation or sequel designed for more advanced students based on the university curriculum. Still, while much of the text is a pastiche of allusions centered on the

³⁸ See Ogata 1966, 149. There is one other pre-Edo outlier, the late thirteenth-century *Physician's Thousand Character Classic* (*Ike senjimon* 医家千字文), a medical “primer.”

Literary Selections, Erya, and Mao's Classic of Poetry, keystones of the *kidendō*

(History/Literature) curriculum at the university – with the addition of the *Child's Treasury* (commonly studied as pre-university preparatory work) and the *Zhuangzi* (not on the university curriculum, but sometimes the subject of scholarly lectures at court)³⁹ – the emphasis is on obscure and rarely-used corners of this university-based canon, not the basics actually used in kanshi composition. At most, it is possible to imagine using this text to test senior students on the thoroughness of their study, rather than in introductory education.

Given this level of difficulty as well as the social context in which the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* was transmitted, it seems clear that Tameyasu's intended audience was in fact his fellow scholars. Only they would be in a position to truly appreciate his command of classical sources and unusual vocabulary, his touches of irreverent humor,⁴⁰ and his skillful blending of features from common primers with more esoteric material. Rather than a practical educational text, *Thousand Character Classic Continued* can be read as a scholarly homage to the primer archetype, playfully performed by the author for an audience of his peers.

Here it is helpful to take a close look at the series of poems in praise of Tameyasu's work by noted literary figures of the day that have been transmitted alongside the text itself. Although these highly stylized poetic tributes clearly cannot be taken word-for-word as evidence of the text's reception, they provide an intriguing glimpse of the social context surrounding its composition. The exchange begins with some generous praise from Fujiwara no Atsumitsu (1063-1144).⁴¹

³⁹ Momo Hiroyuki (1947, 108) comments that although they were not curriculum texts at the university itself, the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the *Complete Works* of Bai Juyi, and the primers *Child's Treasury*, *Thousand Character Classic*, and *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* were the subject of court lectures and tutoring carried out by university scholars. Hisaki 1990 (349) collects some references to lectures on the classics at court, including one on the *Zhuangzi*.

⁴⁰ It is not always possible to be sure what is intended as humor – but the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* is, for example, rather less dignified about marriage than the original *Thousand Character Classic*, and spends more time talking about it (see e.g. lines 6-7 and 127 in Ogata's numbering, discussed more fully below).

⁴¹ See Ōsone 1999. Atsumitsu has a great number of surviving kanshi and other kanbun writings collected in Tameyasu's *Chōya gunsai*, in *Honchō zoku monzui*, and in other sources. He compiled several kanshi couplet anthologies (now lost), and authored a scholarly commentary on Kūkai's *Sangō shiiki* 三教指帰.

Atsumitsu was a leader in literary circles of the day; Tameyasu had apparently sent him a copy of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* in hopes of a favorable review, and Atsumitsu did not disappoint. Setting up the themes of Tameyasu's age and diligence and the surpassing excellence of his work, and declaring that "future generations will call you Zhou Xingsi" (周興嗣後世称君),⁴² Atsumitsu established the parameters (and more concretely, the rhyme characters ending alternate lines) for a poetic exchange that would draw responses from four other contemporary literary figures in addition to Tameyasu himself.

Tameyasu's reply is the closest we have to a statement of authorial intent for the *Thousand Character Classic Continued*. In it, he specifically brings up the *Child's Treasury* and *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* as structural models as well as the *Thousand Character Classic*,⁴³ and says his goal was to encourage young children in their introductory studies (為勸少童之愚学). In judging to what extent this statement is tongue-in-cheek, one is faced with the perennial problem of how far to extend a parodic reading – but it seems reasonable to suspect that there are gently parodic threads running through this whole poem exchange (possibly even a teasing note in descriptions of Tameyasu's extreme age, which seem to go a bit beyond the conventions of the Confucian-scholar archetype).

Tameyasu's reply is followed by flattering poems from four other literary figures; one of the more interesting offerings comes from Fujiwara no Mototoshi (藤原基俊 1060-1142)⁴⁴. The fourth and final couplet reads, "city and village youths all engrossed in reading it; they speak highly

⁴² A clear indication that in this period there was no doubt about the primary authorship of the *Thousand Character Classic*.

⁴³ 四篇更做李家韻。李翰蒙求之頌、李嶠百詠之詩。皆四韻成篇。故云。
(翰 is a common substitution in the name of 李瀚, compiler of the *Child's Treasury*.)

⁴⁴ Mototoshi was a noted waka poet, known as a more conservative rival to Minamoto no Toshiyori and as Fujiwara Shunzei's teacher. He also has kanshi included in *Non-topic-line Poems from Our Court* (*Honchō mudaishi*), and was the compiler of the *Newly-selected Chanting Collection* (*Shinsen rōeishū*), a 'sequel' to the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*.

of none but you” (都邑少年耽読者。更為口実只希君) – a curious and highly implausible compliment (if it were really so widely read, it seems unlikely that this would have left no mention at all elsewhere in the historical record) that pushes Tameyasu’s claims to their logical extreme.⁴⁵ Taken in isolation, Tameyasu’s own statements could be humble posturing, but the fact that the positioning of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* as a primer is enthusiastically taken up by others like Mototoshi (who could instead have praised it more conventionally as a work of scholarly skill) is more telling. Given the nature of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* and the total lack of any other record that it was used in educational contexts, it seems clear that these statements have little to do with the text’s actual reception, but are actually part of a conscious literary pose playing on how children’s primers like the original *Thousand Character Classic* were viewed at the time.

In this sense, the surviving text of *Thousand Character Classic Continued* and its accompanying poem exchange are the record of an elaborate verbal game – one akin to all the other collective play-acting that forms a major part of kanbun composition, in which writers take on the roles of classical figures or adopt kanbun-derived political attitudes – only this time, the players liken Tameyasu to Zhou Xingsi and act out the reception of a children’s kanbun primer. This could in fact be the reason why these praise poems are transmitted along with the surviving portions of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* – they are an important part of the game. When this group of highly-educated composers of kanbun wanted to simulate the creation of a children’s primer, they made choices reflecting the contemporary understanding of what a primer should be: they created a text that follows a strict format of four-character lines in rhymed parallel couplets, is arranged according to topic, and includes historical anecdotes; they claimed that all the young men were

⁴⁵ As a side-note, Mototoshi’s second couplet reads 天地玄黃 乾坤迢遼. 天地玄黃 in the first line corresponds to the opening line of the original *Thousand Character Classic*; since the beginning of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* is missing from the only extant version, there is no way to be certain, but it seems likely that 乾坤迢遼 are its first four characters.

reading it; and they made comparisons to the *Thousand Character Classic*, *Child's Treasury*, and *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*.

With this context in mind, a closer look at the worldview of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* reveals deep contrasts with its ostensible model and hints of a very different literary agenda. Whereas in the original *Thousand Character Classic* the natural world is generally the harmonious source and reflection of an orderly center-based cosmology, the birds and animals of the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* are not so peaceable. Instead, they often strive violently with each other and with humans, and are depicted preying upon each other, struggling in nets, protesting their domestic bondage, and making mockery of human social institutions. This darker and more chaotic worldview is best illustrated by an extended passage comprising lines 100-135 of the extant *Thousand Character Classic Continued* (by Ogata Hiroyasu's numbering).⁴⁶

100-101 雀覩螻蛄、蛇怕蜈蚣⁴⁷

The sparrow eyes the mantis; the snake fears the centipede.

102-103 燕賀杏梁、鶴翥蓬瀛⁴⁸

The swallow rejoices in hazel-wood rafters; the crane flies to immortal isles.

104-105 鷹鷂狎鞞、鶻鷓係（𠂇+左）⁴⁹

Hawk and falcon scorn the gauntlet; the lark is tangled in ropes.

106-107 鶻鷂宵赫、⁵⁰ 鶻鷓春嚶⁵¹

⁴⁶ I have adopted Ogata's line numbering for convenience, with the caveat that his numbers tend to obscure the couplet structure because he assigns no numbers to partial lines (where characters appear to be missing); there are no such cases in the extended passage cited here, but where necessary, I will mark, for example, a partial line following his line 5 as line 5a.

⁴⁷ ZZ p695-697. The Erya (EY p2639, v15 積蟲) has an entry on the mantis, and Song scholar Xing Bing's subcommentary uses the characters 螻蛄 consistently. The Jin scholar Guo Pu's commentary to the Erya says that the 蜈蚣 resembles a fat, long-horned locust, and can eat the brains of snakes. EY p2639, v15 積蟲: 蜈蚣、螻蛄 (注: 似蝗太腹長角、能食蛇腦) .

⁴⁸ Character forms: 燕 (艸→火), 瀛 (女→羊)

The original passage is: 大廈成而燕雀相賀 (HN v17 p10). YWLJ p1596 (燕). In Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, this allusion appears in the sparrow poem, not the swallow one (LJ p122 (雀): 大廈將成日、嘉賓集杏梁). See discussion above.

The image of the crane as a symbol of longevity with associations to the immortal isles of Peng and Ying is widespread beyond any single source.

⁴⁹ TPYL p4113: 左伝、襄公四: 見不仁者誅之如鷹鷂之逐鳥雀

Scops owl sees clearly at night; cuckoo cries in spring.

108-109 籬占巢鷓、谿遷喬鷺⁵²

In the hedge the nesting quail holds sway; in the valley the lofty oriole moves.

110-111 猗牛放郊、管馬識達⁵³

Yi's ox abandons the countryside; Guan's horse knows the way.

112-113 蹋櫪蹠嘶、控輓喘齧⁵⁴

Kicking their troughs, stepping and whinnying; pulling their yokes, panting and chewing cud.

114-115 刷飼叩角、秣飲撫髻⁵⁵

Feed and rub them down, tap their horns; give them hay and water, pat their manes.

116-117 鞍寄鞞抑、轅趨轍 (差+車)⁵⁶

The saddle presses close, the harness pulls tight; the shafts draw near, and wheel-tracks are spaced out.

118-119 獫狁獠狗、喫繼吠嗥

Dogs, canines, hounds and pugs – put to the leash, they bark and howl.

120-121 猴猿狢狙、挽鉤叫吽⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Character forms: 鷓 (夬→決)

The topical encyclopedia *Imperially-reviewed Collection of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping yulan*, TPYL p4122, v927 鷓) cites Zhuangzi: 鷓鷓夜撮蚤察毫末、昼瞑目不見丘山、殊性也 (“At night the scops owl can catch a flea or distinguish the tip of a hair; by day it may strain its eyes, but cannot see a hill or mountain. This is its particular nature.”) Existing Song editions of Zhuangzi instead use 鷓鷓 for the scops owl, but the Tang scholar Chen Xuanying's commentary (莊子注疏) defines 鷓鷓 using the characters 鷓鷓 (ZZ p580, 582).

⁵¹ In using the characters 鷓鷓, Tameyasu may be thinking of the Li Shan commentary on *Literary Selections* (WX p215), which in reference to a mention of the bird in Zhang Heng's 思玄賦 explains that “the 鷓鷓 is also called dujuan 杜鵑. When the third month arrives it cries, not stopping night or day; at the end of summer it stops at last.” (臨海異物志曰、鷓鷓、一名杜鵑、至三月鳴、晝夜不止、夏末乃止。) The contrast of the scops owl, which can see clearly only at night, with the cuckoo, which cries night and day but only in a specific season, makes a tidy couplet about the uncertain and contingent nature of ability.

⁵² 遷喬鷺: MSZY p410 (小雅·鹿鳴之什·伐木).

⁵³ The Yi mentioned here may be Yi Dun (猗頓), a famously wealthy man who started out raising cattle and sheep (mentioned in CXJ p443 富), but the story referred to is unclear. When his party is lost on campaign, Guan Zhong has them let loose his old horse, which immediately finds the way home; see *Child's Treasury* (MG#413). This anecdote probably approached the level of common knowledge: the mid-Heian proverb collection *Sezoku genbun* explains a saying “the wisdom of an old horse” (老馬智, SZG p130) in terms of this anecdote, and the early twelfth century poetics treatise *Toshiyori zuinō* also retells it as commentary to a waka poem (TZ p183).

⁵⁴ This couplet builds on the previous one, reversing the order of ox and horse and expanding on the behavior of each.

⁵⁵ The phrase “tap their horns” (叩角) suggests the story of Ning Qi, who gained a position advising the duke of Qi by hanging around the city gate feeding his oxen, tapping on their horns and singing. See MG #282.

⁵⁶ Character forms: (差+車)

Some of the character usages in these lines are obscure, but the general sense (a description of horses and oxen being saddled and harnessed) is clear.

⁵⁷ The first four characters here are actually vaguely-defined kinds of monkey or ape mentioned in classical writings, which cannot be specifically identified with modern species living in East Asia (狢 is described as black and long-tailed, so a gibbon is at least plausible).

Monkey, ape, gibbon, macaque – they pull at their chains, cry and wail.

122-123 麒麟閣繪、狐狸豕逃

The kirin is painted on a tower; the fox and raccoon-dog flee to a gravemound.

124-125 或勵爪牙、乍忿毳髦⁵⁸

Some sharpen their claws and fangs, or rage at the softest and finest fur.

126-127 苦客蜘蛛 誨嫁鷓鴣⁵⁹

Troubling the visitor – a spider; shaming the bride – a wagtail.

128-129 螻蟻攝埵、鳧鷖馴汀⁶⁰

Ants and mole crickets administer the anthill; ducks and gulls grow accustomed to the shore.

130-131 尺蠖屈趾、鷦鷯翳翎⁶¹

The inchworm curls up its feet; wrens keep their wings close.

132-133 措羅禪鮑、透紗拾螢⁶²

Nets cast to offer sacrifice of abalone; translucent silk to gather fireflies.

134-135 葛藟藟壟、莓苔埋墀⁶³

⁵⁸ 毳 refers to the softest of animal hair; 髦 to the longest and strongest. 髦 often refers by extension to people who stand out from the crowd (i.e. those of superlative talents), and here both 毳髦 might seem to read literally as animal fur in the context of the line, but symbolize (unappreciated) talent in the context of the lines that follow.

⁵⁹ Taking the latter half of the couplet into account, the spider “troubling the visitor” is probably meant to recall the story of Sotohoshi no iratsume, a beautiful imperial favorite who foretells that the emperor will visit her based on the movements of a spider (NS p118-119). This anecdote is loosely retold in the poetics treatise *Toshiyori zuinō*, as “commentary” explaining the poem attributed to Sotohoshi no iratsume (TZ p185-186). In these contexts, however, the spider is an auspicious sign hinting that a visitor will soon arrive; it is not entirely clear how Tameyasu means to apply this idea (in keeping with the embarrassed bride in the second half of the couplet, perhaps we are meant to imagine that the spider is somehow harassing an unwilling lover into making a visit). The base classical reference for the wagtail is the *Classic of Poetry* (MSZY p408, 小雅, 常棣: 脊令在原、兄弟急難), but this line is based on the tradition that during the creation of the world, the male and female deities were inspired in the ways of sexual congress by the bobbing motions of a wagtail (see NS p33, 神代上、第四段、一書第五). The early Japanese dictionaries *Wamyōshō* (WMS p158 and 615-616, late Muromachi MS) and *Iroha jiruishō* (IJR p116, probable late Heian MS, not far from contemporary with Tameyasu) link the reading “marriage-instructing bird” とつぎおしへどり to both usual sets of characters for the wagtail (鷓鴣 and 鷓鴣); the *Wamyōshō* specifies lecture notes on the *Nihon shoki* (*Nihongi shiki*) as authority for that reading (see NSS p57). Tameyasu might well have heard lectures on the *Nihon Shoki* himself, and by his time the *Nihon shoki*-based reading was circulating through poetics manuals and commentaries like the *Toshiyori zuinō* and *Ōgishō* (both from the first half of the twelfth century; see TZ p157, OG p322). (On this subject, I am particularly indebted to David Lurie’s seminar discussions.)

⁶⁰ The mole-cricket and ant together commonly refer to small things, and are used by extension as a symbol for petty and talentless men, for example in *Han feizi* (HFZ v7 p3): 千丈之提、以螻蟻之穴潰
Ducks and gulls by the shore appear in the *Classic of Poetry* (MSZY p537 小雅·生民之什).

⁶¹ The curled-up inchworm is a metaphor for hiding one’s talent, possibly to ultimate advantage; ZY p87·(系辭下) 尺蠖之屈以求信也。龍蛇之蟄以存身也。 See also *Erya* v15 (EY p2639); the subcommentary cites this *Yijing* line. There is a rhyme-prose on the wren in *Literary Selections*, in which it represents the safety found in being small and insignificant (i.e. retreating from public life). (WX p201)

⁶² The poor scholar Che Yin famously gathered fireflies in a silk bag and used their light to study by (see MG #194).

⁶³ 葛藟 appears in the *Classic of Poetry* (MSZY p385-386 國風·周南), where ivy and creepers winding over a tall tree is an auspicious sign.

Ivy and creepers wind over the walls; brambles and moss bury the steps.

This passage presents a vision of nature liberally seasoned with darker and more cynical elements; the relentless emphasis on minutiae takes on an almost parodic tone, as if mocking the original *Thousand Character Classic* with its serene, orderly confidence in the system of the secular world. Much if not all of this natural encyclopedia can be read allegorically in terms of human affairs, and unpacking the classical associations of each image creates a colorful but fundamentally critical picture of human society, in which ruthless competition is rife and talent is no guarantee of success.⁶⁴

The social institutions of marriage and procreation are shown in an equally ambiguous light. In line 127 above, the wagtail, said in the *Nihon shoki* to have enlightened the originating deities in the motions of sex with the tail-bobbing movement of its flight, embarrasses a shy bride with its frankness. Some earlier lines on marriage also resort to a collection of animal metaphors, unimpeachable classical precedents that nevertheless lend a faintly mocking flavor:

6-7 螽斯冀偶、蜥蜴徵嬖⁶⁵

Fecund locusts hope for mates; wall-climbing lizards pursue their favorites.

8-9 鴉鳩戮昵、鴛鴦締契⁶⁶

Breeding cuckoos seal their intimacy; mandarin ducks bind themselves with pledges.

In place of a placid human social order clearly marked off from the natural world, these passages hints at the impermanence or even unworthiness of secular life, with marriage and family

⁶⁴ Lns 84-85 also mention the depressing prevalence of bribery and corruption, leading into a section on frustrated officials who resigned their positions.

⁶⁵ Locusts, written with similar characters, appear in the *Classic of Poetry* in connection with fertility (MSZY 国風·周南·螽斯). The lizard (蜥蜴) appears in the “Rhyme-prose on Whistling” (WX p246), alongside the inchworm, mole cricket and ant found in the lines discussed above. This type of lizard is traditionally defined (for example in *Shuowen jiezi*) as climbing on walls, so that Tameyasu’s line, which uses a character for “favorite” 嬖 identical except in the radical to “wall” 壁, may be an attempt at visual humor.

⁶⁶ There is a poem in the *Classic of Poetry* on the 鴉鳩, which concerns marriage and fertility (MSZY p385-386 国風·曹風·鴉鳩: “鴉鳩在桑、其子七兮”).

no more than animal instincts; at the inevitable finality of death, with a landscape of abandoned buildings crumbling beneath moss and ivy; and at the combative chaos of the natural world and its relationship with humans, mirrored in the cutthroat professional world of court service. These themes reinforce other suggestions of a Buddhist agenda in the text; this passage is actually followed soon after by lines that seem to describe an ascetic monk, transitioning into sections that mainly relate to immortals and virtuous poverty, and eventually to the philosophical tone of the concluding lines:

180-181 希望暗絶、殘涯爰適

Hoping to glimpse an end to the darkness, the span that remains now drawing to a close.

182-183 夢歟幻矣、壽又夭兮

Is this a dream? Is this reality? Long life and premature death.

The contrast between this conclusion and that of the original *Thousand Character Classic* is emblematic of deeper differences between the two texts. Whereas the *Thousand Character Classic* strings together a couplet worth of common sentence-ending particles, marking the end of the text in a formally self-conscious sense and showing clear awareness of its function as an educational primer, the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* aspires to express literary and philosophical content (however general or even banal) within the framework of a kanbun primer. Rather than attempting to imitate the pragmatic approach of the original *Thousand Character Classic*, Tameyasu chooses a few remaining characters used as particles, but incorporates them into a meaningful statement that expresses the end point of his own textual cosmology.

Most lines of Tameyasu's "sequel" hint at specific intertexts, so that the result is a mosaic of coded literary references, which for the accomplished student should spin myriad connections out in the wider world of classical textuality. To an even greater degree than the original *Thousand Character Classic*, Tameyasu's work is shaped by a commentarial mindset, and is perhaps a natural result of imagining the *Thousand Character Classic* in terms of commentary where each line should

point to at least one classical precedent. The *Thousand Character Classic Continued* pieces together a collection of intertexts chosen largely to reflect training received in the imperial university context – a dense tissue of scholarly in-jokes that represents the culmination of the educational path begun with the original *Thousand Character Classic*.

In keeping with the nature of the intellectual game he is offering to his colleagues, Tameyasu by turns promotes and subverts a primer-based approach to kanbun knowledge. His project shows that a kanbun primer like the *Thousand Character Classic* could become a springboard for literary creativity even among the highly educated; at the same time, it reveals a kind of tension between the official university curriculum and the less formal, more introductory “canon” of kanbun primers, a tension that is never entirely resolved. While the original *Thousand Character Classic* marshals its classical allusions into a fairly cohesive worldview, Tameyasu’s “sequel” creates something even closer to the heterogeneous field of a commentary or encyclopedia, which brings together an assortment of passages from past texts without necessarily imposing a single unifying authorial awareness. In place of cohesive logic, the *Thousand Character Classic Continued* offers an eclectic and irreducible textual realm in which traces of authorial perspective can be glimpsed only briefly in the spaces between disparate textual frames of reference.

Conclusion

The *Thousand Character Classic* is in many ways the archetypical primer. It has a particularly clear connection to the process of learning to write and recognize written characters, and conveys a strongly capital-centered cosmology through a broadly inclusive system of topical arrangement. Portions of it allude in highly condensed form to anecdotes about famous people and historical or legendary events. It often circulated in versions with commentarial explanation, which foregrounded its links to the wider universe of classical textuality; in turn, its base text and commentary became reincorporated into later commentaries on other texts. It met with a

multifaceted reception in Japan, including visual, oral/aural, and commentarial aspects, and it became the target of varied reading practices that involved both sound-based and gloss-based reading.

In the discussion above, I have attempted to highlight these aspects of the *Thousand Character Classic* by placing it alongside its earliest Japanese “sequel,” Miyoshi no Tameyasu’s *Thousand Character Classic Continued* – an elaborate scholarly tribute that is arguably not a primer at all, but a literary showpiece that plays with contemporary ideas about kanbun education and different pathways to kanbun literacy. Even as it experiments with the social dimensions of introductory education, Tameyasu’s work ultimately represents a particular specialized form of university-based kanbun literacy – it is extremely dense with allusions to a large but fairly standardized set of sources; it employs demanding formal features and varied, obscure vocabulary; and (as suggested by the presence of such literary one-upmanship) it reflects strong awareness of writing within a small, elite, close-knit community of people sharing certain kinds of kanbun knowledge. In the next chapter I will consider another small, close-knit, and playful community that fostered a different kind of kanbun literacy; namely, the court setting of Sei Shōnagon’s *Pillow Book* around the turn of the eleventh century. In one sense, Tameyasu and Sei Shōnagon present two very different aspects of Heian court culture; but they are linked by an interest in certain primer-based kanbun knowledge and by the use of such knowledge to perform creative and challenging literary roles within their own social groups.

Chapter 3: Kanbun Literacy and Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*

The idea of a gender framework that excluded women in Heian Japan from reading and writing kanbun, while linking wabun with feminine, private contexts, has shaped the modern imagination of classical Japanese literature and culture. The decades around the turn of the eleventh century, in particular, have been canonized as a literary golden age associated with classics like the *Tale of Genji*; an era in which women were active in developing new styles of wabun literature, in part because they were cut off from the Chinese-style public and political textuality of the male establishment. However, this gender model exaggerates the divide between genres and cultural settings at court, and recent years have seen increasing efforts to better represent the complexities of female participation in Heian literary culture.

The question of what kanbun education meant for Heian women is thus a vital one, both on its own account and in working towards an overall understanding of premodern Japanese literary culture. In this chapter, I will consider the *Pillow Book* (枕草子 *Makura no sōshi*), an eclectic compilation of poetry and prose by a lady-in-waiting to Empress Teishi (976-1000CE) known as Sei Shōnagon, as a site for exploring the ways in which a female writer could mobilize various types of kanbun literacy and make creative use of introductory kanbun knowledge.

The following anecdote is a representative first glimpse of the kind of kanbun-related literary triumphs that are enthusiastically retold in the *Pillow Book*. Sei Shōnagon suddenly receives a poetic challenge, which she answers in a clever and unexpected way that wins imperial praise and reflects well on Teishi's salon:

From the courtiers' antechamber, someone sent over a branch of plum whose blossoms had already scattered, and asked, "What can you say about this?" When I simply answered, "Fallen so soon..." a great number of senior courtiers sitting in the north hallway began chanting the corresponding poem. Hearing this, His Majesty declared, "Rather than composing a passable waka poem and sending that, this kind of reply is much better. Well

answered!”¹

While the plum branch was most likely intended as a waka topic (and a tricky one, since unlike cherry blossom plum is rarely prized for its scattering),² Sei Shōnagon sidesteps and offers a phrase from a commonly-chanted kanshi by Ōe no Koretoki (the full line reads “The plum blossom on Dayu Peak has fallen so soon; who will mistake it for face powder?”) – but she delivers it in a waka-like style, replacing the *-nu* ending common in kundoku renderings of kanbun with the more wabun-esque *-nikeri*.³

Even this brief episode hints at several important themes. At the most obvious level, the story is founded on the assumption that everyone within this cultural sphere knows the kanshi in question. Not only can Sei Shōnagon bring it quickly to mind when faced with the topic of scattered plum blossom, but all the senior courtiers immediately recognize it and can chant more of the poem; the emperor recognizes it for an appropriate response to the challenge, and implicitly, Sei Shōnagon assumes there is a good chance the reader will recognize it without any explanation. On the other hand, her response is not a direct quotation of the kundoku style in which this poem would customarily be read, but instead matches the style of the challenge itself, in which a waka poem was probably expected. Secondly, this anecdote reflects the social importance of a kind of literary

¹ 殿上より、梅の花散りたる枝を、「これはいかが」と言ひたるに、ただ、「早く落ちにけり」といらへたれば、その詩を誦じて、殿上人黒戸にいとおほくゐたる、上の御前に聞しめして、「よろしき歌などよみて出だしたらむよりは、かかる事はまさりたりかし。よくいらへたる」と仰せられき。Unless otherwise noted, all *Pillow Book* citations and section (*dan*) numbers are according to the *Shinpen zenshū* edition (based on the Yōmei bunko MS in the Sankan-bon line). Division and numbering of sections (*dan*) in the *Pillow Book* varies somewhat between editions; in the *Shinpen zenshū* edition this passage is dan 101 (MS p204).

² As Ikeda Toshio has pointed out (*Yūseidō henshūbu* 1975, 309).

³ Koretoki’s couplet does not appear in any earlier anthologies, but it is included in the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection (Wakan rōeishū)*, an anthology of kanshi couplets and waka compiled shortly after the *Pillow Book* (WKR p70, 柳). The line in question reads 大庚嶺之梅早落、誰問粉粧; a kundoku reading would be something like 大庚嶺の梅は早く落ちぬ、誰か粉粧を問はん. (With some variation; reading marks in the Shōryōbu MS *Wakan rōeishū Shichū* (WKRSC p331) suggest the reading 大庚嶺の梅早う落ちぬ、誰か粉粧を問はん, while those in the Tokyo University MS (WKRSC p381) suggest 大庚嶺の梅は早く落つ、誰か粉粧を問はん. Either way, Sei Shōnagon’s rendering is in a distinct style that can be clearly distinguished from that of kundoku reading.)

challenge and response in which both the responder's wit and the audience's discernment can be displayed to best advantage. Though the baseline for this kind of activity is the exchange of waka poetry, creative variations on that model involving kanbun material are met with general approval, including the emperor's. Finally, the practice of chanting kanshi aloud, known as *rōei*, clearly has wide appeal and appears to be a social trend that promotes the appreciation and circulation of kanbun material within the court.

These observations resonate throughout the many appearances of kanbun knowledge in the *Pillow Book*, many of which can be understood in terms of variations on this basic dynamic of literary prompt and response. But on the other hand, this episode, in which Sei Shōnagon's interlocutors remain anonymous and her comment is shown to affect her social status at court only on a fairly impersonal level, is an unusual case – a conversational model boiled down to its most abstract elements. In the following sections, I will fill in this abstract social outline by introducing the key characters and relationships of the *Pillow Book*, along with the type of kanbun knowledge it puts on display. I will then consider some longer episodes that use kanbun allusion to construct more complex meditations on themes of friendship and loyalty.

The Social and Political World of the *Pillow Book*

In the *Pillow Book*, Sei Shōnagon combines an assortment of anecdotes, poem exchanges, lists, prose poems and polemic mini-essays to create a multifaceted impression of the glory of Empress Teishi and her salon. But kanbun material, concentrated in the passages that showcase Sei Shōnagon's relationships with celebrated court talents and with Teishi, plays a special role. Appreciating this role requires a quick introduction to the social and political realities that form a largely unspoken backdrop to the text.

The enduring literary efforts of this era were fueled by an underlying rivalry over the coveted role of regent, the real political power behind the court. A specific branch of the Fujiwara

family had established its claim to this role, and its members competed for it by manipulating family ties to the imperial line; in particular, sponsoring a daughter as imperial consort, and supporting her position at court by surrounding her with talented attendants and cultural resources, was a potential path to the social and political advantages of being grandfather to an imperial heir. While Teishi's father Fujiwara no Michitaka was regent, the fortunes of his immediate descendants, known as the Middle Regent's house (*naka no kanpaku ke*), seemed assured; Teishi was the beloved empress of Emperor Ichijō, her younger sister consort to the crown prince, her brothers Korechika and Takaie already well advanced in rank and poised to rise to the highest echelons of the official hierarchy.

But with Michitaka's death in early summer of 995 things began to look less certain, and the regency soon passed to Michitaka's younger brother and rival Michinaga, rather than his son Korechika. The following year, scandal broke when, in a romantic dispute, retainers accompanying Korechika and Takaie shot arrows at retired emperor Kazan. Michinaga and his political allies had the brothers exiled to distant provincial posts, and not even intercession by Teishi or her formidable mother Kishi could protect them; they were removed from the family mansion and sent on their way after Teishi, pregnant and of uncertain health, was forced to endure humiliating searches through her private apartments.⁴ Kishi died later that year, and Teishi, who had now taken Buddhist vows, was left to give birth to her first child (a princess) without family support. Although her brothers were allowed to return to the capital in the summer of 997, they had little hope of regaining real political power, and Teishi was effectively exiled from the palace aside from a few brief visits during which she lodged in inferior quarters. In the winter of 999, Michinaga had his daughter Shōshi become an imperial consort, angling for her to replace Teishi in the emperor's favor. Even though Teishi safely gave birth to the emperor's first son a month later, without strong support from

⁴ Sei Shōnagon seems to have briefly retreated to her private home away from the capital during this period, allegedly because of rumors about her close relationships with men of Michinaga's faction.

male relatives the political implications were not clear; a year later, she died of childbirth complications, and her family's court influence was essentially at an end.

The *Pillow Book* covers the span of these difficult years, but darker political concerns are kept more or less offstage. Instead, Sei Shōnagon constructs a glittering tribute to life in Teishi's salon and to the magnificence of Teishi and her family. In this endeavour, kanbun knowledge in the form of chanted lines of poetry (*rōei*) and witty repartee based on Chinese historical anecdotes plays an integral role, such that the question of Sei Shōnagon's kanbun education or lack thereof has long been debated by commentators.

Kanbun Knowledge in the *Pillow Book*: an Overview

Dating back all the way to Murasaki Shikibu's dismissive contemporary comments about Sei Shōnagon's Chinese-style pretension and lack of real learning,⁵ Sei Shōnagon's penchant for kanbun allusion has become a key issue in the reception of the *Pillow Book* and in the gendered construction of Heian wabun literature.⁶

In English-language scholarship, early approaches to questions about gender and Heian literary style include an article from Richard Bowring (1984) and translated work by Chino Kaori (2003, from a paper given in 1993) – which, although it persisted in locating the true formation of Heian literary identities for both men and women in the “feminine” wabun realm, took important steps in introducing a public/private dimension to the kanbun/wabun dynamic and in approaching Chinese-style arts as a recreation of “China within Japan.” More recently, Atsuko Sakaki (2006,

⁵ In her memoir: see MSN p202 and Bowring 1996 (54). It is worth pointing out that she criticizes Sei Shōnagon for showing off her cleverness and smugly displaying logographic writings that are actually full of flaws – that is, for misjudging the proper social context and attitude for displaying kanbun knowledge, not for the possession of it. The term she uses for logographic writing is *mana* 真名 (“true graphs”), which tends to be used in contemporary texts in contrast to *kana* 仮名 (“borrowed graphs,” phonographic writing); an opposition of graphic style that says nothing directly about Chineseness or Japaneseness (as discussed above in Chapter 1). See Lurie 2011, 324-330.

⁶ See Yahagi 2001 for a good overview of previous Japanese scholarship on Sei Shōnagon's level of kanbun knowledge, and Nakajima 2006 for a more recent discussion of some key examples. More generally, Shimura 1986 outlines a range of contexts in which Heian women of various social classes attained and displayed kanbun literacy.

p107-115) has used the metaphor of “sliding doors” to eloquently suggest the contingent, fluid, and often manipulable barriers between women and kanbun; articles from Edward Kamens (2007), Gustav Heldt (2005), and Joshua Mostow (2001) also involve nuanced consideration of gender and Heian literary style.⁷

Research on gender and literary style in Heian Japan is still in its early stages, however, with a great deal of room for further development as regards the social dimensions of kanbun knowledge and its educational transmission. There is a danger of treating “women’s literacy” in isolated, anecdotal terms, as a discrete side issue rather than as an integral part of the overall shape of literacy in a give time and place. By approaching the question of Sei Shōnagon’s kanbun literacy within an overall exploration of kanbun education as well as within the context of her active creativity as a writer, I hope to relate the literary strategies used by court women to larger patterns in the transmission and circulation of kanbun knowledge.

Though skill at creatively deployed kanbun-based wit is central to how Sei Shōnagon presents herself in this text, there is no single unified awareness of ‘kanbun’ in the *Pillow Book*. We can trace the appearance of various kinds of kanbun elements; knowledge of official and ceremonial court vocabulary and etiquette (which relied heavily on kanbun language and reimagined Chinese precedents), *rōei kanshi* couplets, paraphrases of *kanshi* in *wabun*-ized form, anecdotes about Chinese historical figures, and proverb-like phrases that allude to a kanbun context but already seem to function as unremarkable *wabun* vocabulary. Understanding the common trajectories of kanbun-related education is necessary to have any chance of untangling these various attitudes towards kanbun material.

⁷ Mostow’s article, in particular, includes a brief but inspiring discussion of Sei Shōnagon’s kanbun references, noting the importance of Teishi as audience, the particular interest of the Middle Regent’s house in kanbun learning, and the semi-public/political nature of some episodes as records of Teishi’s salon. I am not entirely convinced by his argument that Michinaga and his daughter Shōshi’s salon stood contrastingly for a kind of nonchalant aristocratic denigration of Chinese-style scholarship, given Michinaga’s own interest in the collection and judicious scholarly circulation of imported Chinese texts and commentaries (see Okabe 2001) – but his point that the differing approaches to kanbun knowledge displayed by Sei Shōnagon and Murasaki Shikibu may owe more to their political affiliations than to gender attitudes or personal rivalry is a powerful one.

To begin with, it is possible to suggest kanbun-inspired connections within the overall structure and general themes of the *Pillow Book*. There are topical sequences in the *Pillow Book* that bear some resemblance to the cosmological arrangements found in Chinese encyclopedias like the *Record for Beginning Study* (Ch. *Chuxue ji*, J. *Shogakuki*, 初学記, 727CE) and *Topical Collection of Literature* (Ch. *Yiwen leiju* J. *Geimon ruijū* 芸文類聚, 624CE), both widely used as literary reference works. The examples of one type of list section (the wa-type lists), if considered independently, form a progression from the seasons and heavens (in the famous opening section) through birds, animals, and plants, and on to geography.⁸ The mono-type list sections, on the other hand, suggest links with continental models like the miscellany *Zazuan* (雜纂) attributed to Li Shangyin, perhaps by way of a kind of Heian parlor game of making amusing ten-item lists on given topics.⁹

It is also worth looking at the origin narrative provided in the concluding section of the *Pillow Book* (the afterword or *batsubun*), which positions it as an alternative to the Chinese historical classic *Records of the Historian* (史記 Ch. *Shiji*, J. *Shiki*), supported by Teishi and her salon in counterpoint to the emperor's current project of copying out the *Records of the Historian* and physically inscribed on left-over paper from that project:

Regarding the [paper] the Palace Minister [Korechika] had offered to her, Her Majesty said, "Supposing one were to write something on this, what should it be? Over at His Majesty's side they are writing out a book called the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji/Shiki*)." When I replied, "Surely it would make a good pillow (*makura*)," she said, "In that case, you shall have it," and gave the paper to me. On it I wrote down bits of this and that I thought unusual, and since I tried to use all of the inexhaustibly large amount of paper, that included a great number of ill-considered things.¹⁰

⁸ See for example Ueno 1973, which points out various topical arrangements that can be uncovered throughout the *Pillow Book*, though always subject to Sei Shōnagon's editorial consciousness; Nakajima 2006 goes a step further and reads the opening *dan* (the famous passage on seasons and times of day) as a deliberate fusion of topical conventions for an appropriate textual beginning in kanbun ('heavens') and wabun ('four seasons').

⁹ See Kawaguchi 1974 (142-168) and Morris 1980 (42-50).

¹⁰ 宮の御前に、内の大臣の奉りたまへりけるを、「これに何を書かまし。上の御前には史記といふ文をなむ、

Sei Shōnagon's "pillow" comment is clearly intended in witty contrast to the title of the *Records of the Historian*, but while Teishi apparently understood the joke, there is no agreement among modern readers (with possibilities ranging from a pun on the Japanese pronunciation *Shiki* for the title of the *Records of the Historian*, which sounds as if it could be a kind of bedding, to several different Chinese poetic references to sleeping with books as one's pillow). Still, whatever the exact rationale behind Sei Shōnagon's answer, the nature of her conversation with Teishi, at least, is clear: it is a challenge of wit like so many others throughout the *Pillow Book*, in which Teishi puts forward the *Records of the Historian* as a topic and judges Sei Shōnagon to have matched it successfully, awarding her a precious gift of writing materials along with an implicit commission to write on behalf of Teishi's salon. This episode frames the very creation of the *Pillow Book* in terms of literary wit concerning a kanbun text.

Kanbun references within the character dialogue of the *Pillow Book* – the sources portrayed directly as part of the cultural life of the court – tend to fall into two main categories, both based on widely-studied introductory educational texts: historical anecdotes, drawn from the *Child's Treasury* (蒙求, Ch. *Mengqiu*, J. *Mōgyū*) or from well-known sections of dynastic histories,¹¹ and *rōei* material (lines of Chinese-style poetry for chanting aloud), which can mostly be found in either the *Collected Works* of Tang poet Bai Juyi or in Fujiwara no Kintō's *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (和漢朗詠集 *Wakan rōeishū*).¹²

書かせたまへる」などのたまはせしを、「枕にこそは侍らめ」と申ししかば、「さは得てよ」とて給はせたりしを、あやしきをこよや何やと、つきせずおほかる紙を書きつくさむとせしに、いと物おぼえぬ事おほかるや。(MS p467)

¹¹ The *Child's Treasury* is a rhymed collection of anecdotes about famous Chinese historical figures prior to the Tang, compiled by early Tang scholar Li Han; it was widely memorized and recited in Japan from the ninth century onwards. (See a longer introduction with examples in Chapter 1). There are two cases of definite allusion to the *Child's Treasury*, in *dan* 6 and *dan* 155, and it probably shapes the author's awareness of historical anecdote more broadly. Sei Shōnagon's knowledge of the *Child's Treasury* has been discussed in Yahagi 1966 and 2000, Ōsone 1999, and Nakajima 2006.

¹² For detailed analysis of the term *rōei* and its usage, as well as historical shifts in *rōei* practice, see Aoyagi 1999. The

Overall, the kanbun sources that play important roles in the *Pillow Book* are thus relatively introductory ones. But it is important to recognize that Sei Shōnagon's purposes, as well as her training, differ from those of university scholars invited to compose kanshi in an official capacity. Anecdotes that show her winning praise for her kanbun knowledge are designed to display her relationship with someone (usually either a talented male courtier, or Teishi) who understands and appreciates her wit – these exchanges are a form of communication, albeit a selective one, and the goal is to reaffirm a connection within an accepted social context rather than to display the most exclusive command of obscure knowledge. Towards this goal, familiar and accessible kanbun sources like primers and popular rōei become particularly effective.

Tadanobu's Excellent Memory: Kanbun Knowledge in Social Interaction

In order to illustrate some of the communicative functions of kanbun knowledge in the *Pillow Book*, I will now turn to a series of connected anecdotes featuring Sei Shōnagon's exchanges with Fujiwara no Tadanobu, a high-ranking courtier known for his literary talent, and his sidekick Minamoto no Nobukata.¹³

The scene opens with a visit from Tadanobu and Nobukata to Teishi and her ladies, who have withdrawn from the palace into temporary quarters because Teishi is in mourning for her father, the former regent Michitaka. It is the day before the Tanabata Festival on the seventh day of the seventh month. When Sei Shōnagon casually quizzes Tadanobu on what sort of rōei would be

Chanting Collection was compiled slightly after Sei Shōnagon's time, but seems to largely reflect the most popular contemporary material for rōei, though selected somewhat prescriptively by Kintō. (See a longer introduction in Chapter 1). Sei Shōnagon's actual sources for rōei material may have included the tenth-century anthology *Brilliant Couplets of a Thousand Years* (*Senzai kaku* 千載佳句), but probably involved oral sources (it seems likely that her keen memory would note any poems chanted in her presence) as well as textual ones. Nakajima 1999 (78-79) briefly discusses the way that women of the Ichijō court would have encountered kanbun through various media, giving contemporary examples of kanbun-based visual culture (screen paintings, pictures, and clothing patterns), aural exposure to rōei, and mediated written culture (involving primers, selected-couplet collections, and topical encyclopedias). She notes that the excerpt collections, encyclopedias, and other mediating texts that survive today are probably only a small fraction of those commonly used in the Heian court.

¹³Dan 155, MS p285-291.

best for the following day, he replies, to her great delight, “Naturally, ‘the mortal world in the Fourth Month’.”¹⁴ At first glance it is a mystifying reply, entirely out of keeping with the season, but there is apparently a subtext yet to be revealed – Sei Shōnagon praises Tadanobu for his ability to recall past matters, noting how rare a virtue this is (especially in men).

Having tantalized the reader, she then explains the past event in question; on the first day of the fourth month several months before, Tadanobu and Nobukata had stayed to visit late into the night, and when the time came to leave, they parted with the following exchange:

Tadanobu then sang out with ‘The dew must be tears of parting,’¹⁵ and Nobukata recited along with him quite delightfully. “Tanabata certainly came early,” I commented. At this, Tadanobu chided himself ruefully, saying “It was just that I happened to remember a piece on parting at dawn, and spoke just as it came into my head, alas. Really, in all situations like this, if you speak without thinking, you’ll end up regretting it!” – and so on, laughing over it again and again. “Don’t tell anyone – I’ll certainly be laughed at,” he added, and since it had gotten very light outside, saying “The god of Kazuraki is now without recourse,”¹⁶ he beat a retreat.

The narrative continues to elaborate on Tadanobu’s excellent memory for private jokes, with an anecdote about Nobukata trying to learn the private code based on terminology in the game of *go* that Sei Shōnagon and Tadanobu use to disguise romantic gossip. It then moves to a setting around the time of Tadanobu’s promotion, to drive the point home with an extended comparison between Tadanobu and Nobukata in which *rōei* and *kanbun* allusions play an integral part:

When Tadanobu was made Consultant, we discussed the matter in the emperor’s presence; “But he chants poetry so charmingly! When it comes to ‘Xiao of Kuaiji, passing by the old

¹⁴ From a Bai Juyi poem, ‘Peach blossom at Dalin Temple’ 大林寺桃花.

¹⁵ From a poem by Sugawara no Michizane on the topic of Tanabata, collected in the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection (Wakan rōeishū)*. As a phrase from a poem on the autumn festival of Tanabata, it is not a good match for the current season.

¹⁶ Based on a legend in which the god of Kazuraki, ashamed of his ugliness, hides away in the daytime and is active only at night.

temple,¹⁷ who else is worth mentioning? Have him not get promoted for a while, and keep serving here. It's such a shame." His Majesty laughed heartily, and declared in a most delightful way, "Then I'll tell him you say so, and I won't promote him." But nevertheless, he got promoted, and was sorely missed. Nobukata, thinking himself a fair replacement, pranced around putting on airs; and when I brought up Tadanobu, saying, "He really chants the poem 'Had not yet reached the age of thirty'¹⁸ like no one else," he replied, "How could I lose to him? I'll do it even better!" He chanted it, but I declared "It's nothing like." "Alas," he said. "How shall I learn to chant like him?" – and when I explained "His 'age of thirty' part, especially, was entirely irresistible," he went away laughing ruefully. Tadanobu was in a guardhouse meeting, but Nobukata called him aside, saying, "This is what she said – please teach me this part," and Tadanobu laughingly complied. Since I knew none of this, when he came up beside my chamber and chanted very much like Tadanobu, I was puzzled and called out, "Who is it?" In a voice full of amusement, he said, "Let me tell you something amazing," and gave the whole story. "When he was in a guardhouse meeting yesterday, I asked him about it, and now I suppose I sound very like him – for you to ask 'who is it' in such an uncritical way..." Since it was charming that he'd gone and learned it especially, so long as he chanted this one poem, I would go out and speak with him – so that he said, "Now I really appreciate what Tadanobu did for me. I should prostrate myself in his direction!" When I was actually in my chamber but instead sent someone to tell him I was attending the empress, if he burst out with this poem, I would admit "The truth is, I'm right here." When I told Her Majesty about all this, she was quite amused.

On a day when there was a taboo in the inner palace, by means of someone called Lieutenant Guardsman of the Right Mitsu-something-or-other, I received a letter on folded paper. "I'd thought to be in attendance," it said, "but due to the taboos in effect today and tomorrow... How about 'had not reached the age of thirty'?" When I replied with, "I'd thought you'd already passed that age. More like the age when Zhu Maichen told off his wife,"¹⁹ he was again vexed with himself, and when he even reported it to the emperor, His Majesty went across to Her Majesty, saying, "How on earth did she know such a thing? Apparently Nobukata has been saying 'It was just exactly the year he turned thirty-nine when he warned her thus,' and 'I've really been well and told off!'" I felt then that Nobukata was a bit of a lunatic.

The earlier episode involving appropriate seasonal choice of *rōei* material – Tanabata versus the fourth month – establishes that Sei Shōnagon was prepared to understand and consider *rōei* material beyond its immediate phrasing, to fill in the context of a line and its various other

¹⁷ 蕭会稽が古廟を過ぎし, from a poetic preface in volume 10 of the *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō monzui*); see discussion below.

¹⁸ いまだ三十の期におよばず, from a poem in volume 1 of the *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō monzui*); see discussion below.

¹⁹ Zhu Maichen's story can be found in entry #227 of the *Child's Treasury* (MGKS p61), which describes him as a poor man who spent his time in study rather than making money. He tried to reassure his wife (who was frustrated with their poverty), saying that although he was now thirty-nine years old he would gain official rank by the age of forty; she left him anyway, only to end up ashamed and regretful when he indeed gained a high official post. The story is translated and discussed in full in Chapter 1.

associations. In this light, it seems important to consider why she highlights the specific lines ‘Xiao of Kuaiji’ and ‘age of thirty’ – of course it is possible that Tadanobu simply did recite them most often or most skillfully, but are any deeper readings possible?

In the case of ‘Xiao of Kuaiji,’ various possible associations do resonate with the immediate context of Tadanobu’s promotion and consequent separation from the sphere of Teishi’s salon. The line is part of a poetic preface (詩序) by Ōe no Asatsuna (大江朝綱), collected in volume ten of the anthology *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō monzui*, 本朝文粹, mid-eleventh century); the following couplet, with its mention of Xiao of Kuaiji, was selected for the “Friendship” (交友) section of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishu*), and one can imagine it circulating independently as an apt phrase on that theme.

蕭会稽之過古廟、託締異代之交。

張僕射之重新才、推為忘年之友。

Kuaiji Magistrate Xiao, on passing the ancient shrine,
forged a friendship across the eras;

Vice Director Zhang, in valuing fresh talent,

Promoted it and formed a friendship transcending age.²⁰

For Sei Shōnagon and her comrades, who are protesting the idea of losing an accomplished and amusing companion like Tadanobu, this line seems like more than just a randomly-chosen example of popular *rōei* material.

Furthermore, the story of Xiao of Kuaiji is not a typical tale of friendship; it tells how when Xiao Yun became magistrate of Kuaiji he stopped and made offerings at the shrine of Ji Zha, a virtuous statesman of the distant past, thus forging bonds of friendship that transcended time. Considering that the whole conversation takes place against the backdrop of Michitaka’s death and the subsequent mourning activities, and that elsewhere (in *dan* 129) we do actually see Tadanobu

²⁰ Translation from Rimer and Chaves 1997, adjusted for consistent pinyin spelling.

mourn Michitaka with a perfectly-selected *rōei* chant, it is plausible to read this particular choice of *rōei* material as praising Tadanobu for his loyalty to Michitaka's memory – or alternatively, exhorting him (like Xiao of Kuaiji) not to forget the honored dead in the context of his new promotion.

This line of thought leads to tantalizing but uncertain ground. Tadanobu's promotion was announced on the very same day as the exile of Teishi's brothers, and it seems clear that he was involved to some extent in their fate.²¹ Would Teishi's ladies have seen Tadanobu's promotion as a betrayal, or at least a choice to abandon them for Michinaga's company? The opposition between the Middle Regent's house and Michinaga's faction was seldom straightforwardly expressed, and the *Pillow Book* is full of anecdotes portraying Michinaga and his partisans (including for example Fujiwara no Yukinari, as well as Tadanobu) in a decidedly positive light.²² But to the extent that there was any general awareness of the reasons behind Tadanobu's sudden promotion, the choice to bring up this particular *rōei* may suggest the vain wish that rather than accept a political promotion cementing his alliance with Michinaga, he could stay closely affiliated with Teishi's salon, offer comfort and diversion in her mourning, and continue to express his loyalty to Michitaka. In this way, the half-joking resistance against Tadanobu's promotion expressed in this anecdote is potentially many-layered, and the seemingly casual mention of *rōei* material can be read at a range of depths, from straightforward thematic association to pointed political commentary.

The key phrase 'had not yet reached the age of thirty' is even more clearly amenable to multiple associations. Sei Shōnagon first brings up this particular *rōei* phrase ostensibly for reasons

²¹ Mitamura 1995 argues convincingly based on entries in the court diary *Shōyūki* that not only was Tadanobu present at high-level deliberations leading up to the exile decision, but since the incident occurred at his late father's mansion he was probably also instrumental in making sure the scandal wasn't suppressed. Tabata 1983 also acknowledges some connection, while suggesting that the 'excellent memory for past events' attributed to Tadanobu in these anecdotes may hint at continued loyalty to Michitaka.

²² It is also important to recognize that although some sections may have been written earlier, the *Pillow Book* was completed and circulated after Teishi's death, when Michinaga was firmly in power and with at least his tacit approval.

relating to its sound, rather than content; Tadanobu's way of chanting it is uniquely appealing. It is impossible to know exactly what vocal performance qualities are being singled out for praise, but given that Nobukata successfully learns to imitate them, one may suppose that they include not only Tadanobu's pleasant voice, but also his signature pattern of lengthening syllables and melodic intonation.²³

Regardless, the content of this phrase also turns out to be far from incidental. It is originally part of a wry poem on advancing age, "On catching sight of white hairs" (見二毛), by Minamoto no Fusaakira (源英明), in which the author (writing at age thirty-five) reacts to spotting his first white hairs in the mirror, concluding that after all he is in good classical company:

Yan Hui was a wise man of Zhou; he had not yet reached the age of thirty. Pan Yue was a famed gentleman of Jin; early on, he published a poem on autumn sentiments. They were both younger than I; I should be glad I'm first seeing this sight so late.²⁴

Yan Hui was the most favored disciple of Confucius; there is a story in *Kongzi jiyu* (孔子家語) that his hair turned white at age twenty-nine. In the preface to his "Rhyme-prose on Autumn Inspirations" (秋興賦), the poet Pan Yue mentions finding his first white hairs; he was thirty-two at the time.

Tadanobu's age at this time was close to Yan Hui's, and whether or not Sei Shōnagon is drawing an exact parallel in terms of age,²⁵ the specific choice of this 'age of thirty' passage hints at likening Tadanobu to Yan Hui (a very high compliment), or at least commenting on his brilliance

²³ Aoyagi (1999) establishes that in the Ichijō court rōei was just beginning to flourish as a customary practice; the use of closely-prescribed melodies and repertoire developed over the course of the following century in tandem with the canonization of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*. This episode thus provides a valuable glimpse of rōei practice in the stage when it was popular, but still somewhat individualized.

²⁴ 顔回周賢者、未至三十期。潘岳晉名士、早著秋興詞。彼皆少於我、可喜始見遲。HCM p132.

²⁵ Tsushima and Nakajima 2010 (192), suggest that this episode takes place in Chōtoku 1 (995), when Tadanobu was exactly twenty-nine – but the conversation only makes sense if it follows Tadanobu's promotion in the fourth month of Chōtoku 2.

and young age – with Nobukata implicitly placed in unfavorable contrast. That is to say, even at this stage it could be taken as effectively mocking Nobukata through comparison to his younger and more successful colleague Tadanobu, such that there may be an inherent joke in convincing the gullible Nobukata to learn this particular line and perform it all the time.

This mocking dimension becomes even clearer in the *Child's Treasury*-based letter exchange that follows. The age at which Zhu Maichen admonished his wife is one point on which commentaries disagree; the old-commentary *Child's Treasury* (古注蒙求), the commentary based on the compiler's original annotation that most commonly circulated in Japan until the late medieval period, gives it as thirty-nine, while the Song period commentary by Xu Ziguang that became standard in Japan from the Edo period onward gives it as “more than forty” (with his prediction of success coming at age fifty).²⁶ Topically speaking, the reference to the age of Zhu Maichen follows on smoothly from the “age of thirty” phrase in Nobukata's letter, but it also expresses the cutting observation that Nobukata is no Yan Hui – rather, like Zhu Maichen at the point when he remonstrated with his wife, he is in his thirties and has yet to reach exalted rank. Then again, comparison to Zhu Maichen is ultimately rather encouraging, even if not on a par with Yan Hui, and perhaps this is why Nobukata doesn't scruple to report the conversation to the emperor.

This anecdote stands as an unusually vivid illustration of the role played by primers like the *Child's Treasury* and their commentaries in the reception of stories from Chinese history among the non-university-trained elite. Not only Nobukata, but implicitly also Sei Shōnagon and even Emperor Ichijō seem to accept thirty-nine as the age when Zhu Maichen told off his wife – that is, not the official *History of the Han* version of the story, but the version presented in the old-commentary *Child's Treasury*. Literary banter of this kind depends on a shared educational

²⁶ The source of this story is the *History of the Han* (漢書 Hanshu), and surviving editions match the ages in Xu Ziguang's commentary; however, there is evidence to suggest that the ages thirty-nine and forty are not an error, but are derived from an older manuscript of the *History of the Han*. See Hayakawa Kōzaburō's discussion in MG p541.

baseline to ensure that everyone will get the joke; and at least within the constructed world of the *Pillow Book*, kanbun-based exchanges seldom fall flat.

Conversational Kanbun in Sei Shōnagon's Court

As suggested in these anecdotes, a conversational dynamic of challenge and response is one of the underlying organizational principles of the *Pillow Book*. Receiving and answering literary challenges is depicted as an important part of Sei Shōnagon's function as lady-in-waiting; by providing appropriate replies to the prompts issued by courtiers, she enhances the image of Teishi's salon and Teishi's claim to imperial favor (many anecdotes about literary exchanges are framed by appreciative conversations between Teishi and the emperor). Although the most commonly shown pattern involves a particular gendered power dynamic, with a male courtier posing the challenge and Sei Shōnagon responding, Sei Shōnagon sometimes plays the role of challenger herself, and in a few cases Teishi initiates exchanges with her attendants that confirm the close-knit loyalty of her salon. Beneath the surface-layer wit of swapping literary allusions, these exchanges often involve a contest to determine the terms of communication, and implicitly to determine the inseparable public and private dimensions of the participants' relationship.²⁷

Sei Shōnagon's self-portrayal in the *Pillow Book* is centered around the ability to find novel and interesting yet still appropriate responses to literary challenges of all kinds. Perhaps because they offer both an extra challenge and an opportunity for intriguing novelty, she pays particular attention to exchanges that involve kanbun references and/or the creative pairing of kanbun material with elements of wabun style. Her interest in this kind of wa-kan literary play

²⁷ On question/answer dynamics in the diary-type sections of the *Pillow Book*, and the gender implications thereof, see Mitamura 1995 (139-152) and Komori 1998 (particularly 63-80). In a broader sense the list-type sections of the *Pillow Book* also rely on question/answer logic; as Mark Morris (1980) points out, Sei Shōnagon's creative lists gain their meaning and interest from the separation between topic and comment, akin to a prompt and response. For that matter, characters in the *Pillow Book* often seem to relate to their environment as a series of literary prompts, and will draw topical prompts out of innocuous conversation or seemingly unpoetic events (e.g. the sudden appearance of a runaway chicken in dan 293, which Teishi's brother responds to by chanting a perfectly-suited kanshi couplet).

seems to go far beyond a simple project of describing her own triumphs and approaches something like an aesthetic agenda. Not only are well-regarded court figures like Fujiwara no Tadanobu shown excelling at this type of kanbun-based conversational exchange, but other ladies-in-waiting, notably Sei Shōnagon's friend and rival Saishō no kimi, also win praise for their kanbun-based responses, and one section even recounts an episode akin to Sei Shōnagon's plum-branch reply that allegedly took place back in the court of Emperor Murakami (which is generally framed as a locus of cultural superiority).²⁸

Beyond its role the author's own self-presentation, kanbun material is instrumental in the portrayal of key relationships within the text. Within the whole of the *Pillow Book*, kanbun references follow certain patterns; scenes involving kanbun-based literary exchanges are mainly set during Teishi's later, more vulnerable years at court, after the death of her father, which gives them added potential layers of emotional weight. Furthermore, they mainly concern Sei Shōnagon's relationships with Teishi and with two powerful allies of Michinaga, Fujiwara no Tadanobu (encountered above) and Fujiwara no Yukinari (who will appear below) – relationships that readily lend themselves to deeper readings based on kanbun-esque concepts of understanding, appreciation, and loyalty.

In placing Teishi at the center of the *Pillow Book*, giving the relationship between lady-in-waiting and mistress its own independent treatment, and presenting a wealth of conversations and literary exchanges between women, Sei Shōnagon was venturing onto new literary ground. In most contemporary texts, a lady-in-waiting may speak as her mistress's voice or mediate access to her mistress – but she will rarely display her own literary agency. In striving to portray her relationship with Teishi, Sei Shōnagon builds on several existing communicative models, including the relationship between loyal, talented retainer and worthy patron often found in *kanshi* (Chinese-style poetry) and in anecdotes from kanbun texts like the *Child's Treasury* and *Records of*

²⁸ Dan 175 (MS p304).

the Historian.

After trying and failing to persuade Sei Shōnagon to delay a visit to her home away from the capital, Teishi sends a letter with an open-ended prompt, and Sei Shōnagon answers with an appeal to kanshi-based communicative logic:

In the middle of the day, when the sun was shining even more tranquilly than usual, Her Majesty sent, “Have the hearts of the blossoms not yet opened? Well, what do you say?” I replied, “Though autumn is still far off, I feel as if my spirit ascends nine times each night.”²⁹

Sei Shōnagon interprets “hearts of the blossoms” in terms of the following poem by Bai Juyi, which adopts the persona of a young woman longing for her beloved:

In the ninth month the west wind rises
The moon is cold and blooms of frost gather
Thinking of you, the autumn nights are long
Each night my spirit ascends nine times.

In the second month the east wind comes
Grasses sprout; the hearts of blossoms open
Thinking of you, the spring days drag on
Each day my stomach twists nine times.

I live north of Luo Bridge
You live to its south
I was fifteen when we met
This year I’m twenty-three.

Just as the lady’s-creeper vine
Grows up the side of a pine tree
Its tendrils short, the branches cruelly high
Winding around, it cannot reach the top.

People say if someone has a wish
And that wish reaches heaven, it’s sure to come true.

²⁹ いみじう常よりものどかに照りたる昼つ方、「花の心ひらけざるや。いかに、いかに」とのたまはせられたば、「秋はいまだしく侍れど、夜に九度のぼる心地なむしはべる」と聞こえさせつ。MS p401-402 (dan 260).

I wish to be a beast in a far-off land
 To walk every step shoulder-to-shoulder with you.
 I wish to be a tree in the deepest woods
 Branches growing twined together with yours.³⁰

Sei Shōnagon's response frames the exchange in terms of these communicative roles, the faraway beloved and the yearning woman, which are conventionally linked to the roles of lord and loyal retainer. But while the Bai Juyi usage would have been widely known (and Sei Shōnagon clearly has no doubt that Teishi will know it, otherwise her reply would be a senseless one), "hearts of the blossoms" (花の心) was also well-established within the poetic vocabulary of waka, with precedents stretching back to the *Man'yōshū* (where it is already linked to longing and loyalty for one's lord or lover).³¹ Among the several possible waka involving the phrase, there is also a famous poem that resonates with Sei Shōnagon's description of a peaceful and sunny spring day:

Lingering long, the springtime is so tranquil – yet why do the hearts of the blossoms hurry?
 (Kiyohara no Fukuyabu)³²

Sei Shōnagon's narration thus calls attention to the multivalent nature of Teishi's prompt and underscores her choice to respond based on the Bai Juyi poem rather than the waka. Her response

³⁰ 長相思。九月西風興、月冷霜華凝。思君秋夜長、一夜魂九升。二月東風來、草拆花心開。思君春日遲、一日腸九迴。妾住洛橋北、君住洛橋南。十五即相識、今年二十三。有如女蘿草、生在松之側。蔓短枝苦高、縈迴上不得。人言人有願、願至天必成。願作遠方獸、步步比肩行。願作深山木、枝枝連理生。 BJJ v2 p645-646.

³¹ For example, MYS #1661 (v2 p378): "As the light of the distant moon shines pure, plum blossoms open their hearts; it is you I long for" (ひさかたの月夜を清み梅の花心開けて我が思へる君). On "heart of the blossoms" in waka and kanshi, see Yasui 1979 and Ochiai 2011. Yasui points out that "heart of the blossoms" in waka can imply changeability; this would give Teishi's letter an added punch (implying that Sei Shōnagon's heart is fickle), which Sei Shōnagon's reply neatly sidesteps by framing the exchange purely in terms of the Bai Juyi poem. Ochiai reads Teishi's challenge as based solely on waka diction, with only Sei Shōnagon's reply bringing in the Bai Juyi reference – but since Sei Shōnagon narrates the episode on the assumption that Teishi understands and approves of her reply, it seems to me that the intent of the initial prompt remains deliberately ambiguous.

³² うちへて春はさばかりのどけきを花の心やなにそぐらん(GSS p31). This is based off an even more famous poem involving blossoms, their unsettled "hearts," and the tranquil springtime: "Even on a spring day with tranquil light from the distant heavens, with unquiet hearts will the blossoms scatter?" 久方の光のどけき春の日に静心なく花の散るらむ (Ki no Tomonori, KKS #84, p59). Sei Shōnagon's use of "tranquil" (のどかに) would immediately call these contexts to mind.

answers the prompt on multiple levels; by impersonating the lonely woman in the poem she answers the implicit challenge to confirm her loyalty and affection as Teishi's attendant, and since "ascending" is also the verb used for travel to the capital from the provinces, her reply suggests that her spirit keeps returning to Teishi's side even if she cannot be there in person. The tempting double meaning of "ascending" is why she turns to the autumn part of the poem instead of the spring portion, which then necessitates mention ("Though autumn is still far off...") lest it seem she is clumsily ignoring the seasonal context.

Here it would be hard to argue (as people sometimes do) that Sei Shōnagon turns to kanbun allusions because she is not entirely comfortable with the world of waka. Nor is this a case of turning to kanbun material to express a message rarely dealt with in waka, since co-opting the usual romantic connotations of "longing for you" (君を思ふ) to describe loyalty within a patron-attendant relationship was also an acceptable strategy in waka diction. Rather, the Bai Juyi reference is deployed because it allows for the cleverest word-play, and because it lets Sei Shōnagon suggest another aspect of her relationship with Teishi by briefly sketching herself and Teishi in kanbun-esque attitudes of talented, loyal retainer and worthy patron.

This response incorporates multiple layers of cross-gender literary role play. The original poem is a male poet speaking in the poetic persona of a lonely woman, a persona that is habitually linked to that of a male retainer longing for his lord; in citing the poem, Sei Shōnagon is a woman speaking as a man speaking as a woman (who also symbolizes a man). But she seems unconcerned about transgressing gender boundaries or invading a traditionally male field of literary role play – the act of casting Teishi as a distant husband/benevolent lord and herself as a longing wife/loyal retainer is accepted as normal in the context of this type of exchange.

Talent and Beauty: a Dialogue with Fujiwara no Yukinari

A more complex awareness of gender implications appears in one of several kanbun-based

episodes involving the celebrated court calligrapher (and close imperial aide) Fujiwara no Yukinari.³³ We are told that most of the ladies of the salon find Yukinari dull and unappealing, and are offended by his judgmental comments about female beauty. Sei Shōnagon, however, recognizes that he is a man of talent and emotional depth; she speaks to Teishi about his exceptional qualities, which Teishi acknowledges. Aware of her support, Yukinari comments agreeably to her, “They say that a woman will make up her face for one who admires her, and a gentleman will die for one who truly understands him.”³⁴ In the following scenes, Sei Shōnagon and Yukinari argue about whether he should be permitted the unusual intimacy of seeing her face.³⁵ Then one morning Sei Shōnagon awakes to find that the Emperor and Empress Teishi are hiding in the side hall where she was sleeping, mischievously spying on courtiers passing by; when they depart, inviting her to follow, she remains behind to apply her makeup,³⁶ only to find that Yukinari has been concealed nearby and has glimpsed her informal dress and unmade-up “morning face.” Although she laughingly laments this embarrassment, from that point onward their conversations continue without concealing screens.

Yukinari’s quotation references the biography of the assassin Yurang in the *Records of the Historian* (史記, Ch. *Shiji*, J. *Shiki*), who repaid his patron’s appreciation with unswerving loyalty.

³³ Yukinari and his calligraphy are also discussed in Chapter 2.

³⁴ 常に、「『女はおのれをよろこぶ者のために顔づくりす。士はおのれを知る者のために死ぬ』となむ言ひたる」と、言ひ合はせたまひつつ、よう知りたまへり。MS p104 (dan 47). This passage is somewhat vague in terms of who is saying what to whom, but it is clear that Yukinari is responsible for this quotation and that for him and Sei Shōnagon it holds shared significance.

³⁵ Courtly conversation like that between Yukinari and Sei Shōnagon would normally be conducted across a concealing screen; for a lady-in-waiting to reveal her face to a man, except in cases involving greatly disparate rank and/or official court duties, would conventionally imply a very close and probably sexual relationship. Opinions vary as to the actual public or private dimensions of Sei Shōnagon’s relationship with Yukinari; Hijikata 2007, for example, reads some of their other interactions as “mock-romantic games” (疑似恋愛遊戯), in which the two participants publically embody their respective patron-groups (i.e. salons surrounding Teishi and the emperor). Fujimoto 2002 gives Sei Shōnagon and Yukinari a bit more agency as individuals, but similarly emphasizes that their conversations and letter exchanges constitute semi-official communication between Teishi and the emperor. I would argue that the passage I discuss here is difficult to understand purely in terms of public communication between court salons, but can be read in terms of inextricably linked public and private loyalties that are never fully separated or resolved within the text.

³⁶ 「いま顔などつくろひたててこそ」とてまみらず。MS p104 (dan 47).

When Yurang's patron Zhi Bo is killed by Zhao Xiangzi, Yurang determines to avenge him, declaring, "A gentleman will die for one who truly understands him; a woman will adorn herself for one who admires her. Now Zhi Bo truly understood me; I must lay down my life to avenge him."³⁷ He dresses as a convict, disfigures his skin with lacquer, and swallows charcoal to make himself mute. Thus disguised, he finds work painting the walls of Xiangzi's outhouse. But before he can strike, Xiangzi senses his killing intent and has him seized for questioning. Recognizing the assassin, he points out that Yurang never took so much trouble in avenging his previous patrons before Zhi Bo, and tries to convince him to stand down. Yurang replies that his previous patrons treated him like an ordinary retainer, so he only avenged them in the manner of an ordinary retainer, but Zhi Bo treated him like a gentleman, and so he must avenge him like a gentleman. Xiangzi acknowledges Yurang's moral code and lets him go with a warning. Yurang returns for a second attempt on Xiangzi's life and is caught again; at this point, Xiangzi regretfully has him executed, but grants his final request – to be allowed to slash a corner of Xiangzi's robe so as to symbolically complete his mission of vengeance.

Yurang's story is originally from the *Strategies of the Warring States* (戦国策 *Zhanguo ce*), but usually circulated based on the *Records of the Historian*. It can also be found in the *Child's Treasury* (with the heading "Yurang swallows charcoal").³⁸ Either way, the line about women and gentlemen seems to have circulated as a proverb in Sei Shōnagon's day; *Common Sayings of Our Age* (世俗諺文 *Sezoku genbun*, 1007), an annotated collection of kanbun-based sayings compiled very shortly after the *Pillow Book*), includes the part about women and cites the full passage from

³⁷ 士為知己者死、女為說己者容。今智伯知我、我必為報讎而死、以報智伯、則吾魂魄不愧矣。SJ p2519-2521.

³⁸ 予讓吞炭。Extant manuscripts of the "old commentary" (*kochū*) edition of the *Child's Treasury*, the one that circulated in Sei Shōnagon's day, are missing the relevant section; it is unprovable but likely that Yurang's line about the loyalty of gentlemen and women would have been familiar from this source. The medieval Gozan commentary gives an abbreviated version that does not include the phrase (see MGKS p415); the Song dynasty Xu commentary does include it (see MG p685-687).

the *Records of the Historian* as commentary.³⁹

The line that Yukinari quotes in the *Pillow Book*, however, is slightly different from the proverb collected in *Common Sayings of Our Age*. Not only has the order of the couplet been reversed, placing the comment on women first, but the original term “[enhance one’s] appearance” has been replaced with the more specific “make up one’s face.”⁴⁰ These changes tie the line even more obviously to the episodes that follow, in which faces – particularly the act of glimpsing a woman’s un-made up face – take on great significance.

In this context, the strictly gendered dichotomy of the original quotation becomes a tangle of overlapping roles. On the one hand, much is made of the fact that Sei Shōnagon (and by extension also Teishi) truly understand Yukinari and recognize his worth, echoing the role of Yurang’s patron in appreciating his true quality; in this sense, the analogy would seem to call for Yukinari’s absolute loyalty as a “gentleman” (perhaps even when faced with an alternative virtuous Xiangzi-like patron in the form of Michinaga). But while Sei Shōnagon and Teishi stand in for the male patron in this equation, the passage also keeps returning to the theme of feminine appearance and the implications of the other half of Yurang’s declaration. Yukinari earns the dislike of the other, less discerning ladies of the salon partly because of his comments about judging the beauty of a woman’s face; when Sei Shōnagon refuses to show herself to him she jokes that he will dislike her for her ugliness; and when he finally sets eyes on her it is because she has delayed attendance on the Empress to apply makeup.

For whom, then, does Sei Shōnagon make up her face? Not for Yukinari, whose first glimpse of her unpowdered “morning face” prompts affectionate teasing rather than rejection; not for Teishi, who has just seen her without make-up and thought nothing of it. Yurang’s statement

³⁹ SGB p166-167. The kundoku reading marks in *Common Sayings of Our Age* give us an idea of how this passage would have been read in Sei Shōnagon’s day, and Yukinari’s quotation suggests that adapted versions of this kundoku rendering had become part of conversational language.

⁴⁰ 容, glossed かたちづくる, replaced with 顔づくりす.

about women has been inverted; rather than making an effort for those who appreciate her best, make-up here signals the assumption of a concealing public persona, which in the case of Teishi and Yukinari, who truly know and appreciate her, is impossible. This function of cosmetics recalls Yurang's use of appearance as a social weapon; his gruesome disguises may seek different effects from make-up, but they share a protective camouflaging function.

In making Yurang's declaration the keynote of this passage, Sei Shōnagon thus juxtaposes two gendered modes of loyalty, layering the potential for literary role play, but ultimately subverts the implied gender model. Teishi plays the role of discerning patron without losing any of her femininity, Yukinari shows no particular gentlemanly tendency to defend anyone with his life, and Sei Shōnagon inadvertently reveals her unadorned face to those who admire her most; this passage explores different facets of Yurang's statement, playing variations on the theme of loyalty and mutual understanding.

The relationship between loyalty and the recognition of talent is a thread running throughout the *Pillow Book*; Sei Shōnagon's portrayal of her relationship with Teishi emphasizes their unique mutual understanding, while as a representative of Teishi's salon Sei Shōnagon also shares a special rapport with the most talented of male courtiers based on mutual appreciation of (often kanbun-based) wit. But in the difficult period after Michitaka's death, these two aspects of Sei Shōnagon's court life were no longer so happily in step; most of her favourite conversational partners (including Yukinari) were affiliated with Michinaga and the court powers responsible for Teishi's brothers' exile, Teishi's withdrawal from the palace, and the sad decline of the Middle Regent's house. At this time, when Teishi was presumably most in need of her support and cheering-up, Sei Shōnagon withdrew for a while to her home away from the capital due to "rumors" among the other ladies-in-waiting – which are generally accepted to have been rumors about her close ties to courtiers supporting Michinaga.⁴¹

⁴¹ See dan 137 (MS p259-265).

This painful period of absence from the court is thought to be when Sei Shōnagon drafted some early sections of the *Pillow Book*;⁴² the issue of loyalty, and how it might interact with relationships based on the mutual recognition of literary talent, would thus have been at the forefront of her mind as she first began to write. Many of the kanbun references in the *Pillow Book* reflect that preoccupation, offering an indirect way of working through the complex intersections of gender, loyalty, and talent. For Sei Shōnagon, the basic kanbun knowledge gleaned from primers is not only a means to display her own wit, but also a key source of creative material in constructing the themes and relationships at the heart of her project.

Conclusion: a Wider Kanbun Context for the *Pillow Book*

From references to commentary on the *Child's Treasury* to popular rōei material and experimental styles of literary exchange, the *Pillow Book* reflects an intellectual climate in which kanbun is an important creative source. The anecdotes discussed in this chapter depict a constructed literary world, and cannot be taken as a precise factual record; but it is a literary world that embodies authorial assumptions about the role of kanbun in social interaction, as well as the accessibility of introductory kanbun material to potential readers. In this concluding section, I will turn briefly to the world outside the text, to consider how the *Pillow Book* fits with hints from other sources about the role of kanbun in the Ichijō court and particularly the backgrounds and interests of those Sei Shōnagon was closest to.

At the nominal apex of this social setting, Emperor Ichijō himself had a strong interest in kanbun, which helped motivate those around him to display such skills. He sponsored a great number of kanshi gatherings during his reign, and many of his own social compositions survive in

⁴² The *Pillow Book* transmitted to us today also contains some episodes dealing with later events, which were clearly not written until after Teishi's death.

poetry anthologies like *Honchō reisō* and *Ruijū kudaishō*.⁴³ In this sense, his portrayal in the *Pillow Book* as a judge and appreciative audience for Sei Shōnagon's comments matches well with his biography, and it is easy to imagine that the salons of Teishi and later Shōshi would seek to appeal to his interests.

As for other potential kanbun trend-setters, the politically powerful Michinaga was also a notable collector of kanbun texts, both brought from the Chinese continent by merchants and obtained from scholarly families in Japan. His collecting and recirculation of these texts reflected a push to enhance his own prestige and that of his daughter Empress Shōshi through strategic gifts to her and directly to Emperor Ichijō, as well as an interest in promoting and shaping literary activities at court.⁴⁴ His competition with the Middle Counselor's house was thus conducted partly on a cultural field that included kanbun literature.

Other key cultural figures of the time included the powerful courtiers later known as the Four Counselors – Fujiwara no Kintō, Fujiwara no Yukinari, Fujiwara no Tadanobu, and Minamoto no Toshikata. Any high court official would need to be able to read and write kanbun, but at least the first three of these men, who all appear in the *Pillow Book*, are particularly known for their kanbun-related cultural interests. Tadanobu is lauded for his kanbun chanting in other sources besides the *Pillow Book*,⁴⁵ while Yukinari was one of the most celebrated calligraphers of the Heian period, whose best-known attributions include a manuscript of Bai Juyi's poetry that survives today.⁴⁶ Kintō, whom Sei Shōnagon seems to have found slightly intimidating, was the compiler of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* and known as an arbiter of both wabun and kanbun.⁴⁷

⁴³ See Kuramoto 2003, 218-220.

⁴⁴ See Okabe 2001.

⁴⁵ See Aoyagi 1999.

⁴⁶ See Carpenter 1997 for an introduction to Yukinari's legacy as calligrapher (Appendix A outlines his biography).

⁴⁷ *Dan* 102 involves her response to a poetic challenge from Kintō, based on adaptation of a Bai Juyi poem.

In a social world led by such figures, ladies-in-waiting were expected to be able to keep up – and though kanbun chanting was seldom if ever performed by women, a certain level of knowledge offered a potential path to social success. The *Pillow Book* mainly focuses on depicting Sei Shōnagon’s own witty comments, but this does not mean she was the only one among Teishi’s ladies who ever displayed such talent. For example, in *dan* 79 an elegant conversation between Tadanobu and Saishō no kimi (another lady-in-waiting) in which she alludes to a Bai Juyi poem is described to an admiring Sei Shōnagon and a group of other ladies – everyone involved understands and appreciates the allusion.

Perhaps the most important element of this setting, as far as Sei Shōnagon was concerned, was Teishi’s kanbun background, which by all accounts was relatively strong. Teishi’s mother, known as Kō naishi (“Handmaid Takashina,” 高内侍), was a daughter of the scholarly Takashina family; her father Naritada was a university scholar who served as Emperor Ichijō’s tutor. The important position of Imperial Handmaid (*naishi*), which involved transmitting messages from the emperor to senior officials, may well have required a higher-than-usual level of proficiency with kanbun writing⁴⁸ – and indeed, although they adopt different perspectives on this fact, the two historical accounts *Great Mirror* (*Ōkagami*) and *Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (*Eiga monogatari*) both describe Kō naishi as an unusually kanbun-literate woman who attracted Michitaka with her talent.

In the *Pillow Book*, Teishi is always (implicitly or explicitly) the main audience understanding and appreciating Sei Shōnagon’s kanbun-based wit, while her brother Korechika appears performing brilliant *rōei* and even informally tutoring the emperor in kanbun texts (with Teishi also present, as in *dan* 293). Similarly, perhaps through her encouragement or by virtue of their connection with her scholarly family, Kō naishi’s children all seem to have been known for

⁴⁸ See Shimura 1986.

their literary skill. The *Great Mirror* even describes Teishi's eccentric younger sister as a forthright arbiter of kanshi composition: "When people were composing and reading out kanshi, she would sometimes pass judgment in a loud voice on which ones were good and bad. Being the descendants of the Second-Rank scholar, in this family all the women were also literarily talented."⁴⁹

While the *Tale of Flowering Fortunes* suggests a positive connection between Kō naishi's kanbun talent and the high positions initially reached by her children, the *Great Mirror* instead quotes a saying that "for a woman to be overly talented with kanbun is bad luck," and puts this forward as a possible reason for the later decline of her family.⁵⁰ These two versions of the Kō naishi narrative suggest that the idea that women and kanbun shouldn't mix was not an unquestioned cultural standard, but a matter for debate. For the highest-ranked ladies like Teishi and Shōshi, certain types of kanbun knowledge could form part of an arsenal in the competition for imperial favour and court standing, while mid-ranked aristocratic women, particularly those from scholarly houses like Kō naishi, Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon, had the opportunity to acquire kanbun knowledge and use it to carve out their own niches at court.

In light of the way these other contemporary sources depict the kanbun-savviness of key court figures, it seems unsurprising that the *Pillow Book* should take kanbun references as an important part of literary communication. As much as the age of the *Tale of Genji*, the Ichijō court might easily be termed the age of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*; it was an era of widespread basic kanbun education among men and women of the court, in which many of the leading literary figures were innovating with the creative use of kanbun references and the pairing of wabun and kanbun styles.

⁴⁹ 「人々文作りて講じなどするに、よしあし、いと高やかに定めたまふ折もありけり。二位の新発の御流にて、この御族は、女も皆、才のおはしたるなり。」 OK p258-9.

⁵⁰ *Eiga monogatari*, on Michitaka's children: 「母北の方の才などの、人よりことなりければにや、この殿の男君達も女君達も、みな御年のほどよりはいとこよなうぞおはしける」 EM p142-3.
Okagami, on Kō naishi: 「それはまことしき文者にて、御前の作文には、文奉られしはとよ。少々の男にはまさりてこそ聞こえはべりしか... 「女のあまりに才かしこきは、もの悪しき」と、人の申すなるに、この内侍、後にはいとみじう墮落せられにしも、その故とこそはおぼえはべりしか。」 OK p258-9.

While gender seems to have acted in combination with class background and other social factors to shape acceptable social avenues for displaying kanbun knowledge, a gendered opposition between masculine-coded kanbun and feminine-coded wabun writing was seldom mobilized in clearcut terms. Although some sources express anxiety or ambivalence about female displays of kanbun talent, the impact on how men and women of the court actually interacted with kanbun texts and quotations could still vary. Sei Shōnagon's comfort with the creative use of basic kanbun material underscores the fact that while the nature of kanbun literacy for court women may have been circumscribed in certain ways, it could still represent a source of valuable knowledge and offer powerful possibilities for social communication.⁵¹

Together, this chapter and the previous one have given some idea of the diverse kanbun literacies active in the Heian court, from the university-trained erudition of a writer like Miyoshi no Tameyasu to the complex factors promoting and suppressing the social display of kanbun literacy among palace ladies. These chapters have also suggested that these different styles of literacy were constantly interacting, particularly when it came to kanbun primers, which formed part of a shared base of knowledge for those who participated in court culture. The following two chapters approach the role of kanbun literacy as part of the Heian court tradition from a slightly different angle; they will shift focus from the world of the Heian court to more peripheral contexts at the close of the Heian era, and will explore how primer-based kanbun knowledge became a valuable commodity

⁵¹ Sei Shōnagon's era offers an unusually rich set of surviving sources about women and kanbun, and may have offered unusual paths of opportunity to kanbun-educated women; but this tension between the need to attain a certain kind of kanbun literacy and the dangers of displaying that knowledge too directly also resonates through later historical contexts. Writing in the thirteenth century, Nun Abutsu (a celebrated waka poet and *Tale of Genji* scholar, and the wife of the poet Fujiwara no Tameie whose youthful preference for kickball over kanbun primers was mentioned at the start of Chapter 1) advised her daughter that she should attain some knowledge of logographic writing for use in waka-related contexts, but perhaps be careful not to pursue it too enthusiastically: "One hears that *mana* writing is not something women should enjoy, but it would be foolish to go as far as not knowing the shapes of characters and how to fit them to a waka topic. One should examine and learn them, drill oneself writing them, and write them in one's idle brush practice." (真名は女の好むまじき者にて候なれども、文字様、歌の題につけて、さる様を知らぬ程ならむは、鳥澁がましく候。御覧じ知りて、書き習ひて、筆のすさびに書かせおはしまし候べく候)。Yanase 1981, 118-119. Abutsu's notes on how to achieve success in court service (often known as *The Wet Nurse's Letter*, *Menoto no fumi*) circulated widely and became one of the most important texts in medieval women's education; see Laffin 2013 (19-59) for an in-depth discussion of its content, and Shiga 1977 (141-147) on its medieval reception.

among intellectuals looking for a place in the new medieval order.

Chapter 4 *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads (Shin gafu ryakui): Bai Juyi's Poetry Through the Lens of Commentary*

Much of the interpretation, dissemination, teaching, and conceptualizing of written texts in premodern Japan was conducted in the form of commentary. Most early Japanese commentaries have been studied relatively little, and mainly from the point of view of tracking textual variations. But despite challenges in reading these commentaries, they offer a unique glimpse into the normally opaque realm of contemporary interpretation, giving us rare clues as to how at least one premodern reader thought the text should be understood. At the same time, a commentary is not a transparent expression of reader response, but a text with its own genre expectations and communicative agendas, which might in turn go on to shape future readers' experiences in ways both intended and unforeseen – while the quotations, anecdotes, and explanations in a given commentary might also be recycled many times as a source of material for future scholarship and teaching.

In this chapter, I examine the role of commentary in the reception of one of the most widely read and enthusiastically adapted texts in premodern Japan: the “New Ballads” (Ch. Xinyuefu, 新樂府, *J. Shin gafu*, 新樂府) of Tang poet Bai Juyi. The writings of Bai Juyi were incorporated into Heian literary culture in a variety of roles, and his “New Ballads,” a set of fifty poems on contemporary social issues, was particularly prominent in educational contexts. However, the first extant stand-alone commentary on these poems dates to the very end of the Heian period (1172CE), when the monk Shingyū compiled his notes and explanations into *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads (Shin gafu ryakui*, 新樂府略意). Shingyū's work illustrates the role of commentary in processes ranging from canon formation to scholarly innovation and the creative adaptation of familiar material, and can be understood as part of an early-medieval trend toward the canonization and educational repackaging of the core texts of Heian literary culture for audiences beyond the court. His approach to explaining the “New Ballads” is geared toward beginning students and

focuses on lively anecdotal content; in his treatment of the historical events behind the “New Ballads,” he uses unusual textual sources – including a lost Tang dynasty primer, a “sequel” to the popular historical anecdote collection, *Child’s Treasury* – to create new and memorable retellings of familiar Tang historical events like the death of concubine Yang Guifei. While discussing Bai Juyi’s “New Ballads” as envisioned by Shingyū, this chapter will consider the place of commentary as an integral part of education and the act of reading, part of the continual reinvention of kanbun texts by different groups of readers.

The Deceptively Simple “New Ballads”

Among the Chinese texts that circulated in Heian and medieval Japan, Bai Juyi’s “New Ballads” stands out for its ability to appeal to a wide variety of readers and listeners and to insinuate itself into a surprising range of literary contexts.¹ This set of fifty poems on various social and political issues (found in volumes three and four of his complete poetic works) presents a unique panorama of Tang society according to the poet’s interests, with an emphasis on voices of the unusual, marginal, and oppressed. With strong narrative elements as well as plenty of quotable phrases, it provides a stock of highly memorable characters, situations, and poetic vocabulary, which poem-chanters, conversationalists, and writers in all genres from the Heian period to the present day would draw from again and again.

The idea that Bai Juyi’s poems, and particularly his “New Ballads,” are comparatively simple, accessible, and easy-to-read is generally taken for granted — and is often cited casually to explain their popularity in Japan. Bai Juyi himself cultivated this image; in his preface to the “New Ballads,” for example, he declares that he has used straightforward language in order to easily move

¹ In rendering the title of this work in English as “New Ballads,” I follow the example of Ivo Smits, the one scholar who has written substantially in English about this text and its Japanese reception (see Smits 1997); another possible translation is “New Music Bureau Poetry.” Despite their importance throughout premodern East Asia, most of the “New Ballads” poems have never been translated into English; translations of a few poems can be found in Owen 1997, Watson 2000, and Hinton 1999.

his audience, defining his concern as content rather than linguistic style.² But even if we take his authorial pose at face value, it does not follow that all readers found his poems immediately comprehensible or that they are entirely lacking in interpretative challenges. ‘Easy-to-read’ is also by its nature a relative concept, and for Heian readers trained to recognize a specific shared vocabulary of historical figures and poetic vocabulary, link them to poetic topics, and combine such connotation-rich keywords into highly formalized social poetry, some of Bai Juyi’s ‘simple’ colloquial language (especially when applied to rare and exotic topics) might initially be less than intuitive. It seems likely that the popularity of these poems throughout East Asia owed as much to their versatility, compelling narrative elements, and potential for anecdotal retelling as to any simplicity of poetic diction.

Bai Juyi’s overt agenda — using poetry to plead for the emperor to improve his policies, with particular attention to reining in corrupt officials, listening to virtuous advisors, restoring traditional standards of classical music and ceremony over new foreign influences, and showing more sympathy for struggling subjects — is not revolutionary. He seems to have based his concept of social-criticism poetry on precedents in the ancient *Classic of Poetry* and its Mao commentary, in combination with a sense of his responsibilities in the post of imperial Reminder (左拾遺, an official responsible for correcting state documents and critiquing policies);³ his interest in appropriating the music-bureau ballad genre to express current social commentary was shared by other poets in his circle, and in fact several titles in the “New Ballads” had already been used as poetic topics by his close colleagues Yuan Zhen and Li Shen.⁴

² BJY v1 p136.

³ Shizunaga 1993.

⁴ See Shizunaga 1993. Shizunaga points out that other poets in Bai Juyi’s circle (which was composed of talented poets from relatively lowly backgrounds) tended to use poems of social criticism as vehicles for self-promotion or praising their allies; Bai Juyi, because he had already achieved a high degree of fame and a position close to the emperor with backing from the prime minister, had the luxury of creating “purer” or at least more innovative social criticism.

However, Bai Juyi's poetry of social criticism stands out in terms of its narrative drama and the range and vividness of its examples. While many primers (e.g. the *Thousand Character Classic*) are concerned with constructing a single centralizing cosmology that introduces the mainstream of classical civilization, the "New Ballads" focuses instead on the margins of this worldview. The world of the "New Ballads" is populated by barbarians, impoverished countryfolk, lonely palace ladies, plagues of locusts, oppressed pigmy slaves, musicians and dancers specializing in exotic foreign styles, draft dodgers, and even a homesick rhinoceros. Most of these topics are not unheard of (the palace ladies, in particular, already had a long history of representing imperial neglect in poetry), but together they present a lively panorama of the excluded fringes — at once sympathetic and threatening — of classical civilization.

Each poem in the "New Ballads" focuses on a particular social issue and comes with an authorial subtitle on its intended "moral," so that the potential for didactic readings is certainly clear; yet it still stops short of being straightforwardly didactic. It is full of unexpected and impassioned voices — a barbarian who turns out to be a former Han prisoner of war now exiled from two homelands; an angry, bitter child whose mother has been put aside for a younger concubine — and moments of painful irony that undermine any simplistic moralizing (e.g. an imperial tax pardon that arrives too late for starving farmers). The interest in human (melo)drama seems to go deeper than the project of assigning moral epigrams, and the central plea, embedded in admonishments about the value of conservative cultural practices, is one for sympathy and communication between different segments of society. In the two penultimate poems of the series, Bai Juyi suggests how he sees the role of mid-level officials like himself; he first describes a legendary sword-smith who dreams of forging a weapon to cut through all barriers between the common people and their lord, and then a mynah bird whose fluent chatter is meaningless unless it restores order to the bird kingdom by warning the lofty phoenix of the sufferings of sparrows and the depredations of hawks.⁵ In this sense,

⁵ BJY v1 p259, 261.

commoners, foreigners, and other peripheral exotica are always defined in terms of their relationship to the emperor, in a framework that privileges the center; but as is often the case in didactic literature, there is a constant tension between the overt moral framework and the actual content described in such loving detail.

The sixteenth poem in the sequence, entitled “Trained Rhinoceros” (訓犀), presents a good illustration of the narrative drama and exotic detail found throughout the “New Ballads,” and of the way in which a striking character or scene often steals the spotlight from any straightforward moral argument.

“Trained Rhinoceros”

Trained rhino, trained rhino, heaven-communing rhino –
 Its appearance startles men, its horn startles chickens.
 The Southern folk across the sea heard tell of a wise prince
 And drove the rhino here, swapping post-horses for ten thousand leagues.
 One morning they gained an audience in the Palace of Great Brilliance;
 Exclaiming in joy they made obeisance, recounting their own efforts.
 Five years they trained and tamed the beast, before daring to present it
 Six times retranslated; only then did their speech become clear.⁶
 His Majesty rejoiced that men and beast had come so far
 The Southerners were lodged in the Hall of Four Directions; the rhino in the imperial park.
 Fed with rare grasses, bridled with gold,
 Its homeland impossibly distant, deep behind its lord’s gates.
 A seagoing bird, unaware of its celebration by bell and drum;
 A pond-dwelling fish, vainly dreaming its dreams of lake and river.
 The trained rhino’s birthplace is in the steamy south
 No pale dew in autumn – in wintertime no snow.
 Several years went by since it first entered the imperial park
 Then came this year’s months of bitter cold.
 Swallowing ice, lying down in hail, it stumbled about in pain
 Its horn frost-bitten, its scaled armor stiff.
 The trained rhino died
 The Southerners cried
 To the palace again they made their bows, their countenances sad,
 Begging leave to go back home, while they still lived
 Afraid that, like the trained rhino, they too would freeze to death.

⁶ Interpretations vary, but this probably means that the barbarians’ speech was so far divorced from the capital standard that it required a relay team of six translators with different linguistic specialties to communicate with them.

Have you not heard, early in the Jianzhong era,
 How a trained elephant was sent back in good health to far Linyi?
 And have you not seen, late in this Zhenyuan era,
 How a tame rhino froze to death and the Southerners all wept?
 That Jianzhong and Zhenyuan should differ so – that is what I lament
 That the elephant lived and the rhino died – what need to even mention it?⁷

Here we can see themes that resonate throughout the “New Ballads” – lavishly described exotic elements; the arbitrariness of imperial grace; and sympathy or pity for the foreign intruder in tension with a moral frame that understands the exotic as important only in so far as it affects the imperial center. This poem also hints at the kind of interest and interpretive challenge that Heian readers, who had never encountered a rhinoceros, elephant, or southern barbarian, might have found in the “New Ballads.” A quick sketch of its reception in Japan will further illustrate the issues at stake for a scholar compiling the first explanatory commentary on this text.

The “New Ballads” in Japan

When a collection of Bai Juyi’s poetry first arrived in Japan in 838AD, confiscated off a ship in Daizaifu harbor and sent to the capital to much rejoicing and acclaim,⁸ it quickly pervaded many areas of cultural life. The archetypal early Heian scholar-statesman Sugawara no Michizane and his literary circle used Bai Juyi as a model both for poetic diction and for fundamental aspects of poetic practice like self-commentary and topic selection;⁹ a trend that continued in most kanbun genres for

⁷ Throughout this chapter, citations of Bai Juyi’s complete works are based on *Bai Juyi ji jian jiao* (BJY), noting any significant differences from the early twelfth century Kanda manuscript (Ōta and Kobayashi 1982). I am also indebted to the following modern commentary editions: Gu 1979, Chen 1955, Takagi 1958, and Suzuki 1926.

⁸ The Dazaifu governor, Fujiwara no Okamori, received a promotion in rank at least nominally for acquiring the text (though Shizunaga 2010 (54-56) suggests that it was also a reward for his work overseeing preparations for the upcoming embassy to the Tang). Naturally, for Bai Juyi’s writings to prompt such enthusiasm, there must already have been an awareness of his reputation and possibly some of his poetry at court, and it has been argued, for example, that Emperor Saga’s poetry shows exposure to Bai Juyi’s work even before this first documented arrival of his poetry in textual form. The collection acquired by Okamori, which apparently included poetry and prose by Bai Juyi and his close colleague Yuan Zhen, was soon followed by a full copy of the *Complete Works of Bai Juyi* (白氏文集), copied at Suzhou’s Nanchan yuan temple by the student monk Egaku in 844. On the introduction of Bai Juyi’s poetry to Japan, see Shizunaga 2010 (for a recent, accessible treatment) and Ōta S. 1956.

⁹ See Gotō 1993 on Michizane’s self-commentary.

centuries to come. Several Heian poets had dreams about meeting Bai Juyi and wrote poems commemorating the experience. At the Heian court educated women as well as men turned to Bai Juyi's poetry as a shared basis for witty, allusive conversation and poetic exchanges. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, Bai Juyi had been adopted as a patron deity in ceremonial poetry gatherings, and arbiters of waka culture like Fujiwara Teika were advocating that aspiring waka poets read Bai Juyi's poetry before composing so as to achieve the appropriate state of mind.¹⁰ In countless ways both subtle and overt, Bai Juyi and his poetry form a thread running through much of Heian literary culture.

Although this unique literary role was by no means limited to the "New Ballads" (the influential *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū*), for example, contains one hundred thirty-six Bai Juyi couplets, but only eight drawn from the "New Ballads"), the latter did hold a particular kind of status. When Murasaki Shikibu (author of the *Tale of Genji*) tutored Empress Shōshi, the text chosen was specifically the "New Ballads." The earliest known reading marks for Bai Juyi's poetry are found in the Kanda manuscript *Complete Works* (*Kanda-bon Hakushi bunshū* 神田本白氏文集, early 12th century), which covers volumes three and four, precisely those containing the "New Ballads." The first full commentary on any of Bai Juyi's poems, the late Heian monk Shingyū's *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads*, takes these poems as its subject. And in the early thirteenth century, when Minamoto no Mitsuyuki created a set of three waka adaptations based on important kanbun primers, he chose the "New Ballads" as a subject along with two standard primers, the *Child's Treasury* and Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*. These examples suggest that the "New Ballads," with its dramatic situations and memorable characters, was often used as an introduction to Bai Juyi's poetry.

Shingyū's commentary on the "New Ballads," discussed further below, helps us imagine

¹⁰ ETG p475, MGS p504.

how he thought it should be presented to students. But before his time, how was the text studied? If it was being used as a kind of primer, why are there no commentaries on it from earlier in the Heian period, and what changed in Shingyū's day that inspired him to create the first full commentary discussing its language and allusions in detail?

The “New Ballads” and Commentary

From a certain perspective, commentary applied to introductory kanbun texts presents a paradox. On the one hand, commentary can have a canonizing function, even in the case of primers, and can function to tie a primer more firmly into the textual network of existing scholarship. Satō Michio has in fact argued that attached commentary is one of the key markers of a primer (and that commentarial activity was part of the *Chanting Collection's* gradual establishment as an important primer).¹¹ Of the most common kanbun primers, the *Thousand Character Classic*, the *Child's Treasury*, and Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions* all had commentary added at the time of their compilation or shortly thereafter, and were introduced and transmitted in Japan along with this explanatory commentary, despite being intended (and received) as approachable introductory texts.

On the other hand, the addition of commentary can be taken to show that the text in question is not (or is no longer) entirely accessible without explanatory commentary; that it is challenging or obscure. And conversely, a text may be transmitted without commentary because it is considered too well-known or too simple to need it. In the case of the didactic primer *Honored Grandfather's House Teachings* (J. *Taikō kakyō*, Ch. Taigong jiajiao 太公家教), for example, the lack of any extant commentary has been understood to reflect its simplistic nature as a rougher and less literary relative of the *Thousand Character Classic*.¹²

Following such a line of thought, it would be tempting to link the fact that Bai Juyi's poetry

¹¹ Satō M. 2006 and 2008.

¹² Yōgaku no kai 2009. For more on this text, see Ōta S. 1949 and Zhang Z. 1962, 48-50.

lacks any early commentarial treatment in China with his image as a poet who used simple, almost vulgar language. But in fact, commentary was not usually applied to contemporary poetry in the Tang – and practices of commentary on earlier poetic anthologies like the *Classic of Poetry* (詩經, Ch. Shijing, J. Shikyō) and the *Literary Selections* (文選, Ch. Wenxuan, J. Monzen) reflect specific circumstances of canonization that resulted in these texts being treated as legitimate topics of scholarly study rather than simply as poetry.¹³ In Japan, too, it is difficult to point out much earlier commentarial activity focused on kanshi anthologies (until the first annotations on the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*, discussed below). Bai Juyi's poems (including his “New Ballads”) were apparently learned, recited, and enthusiastically alluded to throughout the Heian period without any discrete commentarial treatment; Shingyū's commentary *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* (1172), discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter, is the first known full-fledged commentary on any part of Bai Juyi's collection in China or Japan.

However, particularly in the case of the “New Ballads,” the first faint gestures toward commentary on the “New Ballads” appeared early on, and these hints provide a good opportunity to think about the complex significance of commentary and its connections to other kinds of reception. The apparent paradox of commentary on kanbun primers is undermined by two main points: first, that commentary can act on the relationships between reader, text, and author in several potential ways – most notably the practical/educational function of making a text more accessible to the reader, and the scholarly/canonizing functions of establishing the author's scholarly skill and the worth of a text as target for such skill – and second, that issues of audience and transmission can dramatically expand or limit the role of commentary in education.

To begin with, although they are rather sparse and make no attempt at thorough lexical glossing, Bai Juyi's complete works do include occasional commentarial notes from the author; this is

¹³ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, as a poetry collection that quickly gained its own commentarial tradition, is also an exceptional case; the annotator Zhong Tingfang's preface directly links this fact to the collection's role as a primer.

particularly evident, in fact, in the “New Ballads” section, where he includes a brief explanation of the topic and its underlying message of social critique for each poem, as well as clarifying the occasional historical detail. These author’s notes are left out of some later editions, but early manuscripts do include them; Heian readers would have been accustomed to the idea of summarizing the main point of a “New Ballads” poem in a succinct phrase.

Any discussion of Bai Juyi’s reception in Japan must include the way that some of his poetry circulated as part of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū*), and so there are also early commentaries on the *Chanting Collection* to consider: commentarial notes attributed to Ōe no Masafusa (1041-1111), collected in *Gōchū* (江注) and in the *Gōdanshō*, and then Shingyū’s own *Private Commentary on the Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū shichū*, 和漢朗詠集私注, 1161), which he compiled a decade before his “New Ballads” commentary. However, there is generally little attention to the overall meaning and anecdotal interest of the poems in these commentaries; rather, both the selection of “New Ballads” couplets for the *Chanting Collection* and their subsequent treatment as part of the collection seems to frame them mainly as a source for elegant poetic vocabulary. Masafusa’s comments on the eight “New Ballads” couplets in the *Chanting Collection* are very minimal, usually only noting their source; and while there are signs of a looser, more anecdotal approach to commentary elsewhere in Shingyū’s *Private Commentary on the Chanting Collection*, his comments on the “New Ballads” couplets in the collection are brief and almost entirely vocabulary-related.¹⁴ The couplets selected for the *Chanting Collection* are, regardless, ones that fit into the anthology’s topical schema, which is a compromise between the highly streamlined cosmology of waka topics and the somewhat wider variety of common kanshi topics – the more eccentric fringes of the “New Ballads” world (rhinoceros and all) would have no place here. Still, the fact that a handful of couplets from the “New Ballads” (and a much larger

¹⁴ See RGC, WKRSC.

selection from Bai Juyi's other poetry) were widely familiar as part of the *Chanting Collection* – with a whole additional layer of reception that involved widespread recitation and chanting, calligraphic copying, and citation and discussion in social contexts – would have shaped their interpretation.

Another fundamental complication to the issue of commentary on Bai Juyi's poetry is the fact that from the first introduction of his *Collected Works* to Japan they were read using kundoku. The experience of reading and listening to these poems transposed into a specialized style of classical Japanese (or possibly even in the *monzenyomi* style of reading often used for poetry, with each line read once for sound in *onyomi* and once for sense using kundoku) would have inherently involved a set of interpretative decisions about how to gloss individual words and how to render phrases grammatically. Although it would broaden the definition of commentary to an unhelpful degree to call this reading method a form of commentary – it is after all fundamental to the reception of all continental texts in Japan – it could easily lead into a more overtly commentarial mindset.

Concrete traces of kundoku reading have survived in textual form; one of the most important early surviving manuscripts including kundoku reading marks is in fact an early twelfth-century text of volumes 3 and 4 of Bai Juyi's *Collected Works* – the volumes that include the “New Ballads.” This text, known as the Kanda manuscript,¹⁵ is a detailed and scholarly record of reading practice; its compiler, Fujiwara no Shigeaki, included several sets of reading marks, encoding reading traditions from the major scholarly houses (Ōe, Sugawara, Hino Fujiwara, and his own Shiki-ke Fujiwara) separated by color. Rather than simply representing a single vocalization of the text, it therefore also allows for comparison between different scholarly interpretations. There are also a handful of explicit commentarial notes (giving relevant classical sources) added to margins and the backs of pages. The Kanda manuscript of the “New Ballads” suggests a style of reading aloud that gave voice to specific interpretive traditions and incorporated lecture-type explanations, fulfilling some of the functions of

¹⁵ See Ōta and Kobayashi 1982. The Kanda manuscript was copied in 1107, and the reading marks added in 1113 (with some later additions). Fujiwara no Shigeaki (藤原茂明, 1093-?) was a notable scholar of his day, who may have been teaching at the Kangakuin academy when Shingyū was attending.

written commentary but in an ephemeral context limited to particular speakers and listeners.

Shingyū's pioneering written commentary owes something to the oral tradition of explanatory reading represented by the Kanda manuscript – and the next surviving “New Ballads” commentary after Shingyū's, a briefer work dating to 1257 that focuses mainly on assigning a didactic moral to each poem, is actually based on notes taken during a lecture.¹⁶

This suggests a plausible reason why there were no commentaries on the “New Ballads” before Shingyū; namely, the flourishing oral and aural reception of this text within the close-knit world of the Heian court. One may imagine that within socially circumscribed court circles, introductory teaching of the “New Ballads” could be left to individual tutoring, small lectures, and even informal hearsay – but in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods as the market for court “civilization” (including kanbun basics like the “New Ballads”) gradually became larger, more far-flung, more varied, and less predictable, encompassing monks and warriors from peripheral and non-aristocratic backgrounds, written commentaries took on a larger educational role (especially in cases where personal tutoring from a scholar was difficult for geographical, class-based, or logistic reasons). In the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, written commentaries based explicitly on lecture notes (*shōmono* 抄物) would firmly establish traces of oral teachings within the realm of written texts, using comparatively colloquial language to explain classics ranging from waka anthologies and kana-based prose to kanbun primers and the Confucian canon.

Alongside these practical demographic reasons for the rise of written commentary on the “New Ballads,” there are considerations related to the canonizing functions of commentary. Just as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the use of scholarly commentary to canonize wabun

¹⁶ This commentary is titled simply *New Ballads Commentary* (*Shin gafu chū*), and the author is unknown; it is held by the same temple (Shinpukuji) that houses a partial rough draft of Shingyū's commentary. See Ōta T. 1969 for detailed discussion and transcription. There seem to have been other early medieval “New Ballads” commentaries that are no longer extant but are cited in other medieval texts; there is no sign that any predated Shingyū's, however (see Gotō 1990).

(Japanese-style) texts like the *Tale of Genji*,¹⁷ I would argue that this period also saw the construction of an ‘introductory court kanbun’ canon; texts that had played important but informal roles as introductions to kanbun in the Heian court were now explicitly grouped together and rendered more widely accessible with explanatory commentary. As in the case of *Genji* reception, the task of marketing court culture to new audiences of warriors and commoners created an opportunity to define and/or create the Heian kanbun canon for the benefit of interested outsiders.

From the second half of the twelfth century onward, centers of political and cultural power away from the Heian court became increasingly hard to ignore, and the scholars who lived by their knowledge of court culture scrambled to find new audiences for that knowledge. In surviving sources from this period kanbun primers become more visible, moving from an often unmentioned foundational position in court literary culture to an active role as gateway texts for court culture. Part of this process involved an increase in the number and variety of commentarial treatments of kanbun primers, often from scholars with ties to warriors outside the capital; primers became both sources and targets of scholarly textual commentary, of the kind previously reserved for higher-status classics, while at the same time they were also remixed and creatively adapted into anecdotal collections and waka poetry. The following sections consider Shingyū’s commentary on the “New Ballads” as part of this pattern.

Shingyū and the “New Ballads”: Kanbun for a Wider Audience

The commentaries attributed to a monk known as Shingyū (信救, birth and death dates unknown; active c.1160-1205) in the turbulent final decades of the Heian period provide a vivid illustration of contemporary trends in kanbun and its study. His *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* (1172) is the first known full-fledged commentary on Bai Juyi’s “New Ballads” (or on any of Bai Juyi’s poetry, in Japan or the continent); it moves beyond lexical glossing to comment on the

¹⁷ See Shirane 2000.

theme and anecdotal associations of each poem, offering an unprecedented look at how he felt the “New Ballads” should be read.

Some confusion has resulted from the fact that this monk appears by several different names in his manuscripts and in historical records. Ōta Tsugio has shown that the names Shin’a, Shingyū, and Kakumyō (信阿, 信救, 覚明) were all used by the same person, a low-ranked aristocrat turned monk who in his youth had some scholarly training at the Kangakuin academy (the semi-private school of the Fujiwara house, closely associated with the imperial university complex) and developed close connections with warriors and warrior monks. His original name may have been Fujiwara no Michihiro (though the correct character spelling is unclear), and it seems that he initially took the religious name Shin’a but then began to go by Shingyū at some point during his years at Kōfukuji Temple in Nara. During his time at Kōfukuji, he compiled the *Private Commentary on the Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū shichū*, 1161), which breaks new ground in its detailed glosses and anecdotal commentary on the kanbun portions of the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*, as well as the “New Ballads” commentary discussed in this chapter. When he drew the anger of the political and military leader Taira no Kiyomori by writing an inflammatory letter on behalf of Kōfukuji, he changed his name to Kakumyō and fled to the eastern provinces. When the Genpei wars between Minamoto and Taira warrior clans broke out in earnest, he held the position of scribe to the powerful general Kiso Yoshinaka for several years until Yoshinaka’s death.¹⁸

Shingyū makes a striking cameo in the *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) in his role as Kiso Yoshinaka’s scribe; the scene varies slightly between textual lineages, but Helen McCullough’s translation gives a representative impression (she uses the alternate reading Kakumei for Shingyū’s alias):

¹⁸ An analysis of primary sources concerning Shingyū can be found in Ōta T. 1967, and an accessible condensed biography in Niki 2002. In his discussion of Shingyū’s *Chanting Collection* commentary, Miki Masahiro (1995, 231-232) situates Shingyū as part of a new generation of scholars who found an audience for their talents in the Buddhist establishment rather than through increasingly limited university channels, and points out that his time at the Kangakuin probably influenced his placement at the Fujiwara family temple Kōfukuji (on the close connections between the two institutions, see Momo 1947).

Kakumei was attired in a dark blue *hitatare* and a suit of armor with black leather lacing. At his waist, he wore a sword with a black lacquered hilt and scabbard; on his back, there rode a quiver containing twenty-four arrows fledged with black hawk's-wing feathers. His lacquered, rattan-wrapped bow was at his side; his helmet hung from his shoulder-cord. He took a small inkstone and some paper from his quiver, knelt in front of Lord Kiso, and began to write the petition. What a splendid combination of the civil and martial arts he seemed! This Kakumei, the son of a Confucian scholar-family, had formerly served at the Kangakuin, where he had been known as Chamberlain Michihiro. Then he had become a monk, with the name Saijōbō Shingyū. He had been a frequent visitor at the southern capital, and it was he whom the Nara monks had commissioned to reply for them when letters were sent to Mount Hiei and Nara after Prince Takakura's arrival at the Onjōji. Kiyomori had taken violent exception to the sentence, "The Novice Kiyomori is the dregs of the Taira clan, the scum of the warrior class." "How dare that rascally Shingyū call me the dregs of the Taira clan and the scum of the warrior class? Seize him and put him to death," he had said. So Shingyū had fled from the southern capital to the northern provinces, become Lord Kiso's scribe, and taken Taifubō Kakumei as his name.¹⁹

Several Heike variant texts give expanded versions of this passage: the *Record of the Glory and Decline of the Minamoto and Taira* (源平盛衰記 *Genpei seisūiki*) contains an even more dramatic account of Shingyū's flight from the capital after the Prince Mochihito incident, in which he paints himself with lacquer and pretends to be a leper (acting out a strategy familiar from kanbun texts like the biography of assassin Yurang in the *Records of the Historian*) so as not to be recognized on the road.²⁰

Regarding Shingyū's later life, the shogunal chronicle *Mirror of the East* (*Azuma kagami*) mentions him presiding at a Buddhist service attended by the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo and his wife Masako in Kamakura in 1190, but also notes that in 1195 the shogunate issued an order that he stay confined to Hakone (it is unclear what he may have done to offend in the meantime).²¹ Although

¹⁹ McCullough 1988, 229. Her translation is based on the Nihon koten bungaku taikai edition of *The Tale of the Heike* (base text: Ryūtan Daigaku manuscript in the Kakuichi variant line). Elizabeth Oyler (2006, 75-80) has discussed this scene in detail, and points out that Kakumei emerges as the possessor of important knowledge, a cultural guide and interpreter for Yoshinaka. Some versions of the story include the text of the petition he offers to Hachiman in this scene, as well as the letter he wrote at the time of Prince Mochihito's uprising – both consistent with orthodox, university-trained modes of kanbun literacy.

²⁰ GPSS p158-159.

²¹ AZK p384, 550.

it could simply be an attempt to claim direct authority for the text, the monk who copied the Daigoji manuscript “New Ballads” commentary says in its colophon that he met Shingyū personally on Shigi Mountain near Nara in 1205, suggesting that Shingyū may have journeyed back to the capital area and visited his old temple before his death.

This eventful biography provides context for Shingyū’s commentarial work and its audience; his sources and scholarly approach reflect his diverse contacts among university scholars, monks, and warriors and his role as a writer-for-hire for clerical and martial figures without kanbun training. The powerful temples in the neighborhood of the capital on Nara and Mount Hiei were struggling at this time with internal class tensions between monks who were educated former aristocrats and those from lowlier origins;²² Shingyū, however, seems to have had connections on both sides of this divide, and to have exercised his skills in scholarly writing on commission from various sources. On the one hand, his earlier commentary on the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* was (according to one colophon) compiled at the behest of an unnamed powerful political figure who had taken orders²³, presumably for the benefit of that person’s children or less-educated disciples. On the other hand, when Shingyū wrote the critical letter that brought about his exile, it was on behalf of the low-ranking militant monks of Kōfukuji. It is possible that as with the *Chanting Collection* commentary a powerful patron connected to Kōfukuji suggested the “New Ballads” project, but it is equally easy to imagine Shingyū selecting the topic independently – perhaps inspired by his success with commentary on the *Chanting Collection* and confident of his ability to find an audience for his work among less-educated warrior monks of his acquaintance. Certainly the colophon to the Daigoji manuscript of his “New Ballads” commentary tells of considerable effort and enthusiasm on the part of a low-ranking monk at Daigoji, who (if we can believe his story) hastily copied out the first half of

²² See Adolphson 2000 (158) on the distinction at Kōfukuji and Enryakuji around this time between “scholar-monks” and “worker-monks.”

²³ The honorific used for this person, *zenmon* (禪門), is the same one commonly used for (e.g.) Taira no Kiyomori. See Miki 1995, 225.

the commentary from Shingyū's own manuscript when they met by chance, kept the text safe for almost twenty-five years until he finally managed to acquire a complete manuscript, then finally collated and added reading marks to the entire text.

Shingyū's style of commentary owes much to the kind of orthodox scholarship he would have encountered at the Kangakuin, but he also sought to appeal to wider audiences in his use of primer-like and esoteric sources, his addition of anecdotal retellings and interpretive explanations, and most obviously in his student-friendly choice of kanbun primers for commentarial treatment. I will now turn to two specific examples from Shingyū's "New Ballads" commentary – one that involves the challenges of explaining an eccentric poetic topic, and one that foregrounds the historical events behind the "New Ballads" and introduces a startling retelling of the story of Yang Guifei – in order to explore what his commentary reveals about his reading of the "New Ballads" and how this reading fits into shifting trends in kanbun education and scholarship at the close of the Heian period.

The Trained Rhinoceros: Exotic Topics in Shingyū's Commentary

The "New Ballads" poem "Trained Rhinoceros" (translated above) presents an obvious challenge for a commentator seeking to render it accessible to a wide assortment of late Heian readers. Though rhinoceros horn was sometimes imported for decorative and medicinal use,²⁴ a live rhinoceros was not seen in Japan from the advent of written records until modern times; and while this is certainly not an automatic barrier to literary attention (some unfamiliar creatures were nevertheless richly defined as literary topoi, as for that matter were mythical ones like the phoenix and kirin) the rhinoceros also has a limited profile in Tang literature. Bai Juyi himself only uses the word "rhinoceros" (犀)²⁵ a handful of times elsewhere in his complete works, almost always

²⁴ It was particularly prized for its alleged power to neutralize poison. There are several rhinoceros-horn bowls in the Shōsōin collection, with holes in the bottom made by shaving away powder for medicine. See Asahina 1955 (70-71 and 111-113).

²⁵ There is another, rarer classical name for a rhinoceros-like animal, 兕 (Ch. si); by the English term "rhinoceros" I mean 犀 (Ch. xi) unless stated otherwise.

referring to official regalia made from its horn rather than the living animal. The topical encyclopedia *Topical Collection of Literature* (Ch. *Yiwen leiju* 芸文類聚, 624CE) does have a brief section on the rhinoceros, but there is no related entry in the more compact and introductory topical encyclopedia that Shingyū cites frequently, the *Record for Beginning Study* (Ch. *Chuxue ji*, 初學記, 727CE), and Li Jiao does not include a rhinoceros poem in the bestiary section of his *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*. As Edward Schafer puts it, “as an exotic image the rhinoceros was unimportant... It was its horns and their magic virtue which had a significant role in the history of exoticism”²⁶. “Trained Rhinoceros,” in which the animal itself becomes a living embodiment of the exotic south and is described vividly in its death throes, stands as a rare exception to this trend.

How does Shingyū approach the task of explaining this exotic and mysterious animal in his commentary on Bai Juyi’s “Trained Rhinoceros”? As is clear from the following portion of his commentary, his efforts are centered on the two rather cryptic epithets “heaven-communing rhino” (通天犀) and “chicken-startling rhino” (駭雞犀), which figure prominently in the opening lines:

通天犀者、抱朴子云、角上有一百縷且出上天至神驗云々 軀貌駭人者、可勘之、角駭雞者、師說云、昔有人以犀角死於野中、有行人見烏鳶飛翔其上不敢下、往者疑犀爲靈物、取其角使群鳥競集、大霧重露之時置庭中終不沾濡也、南人或名通天犀、或爲駭雞、犀有三角、一在額上、一在鼻上、一在頂上、即只食角²⁷

“Heaven-communing rhino”: Baopuzi says, “On its horn are a hundred striations, which manifestly reach up into the heavens to bring supernatural events.”

“Its appearance startles men”: This requires further thought.²⁸

²⁶ Schafer 1963, 84.

²⁷ SGR p321. My citations are based on Ōta Tsugio’s transcription of the Daigoji manuscript; I have not been able to reproduce the reading marks here, but please see the appendix for a full transcription. There are two surviving texts of this commentary: the Daigoji manuscript, which covers all fifty poems in the New Ballads and is titled *Hakushi shin gafu ryakui* (a Nanbokuchō/early Muromachi period copy of a text copied out in 1230, allegedly based on a copy of the first half of a text Shingyū was carrying with him in 1205 edited together with an unspecified second complete text), and the Shinpukuji manuscript (copied in 1230), which seems to represent an earlier stage in the editing process and for which only the sections on poems 44-50 remain.

²⁸ Although the Daigoji manuscript is the more polished draft out of the two surviving manuscripts, there are still quite a few places where Shingyū has left himself notes amounting to “look this up later.” It is not always clear why these particular points are singled out as difficult – many, like this example, are not matters of obscure vocabulary or source material but rather underlying meaning and context. Why did Shingyū feel he couldn’t satisfactorily account

“Its horn startles chickens”: My teacher’s explanation says, “Once there was a man who died in the wilderness carrying a rhinoceros horn. A traveler passed by and saw that crows and kites were fluttering above the body but did not dare descend; suspecting that the rhinoceros was a creature of supernatural power, he took the horn, which made the birds rush to gather there. At a time of thick fog and heavy dew, if one places a rhinoceros horn out in the garden, afterward it will not be damp. The southerners sometimes call it “heaven-communing rhinoceros” and sometimes “chicken-startling rhinoceros.” The rhinoceros has three horns: one is on its forehead, one is on its nose, and one is on the crown of its head. This alone is the eating-horn.²⁹

If we compare the explanations Shingyū selects to those he would have seen in familiar reference works, his approach seems consciously eclectic and inclined to privilege memorable anecdotal drama. *Baopuzi* (*Master of Embracing Simplicity* 抱朴子, a Daoist treatise by Ge Hong (284-363CE)) is the standard authority cited in continental encyclopedias and commentaries to account for both “heaven-communing” and “chicken-startling,” but versions of the text seem to have varied considerably; Shingyū’s quotation most closely resembles the version cited in the Tang *New Revised Materia-Medica* (*Xinxiu bencao*, 新修本草), which was widely used in Heian Japan as a medical textbook.³⁰ But instead of continuing with *Baopuzi*’s more prosaic explanation for the startled chickens, he turns to a lengthy quotation from a former teacher of his that outlines the supernatural virtues of rhinoceros horn, including a slightly spooky anecdote about its power to keep

for the startling appearance of the rhinoceros? Perhaps he was having trouble imagining it based on the descriptions available? Or did he simply suspect there might be some specific story being alluded to – perhaps an anecdote about a famous person startled by a rhino – and intend to track it down at a later date?

²⁹ 角 is marked as the object (即只食角). The reading marks (of unclear provenance, copied from an unspecified earlier manuscript at Daigoji in 1229) here seem to take 食角 as a verb-object construction (“thus [one] only eats this horn”), rather than following the original meaning in Guo Pu’s *Erya* commentary (see below). This is difficult to justify and may be a simple copying error, or reflect a line of thought concerning the use of ground rhinoceros horn as medicine.

³⁰ XXBC p91-92. For background on this text and its use as a textbook, see Sugimoto 2011(p17) and Kōno 2010, 171-195. The relevant passage in the Qing printed edition of *Baopuzi* usually used as a base for modern critical editions says that the rhino’s horn has a red stripe (BPZ), but the *Baopuzi* citation in the *Topical Collection of Literature* uses “a hundred striations,” corrected to “white striation” in later texts (YWLJ p1644), and the *New Revised Materia-Medica* goes with “hundred.” The issue of “white” 白 vs. “hundred” 百 could have resulted from a very simple copying error at some stage, and does not really narrow down Shingyū’s source (he might easily have seen an older manuscript of *Baopuzi* or *Topical Collection of Literature* that read “hundred,” or have been citing from *New Revised Materia-Medica*).

birds away from a corpse.

This is a relatively obscure story, not cited in the rhinoceros section of the Tang encyclopedia *Topical Collection of Literature* (*Yiwen leiju*) or in any earlier commentaries that mention the “chicken-startling rhinoceros”; it may have originated with a text called *Account of Strange Things in the South* (*Nanzhou yiwu zhi* 南州異物志), which does not survive today but is cited in the “Rhinoceros” section of the Song topical encyclopedia *Imperially-reviewed Collection of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping yulan* 太平御覽):

If you place [a rhinoceros horn] in a wild meadow, birds of the air and beasts of the land that pass by it will all be startled. Once [I] was travelling through the wilderness and saw a dead man; kites and [birds] were trying to approach and peck at him, but each time they reached his head they would suddenly startle and fly away. I thought it strange, and looked more closely; on his head he was wearing a rhinoceros-horn hair-ornament.³¹

This story still differs in many points from that told by Shingyū’s teacher, however, and once again *New Revised Materia-Medica* provides a closer match. This compendium actually incorporates successive layers of commentarial scholarship; it consists of Tang scholar Su Jing’s annotated expansion of Liang scholar Tao Hongjing’s earlier materia-medica text (titled *Bencaojing jizhu* 本草經集注, *Collected Commentary on the Classic of Materia-Medica*), which is itself a commentary on the earlier compendium *Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia-Medica* (*Shennong bencaojing* 神農本草經). In this case, the earlier part of the entry on rhinoceros horn, corresponding to Tao Hongjing’s commentary, contains the story of the corpse in the wilderness, while Su Jing’s additional commentary goes on to question the plausibility of the anecdote:

Once there was [a man who had] a rhinoceros-horn for an official ornament; he died in the wilderness. A traveler saw [birds] flying above him, but not descending to peck at him. Suspecting that the rhinoceros horn was a supernatural object, he picked it up, and the flocks

³¹ TPYL. Kōzen 1995 has a helpful entry on the lost *Account of Strange Things in the South*.

of birds rushed to gather. It is also said that the horn of the heaven-communing rhinoceros will not become damp from the night dew; by this it can be known. ...

Commentary:...This is an error. The main point here is the official regalia. The person in question was wearing an official ornament, and so must have been someone of high rank. He would have had a retinue accompanying him; how could he have been found dead in the wilderness?³²

There are a few differences in wording, particularly unsurprising if Shingyū was repeating something a teacher once said rather than citing directly from the medical text, but it is clearly the same anecdote. The fact that the story is here being retold without any reference to Su Jing's scholarly doubts is also worth noting, though it is hard to say whether it reflects how the *New Revised Materia-Medica* was read, the general tendency of engaging anecdotes to spread without reference to their initial contexts, or the possibility that Shingyū's teacher actually picked up this story from an earlier medical compendium (perhaps Tao Hongjing's, which had previously circulated in Japan without additional commentary).

The description of the rhinoceros' three horns in the final part of the "teacher's explanation," on the other hand, seems to be based on the standard commentary to the ancient Chinese glossary *Erya*, an orthodox source that was on the Heian university curriculum and plays a prominent role in topical encyclopedias. In Guo Pu's (276-324CE) commentary on the character 犀 ("rhinoceros"), he states, "The rhinoceros resembles a water buffalo. It has three horns; one at the crown of its head, one on its forehead, and one on its nose. The one on its nose is the eating-horn."³³ Shingyū's "teacher's explanation" is slightly garbled compared to its apparent source material, either due to the teacher's initial presentation or to Shingyū's memory, but it represents a selection of information assembled

³² XXBC p91-92. 昔者有____犀爲当羴、死於野中、有行人見____飛翔其上、不瞰下往者。疑犀爲異、抽取便群鳥競集。又云、通天犀、夜露不濡。以此知之。...謹案...謬矣。此心爲劍響耳。此人冠羴、則是貴人。當有左右、何得野死。I have filled in the missing characters based on a partial summary given later in Su Jing's comments. The most striking difference between this and the story told by Shingyū's teacher is perhaps that the latter avoids the obscure and non-essential character 羴.

³³ 兕似牛，犀似豕。郭璞注云：兕一角，色青，重千斤。犀似水牛，三角，一在頂上，一在額上，一在鼻上。鼻上者食角也（又名奴角），小而不橢。亦有一角者。(EY)

from the far corners of university-approved sources with an eye toward useful, distinctive, and memorable material.

Given how rarely the rhinoceros appears in other literature, we may imagine that Shingyū encountered this explanation in his long-ago study of this very poem; it gives us an intriguing (if probably distorted) glimpse into an introductory lecture on the “New Ballads” at the Kangakuin academy, with a senior Fujiwara scholar telling illustrative anecdotes about the more difficult phrases for beginning students’ benefit. Shingyū must have had access to the simpler *Baopuzi* explanation for the startled chickens – it occurs in the same sentence directly after the explanation he cites for “heaven-communing rhino,” both in the text of *Baopuzi* and in other potential mediating sources he might have been citing from, like the *Topical Collection of Literature* and *New Revised Materia-Medica*. The *Baopuzi* explanation is also a good deal more obviously relevant; although the “teacher’s explanation” provides a selection of general information on the properties of rhinoceros horn, it says nothing directly about startled chickens, only carrion birds. But Shingyū, perhaps conceptualizing the problem in terms of an overall need to collect useful information on the unfamiliar rhinoceros and its horn rather than to explain any specific epithet, seems determined to make use of the privileged non-textual knowledge he received from his teacher. In a small way, this example suggests the encyclopedia-like premodern role of commentaries (particularly introductory-level ones) as organized repositories of knowledge and storytelling, places to amass any useful or interesting information somewhat related to the topic.

Shingyū’s commentary on this poem also illustrates his relationship with the earlier tradition of “New Ballads” interpretation represented by the notes and reading marks compiled by Fujiwara no Shigeaki in the Kanda manuscript (c.1113CE). The Kanda manuscript is sparing with explanatory notes overall, yet it includes two notes about the rhinoceros and its “heaven-communing” and “chicken-startling” aspects, clearly identifying this as a point requiring special clarification and presaging the emphasis of Shingyū’s commentary. But the sources cited are

quite different from Shingyū's, with nothing like his informal, anecdotal "teacher's explanation."³⁴

Given the possibility that Shigeaki was one of Shingyū's lecturers at the Kangakuin, and thus a candidate for the original source of his "teacher's explanation," the difference is striking – but ultimately may say more about differences in genre expectations and approaches to commentary than about scholarly sources. A lecture from a text like the Kanda manuscript certainly might have been accompanied by less formal "teacher's explanation"-type asides as well, but these were not considered worth committing to permanent written form.

Shingyū, however, was writing a subtly different kind of commentary – one that relied more openly on primers, introductory sources, and informally reported anecdotes, and was geared to an audience largely untutored in literature. Writing in this context and for this kind of audience, Shingyū's lack of high university qualifications (having left the Kangakuin academy without "graduating" to the next stage in academia) still represented a marketable kind of knowledge about capital literary culture. Framing his comments on the rhinoceros in this way allowed him to emphasize his own access to esoteric information, and to work in a dramatic anecdote about a corpse in the wilderness that was more likely to make the miraculous properties of rhinoceros horn stick in the memory for beginning students. The traits displayed here – a broadly inclusive approach to commentary and a tendency to seek out the most vivid, memorable, and/or esoteric anecdotes – are recurring patterns throughout *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads*.

Shingyū and the Death of Yang Guifei

While earlier scholarship on the "New Ballads" (including related portions of Shingyū's own earlier commentary on the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*) tends to concern itself primarily with poetic vocabulary, in *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* Shingyū takes a

³⁴ Ōta and Kobayashi 1982, 41-44. The commentator mainly cites an esoteric commentary on the *Classic of Filial Piety*, *Xiao jing yuan shen qi* 孝經援神契.

particular interest in the history behind the poems, filling in the wealth of historical allusions with a startling array of esoteric texts, familiar kanbun primers, stories attributed to his teachers at the academy, and idiosyncratic paraphrases of orthodox histories. In a sense, he seems to read the “New Ballads” as a kind of anecdotal history, full of local detail – or as the framework for a collection of historical anecdotes. This is particularly clear as he explains references to the ill-fated Yang Guifei (楊貴妃, “High Consort” or “Precious Consort” Yang) and the ambitious general An Lushan.

Bai Juyi’s poetry is often haunted by the shadow of the An Lushan Rebellion, a prolonged and traumatic disruption to the social and political order that ended less than a decade before his birth. In 755CE, the frontier general An Lushan, who had been a favorite of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong and his famously beautiful, doted-upon concubine Yang Guifei, took advantage of general resentment against the extravagance and bad management of the Yang clan and the court and rebelled, prompted in part by friction with Yang Guifei’s kinsman, Prime Minister Yang Guozhong. During the emperor’s flight from the capital, his own troops (underfed and eager to cast blame) turned on the Yangs, and both Guozhong and Yang Guifei were killed. Emperor Xuanzong made it safely to exile in Shu (present-day Sichuan), but while An Lushan himself died in 757, the rebellion dragged on until finally decisive victories were achieved by forces under Xuanzong’s grandson the future Emperor Daizong in 763.

Yang Guifei’s seductive beauty and violent fate quickly became popular poetic themes, but the single most influential depiction of her life, death, and afterlife is Bai Juyi’s ‘Song of Lasting Sorrow’ (Ch. Chang hen ge, J. Chōgonka, 長恨歌). The poem itself focuses on the aftermath of her death, covering the tragic moment itself with the image of her delicate hair ornaments scattered on the ground; but the prose ‘Story of the Song of Lasting Sorrow’ by Chen Hong, which is included alongside Bai Juyi’s poem in his complete works, gives a more concrete account that was often read together with the poem. After describing Yang Guifei’s beauty and cherished position at court, it recounts the beginning of the rebellion:

At the close of the Tianbao era, her elder kinsman Guozhong stole the rank of Prime Minister and made a mishandled mockery of state affairs. An Lushan thereupon led troops towards the palace, on the pretext of attacking the Yang clan; Tong Pass did not hold against him. The imperial cicada-wing banner moved in procession to the south, out onto the Xianyang road, and reached Mawei (Horse Crag) Station. There the Six Armies milled about, gripping their spears but not advancing. The emperor's close advisors prostrated themselves before his horse, begging him to execute the hated minister in apology to the realm. Guozhong offered up his minister's hatstrings and submitted to judgment, and died near the road. The feelings of the emperor's attendants were not appeased; when the emperor inquired of them, those who then dared speak further entreated him to use Guifei to stop the anger of all in the realm. His Majesty realized it could not be avoided, but could not bear to see her death. He turned back one sleeve to cover his face and had them drag her away. In a panic, she ran here and there, until finally she met her end, strangled with a lowly official's sash.³⁵

Orthodox accounts of these events, for example in the dynasties histories of the Tang (both Old and New), employ starker language and give some added details³⁶, but do not conflict in terms of overall plot. Roughly speaking, then, this story of Yang Guifei's death — in which she dies to placate the emperor's own troops — is the main one that would inform the imaginations of readers in Japan throughout the Heian and medieval periods. Going against such a familiar basic narrative seems like a bold step; but this is in fact what Shingyū does in his “New Ballads” commentary.

The events of the An Lushan Rebellion form a tacit subtext in many parts of the “New Ballads,” but poem eight, titled “Dervish Girl” (胡旋女), brings them closer to the surface; it describes the erotic western barbarian dances favored by Xuanzong's court and links them to the decline in court morals represented by Yang Guifei and An Lushan.

³⁵天寶末、兄國忠盜丞相位、愚弄國柄。及安祿山引兵向闕、以討楊氏為辭。潼關不守、翠華南幸、出咸陽、道次馬嵬亭、六軍徘徊、持戟不進、從官郎吏伏上馬前、請誅錯以謝天下。國忠奉釐纓盤水、死於道周。左右之意未快。上問之、當時敢言者請以貴妃塞天下怒。上知不免、而不忍見其死、反袂掩面、使牽之而去、蒼黃展轉、竟就絕於尺組之下。BJY v2 p656.

³⁶ TS v51 p26, XTS v76 p36.

“Dervish Girl”

Dervish girl, dervish girl —
 Her heart hears the strings, her hands hear the drum
 Strings and drum in one voice; two sleeves rise
 A dance like flurrying snow that flies and flutters — like spinning tumbleweed
 Whirling to the left, spinning to the right, no thought of tiring
 A thousand twirls — ten thousand turns — never a moment’s pause
 Among all sorts of things in the mortal realm, there is nothing like it
 The wheels of a speeding carriage look leisurely; a whirlwind now seems slow
 The music stops; again she bows, and pays respects to the emperor
 And seeing this, the emperor parts his teeth in a smile.
 Dervish girl, from far Kangju³⁷
 In vain you have struggled your way east, more than ten thousand leagues.
 In the central plains we already have some who can dervish-dance;
 They contest their rare skills, strive with high ability — you cannot compare.
 In the waning years of Tianbao, the fashions began to change
 Official and concubine — all the court were learning how to spin.
 Within the palace was Taizhen; outside was Lushan³⁸
 Those two, it’s most often said, were skilled at dervish dancing.
 In the pear-blossom garden, she won official titles and was made consort;
 Beneath golden-rooster blinds, he was cared for like a son.
 Lushan’s dervish dance confused our lord’s eyes;
 When his troops crossed the Yellow River, still our lord thought he hadn’t rebelled.
 Guifei’s dervish dance confused our lord’s heart;
 When she was dead and abandoned at Mawei, his longing only grew deeper.
 Since then, the earth’s axis and heaven’s poles³⁹ have spun
 And fifty years later, still no restriction is imposed.
 Dervish girl, don’t dance in vain;
 But sing this song again and again, to enlighten⁴⁰ our wise lord.⁴¹

“Dervish dance” is an imperfect translation, but is intended to convey some sense of
 exoticness as well as the image of dizzying spins; the kind of dance the Tang called *huxuan* (胡旋)
 was a glamorous import from Central Asia, popular in Xuanzong’s court.⁴² This poem shows a

³⁷ Sogdia

³⁸ Yang Guifei (whose religious name was Taizhen) and An Lushan.

³⁹ Kanda MS has “heaven’s poles and earth’s axis” (天維地軸).

⁴⁰ Instead of 悟 (enlighten), Kanda MS has 寤 (awaken/enlighten), with readings サトセ、サトラシメヨ).

⁴¹ BJJ p161-162. I have footnoted minor differences from the Kanda manuscript text, which is close to contemporary with Shingyū and perhaps similar to a text he would have seen (see Ōta and Kobayashi 1982, 23-5 and 18-9).

⁴² See Schafer 1963 (56), Ishida 1932 (25-43), and Xiang 1957 (68-69). Naka Junko (2008) discusses the meaning attached to formerly-exotic dances like the *huxuan* in Bai Juyi’s day, and argues that by his time they were strongly associated with nostalgia directed specifically toward Xuanzong’s court.

deep concern (seen often throughout the “New Ballads”) with the connection between music and morals, warning against the corrupting influence of cultural patterns copied from the Western barbarians. As is often true in the “New Ballads,” comparatively little vitriol is aimed at the barbarians themselves; the real threat is not the western dancing girl (who seems an almost sympathetic figure, and has the chance to become the poet’s ally by the final line), but the sycophantic court insiders who have adopted foreign ways in their selfish pursuit of favor – of which Yang Guifei and An Lushan are the most successful.

Shingyū’s commentary on this poem in *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* reveals his fascination with the drama of Yang Guifei’s death; it begins with attention to the poem’s themes and vocabulary, but becomes increasingly focused on collecting anecdotes about Yang Guifei and An Lushan.

胡旋女者、唐玄宗天宝末歲、康居国献伎女、謂之胡旋女、凡人皆有情、争見美色無愛心、不如、以如此伎女不可令近帝者之前也

“Dervish girl”: In the reign of Tang Xuanzong, late in the Tianbao era, the country of Kangju presented a dancing girl known as a ‘dervish girl’. Everyone developed feelings for her and competed to glimpse her beauty, but without compassion; better not to permit dancing girls like this to approach before the emperor.⁴³

Initially, Shingyū does not mention Yang Guifei or moral corruption at court, focusing only on the figure of dancing girl. He introduces the idea that everyone became infatuated with the dancing girl to the detriment of court morals, which is not directly found in the poem.

廻雪者、文選注云、舞有廻雪之曲

“Flurrying snow”: The *Literary Selections* commentary says, “As for dances, there is a piece of music called ‘flurrying snow’.

⁴³SGR p316.

This reflects the classic commentarial strategy of using a commentary on the *Literary Selections* (文選 Wenxuan; the Li Shan commentary (李善注) was most popular throughout the Heian period, but Shingyū sometimes cites others as well) as a kind of encyclopedia, to fill in details of cultural background and setting.⁴⁴

轉蓬者、曲名也、啓齒者、莊子雜篇徐無鬼曰、奉事大有功者不可為教、而吾君与未嘗啓齒也、成英疏曰、我君未嘗開口微笑 中原自有胡旋者、中原者長安也 楊貴妃安祿山皆侍宮内俱誇帝寵、玄宗愛之無所悟、故指此二人曰中原自胡旋者也

“Spinning tumbleweed”: The name of a piece of music.

“Parts his teeth”: In Zhuangzi’s Miscellaneous Chapters, Xu Wugui says, “I have offered counsel to great effect, too many times to tell, but my lord has not yet once parted his teeth at it.” Cheng Ying’s gloss says, “My lord has not yet once opened his mouth in a smile.”

“In the central plains we already had some who could dervish-dance”: “The central plains” means Chang’an. High Consort Yang and An Lushan both served within the palace, and both took pride in the emperor’s favor; Xuanzong loved them and never realized the truth. For this reason these two are referred to as “the dervish dancers of the central plains.”

At this point it does seem that Shingyū realizes the broader moral implications of “dervish dancing”; his explanation of why Yang Guifei and An Lushan are “dervish dancers of the central plains” mentions nothing about them physically performing the dance, but only the fact that they flattered and deceived the emperor.

中有大真者、楊貴妃馬嵬城之口鬼物也、化為美女、天子不識大以愛之、楊貴妃遊馬嵬城安祿山誅貴妃、玄宗戀慕之深三載一意、從蜀道士來曰、我得仙術欲求貴妃、玄宗大悅令方士求之、方士上昇碧落下至黃泉不得之、海上有一山、謂之玉妃大真院、方士到稱唐天子使者、明朝出謁、故曰中有大真也⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Araki 2009 mentions this line in Shingyū’s commentary, but does not identify what the *Literary Selections* reference might be, noting only that in one case the Li Shan *Literary Selections* commentary cites lines from “Luoshen fu” (Rhyme-prose on the Luo River Goddess) and “Wu fu” (Rhyme-prose on Dance) that include the phrase “flurrying snow.” These two sources shaped the poetic usage of this phrase, and Bai Juyi’s use in this poem hints at both.

⁴⁵ SGR p317. The □ indicates a lacuna in the text.

“Within the palace there was Taizhen”: Yang Guifei was a []⁴⁶ spirit of Mawei Fort, who transformed into a beautiful woman, but the emperor did not realize and greatly cherished her. When Yang Guifei traveled to Mawei Fort, An Lushan executed her. Xuanzong’s love and longing for her were deep, and for three years he had but a single thought. From Shu, a mystic came and said, “I have learned magics of the immortals, and will go in search of the High Consort.” Xuanzong was overjoyed and ordered the wizard to seek her out. The wizard ascended into the jade skies above and descended to the Yellow Springs below, but could not find her. But across the sea was a mountain, known as the Taizhen Cloister of the Precious Consort; when the wizard reached it and declared himself a messenger of the Tang emperor, on the following morning she came out and received him. For this reason it says, “Within the palace, there was Taizhen.”

Here Shingyū’s explanation for the name Taizhen is precisely backwards. According to the *History of the Tang*, the name Taizhen was bestowed on Yang Guifei when she entered the palace; her cloister on the immortal isle is named after her, not vice versa. This probably reflects the impact of the “Song of Lasting Sorrow” on Shingyū’s imagination; in the poem, the name Taizhen appears only as the name of her cloister in the immortal realm. In this gloss, muddled in with a curious and seemingly contradictory image of Yang Guifei as supernatural creature, we also have the first fragments of her death scene, which are discussed below.

外祿山者、安祿山者白廷翰唐蒙求云、楊貴妃之養子也、養在宮內、身肥色白不得出宮、楊貴妃兄國忠居丞相之位政不平也、天下怨哭、天寶十四年、安祿山乘天下之心誅貴妃國忠等、故曰外祿山也 梨華園中冊作妃者、梨園有宮、天子遊覽之地也、以梨園宮為貴妃之号、日本如謂上東門院女院、金鷄障下養為兒者、安祿山被養宮內不垂堂、后妃居下立画鷄之障子云々 唐蒙求注云、安祿山為楊貴妃養子侍宴先拜母、上問其故、對曰、蕃俗先母而後父⁴⁷

“Outside, there was Lushan” refers to An Lushan, about whom Bai Tinghan’s *Tang Child’s Treasury* says: he was Yang Guifei’s adopted child. She raised him within the palace; his body was fat, his color pale, and he could not leave the palace. Yang Guifei’s older brother Guozhong held the position of Prime Minister, but matters of government were not in good order. Throughout the realm, all lamented and wept. In the fourteenth year of the Tianbao era, An Lushan followed the sentiments of the realm and executed Guifei and Guozhong, and so on. For this reason, it says “Outside, there was Lushan.”

“In the pear-blossom garden, she won official titles and was made consort”: In the

⁴⁶ Lacuna in the manuscript.

⁴⁷ SGR p317. Part of this passage is quoted with reading marks in the Appendix.

pear-blossom garden, there is a palace, a place where the emperor enjoys elegant amusements. Here “Pear-Blossom Garden” is used as the High Consort’s title, just as in Japan one says “Cloistered Empress Shōtōmon-in.”⁴⁸

“Beneath golden-rooster blinds, he was cared for like a son”: An Lushan was raised inside the palace, without going into the ceremonial hall. Below the quarters of the empress and consort, there stands a screen with a picture of a rooster (it is said). The *Tang Child’s Treasury* commentary says: An Lushan was Yang Guifei’s adopted son; when attending at a banquet, he first paid respects to his “mother.” His Majesty asked why, and he replied saying: “The custom among barbarians⁴⁹ is ‘mother first and father last.’”

There are multiple retellings of the Yang Guifei story in play here. First, as an extended gloss on the name ‘Taizhen’ for Yang Guifei, comes a retelling that starts unexpectedly by claiming that Yang Guifei was a supernatural spirit in the form of a beautiful woman, who led Xuanzong astray and was executed by An Lushan — but then develops into a more familiar narrative patterned on the “Song of Lasting Sorrow,” involving a mystic or wizard (道士 or 方士) who finds and speaks with the dead Consort in a mysterious land across the eastern sea.

A second retelling then appears as an extended gloss on the name ‘Lushan’, with less focus on supernatural events; but as hinted in the first retelling, rather than dying at the hands of the emperor’s own advisors, this account has Yang Guifei being executed together with her brother, the feckless minister Yang Guozhong, by the traitor An Lushan, who here appears as a kind of avenger of the people. Needless to say, this version differs sharply from standard accounts based on the old or new *History of the Tang* or on the “Song of Lasting Sorrow,” even allowing for the loosest of paraphrasing. Out of several consistent repetitions of this strange account of Yang Guifei’s death throughout the commentary, the only hint of a textual authority is in this passage, where it appears linked to a text called the *Tang Child’s Treasury* (J. *Tō Mōgyū*, Ch. *Tang Mengqiu*, 唐蒙求) by the unknown author Bai Tinghan.

A search for this mysterious text reveals that Bai Tinghan’s *Tang Child’s Treasury* no longer

⁴⁸ The comparison to Japanese usage is doubly interesting because this is not in fact how “pear-blossom garden” is being used in the poem – it clearly refers to a location, not a personal title.

⁴⁹ 蕃 is a general term for peoples outside the civilized state.

exists; it probably always had limited circulation and can now be glimpsed only through a handful of citations in other sources. It has left only faint traces in surviving literary material on the continent; mentions in a few Tang and Song dynasty bibliographic records, a brief excerpt in a Song poetic commentary (concerning the Tang craze for peony blossoms), and a briefer citation of the same peony-blossom anecdote in a Ming poetic commentary, which is probably just copied from the former.⁵⁰ Little is known about its Japanese reception, but at least one copy (or substantial portions thereof) apparently existed in Japan in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods; Shingyū cites several different anecdotes from the *Tang Child's Treasury* in *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads*, and Sugawara no Tamenaga (1158-1246) includes several quotations (some of which do not overlap with Shingyū's) in his glossary for kanshi composition, *Splendid Phoenix Excerpts* (*Bunpōshō* 文鳳抄).⁵¹

The original *Child's Treasury* (J. *Mōgyū*, Ch. *Mengqiu*, 蒙求), one of the most well-known primers of premodern East Asia, is a rhymed collection of anecdotes about famous historical figures prior to the Tang. Like other “sequels” to the *Child's Treasury* compiled in later periods, *Tang Child's Treasury* probably imitated its format of presenting paired anecdotes, with a four-character heading (or code-phrase) and a passage of explanatory commentary for each. Its content, however, was chronologically focused on the Tang (that is, on people and events of the author's own life or recent past), and would thus have taken on a distinct character as rather gossipy local history rather

⁵⁰ The Song collection is *Xixi congyu* (西溪叢語; see XXCY (上, p44), the Ming collection is *Lidai shihua* (歷代詩話; see LDSH v50 p31).

⁵¹ *Tang Child's Treasury* does not appear in *Bibliography of Books Extant in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku*, late 9th century; see NGM) or other early Japanese bibliographies, so its transmission to Japan can only be judged based on these fragmentary citations. Hayakawa (1973) includes it in his list of *Child's Treasury* sequels and derivatives, but lists no details or known cases of Japanese reception. Yanase (1999, 575-577, 666) discusses it briefly, and in a footnote credits an oral presentation by Kawaguchi Hisao for first pointing out the *Bunpōshō* citations. Honma Yōichi's annotated *Bunpōshō* has a full index of cited texts, and notes two references to *Tang Child's Treasury* (see BPS p181, 188). Ōta Tsugio's discussion of Shingyū's commentary (1967) touches briefly on *Tang Child's Treasury*, and Miki Masahiro (1995, 264-5) mentions it as part of a comparison between Shingyū's *Chanting Collection* commentary and his “New Ballads” commentary. There is to my knowledge no definitive work on the nature and reception of *Tang Child's Treasury*, or any complete compilation of the surviving fragments.

than a compendium of well-known classical material.

The *Tang Child's Treasury* account of Yang Guifei's death seems to permeate Shingyū's impressions of Xuanzong's reign. For example, in explaining the line "Zhongzong and Suzong restored the grand endeavor" (中宗肅宗復鴻業) in poem 2 of the "*New Ballads*," which is entitled "Ceremonial music" (法曲) and discusses the need for proper and traditional music in state rituals, Shingyū gives a pair of anecdotes that he claims are paraphrased from the *History of the Tang* (案唐書). The first tells how Emperor Zhongzong restored the Tang dynasty when he succeeded Empress Wu Zetian, and the second attempts to cast the accession of Suzong after Xuanzong's disgrace in the An Lushan Rebellion (which was not strictly speaking the restoration of an invalid line of succession) in a similar mold:

玄宗皇帝天寶末歲、以楊貴妃兄國忠為丞相委于天下、國忠愚翫國柄、天下老弱莫不怨哭、天寶十四年之末、范陽節度使安祿山引軍於馬嵬城誅楊貴妃及國忠、玄宗哀哭遁帝位、子肅宗代位、故曰中宗肅宗復鴻業、鴻業者、天子之位也

In the last years of the Tianbao era, Emperor Xuanzong made Yang Guifei's kinsman Guozhong Prime Minister and entrusted him with the entire realm, but Guozhong made a mishandled mockery of state affairs. Of the weak and elderly throughout the realm, there were none who did not lament and weep. At the end of the fourteenth year of Tianbao, Fanyang District General An Lushan led an army and executed Yang Guifei and Guozhong at Mawei Fort. Xuanzong, grief-struck and weeping, renounced the imperial throne, and his son Suzong succeeded him. For this reason it says "Zhongzong and Suzong restored the grand endeavor." "Grand endeavor" refers to the throne of the Son of Heaven.⁵²

The phrase "made a mishandled mockery of state affairs" (愚弄國柄) is a clear nod to Chen Hong's "Story of the Song of Lasting Sorrow" (translated above). But the rest of the summary, rather than following Chen Hong's version of events or for that matter being "paraphrased from the *History of the Tang*" in any meaningful sense, bears a strong resemblance to the story associated with the *Tang*

⁵² SGR p313-314.

Child's Treasury in the commentary cited above.⁵³

Although Shingyū's insistent citation of the *Tang Child's Treasury* is mystifying at first glance, it is actually not the only unusual source to be found in *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads*. Whereas Shingyū's earlier *Chanting Collection* commentary made substantial use of the *Child's Treasury* and its commentary, his "New Ballads" commentary essentially replaces references to the *Child's Treasury* (which only covers pre-Tang historical figures) with citations of various obscure sources about the Tang.⁵⁴ In addition to the *Tang Child's Treasury*, these include *Tang li* (唐曆), a compilation of Tang-dynasty annals;⁵⁵ *Niandai li* (年代曆), another collection of annals; a Tang "sequel" to *Records of the Historian* (唐史記); and a Tang manual of official precedence called *Shiwu ce* (時務策). None of these sources survive today, except as fragmentary quotations in work like Shingyū's.

These texts, which strongly inform Shingyū's discussions of Tang period historical events and particularly the dramatic events of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, highlight Shingyū's interest in the historical and political motivations of the "New Ballads"; they suggest a move towards approaching the Tang as a concrete historical moment, not just as part of the timeless generality of classical past. The "New Ballads" are unusually rich in specific details of setting, offering a vivid (if unabashedly biased) peek at the unique celebrities, fads, public menaces and social problems of the mid-to-late Tang; and whereas previous reception had usually focused on couplets rich in splendid

⁵³ Similarly unorthodox versions of Yang Guifei's death scene can be found in *Konjaku monogatari shū*, *Toshiyori zuinō*, and some medieval *Chanting Collection* commentaries, though it is unclear whether there is any direct connection with Shingyū's version of the story. I have discussed some of these retellings in more detail in an earlier article (Guest 2013). In analyzing the account of Yang Guifei in the Engyō-bon *Tale of the Heike* (which does not depict An Lushan as executioner, but contains some other unorthodox elements), Yamada Naoko (2011) has discussed some of the retellings found in *Chanting Collection* commentary, with insightful comments about the Yang Guifei story as an evolving anecdote in the medieval repertoire and about the construction of narrative from overlapping layers of source material.

⁵⁴ Miki 1995 (264-265) briefly compares Shingyū's use of the *Child's Treasury* and its commentary in his *Chanting Collection* commentary to his reliance on *Tang Child's Treasury* and *Tang li* in *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads*.

⁵⁵ On the *Tang li*, see Ōta S. 1963.

vocabulary applicable to mainstream poetic topics (as seen in the “New Ballads” couplets selected for the *Chanting Collection*), Shingyū seems equally concerned with the historical and anecdotal dimensions of the poems. His efforts to explain the historical as well as the lexical details of the “New Ballads,” and his decision to bring in comparatively rare anecdotal sources like the *Tang Child’s Treasury* rather than relying on standard dynastic histories, reflect a different awareness of the nature of the text as well as of his own role as commentator. At the same time, the choice of a *Child’s Treasury*-like source as authority for this new information suggests that this historical approach is rooted in the world of primers and their commentaries.

In this sense, Shingyū treats the “New Ballads” as a text that is at once familiar and accessible — linked by the act of commentary to introductory texts like the *Child’s Treasury*, *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, and *Record for Beginning Study* — and also esoteric. His attention to details of Tang chronology, geography, and local knowledge emphasize the unusual and exotic aspects of the text — exotic from the perspective of mainstream classical Chinese, not only from a Japanese perspective — and its concrete connections to its own time and place. The “New Ballads” are striking in their profusion of specificity — era names and actual dates, names of well-known figures in the author’s present and recent past, as well as place names, obscure barbarian clothing and customs, and flora and fauna that (like the rhinoceros) are hardly common poetic topics. Shingyū confronts this wealth of specificity head-on, and seems to revel in it. His approach to the “New Ballads” can help us look past its reputation for transparency and consider the kinds of challenges — and points of interest — readers may have found in it.

Shingyū’s commentary also shows early traces of a medieval trend that might be termed anecdotalization: a heightened interest in breaking down kanbun texts into brief, discrete anecdotes (often framed as accounts of historical people, as in the *Child’s Treasury*), which could then be retold and adapted into a variety of contexts like warrior tales and tale literature.⁵⁶ Shingyū’s use of the lost

⁵⁶ On the increasingly free medieval circulation of kanbun anecdotes beyond direct quotation from source texts, see

primer *Tang Child's Treasury* represents his interest in a kind of historical narration composed of biographical anecdotes and concrete local detail, shaped by narrative commentary that draws on both obscure and familiar textual elements. In its enthusiasm for the anecdotal potential of the “New Ballads,” Shingyū’s commentary stands near the leading edge of new medieval styles of scholarship on the court classics and exemplifies the creative literary aspects of commentarial scholarship.

Conclusion

Aside from its specific interest in the context of readings and reception of Bai Juyi’s poetry, the above discussion of *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* illustrates several important points. Above all, it demonstrates the way in which the interpretation of a kanbun text like the “New Ballads” could become a flexible, living process, responsive to individual circumstance and to shifts in literary and social trends – far from a static case of “reception from China,” but something far more complex and interesting. In particular, it illustrates the nature of commentary as an active and creative form of reception, which could recast a text into new and surprising forms.

In keeping with the variety of ways to read the “New Ballads,” written interpretive scholarship on it could adopt a range of approaches. The proto-commentary of the Kanda manuscript represents a set of scholarly house traditions of explanatory reading rooted in the imperial university establishment. Shingyū’s own *Chanting Collection* commentary treated “New Ballads” couplets as largely transparent and of interest mainly for their poetic vocabulary, while his later “New Ballads” commentary explored the narrative potential and historical context of the poems in much greater depth.

Shingyū’s reading of the “New Ballads” also highlights the feedback relationship between texts for introductory education (a loose and constantly redefined category) and other literary endeavors. Shingyū draws on primers in both concrete and abstract ways; not only does he

Kuroda 1987, Yamada 2009, and (specifically in reference to stories about Yang Guifei) Yamada 2011.

specifically cite common primers upon occasion, but his approach to constructing knowledge resonates with models of historical storytelling found in primers like the *Child's Treasury*. While using the *Tang Child's Treasury* to talk about the events of Xuanzong's reign is at first glance a startling choice – and is unique to Shingyū, with his particular resources and scholarly agenda – it also fits into a broader trend toward accessible and anecdotal history, in which the original *Child's Treasury* and its commentaries played an important part. Bai Juyi's "New Ballads," one of the single most important Chinese literary sources from a premodern Japanese perspective, not only played an important role as an educational resource in its own right, but also came to be read and interpreted through the medium of commentary in ways that developed from patterns of literary education.

In response to the changing social conditions of his era, Shingyū's beginner-oriented commentaries on the "New Ballads" and *Chanting Collection* opened a new chapter in the reception of kanbun primers, making foundational texts of Heian literary culture accessible to students outside the court. The next chapter will continue to explore the role of kanbun primers in the way that capital-trained literati responded to social shifts around the close of the Heian period, through the example of a poet writing a few decades after Shingyū, who created waka adaptations of three kanbun primers (including the "New Ballads") in an attempt to appeal to the elite of the new shogunal capital in Kamakura.

Chapter 5 **Between Poems and Anecdotes: Minamoto no Mitsuyuki's *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (*Mōgyū waka*)**

The previous chapters have given many and varied accounts of kanbun learning; we have seen kanbun knowledge as the basis for wit, feats of literary skill, and social communication, and have witnessed several kinds of creative linguistic exchange between wabun and kanbun styles based on the complex and flexible nature of Heian literacies. In this chapter, I turn to a unique text that acts as a nexus for many themes of this dissertation: *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (*Mōgyū waka*, 1204) by Minamoto no Mitsuyuki.

Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury was compiled in the context of early Kamakura power shifts that left capital literati with new opportunities and challenges in terms of defining and transmitting Heian court culture; even more clearly than the commentaries discussed in Chapter 4, it can be read as an innovative attempt to repackage the court literary tradition for newly-prominent audiences, an attempt that suggests the cultural value assigned to basic kanbun knowledge as part of Heian literary culture. Mitsuyuki's writings demonstrate the socially broad appeal of introductory kanbun material; he is not as well-known as his contemporaries among the major waka poets of the Mikohidari school (like Fujiwara Shunzei, his son Teika, and his grandson Tameie), nor was he a designated kanbun scholar with university training, yet his network of friends and literary contacts encompass both groups – as well as warriors and bureaucrats in the new eastern capital of Kamakura, where he lived for many years. It is likely that he had in mind a very specific audience for this text, namely the new teenaged shogun Sanetomo, and that he wrote it in hopes of winning more teaching opportunities for himself by establishing his ability to both entertain and educate.

Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury demonstrates the kind of genre-crossing creativity that could develop in this type of educational context. Each section of the text begins with a four-character heading from the *Child's Treasury*, adds a passage of wabun commentary retelling

the corresponding anecdote, and finishes with a waka poem that suggests or recapitulates the anecdote in some way – presenting a continuum of written styles, from kanbun through kundoku-style wabun to the specialized wabun of waka poetry.

The following section takes up a pair of concrete examples in order to illustrate how the diverse elements in *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* are woven together by thematic connections as well as playful exploitation of the versatile Japanese writing system, the densely allusive poetic vocabulary of waka, and the conventions of kanbun literature.

Tian Dan's Oxen and Che Yin's Fireflies: Two Summer Entries in *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*

Much as the individual entries in *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* differ from those found in a standard waka anthology, they are arranged in a topical schema reminiscent of waka anthologies, beginning with categories for the four seasons and then adding social categories like love, celebration, and travel.¹ Within the overarching sections for each of the four seasons, the entries are also assigned specific seasonal topics (for example, warbler and plum blossom within the spring section). The following entry appears in the summer category, and is assigned the seasonal topic “mosquito torches” (*kayaribi*, smoky torches lit in the summertime to drive away mosquitos).²

¹ As shown by Zhang J. 2007 (64-66), the topics used in the first, seasonal half of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* overlap significantly with those in the *Horikawa Hundred-verse Collection* (*Horikawa hyakushū*), while the topics in the second, miscellaneous half bear some resemblance to those in the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection* (*Wakan rōeishū*). In turn, the non-seasonal topics of the *Chanting Collection* can ultimately be linked to topical encyclopedias like the *Record of Beginning Study* (初学記). It is easy to imagine Mitsuyuki drawing particular inspiration from these two anthologies; the *Horikawa Hundred-verse Collection* was an innovative literary project in its day, subtly expanding the boundaries of accepted waka topicality with new themes from kanbun sources and from aestheticized pastoral visions of country life, while the *Chanting Collection* was a privately compiled and yet wildly popular mixed-genre anthology that incorporated both waka and kanbun material into a single topical cosmology.

² Citations from *Waka poems on the Child's Treasury* use the Kokkai toshokan kō MS, which dates to the early Kamakura period (making it the oldest surviving manuscript) and appears to be descended from a copy made by Fujiwara Teika. It is available as a photographic reproduction (cited as MGW1). Although this is arguably the most reliable and complete surviving manuscript, it is not without apparent errors (Ikeda Toshio notes that even though it may have been copied out a fairly short time after Mitsuyuki's original composition, the frequency of errors suggests several rounds of recopying, a testament to its popularity). In the most significant cases, I will note possible adjustments based on the text printed in the Edo compendium *Zoku gunsho ruijū* (cited as MGW2), which is an

Tian Dan lets loose some oxen

(Topic: mosquito torch)

Tian Dan, in order to defend his city and hold back the armies of Yan, took a thousand head of oxen, drew in the five colors upon red silk gauze and dressed them in it, and poured oil on their horns. On their horns he arranged soldiers' blades, and he bundled reeds to their tails and set fire to the tips. At night he let the oxen loose, and had fifty stout soldiers stand behind them; as the fires grew hot the thousand head of oxen grew fiercely enraged, and as they ran amok among the armies of Yan, even those hardened soldiers cried out in confusion. It seemed just as if they were dragons. Where the oxen struck, none escaped death or injury. Tian Dan was rewarded and made the lord of Pingzhi.

Naniwagata/ashi orikuburu/kayaribi no/keburu o ushi to/omoikeru kana

Breaking and burning up the reeds of the Bay of Naniwa, a mosquito torch – I mistook its smoke for oxen.³

The waka poem turns on a pun; *ushi* can mean “cause for despair or deep unease” or “cow or ox,” so that the final part of the poem can be read in two very different ways. The former reading results in a somewhat normal waka poem, which could be translated as “Breaking and burning up the reeds of the Bay of Naniwa, a mosquito torch – I thought its smoke was cause for unease.” On the other hand, reading *ushi* as “ox(en),” as is actually demanded by the orthography of the

edited composite based on several manuscripts. The recent publication by Zhang Jian of the first modern Japanese commentary edition of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* is an exciting development that will undoubtedly promote further scholarship on this collection; unfortunately, I was not able to obtain a copy in time to consult it for this chapter (*Mōgyū waka kōchū*, Hiroshima: Keisuisha, 2012).

³ 田單縦牛 蚊遣火
田單、城ヲマモリテ燕エムノイクサヲフセクニ、牛千頭ヲ取テ、アカキカトリニ五色ニエカキテキセテ、ツノニアフラヲソソケリ。ソノウヘニ兵刃ツクリテ、尾ニ葦ヲツカネテ、ソノサキニ火ヲツケテ、夜牛ヲハナチテ、壯士五(十)[千]人ヲシリニタテ(ヲ)[オ]ハシムルニ、千頭ノ牛、火ノアツクナルニシタカ[ヒ]テ、タケリイカリテ燕ノイクサノ中ニハシリミタレテイルニ、ツハモノシカシナカラサ(ハ)[ワ]キマトウ。龍(タツ)カトノミ(ト)[ソ]ミエケル。牛ノアタルトコロ死傷セスト云事ナシ。田單ニ賞(ニヲ)[ヲオ]コナハレテ平※君トス。

ナニハカタアシヲリクフルカヤリヒノケフリヲ(牛)[ウシ]ト思ケルカナ (MGW1 p180-181)

The character marked as ※ is difficult to reproduce in print, but appears to be made up of the 冫 radical plus 隻. In the old commentary *Child's Treasury* Tian Dan is made lord of Nupingzhi 女平隻, and in later commentaries and in the *Shiji*, Tian Dan is made lord of Anping (安平).

I have used parentheses to mark characters that appear only in the Kokkai toshokan kō MS (MGW1), and square brackets to mark characters that appear only in the *Zoku gunsho ruijū* (MGW2); this convention is continued throughout the chapter. The punctuation is added by me, usually based on the *Zoku gunsho ruijū* version; for technical reasons, I have also standardized the forms of the kana to some extent, and have placed all characters onto a uniform line (whereas the Kokkai toshokan kō MS sometimes uses small right-adjusted kana immediately after kanji, in the manner of kundoku annotations).

manuscript I have cited here, creates the scene of imagined oxen – quite incongruous in the world of waka poetry – that appears in the translation given above.

This anecdote appears as line 163 in the *Child's Treasury*, and can also be found in a much more detailed form in Tian Dan's biography in the *Records of the Historian* (史記 *Shiji*). This episode offers one of many indications that Mitsuyuki was using an old-commentary version of the *Child's Treasury*: the Song edition with commentary by Xu Guang, popular in later eras, instead uses the heading “Tian Dan sets fire to some oxen” (田單火牛). The plot of the story in the old commentary runs as follows:

...(Tian Dan) was defending his city and holding back the armies of Yan; in the night, he took a thousand head of oxen, dressed them in red silk gauze, and painted them with dragon patterns in the five colors. He bundled soldiers' blades onto their horns, poured oil on bundled reeds attached to their tails, and set fire to the ends. He dug several dozen holes in the city wall. At night he let the oxen loose, and had stout soldiers follow behind them; when the tails of the oxen grew hot, they became fiercely enraged and ran toward the armies of Yan. When the Yan soldiers beheld them, they were all patterned like dragons. Where they struck, all were killed or injured. Following this, seventy cities of Qi were recaptured, and King Xiang was welcomed back to Ju and established on the throne. The king enfeoffed Tian Dan as lord of Nupingzhi.⁴

Mitsuyuki's retelling follows this anecdote very closely in most respects, even down to similar wording, although the slight confusion about exactly where oil was applied to the oxen suggests that he (or the scholar who originally added reading marks to the commentary text he was using) misinterpreted the phrase boundaries. As is often the case, he has cut out much of the historical detail while leaving the memorable story elements intact. His prose retelling spells out classical Japanese grammatical information using the kana syllabary as well as characters, but

⁴ 守城拒燕軍、乃夜取牛千頭、衣以絳繒、畫五綵龍文。束兵刃於其角、灌脂束葦於其尾、燒其端、鑿城數十穴。夜縱牛、令壯士隨其後。牛尾熱、怒而奔燕軍。燕軍視之皆龍文也。所觸皆死傷。遂復齊七十城、迎襄王莒而立之。王封單為女平隻。

MGKS p46.

Tian Dan's reward title of “Nupingzhi” 女平隻 is unclear; the character 女 should probably read 安 as in the *Shiji* version.

stylistically it falls somewhere in between the classical wabun style of waka poetry or of court prose and the distinctive more abrupt style of kundoku reading.⁵ The entry thus shows a stylistic progression from a code-like four-character kanbun heading, to a lengthy kundoku-style wabun retelling, to a waka poem; there is nothing here that resembles a neat duality of kanbun to wabun translation.

The waka poem that concludes the entry selects reeds of Naniwa as an apt poetic equivalent for the reed torches tied to the tails of Tian Dan’s oxen, and then adds another layer of playful reference to the anecdote with the rather undignified pun on *ushi* (“cause for unease”/“oxen”). “*Ushi*” in the sense of cattle has a few previous attestations in waka, generally with Buddhist resonances as part of the compound “ox-cart,” but this double meaning does not seem to have been commonly exploited in poetry. This punning reading echoes the theme of disguise and visual confusion in the anecdote – but rather than oxen mistaken for dragons, here smoke is mistaken for oxen. It invites us to imagine a poet who is so invested in the world of classical Chinese anecdote that he reacts to the burning reeds of a torch by imagining the fiery rampage of Tian Dan’s oxen – but ultimately, this anecdotal world is insubstantial as smoke, viewed only through the lens of imaginative exaggeration.

Even if we read this as a normal waka poem, with “*ushi*” meaning “(cause for) despair or deep unease,” there are still hints that suggest the Tian Dan anecdote. The topic of mosquito torches in waka is commonly associated with the verbs *kuyū* (to smolder or burn smokily, with a homophone meaning to regret or resent) and *fusubu* (to smolder smokily, with a homophone suggesting jealousy), and is correspondingly used to express hidden love and suppressed emotions.⁶

⁵ As I have indicated with similarities in the English translations, many phrases in Mitsuyuki’s retelling could actually serve as plausible kundoku readings for the *Child’s Treasury* passage, though he also embellishes some details. There is some use of “-keri” to mark past tense, more associated with waka and wabun tale literature than with kundoku readings, but also some characteristics of kundoku style: use of completative “-nu” and plain verb endings, with choppy short phrases, and frequent use of “tokoro” to form passive-like constructions, for example.

⁶ A classic and influential example from the *Kokinshū* is:
夏なれば宿にふすぶるかやり火のいつまでわが身下もえをせん

Mitsuyuki instead describes the burning torches with the more decisive verb “*kubu(ru)*,” which says nothing about smoke but implies destroying or consuming something with flame. The unusual violence of the image – a quietly smoldering torch, described as breaking and burning the reeds to ash – subtly echoes the scene of military chaos in Tian Dan’s story. At least to a modern eye, there is a touch of dark humor in the superimposition of Tian Dan’s story of crafty violence and military success onto a gently elegiac summer scene – and in the trivializing representation of fleeing and dying soldiers as the mosquitos driven off by smoking torches.

The summer section also includes one of the most iconic stories in the *Child’s Treasury*, that of the poor scholar Che Yin who studied into the night by the light of captured fireflies (thus becoming a common symbol of scholarly devotion). As fireflies are an established summer waka topic, in one sense Mitsuyuki’s task was more straightforward here; but this entry shows a similar interest in the interplay of wabun and kanbun frames of reference.

Che Yin gathers fireflies

Topic: Fireflies

He was a minister in the Jin era, a man from Hedong. He reached the rank of Grand Minister of Works. See History of the Jin, vol. 53.

When Che Yin was young, he loved to recite the classics, but since his family was poor and they had no lamp-oil, he gathered fireflies, stitched a silk bag, put the fireflies inside, and used it as a lamp by which to read the classics. Later, he attained the rank of Minister of Education.

Hitomaki o/ake mo hatenu ni/akenikeri/hotaru o tomo su/natsu no yo no sora

Though they have yet to finish lighting a single volume, it grows light – the sky on a summer night, keeping company with fireflies.⁷

Like the mosquito torch that, since it is summer, smolders in the doorway – how long must I burn in secret? (KKS #500)

By Mitsuyuki’s day, the mosquito torch was almost certainly a poetic topic without a clear referent in normal aristocratic life. Minamoto no Toshiyori notes in his poetics treatise (*Toshiyori zuinō*, ca. 1115) that the nature of the *kayaribi* (mosquito torch) has not yet been entirely understood, and outlines two possible interpretations: the mosquito torch may be placed outside a building to draw insects toward the light and away from its occupants, or it may be placed inside a building (or near the entrance) to drive away insects that dislike smoke. He inclines toward the latter explanation (as, it seems, does Mitsuyuki). TZ p159-160.

⁷ 車胤聚螢 螢
 晋代大臣也 河東人也 位至大司空見晋書五十三卷
 車胤若リシ時コノミテ書ヲ誦ニ家マツシクシテ油ナカリケレハ螢ヲアツメテ絹ノフクロヲヌ (イ) [ヒ]テ
 ホタルヲ入テトモシヒトシテフミヲヨミケリ 後ニ司徒ニ至リニケリ

The poem contains a pun on two meanings for *akehatenu*, “finish opening” and “finish brightening” (so that the first two *ku* could read “though I have yet to finish opening a single volume”). The opening phrase sets up a riddle-like contradiction, which is then resolved by introducing the two different sources of light, fireflies and the dawn after a short summer night.

The brevity of a summer night that turns to dawn much too soon is a very common romantic stereotype, often used in waka that lament the dawn parting after a lovers’ meeting. This poem, however, takes an unusual approach in presenting a passionate reader who resents the shortness of time for solitary study just as a lover resents the need to part at dawn. Mitsuyuki adopts the gently self-mocking voice of a scholar who is so absorbed in study that he feels there is scarcely time to enjoy the illumination of fireflies on his books before the unwelcome light of dawn breaks the mood.

There are literary precedents for co-opting Che Yin’s trick in a romantic context, starting with a scene in the *Tale of the Hollow Tree* (*Utsuho monogatari*) in which the emperor recalls the story of Che Yin and has his attendants gather fireflies, then wraps them in his sleeve and uncovers their light at a strategic moment in order to peek at an Imperial Handmaid (the protagonist Nakatada’s mother). The *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*) has a scene in which a flirtatious man (Minamoto no Itaru) releases fireflies into a carriage that he thinks is full of ladies to illuminate their forms from within. There is also the famous scene in the *Tale of Genji* in which Genji surreptitiously releases fireflies behind Tamakazura’s blinds to reveal her to a suitor. The poem does

ヒトマキヲ (アケ) [ヨミ]モハテヌニアケニケリホタルヲトモス夏ノ夜ノソラ

MGW1 p179. The *Zoku gunsho ruijū* version (MGW2) gives another slightly different poem, which replaces “finished opening” with “finished reading,” sacrificing the punning repeated use of *ake-* to mean “open” and then “brighten” in favor of greater clarity. It would read:

“Though I have yet to finish reading a single volume, it grows light – keeping company with fireflies, the sky on a summer night.”

If, as Ikeda Toshio has argued, the manuscript group represented by the Kokkai toshokan kō MS reflects a comparatively early version of the text that was later revised and condensed, Mitsuyuki may have decided that the pun was rather weak to start with, since it relies on using the completative *hatenu* a bit awkwardly with an action (“opening”) that is usually accomplished in a single moment.

not reference any of these scenes directly, though the Genji case at least may have been well-known enough by this time to be an inevitable background association when dealing with fireflies and romance, and to make the use of the fireflies' light to steal glimpses of a book instead of a female body something of a surprise twist.

The image of Che Yin diligently reading through the night is a widespread trope in kanbun literature, occasionally even making appearances in waka (e.g. among poems on fireflies in the innovative collection *Horikawa hyakushu*);⁸ but none of them bring together the spheres of diligent study and romantic longing in quite such a way. Mitsuyuki's poem yields a fresh take on the well-worn poetic theme of the short summer night by turning it into a lament about how time flies when you're reading a good book – an approach that may only have been possible in the context of an unusual hybrid-genre text like *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*.

These two examples show the range of challenges involved in compiling this collection – whereas in the case of Che Yin's story the connection to a seasonal topic was obvious (but that topic needed to be reimagined in a new way), Tian Dan's story presented no immediate keyword within the bounds of waka diction and a waka topic had to be carefully selected that would echo its content more subtly. The nature of the unusual connections forged in this text between kanbun anecdotes and waka poetry raises further questions: what kind of person (and what kind of reader and writer) was Minamoto no Mitsuyuki, and how did he himself conceptualize the task of compiling this kind of multi-genre adaptation? The following two sections take a closer look at reconstructed traces of Mitsuyuki's life, how they contextualize his creation of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*, and how he frames his project in the paired kanbun and wabun prefaces to the text.

Mitsuyuki's Life and Scholarship

Records on Mitsuyuki's early life are sparse. From a later entry in Fujiwara Teika's diary,

⁸ HH p90-91. Poems #470, 476, and 478 allude to Che Yin.

Meigetsuki, we can estimate that he was born in 1163 (though this may only be approximate).⁹ His father was at one point the governor of Hizen; the family was not known for literary or scholarly specialization, but its members were successful as mid-rank officials under the Taira, whom they served closely.¹⁰ According to Mitsuyuki's own reminiscences in the prefaces to *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* and *Waka Poems on the Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, he studied the Chinese classics (at least, primers like the *Child's Treasury* and Li Jiao's *Hundred-Twenty Compositions*) as a child, and he maintained a lifelong connection with his kanbun-studies teacher Fujiwara no Takanori.¹¹ He also studied waka with one of the capital's leading poets, Fujiwara Shunzei.

Records of Mitsuyuki in his youth suggest a busy and promising time. He was appointed as an assistant to the Master of the Palace Table around age sixteen, and promoted to Senior Secretary for Civil Affairs (民部大丞) in 1180, a year or so later; not particularly prestigious posts, but encouraging given his age and class. He was active in poetic circles, and had several poems selected for a private collection (*Tsukimōde wakashū* 月詣和歌集) while still in his teens. Some manuscripts of the *Tale of the Heike* actually describe Mitsuyuki being entrusted with the layout of the short-lived Taira capital at Fukuhara; even if we do not take this story at face value, it suggests the close ties between his family and the Taira, as well as his correspondingly rosy career prospects during this period.

But in the later stages of the civil war between Taira and Minamoto-led warrior factions, these connections became a cause for grave concern. By 1184, the final defeat of the Taira was easy to predict, and Mitsuyuki embarked on a trip east to Kamakura to beg for clemency on his father's

⁹ In this passage, Teika grumpily points out that Mitsuyuki is soliciting poems to mark his sixtieth year and to see him off on a trip to Kamakura, even though he is actually already sixty-seven.

¹⁰ Mitsuyuki's uncle was a police official (*kebiishi* 檢非違使) under the Taira leader Kiyomori and was later taken hostage alongside the surviving clan leader Taira no Munemori at the battle of Dan no ura, as was Mitsuyuki's adoptive older brother.

¹¹ Takanori was a university scholar known for his skill in kanshi composition, who would later serve as head of the university.

behalf. His traveling companion, Miyoshi no Yasunobu, had won the trust of the Minamoto leader Yoritomo by sending him valuable intelligence from the Taira capital, and with such patronage Mitsuyuki managed to obtain a pardon for his father – though Yoritomo is recorded as expressing reservations about his manners.¹²

Perhaps due to this unfavorable impression, Mitsuyuki does not seem to have played much of a role in Yoritomo's new government — in fact, he may have returned west to the capital for a period of time, perhaps to take up a post as governor of Yamato in his late twenties. But after Yoritomo's death in 1198, Mitsuyuki suddenly appears again in Kamakura records, occupying a prestigious role in the inaugural reading ceremony for the new shogun Yoriie alongside some of the most powerful and trusted officials in the shogunate. In the short years of Yoriie's government, Mitsuyuki was active in settling legal disputes for the Bureau of Investigation (Monchūjō 問注所, the main legal office in the early shogunate), and was also given several fairly prestigious special appointments; but on the other hand, his status in Kamakura seems to have been somewhat vague and informal. (The scant records probably tell only a fraction of the story — a great deal of maneuvering may be hidden behind these seemingly brief and unconnected political appearances, especially considering the fact that several of the other men named on Yoriie's inaugural reading list suffered dramatic and fatal falls from grace during this period.)

But when in 1203 Yoriie was succeeded as shogun by his younger brother Sanetomo, a youth of thirteen whose education was actively encouraged by his powerful mother Hōjō Masako, it offered Mitsuyuki a promising chance to translate his knowledge of capital literary culture into a firmer status with the shogunal government. In the seventh month of Genkyū 1 (1204), less than a year after Sanetomo's confirmation as shogun, Mitsuyuki finished the considerable task of compiling *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*; *Waka Poems on the Hundred-Twenty Compositions* (*Hyakuei waka*) was completed two months later, and the lost text *Waka Poems on the New Ballads* (*Gafu waka*)

¹² AZ (Genryaku 1-4-15).

probably took a few more months, so that the full three-work set would have been presented to Sanetomo early in 1205. There is no record of how this major feat of scholarly endurance was received by its intended audience – which may have included both the teenaged Sanetomo himself and his mother, who played a role in inviting scholars to promote her son’s education.¹³ However, Inaba Miki has pointed out some phrases in Sanetomo’s waka poetry that seem to be drawn from *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* or *Waka Poems on the Hundred-Twenty Compositions*, suggesting that he did study them as models.¹⁴

Mitsuyuki probably moved back west to the capital around 1207, though he is on record as participating in poetry matches in both the capital and Kamakura in the following years and may have traveled with some frequency between them. The afterword appended to both surviving waka adaptations, which includes a statement of praise from his teacher Takanori, was most likely added around 1213 (it mentions that Mitsuyuki is now in the capital once more, so was clearly not written along with the original text). After presenting a copy of the three-work set to Takanori, perhaps with some revisions, Mitsuyuki also presented a copy to Fujiwara Teika (this is discussed further below). During this period Mitsuyuki was promoted to the position of Senior Inspector of Central Affairs (大監物) and served retired emperor Gotoba closely, finding favor for his familiarity with classical elegance; one anecdote describes his role in organizing *shirabyōshi* dances for the retired emperor, and another recounts that when the cherry trees at the palace were burned down, Gotoba had them replanted from the trees in Mitsuyuki’s gardens, which had been grown from the original palace seeds.¹⁵

Perhaps because of this experience, Mitsuyuki came out on Gotoba’s side when in Jōkyū 3 (1221) the retired emperor tried to contest the power of the shogunate; he even used his familiarity

¹³ Gomi 2003, 353.

¹⁴ Inaba 1987.

¹⁵ KKCM 下 p336.

with the shogunal government to write a guide to important people of Kamakura that was sent out along with Gotoba's call to arms. The messenger carrying these documents was captured by shogunal forces, escalating the conflict, and the retired emperor's forces were then defeated; Mitsuyuki was summoned to Kamakura for judgment, but unlike many of Gotoba's supporters who were killed en route, he made it safely to Kamakura, and thanks to the impassioned pleas of his son Chikayuki and the intercession of a high-ranked patron (Ichijō Masazane) he was ultimately pardoned. (Ikeda points out how surprising it is that Mitsuyuki survived this ordeal, and wonders if perhaps there was more to the story than can be reconstructed from surviving records.) Regardless, Mitsuyuki probably took Buddhist vows at this point, but he lived until 1244. Glimpses of his later years show him engaged in waka composition (a letter recently discovered in his hand expresses boundless gratitude to Teika for including a few of his waka poems in the *Shin chokusenshū* anthology)¹⁶ and in scholarship on the *Tale of Genji*, which would become a major legacy for his family.¹⁷ By the end of his life, Mitsuyuki had been involved in some form with many of the major literary trends of his day – attention to waka theory and education from the Mikohidari school, commentarial scholarship on the *Tale of Genji*, the circulation of anecdotes and the compilation of warrior tales, and the creation of accessible digest versions of court culture for warrior audiences.¹⁸

Mitsuyuki was younger than Shingyū, the central character of the previous chapter, by about twenty years, but came of age during the same period of civil war that ended Shingyū's years of temple scholarship and set him on a path toward military exploits and exile in the east. These two figures were enmeshed in substantially different sets of social ties; Shingyū to the world of formal

¹⁶ See Ikeda 2009. The letter was reused as paper for Teika's diary; see further discussion below.

¹⁷ Alongside his eldest son Chikayuki, Mitsuyuki is credited with an important early recension of the *Tale of Genji* (known as the Kawachi-bon after Chikayuki's post as the governor of Kawachi) and an influential early commentary, the *Suigenshō*. Several other important early *Genji* commentaries were compiled by Mitsuyuki's sons.

¹⁸ This reconstruction of Mitsuyuki's biography is based on the extensive biographical timeline in Ikeda 1977, with adjustments based on Ikeda Toshio's more recent work (2008, 2009) and a consideration of Mitsuyuki's possible authorship of the *Kaidōki* by Gomi Fumihiko (2003).

kanbun studies through the university and to the wider and more socially diverse world of temple education, Mitsuyuki to the world of waka and Genji scholarship and to the higher echelons of the new warrior-led government in Kamakura. But both of them faced periods of social unrest armed with valuable knowledge of capital literary culture, and over the course of their lives strove to negotiate the shifting social fabric by creatively adapting elements of basic kanbun knowledge for new audiences; both of them, as part of this process, created experimental new educational texts that would shape the study of literature in the centuries to come.

Parallel Prefaces: a Wakan Frame

Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury opens with paired mana (kanbun) and kana (wabun) prefaces, which are closely related but not exact translations – beyond the differences in style and customary phrasing, there is no intention of conveying exactly the same information (for example, mention of Mitsuyuki's palace service and move to Kamakura are found only in the kana preface). This is a custom with a long history, not specific to Mitsuyuki; the kana and mana prefaces to the *Kokinshū*, for example, are similarly related but distinct. But it also presages a certain attitude towards the relationship of different written styles: not translation, but paired presentation of related material. The act of providing mana and kana prefaces, together with the title of the work, also encourages the reader to approach it as a waka anthology (this was a common format for imperial waka anthologies, from the *Kokinshū* to the *Shinkokinshū* that in autumn of 1204 was nearing completion at the hands of Mitsuyuki's acquaintances).

On the other hand, both prefaces also frame *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* as a work of textual scholarship. Mitsuyuki is at pains to emphasize that he has taken the “names” of famous men and women from the *Child's Treasury*, but has then searched widely in other sources for stories about these people, rather than translating the *Child's Treasury*. This claim is not untrue – for some stories, he adds details drawn from other sources like the *Records of the Historian* and the official

dynastic histories – though most of his anecdotal retellings do rely heavily on the old commentary to the *Child's Treasury*. The significance of this claim, however, is that it frames the text as a work of commentarial scholarship, not of translation or adaptation. Mitsuyuki invites us to see his work as an act of kanbun-based scholarship, albeit one expressed in the language of waka poetry. In this sense, the prefaces make a strong case for reading *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* as both a poetry anthology and also a scholarly commentary on kanbun anecdotes.

I will now discuss both prefaces in full, along with the way they frame the nature of the text as a whole.

Mana preface:

夫蒙求者、利翰之所撰也。述數百家之事跡以教人。和歌者、柿本之遺流也。聯卅一字之篇、什以傳世。如予者、素稟愚魯之性、雖疎和漢之才、少日受訓說、壯年求簡要。是以試和皇漢之曩行、聊呈我朝之風俗。假男女於此文中、訪言行於他書之外。寄其詞於花月、歌詠二百五十、分其題於春秋。卷成一十有四。偏為幼童之易覺、不顧耆老之所嘲而已。于時元久甲子之歲、初秋壬申之(月)[日]、朝議大夫源光行閑居(假)[暇]慨然記之云爾。¹⁹

The *Child's Treasury* was selected by Li Han; it describes the records of past events concerning several hundred personages, in order to educate the people. Waka is the style bequeathed us by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro; it brings together collected poetry of thirty-one characters, in order to pass it down to future generations. One such as I, with a simple and foolish nature, has little talent in wabun or kanbun – yet in my youth I received scholarly teachings, and in my prime I have sought what is simple and essential.²⁰ Thus I have experimentally harmonized with the past deeds of imperial Han, and tentatively laid out the customs of our court. I have borrowed the men and women in this text, and sought their words and deeds beyond other writings. Expressing their words with blossom and moon,²¹ I composed two hundred and fifty poems. I divided their topics into spring and autumn, and made up fourteen volumes. This merely inclines toward what children will easily memorize, without considering what elders may mock.

It is now year one of the calendrical cycle in the Genkyū era (1204),²² the twelfth day of

¹⁹ MG1 p151-152. As explained above, characters in parentheses () are found only in the Kokkai toshokan kō MS (MGW1); those in square brackets [] are found only in the *Zoku gunsho ruijū* version (MGW2).

²⁰ The phrase “simple and essential” 簡要 appears in the first line of the *Child's Treasury*, where it describes the virtue of an exemplary scholar-official; Mitsuyuki is undoubtedly playing on this reference.

²¹ “Blossom and moon” (花月) conventionally refers to poetic language, particularly the language of waka poetry.

²² 元久甲子之歲。甲子, a combination of zodiac signs that designates the first in a sequence and can be read as きの

early autumn.²³ Lower Fifth Rank Courtier²⁴ Minamoto no Mitsuyuki has freely written this at leisure.

Kana preface:

蒙求ハ李翰カ意根ヨリ(ヲ)[オ]コリテ、フルキ跡ヲアツメテ人々ニツタヘ、和(哥)[歌]ハ柿本ノ言葉ヨリサカ(へ)[エ]テアラタ[ナル(コトワサ)][諺世ニ弘マレリ]。[ココニ]ココロハヤマトモロコシノミチヲタトリ、コトハ花ト月トノ色ニマトヘルモノアリ。イトケナクテコノ書ヲツタヘヨムトイヘトモ、竹ノエタニムチヲウ[チ]テサカイヲカヘリミルコト[ヲ]ワスレ、サカリノ時ハ、ソノ心ヲサトラムトスレハ、又ヤナキノハヲアムニモノウクシテ、(ヲ)[オ]クヲキハムルニオヨハス。ナカコロハ北闕ノ北ニ家ヲワスレテ、霜ヲフミ星ヲイタタクニイトマナク、今ハ東邑ノ東ニスタレヲトチテ、雪ヲカカケホタルヲトモ[ト]ス[ル]ニタヨリアリ。トキニ男コ女ナノ名ヲ一巻ノウチニヌキイテテ、カシコクオロカナルタメシヲアマタノフミノソコヨリウカカヒイテタリ。歌二百五十ヲツラ子テ、巻一十有四ヲナセリ。チチノシルス所クラシトイヘトモ、コノサトル所アキラカナラムタメナラシ。年ハハシメヒサシキ、時ハキノエノアキノトケキミツノエノナミニ、ムラサキノサヲケノフテヲソメテ、シロキアサノカミニシルストナリ。²⁵

The *Child's Treasury*, arising from Li Han's essential intentions, collected ancient records and transmitted them to the people; waka, flourishing forth from Kakinomoto no Hitomaro's words, spreads new words and deeds throughout the world.

Here is one whose heart seeks the ways of Yamato and Morokoshi, but whose actions drift astray in the beauty of flower and moon. In his childhood he was taught these writings, but beating his bamboo branch with a riding crop, he forgot to look back at the border; in his prime, when he thought to awaken to their meanings, still he struggled to weave the willow fronds, and could not reach their deepest sense.²⁶ In recent days to the north of the north

えね, here refers to the first year in a sixty-year calendrical cycle; Genkyū 元久 refers to an era that lasted roughly from 1204 to 1206CE. Together, these conditions designate a lunar year that roughly corresponds to 1204CE.

²³ 初秋壬申之日。(Corrected in line with MGW2: MGW1 has month 月 instead of day 日, but the ninth month is late autumn, not early autumn.) 壬申 is a combination of zodiac signs that designates the ninth in a series and can be read as みずのえさる。初秋 “early autumn” can refer more specifically to the seventh lunar month. The twelfth day of the seventh month in the first year of Genkyū was marked 壬申。

²⁴ 朝義大夫 is a kanbun-style title for someone of the lower fifth rank with no official post.

²⁵ MGW1 p152-154. The underlined character ノ in the last line is given as テ in the Kokkai toshokan kō MS, but with ノ written alongside as a correction.

²⁶ These lines describe Mitsuyuki's childhood and adult studies in parallel with hints at two *Child's Treasury* anecdotes. The bamboo branch is probably a “bamboo horse” (竹馬), a kind of hobby-horse for children; this particular symbol of childhood play recalls a story about the virtuous official Guo Ji, found in *Child's Treasury* #499, 郭伋竹馬 (MG p933-934). Upon arrival in one district under his care, Guo Ji is greeted with innocent enthusiasm by several hundred children on bamboo horses, who have come to welcome him; they arrange to meet him when he passes through the area again, and although Guo Ji actually arrives before the agreed-upon day, he displays his sympathetic nature by waiting there until he can keep his promise to the children. In connection with this story, Mitsuyuki may be describing himself as a comically oblivious child who became utterly lost in his game and spurred his hobby-horse away across the border without waiting to meet Guo Ji. Weaving willow fronds is a symbol of

palace gate he had forgotten his home, laboring endlessly with frost beneath his feet and stars above his head; now he has dropped his blinds in the east of the eastern settlement, and has a chance to stir up light from the snow and keep company with fireflies.²⁷

At that time, extracting the names of men and women from within a single volume, from the depths of a great many books he spied out examples of their wisdom and foolishness. Arranging two hundred and fifty poems, he made them into fourteen volumes. This is because, one hears, although the writings of the father may be obscure, the understanding of the child will be clear.²⁸

In the era of Genkyū, “far from the beginning,”²⁹ and the time of waves on the “Mitsu River” when autumn of the “Tree Branches” is pleasant and tranquil,³⁰ inking my purple rabbit-fur³¹ brush, I mark this down on paper of white hemp.

Mitsuyuki’s mana preface employs fairly standard style and vocabulary for its genre.³² But the kana preface, on the other hand, contains some surprises that hint at the nature of the text as a whole. For example, as I have tried to suggest by translating the era name near the end of the kana preface as “Genkyū, “far from the beginning”,” Mitsuyuki handles the conventional notation of

scholarship based on the story of the model student Sun Jing, who copied out the classics on woven willow fronds when he was too poor to buy other writing materials (MG p591, #275 文寶緝柳). (I am indebted to Brian Steininger for comments on these two references.) In this way, Mitsuyuki paints a wryly self-mocking picture of his youth and adulthood, in which he failed to live up to examples from the *Child’s Treasury*.

²⁷ Dropping one’s blinds and reading by the light reflected on snow or by the glow of captured fireflies are all commonly-used images for dedicated study of the classics drawn from the *Child’s Treasury* (#193 and 194). In this section Mitsuyuki seems to mean that as a government official he worked from the frosty predawn to late at night, but since living in the east (Kamakura) he has devoted himself to quiet study. Ikeda comments that the phrase I have translated “in the east of the eastern settlement” is ambiguous, and it is unclear whether Mitsuyuki was living in the east side of Kamakura itself or outside town to the east (2009, 178) – though the phrase may also be included mainly to form a parallel with “north of the north gate.” As has been discussed above, Mitsuyuki’s time in Kamakura was far from quiet seclusion – but given the short time in which he completed the mammoth task of compiling his three waka adaptations, it may be true that he took a hiatus from his official duties.

²⁸ This line is obscure, but appears to be a proverb, probably adapted from a kanbun source (it has a kundoku-like flavor).

²⁹ Here Mitsuyuki refers to the current era name, Genkyū 元久, by common kundoku readings of its characters (one reading for 元 is *hajime*, and 久 can be used in writing the adjective *hisashi*), creating a playful sort of mock translation.

³⁰ 時ハキノエノアキノトケキミツノエノナミニ。 This phrase continues to play variations off of the date of composition, with a poetic description of the season that conceals punning references to the two zodiac-sign combinations used to define the date: the “tree branches” of autumn きのえ sound like the reading for the first character in the year designation, while the “Mitsu River” みつのえ could be the traditional spelling for the reading of the first character in the day designation.

³¹ ムラサキノサヲケノフテ

³² See Gotō 2012 (313-333) for an outline of these genre conventions; examples of mana prefaces for waka anthologies can be found, for example, in *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō monzui*).

composition date at the end of the preface in an unusually playful manner. Rather than being written in Chinese characters and pronounced with its Sinitic readings, the era name Genkyū 元久 is suggested in puzzle-like fashion with common kundoku readings of its characters (one reading for 元 is *hajime*, and 久 can be used in writing the adjective *hisashi*, which here grammatically becomes *hisashiki*). The following phrase, too, conceals further calendrical information within a poetic description of the season; “Mitsu River” and “Tree Branches” sound like readings of two characters used in calendrical designation, and in combination with the orthodox way this calendar information is presented in the mana preface the entire date can be easily decoded.

The conclusion to the kana preface also suggests Mitsuyuki’s willingness to play with stylistic boundaries. “Purple rabbit-fur brush” (むらさきのさをけのふて) is not a common wabun phrase (さをけ in particular is very rare and is unattested in kana prefaces), but is given as a kundoku reading for the phrase 紫毫筆 in the Kanda MS *Collected Works of Bai Juyi* under the “New Ballads” poem of that name.³³ The phrase “inking my purple rabbit-fur [brush]” 染紫毫 appears twice in the kanbun anthology *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō monzui* (9/254/12 and 10/309/13)), and seems to be a not uncommon expression for the act of writing a mana-style preface – the purple rabbit-fur brush refers to an extremely high-quality implement used for official remonstrations and reports to the emperor, and the white hemp paper Mitsuyuki pairs it with is similarly suggestive of governmental importance.³⁴ Mitsuyuki’s incongruous kundoku-style usage in his kana preface is an intentional blurring of stylistic lines that foreshadows the hybrid nature of *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* as a whole.

These prefaces hint at the nature of *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* through their

³³ Ōta and Kobayashi 1982, 105. This is pointed out by Ikeda Toshio (2008, 417).

³⁴ Ikeda Toshio (2008, 412-3) uses these phrases as evidence that *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* was written for presentation to the shogun Sanetomo.

unusual emphasis on linguistic play. Mitsuyuki is alive to the surprise potential of kundoku, of taking material familiar as kanbun and presenting it as wabun – and this is a large part of his approach in the text as a whole. It is difficult to say whether he means such quirky kundoku readings as humorous, but they are certainly unusual and might well have been read in terms of the humor of the unexpected and of mismatched registers.

To the extent that we can read these linguistic flourishes as humorous, it is not so much the humor of translation as a more general humor of inscription – a keen awareness of the potential for double meanings inherent in the written language (through kundoku and through multivalent strings of kana). Reading Genkyū as *hajime-hisashiki* or *ushi* in terms of both elegant disquiet and runaway cattle is not translation so much as blatant manipulation of the ambiguous potential of written language and the mismatch of written styles. The links between stories and poems in *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* encompass links based on this type of linguistic ambiguity as well as larger-scale adaptation of plot and content.

Mitsuyuki and the *Tale of Genji*

Mitsuyuki's depiction of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* as a work of kanbun scholarship expressed in the language of waka poetry resonates with the scholarship on the *Tale of Genji* pioneered by Mitsuyuki himself and other near-contemporaries, which often read the *Tale of Genji* in terms of kanbun phrases and allusions, reimagining the text as kanbun expressed in wabun/waka diction.³⁵ In this sense, Mitsuyuki's activities (like those of his contemporaries like Shunzei and Teika) were pushing the boundaries of scholarship, redefining literary scholarship to include adaptations across genre and style.

One particularly vivid case of reframing a kanbun anecdote in terms of the *Tale of Genji*

³⁵ This process is explored in Kōno 2012.

can be found in the story of legendary beauty Xi Shi, which Mitsuyuki places in the summer section with the topic *yūgao* (“evening-face flower,” a kind of gourd blossom similar to the morning glory).

The story of Xi Shi is one case for which versions of the *Child’s Treasury* differ substantially, and Mitsuyuki’s adaptation does not precisely follow either. The “old commentary” *Child’s Treasury*, which is closest to a text Mitsuyuki might have used, gives the following story:

Xi Shi presses her heart

From the Zhuangzi. Xi Shi, suffering, pressed her hand to her heart and squinted her brows. The ugly people in her village, seeing this and thinking it beautiful, pressed hands to their hearts and squinted their brows. People of that time loved and admired her exceedingly much. Xi Shi was a woman of Yue;³⁶ she possessed a dynasty-ending kind of beauty. Fuchai³⁷ favored her; every time she entered a marketplace people who wished to see her had to first hand over a coin.³⁸

Xu Guang’s later commentary, on the other hand, uses the same basic source but does not add in the marketplace anecdote and gives more detail about Xi Shi’s involvement in a plot to overthrow King Fuchai:

Xi Shi presses her heart

Zhuangzi says: Xi Shi suffered in her heart,³⁹ and squinted up her eyes in pain all over the village. The ugly people in her village saw this and thought it beautiful; when they went home they also pressed hands to their chests and squinted up their eyes all over the village. They knew her squinting look was beautiful, but did not know why it was beautiful. Xi Shi was a woman of Yue; she was known as Xizi. She possessed a dynasty-ending kind of beauty. King Goujian of Yue gave her as tribute to King Fuchai of Wu; Fu Chai took her as

³⁶ Yue and Wu were names of countries in the Spring and Autumn period.

³⁷ The king of Wu.

³⁸ 西施捧心
莊子。西施病、捧心而頰眉。其里醜人見而美之、捧心而頰眉。時人愛慕甚也。西施越女、有絕代之容。夫差幸之、每入市人願見者、先輸金一文也。
MGKS #151 p43.

³⁹ Watson’s translation of the *Child’s Treasury* (Watson 1979) interprets Xi Shi’s problem as physical illness (heartburn, in fact), while Hayakawa Kōzaburō (MG) glosses it as a heart full of worries. Ultimately, modern ideas about psychological versus physical pain may be misleading here. I have tried to keep the matter ambiguous by translating 病 (and ヤマヒ in Mitsuyuki’s adaptation) as “suffering.”

his wife, and in the end this caused the fall of his country.⁴⁰

Both of these commentaries on Xi Shi are based on a story in the Tianyun chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. As noted by Hayakawa Kōzaburō, however, there is an omission: Zhuangzi, after noting that the ugly people pounded their chests and squinted up their eyes, continues to describe the effects of their strange behaviour:

When the wealthy people of the village saw them, they firmly shut their gates and would not come out; when the poor people saw them, they scooped up their wives and children and ran away from them.⁴¹

The omission of these lines from the *Child's Treasury* makes the anecdote less comedic and more didactic, shifting some of the focus away from the foolish ugly people and towards the account of Xi Shi's ambiguous position of royal favor (in the old commentary) or final disastrous fate (in Xu Guang's commentary).

Mitsuyuki's adaptation in *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* gives only the abstract frame of the ugly-women anecdote, without concerning itself about historical specifics:

Xi Shi presses her heart

Topic: yūgao

Xi Shi, in both face and form, was a woman beyond compare. Prostrate with suffering, she pressed her hand to her breast and squinted her eyes in an expression of ever-increasing agony of the heart. The ugly women of that village, envying her, fruitlessly fostered suffering in their own breasts and squinted their eyes. Xi Shi's countenance, no matter what she did with it, was exceedingly beautiful; the squinting, fretful forms of the ugly women looked extremely frightening.

Yūgao no/tasogare toki no/sorame ni mo/tagui ni su beki/hana no naki kana

⁴⁰ 西施捧心

莊子。西施病心而矚其里。其里之醜人、見而美之、歸亦捧心而矚其里。彼知美矚而不知矚之所以美。西施越女、所謂西子也。有絕世之美。越王勾踐獻之吳王夫差。夫差嬖之、卒至傾國。
MG #151, p396.

⁴¹ 其里之富人見之，堅閉門而不出。貧人見之，挈妻子而去之走。
ZZS.

The evening-face flower – even with its upturned gaze in the twilight, no flower can equal it!⁴²

The poem puns on several meanings of *sorame*; it can refer to looking upwards at the sky, to imagining that one sees something (or mistaking it for something else), or to looking in vain. There are consequently several valid possible readings of the poem. In the translation given above, *sorame* hints at Xi Shi's strange expression; in the context of the story, we might even read it as 'squinting gaze' (i.e. even with its squinting gaze, the *yūgao* is without equal). Alternatively, *sorame* read as 'vainly looking' could also suggest the vainly squinting eyes made by the ugly women, especially since Mitsuyuki describes their efforts as *sora* ("in vain") in the anecdote. It is thus possible to combine several meanings of 'sorame' and read the poem as something like 'The evening-face flower's upturned gaze in the twilight – even if they vainly squint their eyes, there is no flower that can equal it!'

Sorame, with its sense of imagined sight, has another function; it calls up echoes of the two *yūgao* poems in the *Yūgao* chapter of the Tale of Genji, which center on questions of indistinct or uncertain vision:

Guessing, I think it may be him – the evening-face flower, graced by the light of the white dew.

Come closer, and you will see if it is – that flower of an evening face glimpsed faintly in the dusk.⁴³

⁴² 西施捧心夕顔

西施ハミメモカタチモタクヒナカリシ女ナリ。ヤマヒニフシテ、ム子ヲ(ヲ)[オ]サヘテメヲヒソメケレハ、イヨイヨココロクシクイタハシキサマナリケリ。其里ノミニクキ女トモ、コレヲウラヤミテ、ソラムネヲヤミテメヲヒソメケリ。西施カ顔色コソイカナルニツケテモ、イミシクアテナリケレ。ミニクキ女トモメヲヒソメケルヤマ(イ)[ヒ]スカタ、イトト(ヲ)[オ]ソロシクソミエケル。(ユウカホ)[夕顔]ノタソカレ(トキ)[時]ノソラメニモタクヒニスヘキ(ハナ)[花]ノナキ(カナ)[哉] MGW1 p181. Differences from MGW2 (*Zoku gunsho ruijū*) are in this case limited to orthography.

⁴³ 心あてにそれかとぞ見る白露の光そへたる夕顔の花 and
寄りてこそそれかとも見めたそがれにほのぼの見つる花の夕顔
(GM).

The yūgao is a comparatively rare poetic topic (there is no yūgao section in the *Japanese and Chinese-style Chanting Collection*, from which Mitsuyuki seems to have taken many of his topics), and the Genji poems seem to be an influential association for the flower; the one yūgao poem in the near-contemporary waka anthology *Shinkokinshū* alludes to the second Genji poem above with the phrase ‘faintly glimpsed, the evening-face flower’ ほんのぼの見えし夕顔の花.⁴⁴ This is a possible answer to the otherwise troubling question of why Mitsuyuki chose yūgao as the seasonal topic for the story of Xi Shi; there is no hint of a seasonal topic in the poem itself, which gave him considerable freedom, but it is not immediately clear why yūgao might be the most appropriate flower to represent the famous beauty. However, if Mitsuyuki sought to draw a connection between the tormented Xi Shi and Genji’s perpetually anxious Yūgao, the choice makes sense.

In linking Xi Shi by means of this waka with Yūgao’s timid nature and nervous flights of fancy, Mitsuyuki suggests a possible solution to a central problem in reading the Xi Shi story: namely, why is Xi Shi so upset? If Xi Shi merely suffers from heartburn, there is no problem, but if we understand her trouble to be emotional rather than physical pain, then we are left with the interesting task of guessing why such a famous beauty might be so unhappy. Reading Xi Shi’s story alongside the Yūgao chapter makes this situation seem more plausible; perhaps Xi Shi is timid and uncomfortable with the attention she receives, perhaps she worries about the future (with good cause, if we consider her ultimate fate), or perhaps she even suffers from the jealousy of others much as Yūgao does. The *Child’s Treasury* anecdote itself and the original version of the story in the *Zhuangzi* do not address this question; neither of these two versions is particularly interested in Xi Shi’s feelings, instead focusing on either the foolishness of the ugly women (*Zhuangzi*) or the dangerous nature of beauty (*Child’s Treasury*). Mitsuyuki, on the other hand, seems more interested in Xi Shi herself. Even if we take *sora* as a reference to the vain efforts of imitators, the emphasis of

⁴⁴ By Fujiwara Yorizane.

his poem is on the yūgao's unique beauty rather than the foolishness of others.

This theme holds true for other elements of Mitsuyuki's presentation. He emphasizes Xi Shi's beauty more than the *Child's Treasury* version does; this is apparent in his first sentence ('Xi Shi, in both face and form, was a woman beyond compare' 西施ハミメモカタチモタクヒナカリシ女ナリ), and also in the fact that he explicitly describes the fretting Xi Shi as 'still very elegant' (イミシクアテナリケレ), while in the *Child's Treasury* version we are told only that the foolish ugly women find her squint beautiful (perhaps not an unqualified recommendation in any case). He also pays more attention to her feelings; rather than simply 'ill at heart' (病心), she is 'prostrate with suffering' (ヤマヒニフシテ), and shows 'ever-increasing agony of the heart' (イヨイヨココロクシクイタハシキサマ). We are still viewing Xi Shi from the outside, rather than sharing her emotions or hearing her describe them, but Mitsuyuki's comparatively vivid descriptions make her pain seem much more real and deserving of sympathy.

Mitsuyuki's interpretation of the anecdote contains no rendering of the most overtly explanatory sentence in the *Child's Treasury* version ('They knew her squinting look was beautiful, but did not know why it was beautiful' 彼知美贖而不知贖之所以美); the omission of this sentence contributes to the less didactic and more dramatic feel of Mitsuyuki's version. Similarly, his omission of the further biographical information about Xi Shi (particularly the fact that she brought ruin to a country) removes a major focus of the *Child's Treasury* passage. The *Child's Treasury* is organized in couplets, and lines are often paired for contrastive or enhancing effect; the Xi Shi anecdote is paired with that of Sun Shou, the beautiful wife of a Han general who behaved seductively and manipulated her husband, but in the end was utterly loyal to him. The discussion of Xi Shi's ultimate fate is therefore necessary within the couplet; the couplet as a whole provides counter-balancing examples of feminine beauty as disastrous and feminine beauty as beneficial.

Mitsuyuki, in cutting the individual stories free from their couplet structure and creating

his own system of organization, removes the need to mention Xi Shi's ultimate fate. Leaving out the disastrous effects of Xi Shi's beauty allows him to portray her as a less ambiguous figure – one of surpassing beauty without any ominous undercurrents – but on the other hand, the tragic end to her story would have meshed perfectly with the image of the yūgao (which opens in the evening and withers away in the morning). It seems most likely, therefore, that rather than a particular aesthetic choice, leaving out the remainder of Xi Shi's story is simply part of a general trend in the *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* towards omitting biographical details; while many *Child's Treasury* entries begin by listing the birthplace and polite name (字) of the person in question and end with a summary of his official career, Mitsuyuki tends to include only the story part of the entry. This has the effect of generalizing the anecdotes, making them read more like parables – one wonders, however, whether Mitsuyuki might have simply assumed that his readers would know at least the more famous biographies already. It seems likely at least that Mitsuyuki was influenced by the rest of Xi Shi's biography in choosing to imagine her as a melancholy yūgao flower, even if he did not explicitly include it.

Throughout *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*, we can observe a range of different relationships between waka and anecdote. In the case of Xi Shi, Mitsuyuki uses his choice of yūgao as the seasonal topic to blend elements of elegant emotion into the story, while stopping just short of negating the point of the anecdote. His version of Xi Shi takes on the colors of a sad beauty, but to claim that her beauty does indeed come partly from her sadness would be to align himself with the ugly women in the story. The identification of Xi Shi with the yūgao flower thus adds an element of paradox just as it adds interest and depth to the story.

Mitsuyuki's use of the *Tale of Genji* as a context for reimagining Chinese historical anecdotes illustrates the growing interest it was attracting at this time among his contemporaries. His involvement in commentarial scholarship on the *Tale of Genji* is one of many bonds linking him and his sons to his waka teacher, the leading poet and cultural arbiter Fujiwara Shunzei, and to

Shunzei's son Teika (himself a major poet, poetry teacher, and anthologist). Shunzei's poetry-match judgments helped establish the *Tale of Genji* as worthy material for poetic allusion and study, while Teika compiled notes on the text in his *End-notes to the Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari okuiri*). In the next section, I will take a closer look at the way Mitsuyuki's waka adaptations fit into a larger picture of multi-genre literary innovation involving Shunzei's family and other cultural leaders of the day.

Mitsuyuki's Literary Context and the Wakan Experiments of Fujiwara Teika

The one extensive surviving document in Mitsuyuki's own hand is a letter directed at Teika and his son Tameie, which was then reused by Teika as paper for his diary.⁴⁵ In the letter, Mitsuyuki humbly thanks Teika for including a few of his own poems in an early draft of the imperial anthology *Shin chokensen waka shū*, while implicitly also lobbying for greater poetic representation for his family. It also references the fact that one of Mitsuyuki's younger sons was in service as attendant to Teika's son and poetic heir Tameie, and suggests that this created an additional conduit for information about waka-related activities.

Given that Mitsuyuki and Teika were within a year of age and had both learned waka composition from Teika's father Shunzei, it is easy to imagine a kind of cordial literary rivalry between them – though Teika achieved much higher official ranks and much greater renown as a poet, so the hierarchy between them would always have been clearly defined. But despite this gap in status, the flow of literary ideas between the two may not have been entirely unidirectional – and both were undeniably interested in innovative combinations of waka and kanbun material.

The oldest and most complete manuscript of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (the Kokkai toshokan kō MS that I cite here) ends with a note suggesting that it is descended from a

⁴⁵ Discussed in detail in Ikeda 2009.

copy belonging to Teika.⁴⁶ Ikeda Toshio suggests that Mitsuyuki showed his three waka adaptations to Teika shortly after he ran them by his kanbun teacher and received his praise-filled afterword (probably around 1217). Teika made a copy, adding his own name at the end, and successive rounds of recopying gave rise to the more complete of the two surviving manuscript groups.

Around the same time, Teika himself created several multi-genre texts; in Kenpō 5 (1217), for example, he compiled a kind of one-person poetry match linking kanshi couplets and waka (*Four Seasons of Waka Poetry on Rhyme Characters*), and the following year he composed a series of one hundred waka poems on Bai Juyi's *Collected Works* (*Bunshū hyakushu*).⁴⁷ Teika's interest in the relationship between kanshi and waka poetry was not a passing fancy; around the same time as Mitsuyuki was putting together his waka adaptations, Teika was writing the waka guide *Maigetsushō* in his role as long-distance tutor to the shogun Sanetomo, in which he advises that reciting kanshi to oneself is an excellent way to “make one's heart clear and refined” in preparation for composing waka (and particularly recommends the early volumes of Bai Juyi's *Collected Works*).⁴⁸ It is possible that Teika's later burst of genre-bending creativity was inspired in some way by Mitsuyuki's work, or that Mitsuyuki sent his manuscript because he knew of Teika's current interests – but regardless, they clearly shared literary and educational interests in cross-genre innovation.

⁴⁶ The surviving manuscripts of *Waka poems on the Child's Treasury* fall into three groups: one comprised of texts written mostly in hiragana with a smaller number of entries and many poems missing (known as Type 1); one comprised of longer texts written in katakana with a more complete array of poems (Type 2), and a third group of texts edited later to combine elements of the first two types. Earlier scholarship dubbed Type 1 the “draft” manuscript group, suggesting it developed from an early and incomplete version as opposed to the “polished” Type 2 group, while Ikeda has shown that there are problems with this argument (and argues that Type 2 may in fact have originally been a draft-like stage). The Kokkai toshokan kō MS cited here as MGW1 exemplifies Type 2.

⁴⁷ For text of Teika's poems on Bai Juyi's *Collected Works*, see Kubota 1986, 65-84. Teika's set of one hundred waka poems was composed at the instigation of Jien, who also composed a similar set of one hundred poems at the same time. For more on Teika's approach to kanbun knowledge and the kanbun allusions in his waka, as well as his own kanshi compositions, see Satō T. 2001, 289-544. On Teika's poems on the *Collected Works* within the history of Bai Juyi reception, see Jun 2002.

⁴⁸ MGS p504. Teika places a similar emphasis on the poetry of Bai Juyi in his poetics treatise *Eiga taigai* (ETG p475). For an overview of scholarship on the question of exactly what early portions of the *Collected Works* Teika was recommending, see Satō 2001 p291; it seems likely that he had the “New Ballads” in mind.

Four Seasons of Waka Poetry on Rhyme Characters (Inji shiki uta) displays a flexible awareness of written characters that resonates with the playful combinations of textual style that appear in *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*. Like many of the poetic works Teika includes in the final part of his personal collection, this series of poems was inspired by an unusual organizing principle. Teika's preface explains:

I think it was in the fifth year of the Kenpō era – I heard that in the palace, various people received rhyme-characters and composed kanshi. Since I had some free time, I thought ‘Couldn't they also be used to make waka?’ When I examined the poems, arranged in my mind's eye, it seemed rather pointless; but even so, I wrote them down as I remembered them.⁴⁹

Rhyme characters were commonly used as prompts or challenge conditions for composing kanshi, and would dictate the final character in each couplet. Teika's unconventional idea was to try to use rhyme characters in a similar way in waka, ending each waka poem with a word corresponding to a rhyme character and then pairing kanshi couplets and waka with the same rhyme character into poetry-match style rounds. As is clear from the following example, Teika's idea of what constituted “using the same rhyme character” was very loose:

霞隔南山黄綺跡，雲連蒼海碧羅天。

Mists set off South Mountain and the traces of the Four Hermits;
Clouds link the blue sea and the green-gauze sky.

つり船のさとのしるへも事とをしやそ嶋かすむ曙の空

From a fishing boat, the signs of habitation are distant – turning the myriad islands misty,
the dawn sky.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Text of *Four Seasons of Waka on Rhyme Characters* can be found in Kubota 1986, 99-110. It also appears in the Edo compendium *Gunsho ruijū*, titled *Teika-kyō dokugin shiika* (Teika's Independently-composed Kanshi and Waka Poetry Match). The tradition of the mixed-style poetry match pairing kanshi couplets and waka (*shiika-awase*) was in its early stages of development in Teika's day; on the problems with classing this text as a one-person poetry match, see Minegishi 1973.

⁵⁰ Kubota 1986, 102. Kubota has standardized the kana usage and added some kanji and dakuten, while noting the original orthography of his base text (Reizei Tamemura's MS in the Imperial Household Archives); since orthography is a major issue in this particular case, I have cited the text without ease-of-reading modifications.

Here the kanshi couplet and waka end with different written characters, though the two characters share a similar meaning and a common possible kundoku reading (*sora*). This suggests that Teika was thinking of the original rhyme character (天) primarily in terms of its kundoku reading.

On the other hand, the following round stretches the relationship between character and sound in the opposite direction:

溪嵐吹浪冬冰盡，山氣帶霞晚月微。

Gusts on the brook whip up waves; the winter ice is gone. Mountain vapors form a girdle of mist; the late-night moon is faint.

たれか又花ををそしとしらせまし春ををしふる鳥なかりせは

Who would let the flowers know they are late? – if there were no birds to instruct the spring.⁵¹

The rhyme character for this pair is 微, which has several possible kundoku readings reflecting several distinct meanings; in the context of this kanshi it would be read as ‘*kasuka nari*’, based on the meaning ‘faint, indistinct’, while the waka uses the reading ‘*nakariseba*’, based on the use of this character as a negative hypothetical. That is, the rhyme character would be read differently, and the meaning is at best tenuously related – what is left but the written character itself to relate the two poems?

In playing with the ambiguities inherent to kundoku reading, Teika effectively deconstructs the idea of the rhyme character and creates a multi-genre text held together by a range of different links. In this radical company, Mitsuyuki’s waka adaptations seem less like outlying eccentricities and more like a unique response to certain central problems faced by many early medieval literati, who were experimenting with new styles of literacy and new ways to codify existing literary traditions.

Although he mainly operated at a more rarified literary and political level in the western

⁵¹ Kubota 1986, 100.

capital, Teika shared some similar concerns to Mitsuyuki in terms of transmitting literary knowledge to the new warrior elite (both tried to relate to the young shogun Sanetomo in an educational capacity) as well as a similar interest in fully exploring the combinatory possibilities of different writing styles. Both the project of scholarship on the *Tale of Genji* and the creation of innovative multi-genre texts can be understood as part of a broadly shared interest in codifying the many styles and sources of court literary culture, from kanbun primers to waka to classical wabun prose; exploring the possible rearrangements and connections between genres became part of the project of creating a Heian canon.

Conclusion: Anecdotal History and Topical Cosmology

The preceding sections show that *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* can be linked to many literary developments of its day, from the growth of scholarly attention to waka and the *Tale of Genji* as part of a Heian court canon, to the experimental juxtaposition of wabun and kanbun genres in works by Fujiwara Teika. The act of imposing topical arrangement on *Child's Treasury* anecdotes brought together two major educational trends – the adaptation of biographical anecdotes and the use of *Chanting Collection* style topical cosmology blended from waka anthologies and Chinese topical encyclopedias. This kind of text would have clear practical advantages for a writer looking for an anecdote to work into a composition, who could use the topical arrangement to immediately find a story related to the subject at hand. In this sense, the arrangement of *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* is well in line with its overall goal of making historical anecdotes more accessible and appealing.

Mitsuyuki's choice of the *Child's Treasury* for his project underscores the importance of biographical anecdotes from Chinese historical sources in literary circles of his day. Anecdotes like those in the *Child's Treasury* represent a powerful form of historical knowledge, easy to transmit, rearrange, and rework into a variety of new forms; it was a mode of history that could be pressed

into the service of an annalistic approach (with events arranged sequentially into a unified chronological narrative), but could also transcend or subvert sustained historical narratives.

Lionel Gossman, in a discussion of the varied relationships between anecdote and other forms of history, notes that anecdotes “may reduce complex situations to simple, sharply defined dramatic structures, but they may also, if more rarely, prise closed dramatic structures open by perforating them with holes of novelistic contingency.”⁵² He is largely concerned with the particular literary developments of eighteenth-century Europe, but the idea that anecdotes embody a tension between stereotyped “dramatic” plots in which characters and events can be abstracted to type and more “novelistic” attention to the exceptional and the particular could equally apply to a text like the *Child’s Treasury*. The collection defies any neat overarching message; brief and seemingly straightforward didactic anecdotes on the importance of studiousness, filiality, or other accepted social virtues may be juxtaposed with stories of supernatural events, stories that lack a clear moral, or other tales that seem chosen more for their entertainment value than any other purpose. In educational contexts, this elusive relationship between didacticism and entertainment was surely an advantage.

Japanese adaptations of *Child’s Treasury* stories, including Mitsuyuki’s, capitalize even further on the flexible potential of biographical anecdotes, which offer ready conversion between the blatantly didactic and the surprising, eclectic, or sneakily entertaining. *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* illustrates the way that historical anecdotes provided a malleable and symbolically powerful form of literary currency in premodern Japan, which could cross genre lines and circulate in ever-changing forms through educational texts and beyond. Beyond its implications for the anecdotal trend in the reception and transmission of kanbun knowledge, *Waka Poems on the Child’s Treasury* reflects a kind of kanbun literacy that involves close combination with other written styles; operating at several removes from the waning authority of the state university complex, it draws on

⁵² Gossman 2003.

an outsider's impression of kanbun commentary as well as on traditions of waka study as it makes a creative appeal to new audiences beyond the imperial court.

Afterword

This project has approached issues of literacy, literary language, and cultural interaction in the literature of premodern Japan by examining the primers and commentaries used to study kanbun literature in the Heian and early medieval periods. The preceding chapters have presented a small selection of the rich variety of Heian and early medieval kanbun literacies, drawn from several facets of eleventh and twelfth-century Heian court culture (the state university context most often associated with kanbun writing and the world of the inner palace that produced much of the era's surviving classical Japanese prose) and from the reception of this Heian court tradition in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in contexts of temple education and tutoring aimed at warriors. These modes of literacy are rooted in specific social settings that involve specific approaches to the display and transmission of literary culture, but they are linked by knowledge drawn from key kanbun primers, which formed part of a court literary tradition that became increasingly valued beyond the court from the end of the Heian period. Under new social pressures at the geographical and chronological margins of Heian court culture, the widespread appeal of primers and their commentaries stands out even more clearly.

The first chapter of this dissertation began at one of these chronological margins with a passage from Fujiwara Teika's diary, in which he complained that his son Tameie had forgotten the study of kanbun primers in favor of playing at kickball and would surely bring about the ruin of their house. Thankfully, Tameie managed to disprove his father's dire predictions, and ended up renowned for his waka poetry and guardianship of the family literary tradition rather than his sporting interests; he and the following generations of his family stand as iconic figures in the formation of a Heian court canon. Chapter 5 also circled back to Teika's perspective on kanbun knowledge from a different angle with a discussion of his interest in cross-genre poetic innovation; in this sense, Teika and his descendants bookend the project and suggest several of its main themes. They saw themselves as specialists in the way of waka poetry; yet as they established house

traditions of literary scholarship and worked to define the Heian literary legacy, they also incorporated elements of basic kanbun education and experimented with combinations of kanbun and other literary styles. As a whole, the texts discussed in this project have suggested that a fundamental level of primer-based kanbun literacy was relevant for a wide range of writers and readers, even well outside the acknowledged centers of kanbun studies, and that it formed an important part of Heian court culture as well as its immediate medieval reception.

The issue at stake in mapping the importance of introductory kanbun education is not just one of dividing up who did and didn't study kanbun (for example along lines of gender), but of understanding who displayed what kind of kanbun knowledge in what context and to what purpose. This is perhaps clearest in the case of kanbun-literate women, who had to negotiate with certain expectations of knowledge as well as partial constraints on how it should be displayed. But for men, as well, the acquisition and display of kanbun knowledge was shaped by social expectations, and would depend on social role and degree of involvement in the university or kanbun-related court events. For both men and women, education involved absorbing various types of literary knowledge (vocabulary, historical anecdotes, poetic forms and techniques, and so on), but also a pragmatic understanding of how such knowledge should be socially displayed.

Close attention to the social dimensions of basic kanbun literacy highlights the communicative and creative aspects of literary education. The use of phrases and anecdotes drawn from kanbun primers as a source of symbolically powerful raw material for writing, as with Sei Shōnagon's allusive exchanges in the *Pillow Book*, is one kind of relationship between kanbun education and literary creativity; another complementary kind can be found in the creative storytelling and playful poetry that flourished within the construction of practical educational texts like Shingyū's commentaries and Minamoto no Mitsuyuki's *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury*. Not only could kanbun knowledge provide an allusive vocabulary supporting literary work, but educational contexts themselves could also become contexts for literary creativity. The interrelation

between practical agendas of education or transmission and creative literary activity is related to the idea that education is not such a straightforwardly “practical” matter after all, but a complex cultural process that shares in the communicative functions and instinct for entertainment that drive other literary practices.

Some Directions for Further Study

Here I have only begun to sketch in a few important moments in the diverse span of Heian and medieval Japanese kanbun literacies, and many angles remain for further consideration. One important aspect to address in the future is the distinct but overlapping tradition of literacy associated with Buddhist texts, and how it interacted closely with ways of reading, annotating, and studying non-Buddhist texts moving from the Heian period into later medieval contexts (when a new wave of Chinese educational sources like the *Santi shi* (J. Santai shi, 三体詩) began to affect kanbun scholarship in the hands of Gozan Zen monks).¹

Another natural step would be to expand the cases of inscriptionary playfulness and kanbun-based wit discussed here into a broader look at the premodern history of kanbun humor. Kanbun literature was associated with high canonical status and a dignified scholarly tradition, but this also meant it held great potential for parody and literary play. Scenes in wabun classics like the *Tale of Genji* and the *Pillow Book* lampoon scholarly pretensions and the poorly-judged deployment of kanbun allusions, while scholars themselves also indulged in wordplay based on the mechanics of kundoku literacy and pursued the comic potential of composing in formal classical language on unlikely topics. Fujiwara no Akihira’s *Record of the New Monkey Music* (*Shin sarugaku ki*), for example, provides a rich and detailed satire of various social classes and professions in mid-eleventh-century society, while his kanbun anthology *Literary Essence of Our Court* (*Honchō*

¹ See Pollack 1986 (Chapters 4 and 5) on Gozan literary culture (although he is not particularly interested in educational texts). For a more detailed discussion of commentaries on the *Santi shi*, see Horikawa 2006, 271-305.

monzui) includes satirical poems, playful acrostics, and character-based word games from a variety of authors.² Adopting a broader time scale, it would be worth tracing a trajectory from these early comic works to the iconoclastic eighteenth-century genre of *kyōshi* (“crazy Chinese-style poetry”), which often refashioned Chinese classics into parodic versions that gleefully incorporated current slang and vulgar language. These sources illuminate a lively and flexible side to kanbun literature, raising intriguing questions about the connections between humor and “foreignness,” between humor and elite genres, and between humor and the juxtaposition of different linguistic and cultural registers. As one of the most culturally sensitive and difficult-to-translate literary endeavors, humor is an ideal theme for exploring issues of translation, cross-cultural reading, and creative cultural adaptation.

Finally, a more detailed look at the world comparative context of premodern Japanese kanbun education could greatly enrich future discussion. Scholarship on premodern Japanese literary education and commentary could be productively set into dialogue with work on manuscript culture elsewhere in medieval East Asia³ and in medieval Europe,⁴ in order to gain broader perspective on how modes of literacy spread across boundaries of language and culture in the premodern world and how this process was intertwined with the transmission of literary knowledge through primers, commentaries, and encyclopedic anthologies.

The parallel between classical Chinese and Latin as transregional literary languages has often been noted in general terms, but specific comparative work (particularly in terms of patterns

² One humorous erotic poem from the Honchō monzui is discussed and translated in Borgen 2009.

³ For example, see Tian 2007 on Liang Dynasty literary culture and Nugent 2010 on issues of literacy, orality, and manuscript culture in the Tang.

⁴ As a starting point, see Irvine 1994 as an overview of grammatica (education in the reading and interpretation of classical texts) and its role in shaping textual culture, Reynolds 1996 on twelfth-century English and French traditions of pedagogical glossing, various themed article collections like Rees Jones ed. 2003 and Bremmer and Dekker eds. 2007 for case studies on Latin educational and scholarly practice in various regions, and Franklin-Brown 2012 on medieval scholastic encyclopedic practices.

of education) is rare.⁵ Some interesting parallels can be drawn between the study of Latin in various medieval European contexts and the study of *kanbun* in early Japan, and this comparison has the potential to deepen our understanding of both environments while creating new perspectives on issues of literary language and cross-cultural interaction. From the perspective of Japan studies, comparative work presents an appealing counter to the exoticizing trend that paints the Japanese writing system as bizarre and wildly impractical, suggesting that points of interest can be found both in the unique, context-specific aspects of classical Japanese textuality and in the patterns it shares with other literary cultures in the premodern world.

Perhaps the central underlying contrast is that there was no close equivalent of *kundoku* for reading Latin, and at least in many areas Latin was treated as a spoken as well as a written classical language; this had a wide range of consequences in terms of educational practice and literary culture. However, the building blocks of *kundoku*-like reading did exist, although it seems they never coalesced into a full-fledged system of reading and writing. Many medieval readers and writers of Latin faced challenges analogous to those involved in handling classical Chinese texts in Japan, since the grammar and other conventions of written Latin were substantially different from those of their everyday spoken language (most clearly in the case of Anglo-Saxon and other Germanic speakers, but also for speakers of the vernacular Romance languages that were already developing in new directions away from classical Latin standards). Such readers could construe Latin logographically, with each written word rendered freely as a vernacular equivalent and grammar adjusted as needed as part of the reading process.

In fact, some medieval manuscripts include syntactic annotations showing how to transpose Latin word order, reminiscent of the syntactic markings used as an aid to *kundoku* reading, and there was also a widespread practice of lexical glossing (either in Latin or in a vernacular

⁵ For an insightful discussion of the classical Chinese/Latin analogy, see Lurie 2011, 350-351. For a groundbreaking comparative look at Latin and East Asian glossing practices, see Whitman 2011.

language), yet it seems that these two types of glossing were not woven together into a complete reading system like *kundoku*.⁶ Some scholars have interpreted syntactic glossing as an attempt to bring Latin word order closer to that of the vernacular; on the other hand, Suzanne Reynolds makes a plausible case (at least for the high middle ages) that syntactic glossing reflects an idealized, pan-European metalinguistic model of “natural” word order based on academic traditions of *grammatica* (education in the reading and interpretation of classical texts), rather than a straightforward reliance on the word order of any specific vernacular. She argues that glosses on texts for introductory education like Horace’s *Satires* do not represent an agenda toward vernacularizing Latin texts; rather, they are based in a specific philosophy of introductory teaching that draws on simplification, selective representation, and vernacular explication. Either way, there are elements of this process and of European manuscript glossing traditions more broadly that seem familiar in the context of Japanese *kundoku* markings, but it seems that these practices did not coalesce into an integrated *kundoku*-like system to support logographic reading. Instead, medieval Latin literacy came to place more emphasis on phonographic reading practices, with the end result that Latin was learned and used as a spoken language as well as a classical written standard.

This may have been partly due to different conditions of linguistic typology than those pertaining in premodern Japan – but it was not a foregone conclusion. Roger Wright has explored from many angles the fact that the split between Late Latin and the Romance languages was not inevitable – the establishment of new phonographic standards for Latin orthography (related to the birth of Latin as a separate classical language that could be spoken as well as read – and to the new

⁶ These annotations assign letters of the alphabet or other symbols to words in a phrase, to show what their new sequence should be. See Robinson 1973, Reynolds 1996 (Chapter 9). Robinson dealt mainly with Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, where the connection to vernacular syntax seems clearer, but Reynolds added some later examples of syntactic glossing from northern France; these also take SVO word order as a consistent ideal, even though this order was not yet fixed in Old French. She characterizes this as a practical pedagogical approach to the comparatively free stylistic variation of Latin word order, “a kind of translation, not from one language to another, but from one art (rhetoric) to another (grammar),” though “the pedagogical efficiency of *ordo naturalis* may reside in its closeness to emerging vernacular forms” (120). John Whitman (2011, 112-116) has commented on some general similarities between medieval European and East Asian glossing traditions, including the shared role of glosses as performative aides for reading aloud.

concept of vernacular languages that could be written as well as spoken) was the result of specific changes in educational practice that were imposed in the Carolingian court and gradually spread throughout Europe.⁷ Wright suggests that prior to these changes traditions of reading Latin texts aloud in Romance-speaking areas were essentially logographic, but readers and writers were accustomed to the considerable gap between the literary standards used to inscribe a text and the spoken language used to read it aloud, so that the act of reading would involve performative adaptations to bridge that gap for a particular audience.

Standards for spoken as well as written Latin that defined it as a separate classical language in contrast to evolving Romance vernaculars were established by native speakers of Anglo-Saxon and other Germanic languages, became officially adopted in the Carolingian court, and gradually spread to other Romance-speaking areas. As Wright puts it, according to the new “artificial spelling-pronunciation techniques” of Germanic-speaking scholars, “every written letter of a word was given a sound (which is how we all still read Latin aloud today, that is, on the phonographic assumption, that every written letter of the standard spelling should be given a regular sound). Many words thus sounded in this system quite different from their normal vernacular pronunciation, so this reform meant that texts, read aloud with the newly standardized and artificial spelling-pronunciation, came for the first time to be largely unintelligible to the uninitiated Romance-speaker.”⁸ Carolingian universities laid the foundations of a curriculum based on spelling-pronunciation and the classical grammars of Donatus and Priscian, which continued to shape traditions of *grammatica* throughout the medieval period.

The fact that Latin was defined and taught as a spoken language meant that the first primers used by a beginning Latin student sometimes functioned quite differently from those used in premodern Japan; for example, students might have to practice classroom colloquies, educational

⁷ Wright 2003, particularly chapters 1, 2, 6, 22, and 25.

⁸ Wright 2003, 348.

dialogues that allowed students to repeat useful phrases in a conversational question-and-answer format.⁹ No such textual evidence of teaching classical Chinese as a spoken language survives in early or medieval Japan, and although actually communicating in spoken Chinese would have been relevant for some early continental immigrants and the scholar-monks and diplomats who actually traveled to China up until the early Heian period, for the centuries discussed in this project it was a rare and particular skill rather than an integral part of literary education. Reading based on Chinese-like pronunciations (*ondoku*, “sound-based reading”), too, was taught as a specialized performance tradition rather than a conversational mode. If practices of literal spelling-pronunciation in Latin had developed in tandem with the older styles of logographic reading instead of displacing them, one might imagine an educational and literary culture more closely analogous to that of premodern Japan.

On the other hand, the early stages of Latin study also involved some parallels with kanbun education. Introductory education involved rote-memorizing and reciting short passages of culturally-important material (in this case, usually psalms or the Lord’s Prayer) in order to internalize the mechanics of reading and pronunciation, then memorizing grammatical patterns from Donatus’ *Ars Minor* and studying didactic texts like Cato’s *Disticha* (a collection of brief moral maxims that might be interestingly compared with the *Thousand Character Classic*), before finally progressing to readings from the classical satirists and historians.¹⁰ Although there are contrasts in the content of introductory primers in these two contexts, with kanbun education giving larger roles to topical cosmologies and biographies and a much larger role to poetic vocabulary about the natural world, the common tendency toward use of rhyme and meter to aid memorization among beginning students could suggest some interesting connections between premodern cultures of

⁹ See for example the work of Scott Gwara, including an edited volume of classroom colloquies (Gwara ed., 1996) and an interesting discussion of education in Latin as a spoken lingua franca (Gwara 2002).

¹⁰ The educational stages involved in the practice of *grammatica* as it had developed by the twelfth century are outlined in Reynolds 1996, 7-16. See also Irvine 1994.

memory. The key pedagogical role of commentary and its power to reframe a classical text in terms of contemporary moral and didactic agendas also stands out as an area of common ground.

Comparisons between the transmission of literacy in medieval Latin and in kanbun would need to be explored in more detail to illuminate much about either process, but even this kind of preliminary look helps give further weight to important points about Heian kanbun literacy – above all, the centrality of kundoku reading and the way this emphasis on logographic reading promoted the adaptation of elements from the classical Chinese tradition into “vernacular” (kana-based) contexts. The creative implications of Heian kanbun literacy and its medieval reception resonate throughout the classical Japanese literary tradition, and also highlight the need for flexible conceptual models of literacy, translation, and cultural contact that give due credit to the inventiveness of premodern readers and writers. Ultimately, I hope this project will contribute to ongoing discussions of premodern literacies and approaches to literary knowledge.

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The city of publication is Tokyo unless otherwise specified. To avoid confusion among the varied formats of primary sources used in this project, numbers in citations are marked as either printed page number in the cited edition (p), conventional line or item number (#), and/or volume number (v); other non-numeric information is also included where particularly useful (e.g. the topic category when citing from a topical encyclopedia). (The numerals in secondary source citations are always page numbers.)

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BPS. *Bunpōshō*. Honma Yōichi, ed. (Karon kagaku shūsei, betsu 2). Miyai shoten, 2001.

BPZ. *Baopuzi*. From Wang Ming, *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985.

CXJ. *Chuxue ji*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980.

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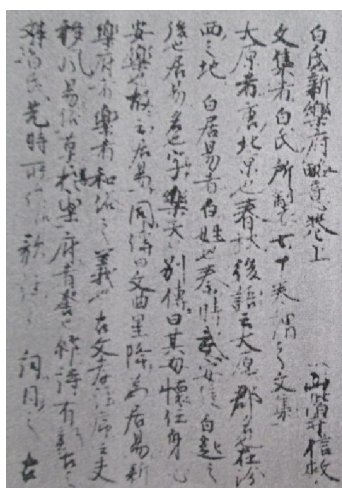
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Appendix

This section provides a supplementary visual reference to the two lesser-known educational texts discussed in Chapters 4 and 5: *Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads* (Shin gafu ryakui) and *Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury* (Mōgyū waka, 1204).



Condensed Meaning of the New Ballads (Shin gafu ryakui). Compiled by the monk Shingyū (also known as Shin'a, Kakumyō, Kakumei, Fujiwara no Michihiro) in 1172, at Kōfukuji. Image reproduced from Ōta Tsugio 1967.

Example of commentarial entry for the phrase “Outside, there was Lushan” 外祿山 in Bai Juyi’s poem “Dervish Girl” 胡旋女 (text and reading marks according to transcription in Ōta Tsugio 1967):

貴妃国忠等、故曰外祿山也

天宝十四年、安祿山乘天下之心誅

居丞相之位、政不平也、天下怨哭

身肥色白不得出宮、楊貴妃兄国忠

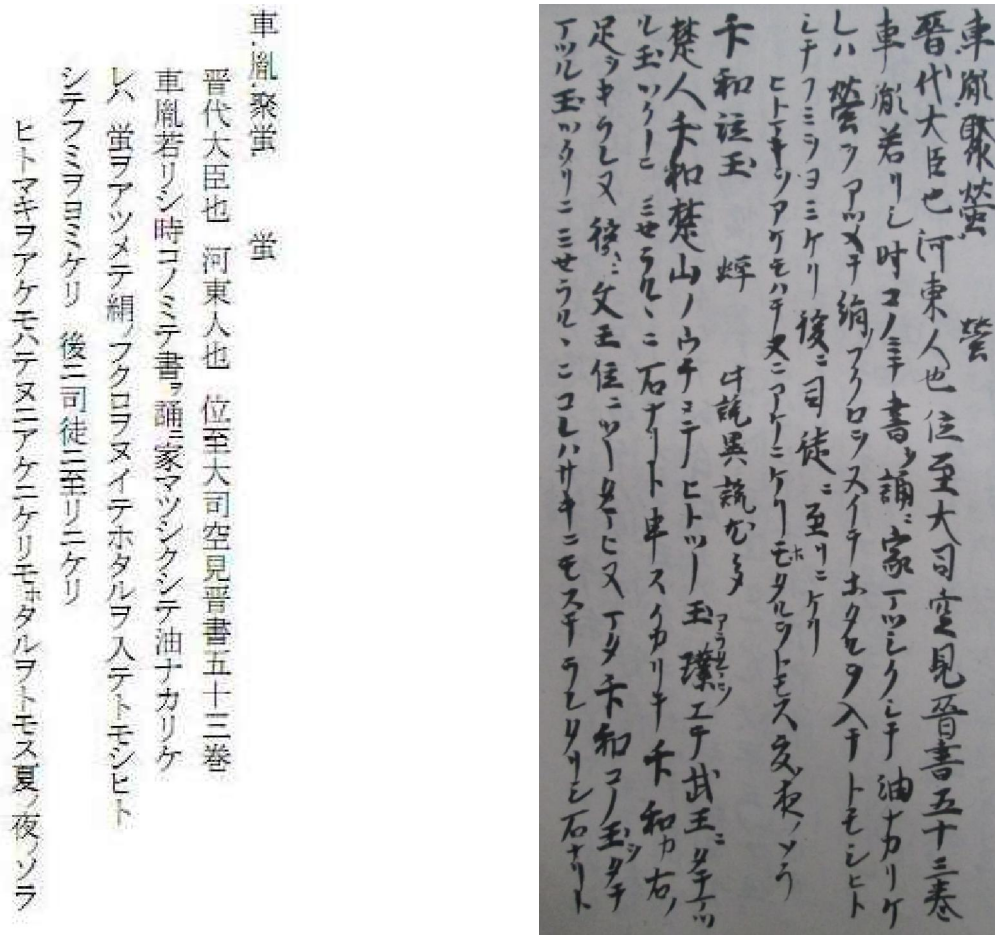
云、楊貴妃之養子也、養在宮内、

外祿山者、安祿山者白廷翰唐蒙求

“Outside, there was Lushan” refers to An Lushan, about whom Bai Tinghan’s Tang Child’s Treasury says: he was Yang Guifei’s adopted child. She raised him within the palace; his body was fat, his color pale, and he could not leave the palace. Yang Guifei’s older brother Guozhong held the position of Prime Minister, but matters of government were not in good order.

Throughout the realm, all lamented and wept. In the fourteenth year of the Tianbao era, An Lushan followed the sentiments of the realm and executed Guifei and Guozhong, and so on. For this reason, it says “Outside, there was Lushan.”

Waka Poems on the Child's Treasury (Mōgyū waka). Compiled in 1204 in Kamakura by Minamoto no Mitsuyuki. Image reproduced from Kokkai toshokan kō MS (cited as MGW1), accompanied by a transcription and translation of the Che Yin entry.



Che Yin gathers fireflies

Topic: Fireflies

He was a minister in the Jin era, a man from Hedong. He reached the rank of Grand Minister of Works. See History of the Jin, vol. 53.

When Che Yin was young, he loved to recite the classics, but since his family was poor and they had no lamp-oil, he gathered fireflies, stitched a silk bag, put the fireflies inside, and used it as a lamp by which to read the classics. Later, he attained the rank of Minister of Education.

Though they have yet to finish lighting a single volume, it grows light – the sky on a summer night, keeping company with fireflies.