

# Ideology and Historiography : The Case of Sugawara no Michizane in the ''Nihongiryaku, Fuso Ryakki'' and the ''Gukansho''

著者	PLUTSCHOW Herbert
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## **Ideology and Historiography: The Case of Sugawara no Michizane in the *Nihongiryaku*, *Fusō Ryakki* and the *Gukanshō***

**Herbert PLUTSCHOW**

University of California at Los Angeles

To make victims into heroes is a Japanese cultural phenomenon intimately related to religion and society. It is as old as written history and survives into modern times. Victims appear as heroes in Buddhist, Shinto, and Shinto-Buddhist cults and in numerous works of Japanese literature, theater and the arts. In a number of articles I have published on this subject,<sup>1</sup> I tried to offer a religious interpretation, emphasizing the need to placate political victims in order to safeguard the state from their wrath. Unappeased political victims were believed to seek revenge by harming the living, causing natural calamities, provoking social discord, jeopardizing the national welfare. Beginning in the tenth century, such placation took on a national importance. Elsewhere I have tried to demonstrate that the cult of political victims forced political leaders to worship their former enemies in a cult providing the religious legitimization, that is, the mainstay of their power.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this was, as I demonstrated, the attempt leaders made to control natural forces through the worship of spirits believed to influence them. Placating their former enemies, therefore, was for them a means to claim control over natural forces. This control was paramount in premodern Japanese politics.

Of course natural disasters do occur, but they never last forever. Political leaders could claim that it was thanks to their elaborate cult that the disaster has come to a timely end and that things have again normalized. They tried to do the same with social upheavals, always claiming that they overcame the calamities because of the cult they offered to the spirits feared to have caused them. Political leaders used natural calamities and social upheavals to legitimize their authority.

In addition, political leaders relied on prevalent shamanistic practices to identify vengeful spirits as the causes of natural and social calamities. They did so because they had a vital interest in such "identification." Identifying a known victim as the cause of the calamity was for them a means to offer cult, and through the cult, to claim control over the forces of nature.

Yet, the political leaders were unable to monopolize this kind of victimary discourse throughout history. It often shifted into the lower classes, even to people living on the fringes of society. Especially when issued from the political "outs," this discourse

turns into a subtle political protest, an antistructure of sorts, offering views and interpretations of events, opposed to mainstream leadership discourse. One may call it “turning the world upside down,” creating contrast between the *vox dei* and the *vox populi*. Psychologists explain such cultural phenomena as a release valve, often tolerated, even encouraged by the political leadership, offering the people a voice, though perhaps not an official one, in the overall national discourse.

This interpretation of the victimary discourse relates to the distinction between “private” and “official,” scholars have discovered in much premodern Japanese culture. Making heroes out of the defeated in the twelfth-century wars that resulted in the political dominance of the warriors, the *Tales of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*, a recitative epic of the thirteenth century) would thus constitute a “private” voice opposed to the discourse of government leaders, a voice emanating from the fringes of society. Such “voice” also exists in other parts of the world. Even such ruthless leaders as Stalin in the Soviet Union and Erich Honegger in East Germany, among others, had to tolerate the existence of political cabarets where the cabaretists made fun of them. Under repressive regimes, such “antistructure” assumed a humorous tone, veiled in the art of clever camouflage and theater. In less repressive states, the critics take on the role of offering their voice to the people and the political “outs.”

Separating “private” from “public” may not sufficiently take into account the complexity of the victimary discourse in Japan where it appears more often than not, mixed with cultic needs to placate political victims. Thus the *Tales of the Heike* became, in turn, a religious, placatory text often recited at official occasions. The *Heike-gatari* (recitation the *Tales*) became one of the important legitimizing cultic events of both the Ashikaga (Ashikaga period, also called Muromachi period, 1336-1568) and Tokugawa shoguns (Tokugawa period, also called Edo period, 1603-1868). Shogunal leaders officially sponsored the *Heike-gatari* allowing it to survive into the nineteenth century as part of official, military and shogunal cult and culture. In this way, they made sure that the victims they had caused themselves, at the outset of their power, would not revenge themselves on the victimizers and their descendants. Interestingly, recitation of the tales was doomed when the shogunal government came to an end in 1868. Other forms of recitations of battles and bloodshed especially popular among female reciters accompanying themselves on a musical instrument called Chikuzen biwa (lute of Chikuzen Province, the present Fukuoka Prefecture in Kyushu) until Japan’s defeat in World War II, declined markedly in the anti-militaristic postwar period.

Japanese victimary discourse is therefore a complex religious, political and social phenomenon. It involves the leading and the lower classes, both participating in the same culture. It is related variously to the Japanese *matsuri* (festivals), often leveling local

society or turning it upside down in manners reminding one of the European carnivals. As Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) has pointed out, carnivals were the breeding grounds of European anti-structural behavior and discourse.

In one form or another, victimary discourse exists in all cultures. It existed in China at the lower echelons of society more than among the upper classes, which tended to impose Confucian morality (“It served them right!” “They deserved it!”) on political victims. Despite their bravery, Shakespeare’s villains such as Macbeth and Richard III are not made into heroes. Making them into heroes would probably have been inimical to the state under Elizabeth I as well as to the Christian worldview. But, on the popular level, a politically neutralized victimary discourse thrived in both literary works and in popular plays.

What follows is an analysis of the role victimary discourse played in two works of history telling us what happened after the premature death in exile of the statesman Sugawara no Michizane (845-903). Who was Sugawara no Michizane and why was he exiled?

The Fujiwara became the most powerful clan in the ninth century under Fujiwara no Mototsune (836-891). Mototsune married two daughters to the emperor and was eligible for the highest office of *sesshō-kanpaku*. *Sesshō* were the regents who served during the reign of infant emperors and *kanpaku* (prime minister) was the highest position in the imperial government. The combined *sesshō-kanpaku* was equal to civil dictator. Mototsune became *sesshō* under Emperor Yōzei (r. 876-884), then he put Emperor Kōkō (r. 884-887) on the throne and became *kanpaku* under Emperor Uda. Under Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804-872) Mototsune’s father, the Fujiwara started to monopolize these titles. They controlled the imperial throne by marrying their daughters to the emperors—becoming traditional imperial in-laws—and by enthroning their infant grandsons. Mototsune was thus related to three emperors.

Mototsune’s eldest son Tokihira (871-909) took over the political authority from his father, and his official career began in 14/2/899, when Emperor Uda (r. 887-97), appointed him *sadaijin* (Minister of the Left), the most powerful office under the *kanpaku*. Uda, whose mother was not a Fujiwara, was strong-willed and intent on balancing Fujiwara power with other clans. With counterpoise in mind, he appointed Sugawara no Michizane *udaijin* (Minister of the Right). Under the hereditary system already well under way at that time, the Sugawara had no rights to such high office. The Fujiwara under Tokihira seized every chance to intrigue against Michizane.

As the descendant of a prominent scholarly family, Michizane persisted and even thrived under Uda’s patronage. His father was an expert in Chinese studies and his expertise was particularly important when the imperial government needed information

about Chinese precedent and a scholar-diplomat able to advise in its foreign relations. His grandfather had opened a school of Chinese learning and the precocious Michizane, allegedly able to compose Chinese poems at age ten, eventually became an expert in his own right. In 874, he was promoted to Fifth Rank, which gave him access to the court and opened the door to high government positions. In 880, on the death of his father, he took over his grandfather's college. As an expert in Chinese studies, he was charged in 883 and 7/5/895 with receiving the ambassadors of the kingdom of Parhae. Three daughters of Michizane entered the court; one married Emperor Uda's second son.

After the death of Fujiwara no Mototsune, his first son Tokihira succeeded him. In 893 Emperor Uda appointed Michizane to the position of adjunct to the crown prince's (later Emperor Daigo) office headed by Tokihira. In 894, Michizane was appointed ambassador to China but, concerned about the decline of the Tang dynasty (618-907) and perhaps about his own political future, he advised the emperor to discontinue sending embassies to China for the time being. In 897, Emperor Uda abdicated in favor of Emperor Daigo. After the enthronement ceremonies, both Tokihira and Michizane were promoted to Third Rank and to the positions of Minister of the Left and Minister of the Right respectively. This promotion gave Michizane access to all correspondence. In 900, Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki, whom Michizane had once refused the doctorate, warned Michizane that a plot against him was afoot at court.

Uda was able to keep the political rivalry between his two ministers in check, but, as was customary by that time, he abdicated in favor of the younger Emperor Daigo (885-930). Soon after the Daigo's enthronement, Tokihira assembled such disgruntled politicians as Fujiwara no Kiyotsura (34), Minamoto no Hikaru (56), the son of Emperor Ninmyō (810-50), Fujiwara no Sadakuni (34), and Fujiwara no Sugane (45). Tokihira promised Hikaru the position of *uchūben* (Secretary of the Right) if successful. Sugane, who served as *uchūben*, aspired to the position of *udaishō* (General of the Right Guard). At first, Michizane promoted Sugane but, during a banquet, slapped him on grounds of insubordination. The marriage of Michizane's daughter to Prince Tokiyo, the maternal brother of Emperor Daigo, served as food for the plotters. They accused Michizane of promoting Tokiyo at the expense of Daigo, who at age seventeen was already too old for the emperorship under the *sesshō-kanpaku* system. On 3/1/901, the credulous Daigo decreed that Michizane should be immediately stripped of his court rank and sent to the Dazaiфу (Military Headquarters of the West) as a low-ranking official.<sup>3</sup> This amounted to nothing else but exile. His entire family was sent away from Kyoto under the harshest conditions. In 25/1/901, Michizane left Kyoto. Before leaving, he sent his Chinese poems to his friend Ki no Haseo, who ensured their survival. Intent on preventing Michizane's exile, Ex-emperor Toba tried to force his way into the palace, but Minamoto

no Sugane prevented him.<sup>4</sup> The Ex-emperor sat in the grass and waited until the end of the day without avail. That day, Minamoto no Hikaru was appointed Minister of the Right and took over Michizane's post. On 25/2/903, after having proclaimed his innocence, Michizane died unpardoned at the Dazaifu. He was sixty years old.

Let us now look into how the contemporary histories report the events after Michizane's death in order to determine what impact the victimary discourse had on the historiography. Two histories, the *Nihongiryaku* and the *Fusō ryakki*, deal with the events at that time. To a lesser extent, the *Gukanshō* chronicles these matters. Let me begin with the more detailed *Nihongiryaku* (a history compiled by an unknown person, covering from the age of the gods to Emperor Goichijō (reigned 1016-36) in the format of a diary, from the reign of Emperor Uda). Then I will proceed to the *Fusō ryakki* (compiled by monk Kōen (1119-69?), covering from Emperor Jinmu (first official emperor, dates unknown) till Emperor Horikawa (reigned 1079-1107).

*Nihongiryaku:*

25/12/902	The death of Michizane reported
7/7/903	Drought
8/7/903	Prayers for rain
7/intercalary3/904	Epidemic
1/4/904	Solar eclipse
7/4/904	Thunderstorm
23/6/904	Floods
1/10/904	Solar eclipse
1/4/905	Solar eclipse
15/4/905	Lunar eclipse
1/4/906	Solar eclipse
2/4/906	Violent thunderstorm. Hail as big as eggs
3/7/906	Death of Fujiwara no Sadakuni
7/6/907	Death of Fujiwara no Atsuko, Emperor Daigo's wetnurse
1/9/907	Solar eclipse
7/11/907	Death of Fujiwara no Sugane, age 54
1/2/908	Solar eclipse
4/4/908	Death of Fujiwara no Tokihira, age 39
1/5/908	Epidemic
19/5/908	Floods
9/6/908	Thunderstorm

12/6/908	Prayer for the cessation of rain
1/7/908	Insurrection in Shimofusa Province
7/908	Epidemic
1/1/909	Abundant rain
22/4/909	Violent storms
23/4/909	Violent storms
14/5/909	Thunderstorm
1/7/909	Solar eclipse
1/1/910	Solar eclipse
1/6/910	Solar eclipse
6/910	Flood in the capital
1/12/910	Solar eclipse
8/4/911	Solar eclipse
10/4/911	Prayers for rain
5/5/911	Epidemic
1/intercalary5/911	Solar eclipse
2/6/911	Prayers for rain
1/11/911	Solar eclipse
21/3/912	Minamoto no Hikaru died, age 68, during a hunt. His horse dragged him and his body disappeared in the mud
1/5/912	Solar eclipse
14/8/912	A kite dropped a mouse it had caught onto Fujiwara no Kiyotsura
1/11/912	Solar eclipse
7/11/912	Violent storms
1/4/913	Solar eclipse
2/5/913	Fire in the capital destroys 617 houses
1/10/913	Solar eclipse
1/3/914	Solar eclipse
1/9/914	Solar eclipse
10/15/914	Epidemic. Continued into the following year
1/3/916	Solar eclipse
3/5/916	Hail
7/5/916	Hail with violent winds
29/6/916	Earthquake
1/9/916	Solar eclipse
916	Disturbances in eastern Japan
1/3/917	Solar eclipse

7/917	Beginning of a famine
1/1/918	Solar eclipse
1/8/918	Solar eclipse
15/8/918	Violent storms

Such reports continue until 923. Below I select only the events related to the people who played a role in Michizane's exile and supported Fujiwara no Tokihira and the events directly related to Michizane.

21/3/923	Death of Crown Prince Yasuakira. People cried as loud as thunder. He was possessed by Kan's (Michizane's) spirit.
11/4/923	Epidemic. Change of era name.
20/4/923	Michizane restored to Minister of the Right, Second Rank
26/6/930	The weather was clear. A black cloud moved in from Mt. Atago and quickly covered the sky. It thundered loudly and lightning struck the Seiryoden. The wall caught fire. <i>Dainagon</i> Fujiwara no Kiyotsura's dress caught fire, his breast split and he died instantly, age 64. <i>Uchūben</i> Taira no Mareyo suffered burns in his face. At the Shishinden: <i>Hyōe no suke</i> Mibu Tadakane's hair caught fire and he died. Ki no Kagetsura's stomach split open and he lost consciousness. Azumi Munehito's knees sustained burns and he could no longer get up. The Emperor fell ill. An epidemic reigned.
15/9/930	The Emperor began to cough
29/9/930	The Emperor passed away. <sup>5</sup>

*Fusō ryakki:*

20/4/903	Report of an oracle in which Michizane revealed that he turned into a god of thunder
10/2/904	Yasuakira (two years old) appointed crown prince
7/8/908	Minamoto no Sugane died at age 54
14/1/909	Lunar eclipse.
909	Spring and Summer Epidemic
4/4/909	Tokihira died at age 39. During his illness, ten monks came to offer prayers but they were afraid of the evil spirit that was haunting Tokihira. In broad daylight, Michizane's spirit came out of Tokihira's ears as a blue dragon.

1/1/911	Solar eclipse
7/6/911	Floods
12/3/913	Minamoto no Hikaru died at age 68. He dreamed of Michizane the year before
2/5/915	Fire destroyed 617 houses in the capital
5/6/915	Floods
916	Autumn epidemic
8/918	Floods
20/4/923	Michizane's rank restored after an oracle
11/i4/923	Epidemic
18/6/925	Crown Prince Yasuyori died at age 5. His mother was Tokihira's daughter
925	Summer drought
4-5/927	Severe epidemic
1/6/927	Earthquake
11/7/927	Thunderstorm. Lightning struck the pagoda of Saidai-ji Temple
3/929	Epidemic in Home Provinces. The dead filled the streets
16/6/929	Lunar eclipse
26/7/929	Typhoon and floods
8/929	Typhoon
930	Spring and summer epidemic
26/6/930	Lightning struck the Imperial Palace twice. Michizane caused the lightning. Emperor Daigo died at age 36. <sup>6</sup>

The *Fusō ryakki* includes an entire supplement on the lightning.

Not only in the enumeration of natural calamities and the death of Michizane's rivals, the histories make it clear that Michizane's spirit was the perpetrator. In its report of Minamoto no Hikaru's cruel death, the *Nihongiryaku* strongly suggests that Michizane was behind it. The same can be said about the kite dropping a dead mouse onto Fujiwara no Kiyotsura's head. It refers to Michizane as the cause of Crown Prince Yasuakira's death. In the case of the lightning striking the private quarters of Emperor Daigo, and his consequent death, both histories make it unequivocally clear that the cause of the lightning was no other than the god of thunder, Michizane. The thirteenth-century scroll entitled *Kitano tenjin engi emaki*, now a national treasure, represents the lightning as engendered by Sugawara no Michizane's vengeful spirit. Both histories use a victimary discourse to explain historical events and to condemn Emperor Daigo's reign.

The *Ōkagami* (Great Mirror), a collection of stories about Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027) and his times, claims that “People say Tokihira’s descendants died out because of the terrible sin he committed. No doubt they are right...” Tokihira’s eldest son Yasutada died in 936, at age 47, a ghost haunting his deathbed. Tokihira’s third son Atsusada died in 943 at the age of thirty-eight. Both daughters died prematurely. Only his second son Akitada was able to live over sixty and rose to the position of Minister of the Right, but as the *Ōkagami* points out, only because he lived simply and frugally. Yet his line died out too in the end allegedly because of Michizane’s grudge.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Fujiwara Tadahira (890-949), Tokihira’s brother who had sided with Michizane, and his line with Morosuke (908-960), Kaneie (929-990), Michinaga (966-1028) prospered. Morosuke built the Kitano Shrine for the repose of Michizane’s spirit in Kyoto and Michinaga orchestrated an imperial visit to the shrine. Under Morosuke’s line known as the Kujō, a temple and shrine were built at the site of Michizane’s death in Kyushu and members of Michizane’s family appointed as priests. They sponsored biographies of Michizane and, in 1219, even a pictorial biography, the *Kitano tenjin engi emaki*, now a national treasure.

The *Nihongiryaku* and the *Fusō ryakki* seem to go beyond enumerating the ill fates of those responsible for Michizane’s exile and death. They list one natural calamity after the other: eclipses, earthquakes, floods, drought, epidemics. By pointing out these events, the historiographers claim in fact that heaven is unhappy with Japanese court politics and that it is punishing the court and the nation. This has been an ancient Chinese device used by the historiographers to point out heaven’s displeasure, especially at the end of a dynasty before the start of a new one. This was a means to justify the political change and to legitimize the advent of a new dynasty. At such times of change, historiographers and astronomers would observe the sky, carefully detecting anything unusual that might signal and justify a political change. Snow in summer and like disorderly behavior of the seasons, as well as the sight of eclipses and comets could be interpreted as signs of heavenly will. Such historiography began in the Han dynasty (*Han shu*, ca. 82 CE) and pervaded Chinese dynastic histories until the Chin.

Astronomers reported unusual celestial phenomena or ignored them depending on how well or ill-disposed they were towards the government or the government could manipulate astronomical observation to its own political advantage. Therefore a new dynasty is likely to have its historiographers point out such unusual phenomena at the end of the previous dynasty to justify the political change. Japanese historiography differed from Chinese dynastic histories. In Japan it was not a new dynasty that wrote the history of the old, since there was no dynastic change at the imperial level. But a Chinese-style dynastic change was possible among the leading clans under the emperors.

Conceivably, therefore, the *Nihongiryaku* and *Fusō ryakki* historiographers used natural calamities to point out heaven's displeasure with Emperor Daigo and Tokihira's line. All natural disasters enumerated are of course possible, but the numerous eclipses are questionable. The *Nihongiryaku* lists twenty-four eclipses between 904 and 918, an astronomical impossibility. Even if they were only partial eclipses, the number is unlikely. Eclipses do not happen so often, especially not in one spot of the earth, regardless of whether this spot is Japan or Kyoto. It is possible that the historiographer used these eclipses to justify Tokihira's demise and the "violent" end of Emperor Daigo.

The *Gukanshō* is yet another history written on the basis of a victimary discourse. It was written by Priest Jien (1155-1225). As a descendent of Tadahira and Morosuke, Jien favored the cult of political victims in which he and his clan had developed a high stake. Priest Jien was keenly aware of the havoc vengeful spirits of political victims could wreak. Understandably so, because he lived in a time of deep turmoil. In mid-twelfth century much of the political power of the imperial government shifted to the warriors (samurai). This was not because the warriors usurped imperial power by force, but rather because political factions in the imperial government increasingly used military force to press their demands. By the middle of the twelfth century, two prominent military clans, both originally from the Kantō area of present-day Tokyo emerged: the Taira (also Heike) and the Minamoto (also Genji). At first the Taira dominated but between 1180 and 1185, the Minamoto eliminated the Taira. During the last battle between the rivaling clans at Dannoura on the Western edge of Japan's main island Honshu, the child emperor Antoku (1178-85) whom the Taira had taken along with his mother, the daughter of the Taira chieftain, and many court nobles perished. After the news of the battle reached the capital Kyoto, the earth shook violently. This was bad news for anyone believing in the power of dead victims.

Concerned about a victimized emperor and numerous "tragic" nobles, Jien wrote a private moral history entitled the *Gukanshō*. In addition, he petitioned Ex-emperor Gotoba to build the temple Daisenpoin in Kyoto to appease the spirits and organized the *Heike monogatari*. The *Gukanshō* dates to the year 1219; the year Shogun Minamoto no Sanetomo was assassinated and two years before Gotoba marched against the military government in Kamakura and coincides roughly with the compilation of the *Kitano tenjin engi emaki* and the appointment of Jien's relative, Kujō Yoritsune, as fourth shogun (in office 1226-1244) of the Kamakura Period (1185-1333). This was also a highly unstable time when the Kujō needed to consolidate their political future and sponsor the religious activities needed for that end. The *Gukanshō* is a history in which the vengeful spirits are the main historical driving force during this time of deep change. Jien said this about vengeful spirits in his *Gukanshō*:

Vengeful spirits are those which, when they were alive, felt an implacable hatred toward those who caused it. From the tiniest hermit huts to the end of the empire, they slog at their rivals in the traps they tend and seek to destroy them by slander and false accusations; this is how they cause disorder in the world and harm the people. When they cannot exact their revenge from the visible world, they do so from the world of the dead.<sup>8</sup>

Jien claimed that it was the cult his ancestors offered, that placated Michizane's spirit and allowed the Kujō to prosper. In order to legitimize Kujō power, he went as far as to claim that Michizane was an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon who sacrificed himself for the good politics of the Kujō. How much further can one manipulate the victimary discourse in one's own interest?

## CONCLUSION

The *Nihongiryaku*, the *Fusō ryakki* and the *Gukanshō* were "private" histories. As private histories, they could take liberties with the facts and how to list them. They were all written in an attempt to give meaning to history, and the victimary discourse lent itself well to that "signification." Like their official Chinese counterparts, these Japanese histories were retrospective, and tried to reconstruct history on the basis of daily entries of facts and events. If one writes history by accurately and truthfully noting down events day by day as in a diary, such history would lack "meaning." It is only possible when one arranges the facts later, something the first two histories did in the choice of events following the death of Sugawara no Michizane. The *Gukanshō* is a retrospective, interpretive, moral history in which Jien tried to explain—with the help of the victimary discourse—the historical processes that led to the dominance of the warriors.

As private histories, the *Nihongiryaku*, the *Fusō ryakki*, and the *Gukanshō* constitute an unofficial view of history. The first two relied heavily on the victimary discourse in Michizane's case and the latter combining the victimary discourse with Tendai Buddhism and its concern with the *kimon* (gate of hell). The moral message Jien provides in his *Gukanshō* is that the state must be protected from the *kimon*—an important task of the Tendai head temple on Mt. Hiei—through which the evil spirits were believed to infiltrate the state.

Japanese victimary discourse does not stop here nor is the case of Sugawara no Michizane unique. It has assumed various aspects in the course of history. We see it play an important role in the *noh*, *kabuki*, and the puppet theaters, in storytelling and other forms of popular ritual popular during the feudal age (1185-1868) dominated by the war-

riors. It was somewhat secularized in the nineteenth century, perhaps because of the onslaught of Western thought and technology. After the assassination of the statesman Mori Arinori (1847-1889), for example, the emphasis was no longer on the religious need to appease the spirit of the murdered man; instead the event provided the underprivileged—especially women entertainers whom mainstream society marginalized on its fringe—with the chance to propose a kind of popular, minority view. Victimary discourse was turned on its head to make a hero out of someone the elite despised as a villain.

Mori Arinori had been an envoy to the United States and a progressive minister of education known for his radical views on modernization and progress. He supported the disarmament of the samurai class and the Constitution and promulgated an American-style separation of church and state. As Minister of Education he excluded Shinto from the school curriculum. On a visit to the Ise Shrines, he dared push aside the sacred curtain with his walking stick. Like Percival Lowell (1855-1916), most Westerners in Japan at that time must have sympathized with the minister's rational curiosity, but the radical shintoists and imperialists (the shrines are the ancestral shrines of the imperial family) among the Japanese did not forgive him the sacrilege. The morning of 11 February 1889, as Mori was dressing up to attend the ceremony for the imperial proclamation of the Constitution, Nishino Buntarō, a radical, entered his house and stabbed him. Nishino was cut down by Mori's bodyguard, but Mori died two days later from excessive loss of blood. Emperor Meiji and the government, as well as the foreign delegates, mourned the death of one of Japan's most able ministers. While the powerful grieved, the popular press published articles favoring Nishino and the female entertainers in the pleasure quarters propagated songs glorifying the assassin as a hero, Percival Lowell reported home. "He was at once raised to the pedestal of a hero and a martyr," Lowell, an acute observer, wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the geishas "raised him into a sort of demigod."<sup>9</sup>

Mori's assassination gave the people and its spokesmen the chance to oppose the mainstream ideology. It was a kind of struggle of the *vox populi* versus the official version. The geishas used the victimary discourse to express a kind of "women's power." But after Mori's death and the promulgation of the Constitution, such voices, however marginal they may have been at the outset, began to exert a serious impact on Japan's public opinion, something the mainstream could no longer ignore.

## NOTES

- 1 See my “Fujiwara Politics and Religion: Goryo Cult and the *Kitano Tenjin Engi* and the *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki*,” *Florilegium Japonicum: Studies Presented to Olof G. Lidin on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Bjarke Frellesvig and Christian Morimoto Hermansen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1996), pp. 215-28.
- 2 “Tragic Victims in Japanese Religion, Politics, and the Arts” *Anthropoetics* (Electronic Journal).
- 3 The Dazaifu was established as an office of the *ritsuryō* government in mid-seventh century to guard the northern coast of Kyushu, the nearest point between Japan and the Asiatic continent.
- 4 The Minamoto surname was given to imperial princes not eligible to become crown princes.
- 5 *Nihongiryaku, (Shintei zōho) kokushi taikai*, vol. 11 (Tokyo, 1929) pp. 8-42.
- 6 *Fusō ryakki, (Shintei zōho) kokushi taikai*, vol. 12 (Tokyo, 1932) pp. 170-211.
- 7 *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, vol. 21 (Tokyo, 1970), p. 79.
- 8 *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, vol. 86 (Tokyo, 1965), p. 339.
- 9 “The Fate of a Japanese Reformer,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 397 (November 1890).